

Canadian Soldiers in Bermuda During World War One

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Three Canadian infantry battalions served in Bermuda during the First World War. Very little is known about their presence in these islands. The raison d'être of this article is to provide a better knowledge of this first Canadian garrison duty abroad. The author analyzes the selection of the units which were sent to Bermuda and studies and compares them from different points of view. Then, he examines their stay, emphasizing the social aspects of their garrison duty. The Canadians' reaction toward it and the reciprocal feelings of the soldiers and the Bermudians are considered.

Trois bataillons d'infanterie canadiens ont servi aux Bermudes pendant la Première Guerre mondiale. On ne sait à peu près rien de leur passage là-bas. Cet article vise à combler cette lacune. L'auteur explique le choix des unités envoyées en garnison dans ces îles de l'océan Atlantique, puis les étudie et les compare à divers points de vue. Il s'attache ensuite à leur séjour, en mettant en relief le côté humain des choses. La réaction des Canadiens à l'égard de ce service de garnison et les sentiments réciproques des soldats et des Bermudiens sont considérés.

The presence of three infantry battalions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) in Bermuda during the First World War has not excited the attention of Canadian historians. They have been indifferent to this “humiliating garrison duty”,¹ focussing instead on Canada's participation in military operations in Europe. Bermudian historians seem to have adopted a similar attitude, simply ignoring or scarcely mentioning the presence of Canadian troops in the islands at that time.²

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1. D. Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada's Overseas Ministry in the First World War* (Toronto, 1982), p. 54.

2. See, for example, M. Gray, *A Brief History of Bermuda, 1503-1973* (Hamilton, Bermuda, 1976), p. 25; W. Brownell Hayward, *Bermuda, Past and Present* (New York, 1935), chap. 8; R. Willock, *Bulwark of Empire: Bermuda's Fortified Naval Base, 1860-1920* (Princeton, N.J., 1962); W.Z. Zuill, *The Story of Bermuda and Her People* (London, 1973), pp. 151-152.

Garrison duty, of course, holds little interest for the military historian who is engrossed in battles and tactics. Specialists in Bermuda history reacts in much the same way: to them, the presence of the Canadian garrison was simply a minor event in the annals of the islands. Social historians, however, sees it in a vastly different light. Their interest lies in the many problems associated with the Canadians' mission, and this casts the event in quite a different and fascinating perspective. A treatment such as this imparts life to a segment of the history of the CEF which deserves to be known. After all, garrison duty outside Canada was a new experience for Canadian troops. In more recent times, they have often been sent abroad on peace-keeping operations. When viewed in this broader context, the presence of the Canadian soldiers in Bermuda during World War I cannot be ignored.

I — Selection of Canadian battalions in garrison in Bermuda

On 4 August 1914, the day Great Britain declared war on Germany, the British were maintaining a garrison in Bermuda made up of an infantry battalion and detachments of the Royal Engineers and the Royal Garrison Artillery,³ because of the strategic value of the islands that were unhesitatingly referred to as "The Keeper of the Western Gate".⁴ The outbreak of hostilities in Europe, however, forced the metropolis to repatriate its infantry. It could not, of course, leave a base of such importance without a garrison. Consequently, on 19 August 1914, Britain asked Canada to provide replacement troops.⁵ The day after the telegram had been sent from Britain, the Adjutant-General, Canadian Militia, directly contacted the Officer Commanding the Royal Canadian Regiment to ask if his unit would agree to volunteer for service in Bermuda.⁶ Two days later, on 22 August, the Officer Commanding the Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Alfred Octave Fages, "[accepted] with pleasure the offer made by the Militia Department." He did, however, express the wish "that this first move [might] in the near future lead us to further advancement towards the battle field, which [was] the desire of all ranks".⁷ Under the *Militia Act*, the military authorities could not give the order to the RCR to go to Bermuda, since Canada's security was in no way involved in such a mission. Accordingly, the authorities asked the unit and its members to offer their services on a voluntary basis.

3. *Canada in the Great World War. An Authentic Account of the Military History of Canada from the Earliest Days to the Close of the War of the Nations...*, vol. III, *Guarding the Channel Port* (Toronto, 1919), p. 333.

4. Willock, p. 148.

5. National Archives of Canada (NAC), External Affairs papers, RG 25, F 7, vol. 1074-I, telegram from Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor General.

6. NAC, Department of National Defence papers, RG 24, vol. 4538, file 4-6-196-1, Adjutant-General, Canadian Militia, to Officer Commanding 6th Divisional Area, Halifax, 21 August 1914.

7. NAC, RG 24, vol. 4538, file 4-6-196-1, Officer Commanding the RCR to the Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General, 6th Divisional Area, 22 August 1914.

The choice of the RCR is at first glance surprising. The RCR was the only permanent infantry unit in Canada, and it is logical to wonder why the unit was not sent to fight in Europe. One cannot help but be somewhat surprised as well at seeing the Halifax base deprived of the regiment that had served as its garrison ever since the departure of British troops in 1905. These questions may be answered in the following way. The Minister of Militia and Defence, Sam Hughes, probably welcomed the opportunity to show his scorn once again for the permanent force.⁸ But it would be wrong to see Hughes' feelings as the main reason for choosing this unit. Indeed, Canada's honour was at stake, and the RCR was by far the regiment best prepared for this urgent mission on such short notice. What is more, the militia regiments were leading a hectic life at the time, involved as they were in recruiting the first expeditionary contingent. In that context, it is easier to understand the reason for the Governor General of Canada's intervention. Through the Chief of the General Staff of the Canadian Militia, Colonel Willoughby Garnons Gwatkin, the Duke of Connaught expressed his desire to see the men and officers of the regiment volunteer for service in the island colony.⁹ Several weeks later, on 13 October 1914, he accepted the title of honorary colonel of the unit.¹⁰ Furthermore, in case of attack, Canada was for obvious reasons less vulnerable than Bermuda and, as Roger Sarty has shown, Colonel Gwatkin did not take the German threat against the port of Halifax seriously in August 1914. "...at the present juncture", Gwatkin wrote at the time, "[Halifax is] in very little danger of German cruisers and German landing parties."¹¹

Sailing from Halifax on 10 September 1914, the RCR landed three days later in Hamilton, the capital of Bermuda, to relieve the 2nd Battalion of the Lincolnshire Regiment. The RCR was to remain there eleven months: on 13 August 1915, it left Bermuda for England via Halifax. The 38th Battalion of the CEF, which had arrived the day before, replaced the RCR on the Summer Islands.¹²

As was the case with the RCR, the 38th Battalion did not receive a formal order to serve in Bermuda. Rather, the military authorities invited the Commanding Officer to volunteer the services of his unit for the assignment after the Minister had given his approval.¹³ Lieutenant-Colonel Cameron

8. On Hughes' attitude toward the permanent force, see Morton, pp. 16 and 65.

9. NAC, Gwatkin Collection, MG 30, E 5, file 2, Gwatkin to Rutherford, 23 August 1914.

10. R.C. Fetherstonhaugh, *The Royal Canadian Regiment, 1883-1933*, (Montreal, 1936), p. 204.

11. NAC, Gwatkin Collection, file 2, Gwatkin to Rutherford, 28 August 1914, quoted in R.F. Sarty, 'Silent Sentry: A Military and Political History of Canadian Coast Defence, 1860-1945', unpublished Ph.D. (University of Toronto, 1982), p. 267.

12. Bermuda is also known as the Somers or Summer Islands, after Sir George Somers, commander of the *Sea Venture*, shipwrecked off Bermuda in 1609, the date from which continuous occupation of the islands began.

13. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-3, Chief of the General Staff to Adjutant-General, Canadian Militia, 21 July 1915.

MacPherson Edwards, on 22 July 1915, consented to the Minister's request, stating, however, that he would rather have received an order to this effect.¹⁴ The 38th Battalion's selection was more than a routine administrative decision. A stormy interview took place, on 18 March 1915, between Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards and the Minister of the Militia and Defence.¹⁵ As a result of that meeting, Edwards decided to hand in his resignation as Officer Commanding the 38th Battalion, as soon as Hughes could find a successor, since the Minister "apparently [did] not approve of my methods of handling the Battalion."¹⁶ Oral tradition suggests that the Minister, a Conservative, who did not want the nephew of a Liberal senator commanding a battalion of the CEF at the front, told Edwards that his unit was being sent to Bermuda. Considering the political practices of the time, the Minister's character and his habit of intervening in the administration of military affairs, the interpretation is plausible. The Minister, at any rate, would not accept Edwards' resignation.¹⁷ Then, three months after, on 30 June 1915, Hughes refused to authorize the departure of the 38th Battalion for Bermuda, in spite of the fact that the acting Adjutant-General, Brigadier-General W.E. Hodgins, supported by the Chief of the General Staff, strongly recommended the choice of this unit.¹⁸ Only a few weeks later, Hughes changed his mind again, allowing the 38th to go to Bermuda. In the opinion of the Militia Council, only one other battalion, the 35th, could have accepted such a mission.¹⁹ As recruitment for the 35th had begun in Toronto, in April 1915, training was in a less advanced stage than for the 38th Battalion, where training had begun two months earlier. Like the RCR, the 38th Battalion wanted to leave for the front, and not for the islands in the South. At that time, however, training of the unit was sufficiently advanced for it to maintain a garrison in Bermuda. Moreover, the Officer Commanding the unit was well known in military circles in Ottawa. Before enrolling with the 38th Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards had held the rank of major in the Duke of Cornwall's Own Rifles, an Ottawa militia regiment. He was appointed Officer Commanding the 38th Battalion on 16 January 1915, and remained at the head of his unit until 9 September 1918: the leadership and bravery he showed in combat earned him the Distinguished Service Order, with two bars, among other decorations. All indications are that from the time he assumed his post, he performed his duties, including the

14. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-3, Officer Commanding 3rd Divisional Area to Adjutant-General, 22 July 1915.

15. Archives of Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, Lieutenant-Colonel C.M. Edwards' Diary, 18 March 1915.

16. NAC, Personnel Records Centre (PRC), HQ file, Lieutenant-Colonel Cameron MacPherson Edwards, Officer Commanding 38th Battalion, to Officer Commanding 3rd Military Division, 18 March 1915.

17. Hughes' refusal of Edwards' resignation appears in NAC, RG 24, vol. 1379, file HQ 493-6-1-38, Adjutant-General of Militia to Officer Commanding 3rd Military District, 26 March 1915.

18. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 4, the acting Adjutant-General to the Minister of Militia and Defense, 30 June 1915.

19. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1201, file HQ 96-18-5, Loughheed to Hughes, 20 July 1915.

training of his unit, skillfully. These factors were certainly taken into account in the selection of the 38th Battalion.

The 38th Battalion's stay in Bermuda lasted ten and a half months. Nevertheless, that unit was luckier than many others, since it finally went to the front instead of being dismembered in England to reinforce the fighting battalions. It was replaced in the islands by the 163rd (French-Canadian) Battalion, which stayed there only six months, from 29 May to 27 November 1916.

The choice of a French-Canadian unit was surprising, given the small number of French-speaking infantry units (a dozen out of 260) in the CEF. It should be recalled, for example, that only one of the 48 Canadian battalions that served at the front was French-Canadian: the 22nd Battalion. It seems, however, that after the 38th, it was decided that the next unit to be sent to Bermuda would be chosen from among the French-speaking battalions. On 16 November 1917, the Deputy Minister of Militia and Defence, Surgeon General Eugène Fiset, wrote to H.C. Hacken, president and editor of the *Sentinel* of Toronto: "After it had been decided to send the 38th from Bermuda to England, it was thought reasonable and right that a French-Canadian battalion should take its place."²⁰ There were few French-Canadian units from which to choose the appropriate battalion; even so, the authorities had much more trouble deciding which unit should be sent than they had in selecting the RCR or the 38th. The search for a unit to replace the one led by Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards began on 30 March 1916. On that date, the Adjutant-General, Canadian Militia, ordered the Officer Commanding 5th Divisional Area, which covered the eastern half of the province of Quebec

[to] ascertain whether the 57th Overseas (F.C.) [French-Canadian] Battalion, CEF, would be willing to volunteer for service in Bermuda to relieve the 38th Battalion now stationed there; also, whether the establishment of the 57th Battalion could be brought up to war strength or, at any rate, the necessary officers, and at least 1,000 other ranks.²¹

The 57th Battalion was prepared to volunteer for service in Bermuda,²² but on 31 March 1916, its strength was limited to 700 officers and men.²³ The Officer Commanding 5th Divisional Area, Lieutenant-Colonel Fages — the same Fages who had commanded the RCR in Bermuda until his appointment

20. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 6, Surgeon General to H.C. Hacken, 16 November 1917. *See also* Assistant Adjutant-General to Chief of General Staff, 15 November 1917, quoted in John Swettenham, 'Canadian Forces in Bermuda and St. Lucia, 1914-1919', Canada, Army Headquarters, Historical Section, Report n° 87, 20 October 1959.

21. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-3, Adjutant-General to Officer Commanding 5th Divisional Area, 30 March 1916.

22. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-3, Acting Adjutant-General to Officer Commanding 5th Divisional Area, 13 April 1916.

23. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-3, Director of Mobilization to Chief of the General Staff, 8 April 1916.

to the 5th Divisional Area post on 1 January 1916²⁴ — undertook to bring the unit up to strength by having recourse to the other battalions that were in the process of being organized in his region. The Officers Commanding the 171st and 189th Battalions refused to supply detachments to the 57th.²⁵ Lieutenant-Colonel Readman, Officer Commanding the 167th, was more co-operative,²⁶ but on 7 May 1916, Fages acknowledged that the detachment of 250 men Readman was prepared to supply would not be sufficient to bring the battalion up to strength. It was in these circumstances that the Officers Commanding the battalions then being organized in 5th Divisional Area met to examine the question on 6 May 1916.²⁷ That same day, however, the Second in Command of the 163rd Battalion, Major Olivar Asselin, wrote to Sam Hughes asking that the 163rd be sent to the front. The minister decided to kill two birds with one stone and asked the 163rd Battalion to go to Bermuda instead. The battalion accepted.

Sam Hughes had authorized the formation of the 163rd Battalion on 10 December 1915.²⁸ But even while recruitment was in full swing, the Minister decided to create another unit in the same divisional area, in February 1916.²⁹ In theory, the 206th Battalion should have recruited its personnel from the nearby counties, rather than on the island of Montreal itself. Such was not the case: the 206th Battalion, in fact, did most of its recruiting in Montreal, where there was a considerably larger population than in the surrounding rural counties. In addition, with the establishment of the unit's headquarters in Guy Barracks, where the 163rd Battalion was also quartered, authorization was given implicitly for the 206th to carry out recruiting in the metropolis. The situation angered Olivar Asselin. Another unit was entering into competition for recruits with his 163rd, and just when his own campaign was in full swing. What is more, the new unit was not at all scrupulous in choosing its volunteers or in its recruitment methods. It was in this context that an exasperated Asselin made a formal request for the transfer of his unit to the front. As we have seen, Hughes chose to send it to Bermuda instead.

24. Fetherstonhaugh, p. 206.

25. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-3, Officer Commanding 171st Battalion to Assistant Adjutant-General, 5th Divisional Area, 4 April 1916; Officer Commanding 189th Battalion to same, 4 April 1916.

26. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-3, Officer Commanding 167th Battalion to Assistant Adjutant-General, 5th Divisional Area, 5 April 1916; Adjutant-General to Officer Commanding 5th Divisional Area, 18 April 1916.

27. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1585, file HQ 683-24-5-2, Officer Commanding Military District No. 5 to Secretary, Militia Council, 7 May 1916.

28. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1388, file 593-6-1-163, telegram from Adjutant-General to Officer Commanding 4th Divisional Area, 10 December 1915.

29. More details about the 163rd and 206th Battalions are provided in J.-P. Gagnon, *Le 22^e battalion (canadien-français), 1914-1919. Étude socio-militaire* (Québec, 1986), pp. 165-168, 181-183.

Of course, garrison duty in Bermuda was of a much simpler character than service at the front. Nevertheless, the troops sent there had to be prepared to perform creditably. In this context, the selection of the RCR and of the 38th Battalion might be seen as particularly appropriate, even if the RCR ranks had to be completed with volunteers enlisted in the first expeditionary contingent, as will later become apparent. The same can be said of the 163rd Battalion which, along with the 189th Battalion, was the best available French-Canadian infantry unit. The 163rd had more men than the other, however. It also has to be remembered that the 163rd Battalion was sent to Bermuda because of its French-Canadian character, not necessarily because it was the best prepared unit. In fact, it was not as well trained as others, since it was barely five months old at the time it left Canada. The circumstances of the choice of the 163rd Battalion are indicative again of Hughes' character, but also of the recruiting problems in the Quebec district in the spring of 1916.

II — Strength of the battalions

A total of 3,060 Canadian infantry troops served in Bermuda during the First World War.³⁰ The Royal Canadian Regiment, for its part, sailed from Halifax on 10 September 1914 with a strength of 32 officers, 891 non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and other ranks (ORs), according to statistics established from the sailing list of the unit.³¹ The authorized strength was 1,011 officers and men.³² However, to bring the unit up to strength, it had been necessary to recruit 400 volunteers from the Valcartier base,³³ where Canada's expeditionary contingent had been assembled prior to leaving for Europe. On 17 October 1914, scarcely one month after the battalion's arrival in Bermuda, 16 men deemed undesirable or unfit for service were already on the way back to Canada, after acknowledging in writing that they had not signed the forms for enrolling in the militia.³⁴ The problem was far from settled, however: none of the 400 volunteers from Valcartier had signed the enrolment form either.³⁵ After being informed of the oversight that had occurred in Halifax before the departure of the RCR, authorities in the Department of Militia and Defence

30. There are various figures on the subject. Aside from the one mentioned here, only one other — 3,116 — seems plausible. See PRC, file 'Statistics World War I'.

31. Canada, Militia Orders, *Royal Canadian Regiment, Nominal Roll of All Ranks Serving in Bermuda* (corrected to 19 November 1914), issued with Militia Orders, 1915 (Ottawa, 1915). To the names on the list, 15 should be added who were sent back to Canada in October. This document and others like it will hereinafter be referred to as 'Sailing list' and followed by the name of the unit concerned.

32. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2516, file HQC 1540, vol. 1, Quartermaster General to Officer Commanding 6th Divisional Area, 6 September 1914.

33. NAC, RG 24, 4538, file 4-6-196, vol. 1, Quartermaster General to Officer Commanding 6th Divisional Area, 5 September 1914.

34. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2516, file HQC 1540, vol. 2, Officer Commanding the RCR to Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General, 16 October 1914.

35. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2516, file HQC 1540, vol. 2, Commander in Chief, Bermuda, to Secretary, Militia Council, Ottawa, 8 October 1914.

ordered that the men be enrolled in the permanent force. But the pay in the permanent force was much lower than that offered to volunteers in the CEF: privates received \$0.60 a day, as compared with \$1.10 in the CEF. The RCR volunteers refused, and the military authorities took steps to repatriate the recalcitrant soldiers to Canada.³⁶ The dispute was settled by the Cabinet.³⁷ As of 11 November 1914, the volunteers would receive the same pay as members of the CEF. While the imbroglio thus had a happy ending for the volunteers, some of them continued to make trouble, so much so that 101 men left Bermuda to return to Canada in the following weeks.³⁸

The RCR sailing list reveals that almost all of these 100 men had signed their enrolment form in Bermuda. These were part of the Valcartier volunteer contingent. The discharge of over 100 men, in addition to the 16 who returned to Canada in October, thus takes on a new dimension and should be analyzed in terms of the Valcartier detachment, rather than the RCR as a whole. In that case, it is a question of the discharge of 1 soldier out of 4, rather than 1 out of 10. This is a higher average than the one in Valcartier for the first contingent, where the rejection rate was 15.15 percent.³⁹ The 400 men who had been chosen to serve at Valcartier volunteered for service in Bermuda at a time when there was a great deal of confusion in the camp, where tens of thousands of men were being assembled. Of these, 886 had volunteered to serve in the RCR in Bermuda,⁴⁰ but it is doubtful that the 400 volunteers were chosen according to clearly defined criteria. It is important to note as well that these soldiers, once in Bermuda, denied having offered their services for such a mission. On the contrary, they said to have been forced to accept it.⁴¹ The reason why soldiers were returned to Canada is known in almost all cases: the largest number of men (33) were considered unfit for military service on medical grounds; 25 refused to enlist, even at the rate of pay for members of the CEF; another 25 were deemed undesirable for one reason or another. Ten were not British subjects, having been born in the United States. Finally, 9 were returned to Canada because they were underage. To make up for these losses, a detachment of 116 men arrived in Bermuda on 22 December 1914.⁴²

36. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2516, file HQC 1540, vol. 2, Chief of General Staff to Deputy Minister, 6 October 1914.

37. Privy Council Order-in-Council P.C. 2621, 21 October 1914. See NAC, RG 24, vol. 4538, file 4-6-196, vol. 2.

38. NAC, RG 24, vol. 4538, file 4-6-196, vol. 2, Adjutant-General, Canadian Militia, to Officer Commanding 6th Divisional Area, 10 December 1914.

39. On 8 September 1914, troops stationed in Valcartier numbered 32,665. Of this number, 5,081 were discharged before the first contingent left for England on 3 October 1914. See Colonel A.F. Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919*, General Series, vol. 1 (Ottawa, 1938), pp. 48 and 61.

40. D Hist, Pye Collection, 74/672, file 15, folder 'RCR — Bermuda'.

41. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 4, the Commander in Chief, Bermuda, to Secretary, Militia Council, 11 June 1915.

42. Fetherstonhaugh, p. 205.

Six months later, on 21 June 1915, the regiment welcomed in its ranks 40 more men from the regimental depot in Halifax.⁴³

According to the sailing list, the 38th Battalion included 35 officers and 963 men in its ranks at the time it left Halifax on 8 August 1915. All were officially enlisted in the CEF upon arrival in the unit, so that Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards did not have to face the problem Lieutenant-Colonel Fages had encountered the previous autumn. On 3 December 1915, 1 officer and 98 men from the 77th Battalion joined the 38th in Bermuda.⁴⁴ As the unit had left the Summer Islands with a strength of 1,036 officers and men,⁴⁵ it apparently lost about 60 members along the way. Our research provided information on the nature of 25 of the departures. Fifteen men came back to Canada, because they were unfit for service.⁴⁶ The 10 other rejects involved men of the 77th Battalion and occurred in January of 1916. One man returned to Canada for medical reasons and 2 for disciplinary reasons.⁴⁷ As for the other 7, Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards decided to return them to Canada, because they had “practically no knowledge of the English language and [spoke] only French”.⁴⁸ As the instructors of the 38th Battalion did not know French, these men were thus not able to benefit from an adequate level of training, and their presence in the platoon complicated the job for the other soldiers. Six of the 7 were French-Canadians and the other a native Indian. We do not know why the others were rejected. We have good reason to believe, however, that the men concerned were part of the 77th Battalion draft. This group was considered to be of a very poor quality. Only one third of its members were expected to become efficient soldiers.⁴⁹ The others were described as “physically weak and puny, suffering from various diseases and general weakness”.⁵⁰ That is why the Adjutant General of the Militia anticipated their return to Canada, at the public expense.

43. Fetherstonhaugh, 208; NAC, RG 24, vol. 6281, file HQ 32-10-33, vol. 1, Adjutant-General to Commander in Chief, Bermuda, 24 May 1915.

44. NAC, RG 9, III, D1, vol. 4694, file 57, folder 1, historical report of 38th Battalion, p. 3.

45. Canada, Department of National Defence, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919, Chronology, Appendices and Maps* (Ottawa, 1938), Appendix 734, p. 368.

46. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 5, Officer Commanding 38th Battalion to Acting Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General, Bermuda, 13 October 1915.

47. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-10, Officer Commanding Discharge Depot to Assistant Adjutant-General, 6th Divisional Area, 26 January 1916.

48. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-10, Officer Commanding 38th Battalion to Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General (Prospect), 29 December 1915.

49. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 5, the Deputy Minister of the Militia and Defence to the Governor General and Commander in Chief, Bermuda, 15 January 1916; Adjutant-General to Officer Commanding Military District No. 3, 15 February 1916; the Officer Commanding Boaz Island draft to the Officer Commanding 38th Battalion, 17 January 1916. For a comment on another draft of the 77th Battalion, see Adjutant-General, Canadian Militia, to Officer Commanding 3rd Divisional Area, 22 December 1915.

50. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 5, Officer Commanding 38th Battalion to Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General, Prospect, 26 January 1916.

For reasons that will be referred to later on, the ranks of the 163rd Battalion were not as full as those of its predecessors, when the unit left for Bermuda on 26 May 1916. Lieutenant-Colonel Desrosiers had under his command 33 officers and 659 NCOs and ORs.⁵¹ In order to bring the unit up to strength, 3 officers and 150 NCOs and ORs from the 206th Battalion, which the authorities had just disbanded, were transferred to Bermuda, on 27 July 1916. A second detachment, made up of 1 officer and 38 NCOs and ORs of the same unit left in turn for Bermuda on 9 August 1916.⁵² A total of 884 officers and men went to Bermuda with the 163rd Battalion. However, 115, at least, had to be struck off strength and returned to Canada for different reasons, not known in detail.⁵³

* * *

The problems each battalion faced forced it to return men to Canada. The situation of each, however, was unique. The 163rd Battalion returned the most men. This is not surprising, considering its condition when it left Canada, the fact that it lost a number of men just before departing for Bermuda and that its reinforcements were from the 206th Battalion. The RCR's problems came from first contingent volunteers, not its original men. The same may be said of the 38th Battalion. But on the whole, Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards' situation seems to have been easier than Lieutenant-Colonel Fages'. The nature of the rejects is no surprise to those familiar with the problems met in the recruitment of the CEF.

III — Recruitment and composition of the battalions

The three Canadian infantry units that served in turn in Bermuda, from September 1914 to November 1916, differed in many respects. First of all, the RCR was the only regiment already in existence at the outbreak of hostilities in Europe. Indeed, it was the only infantry regiment in Canada's permanent force. The 38th and 163rd Battalions, on the other hand, were created after the beginning of the War, and because of the War.

Second, the dates and places of enlistment vary from one battalion to another. We have not attempted to establish this information for all the men who served in Bermuda with one or the other of the three units. However, tabulation of data from the sailing lists has enabled us to establish the following facts. First, of the 873 NCOs and ORs whose names appear on the RCR nominal roll and whose enrolment date is known, 511 (58.53 percent) were already part of the Canadian army when hostilities broke out on the Continent.

51. PRC, Ledger 'Units of Canadian Expeditionary Force, Infantry'.

52. NAC, RG 24, vol. 4493, file 48-206-1, Officer Commanding Valcartier camp to Secretary, Militia Council, 17 August 1916.

53. D Hist, Pye Collection, 74/672, file n° 2, folder 'Bermuda, Reliefs and Sailings'.

The rest, 362 ORs (41.75 percent) were volunteers who had enlisted later. On the other hand, at the beginning of August, 345 men (39.51 percent) had been serving for at least a year and 165 (18.9 percent) had enrolled before 1910. One soldier joined up as far back as 1884 (*see* Table 1). The recruitment of the 38th and the 163rd Battalions occurred in a quite different context, of course. Their establishments were filled between January and July 1915, and December 1915 and May 1916, respectively.

Table 1 **Year of enrolment of other ranks serving in Bermuda with the Royal Canadian Regiment**

Year of enrolment	Number of recruits	Cumulative total	Cumulative percentage
1884	1	1	0.11
1887	1	2	0.23
1891	2	4	0.46
1894	1	5	0.57
1898	1	6	0.69
1899	3	9	1.03
1900	3	12	1.37
1901	1	13	1.49
1902	4	17	1.95
1903	8	25	2.86
1904	6	31	3.55
1905	29	60	6.87
1906	22	82	9.39
1907	44	126	14.43
1908	14	140	16.04
1909	25	165	18.90
1910	37	202	23.14
1911	38	240	27.49
1912	65	305	34.94
1913	123	428	49.03
1914	445	873	100.00

Source: Sailing List of the Royal Canadian Regiment for Bermuda.

Note: The officers' dates of enlistment do not appear therein.

The character of the RCR is reflected not only by when men enlisted, but also where. Locations were recorded in the sailing list. The largest number—300 (34.32 percent)—enlisted in Bermuda, as a result of the imbroglio described above, and the majority of the others enlisted in one of the five cities where there was an RCR regimental depot: Halifax (253, or 28.95 percent), Toronto (122, or 13.96 percent), London (59, or 6.75 percent), Quebec City (49, or 5.61 percent) and Fredericton (42, or 4.80 percent). The rest—49, or 5.61%—enrolled elsewhere (*see* Map 1).

The place and date of enrolment of the men of the 38th Battalion form quite a different pattern. This unit included 998 officers and men at the time of its departure from Halifax.⁵⁴ With the exception of 12 soldiers who signed their enrolment form in Bermuda, all of them had joined the unit in Ontario, in particular at Ottawa, the Barriefield camp and Lindsay (*see* Map 2). Recruitment of the battalion and, accordingly, the training of the men were complicated by the decision of the military authorities to remove two detachments from the unit. On 29 May 1915, D Company, made up of McGill University students⁵⁵ and consisting of 6 officers and 250 men, left Canada for England to reinforce the PPCLI at the front.⁵⁶ One month later, on 24 June 1915, another detachment of 5 officers and 250 men was sent overseas.⁵⁷ It was to serve as reinforcement for the 2nd Canadian Infantry Battalion. The Officer Commanding the 38th Battalion had quickly lost a quarter of his men. The losses were made up, it is true, by the transfer to the unit of about 500 men from the 59th,⁵⁸ but the arrival of so many new men at the same time necessitated a period of adjustment and complicated Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards' training program.⁵⁹ Edwards' task was made especially difficult, because he had chosen to part with his best men; he now took charge of men who were less well trained and less motivated.⁶⁰ Six months later, in Bermuda, he was required once again to take in men from another battalion, the 77th, but this time, their numbers were smaller and Edwards did not have to part with some of his best-trained men.

Unlike the RCR and the 38th Battalion, the 163rd was a French-Canadian unit, which enrolled the majority of its members (90.08 percent) in

54. Sailing list of 38th Battalion.

55. D Hist, Regimental Records of 38th Battalion.

56. D Hist, Regimental Records of 38th Battalion; Duguid, p. 607. The figures given here correspond to the number of officers and men forming the 2nd detachment of the 38th Battalion on the sailing list.

57. NAC, RG 9, III, D1, vol. 4694, file 57, folder 1, Historical Report of 38th Battalion, p. 2.

58. NAC, RG 9, III, D1, vol. 4694, file 57, folder 1, Historical Report of 38th Battalion, 2; D Hist, Pye Collection, 74/672, file 21, folder '38th (Ottawa) Battalion, C.E.F.', document 'n^{os} 1 and 2 Universities Companies, 38th Battalion'. It cannot be stated with any accuracy how many men of the 59th Battalion served in Bermuda with the 38th, because at the time of their transfer to this unit, they were given new regimental numbers, as was the practice at the end of the first year of the War. There can be no doubt, however, that the men who enlisted at Lindsay (116) and Peterborough (7), according to the sailing list, had first joined a unit other than the 38th Battalion. An undetermined number of men who enlisted at the Barriefield camp also were in this category.

59. NAC, MG 30, E 153, 'Regimental Records — 38th Ottawa Battalion, C.E.F., compiled by the Regimental Chaplain, Captain the Rev. H.I. Horsey, begun at Bermuda, 8 March 1916', p. 64; Records of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, 'A Soldier of the Line', written by Sgt. John Anderson Church in March 1973, p. 4. These two sources will henceforth be referred to as 'Horsey diary' and 'Church memoirs', respectively.

60. Church memoirs, p. 4. For a comment on drafts of the 59th Battalion after their arrival in England, *see* NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 5, Adjutant-General, Canadian Militia, to Officer Commanding 3rd Divisional Area, 22 December 1915.

the province of Quebec (*see* Map 3). Of the remainder, most joined the unit in one of two areas of Ontario where French-Canadians were particularly numerous: the Ottawa region (14) and Northern Ontario (32). In Quebec, the battalion recruited 80.03 percent of its volunteers in Montreal. The rest enrolled mainly in Sherbrooke (7.78 percent), Saint-Jean (2.94 percent) and in localities north of the Ottawa River, between Ottawa and Montreal (3.08 percent). The 163rd Battalion, unlike the 38th, did not have to strip its ranks for the benefit of other units, nor did it receive transfers from other units during its stay in Canada. Recruitment, which began officially on 21 January 1916 with a large meeting at the National Monument in Montreal, yielded excellent results: three months later, at the end of April, the battalion was nearly up to full strength. This was more than a minor success, considering the recruitment difficulties faced by French-Canadian battalions in general.⁶¹ Thanks in particular to the credibility, enthusiasm and prestige of its Second in Command, Major Olivar Asselin, the unit is said to have had in its ranks 974 NCOs and ORs.⁶² Nevertheless, the battalion apparently lost several hundred men in the weeks that followed, because it left Canada for Bermuda with a reduced strength of 663 NCOs and ORs.⁶³ On the 19th of May, the Officer Commanding Military District No. 4 decided to send the 148th Battalion instead of the 163rd, due to the desertion in the ranks of the latter Battalion.⁶⁴ The RCR and the 38th Battalion did not experience such mishaps. Many ORs seemed to have preferred to go home rather than serve in Bermuda, and we have described elsewhere the upheaval that occurred among the troops before departure.⁶⁵ These losses could not be made up immediately, but only in the course of the summer, thanks to detachments of the 206th Battalion which, in their turn, left for Bermuda.

The RCR, the 38th Battalion and the 163rd Battalion were thus quite distinct entities. Their state of preparation was different, their ranks were filled in different ways, and the men who served with these units in Bermuda enrolled in different places and at different times. And there were other important dissimilarities as well. Relatively few of the men in the RCR were born in Canada (*see* Table 2); over two-thirds (613, or 67.66 percent) were from the British Isles.⁶⁶ In the 38th Battalion, 471 men also originated from that area,⁶⁷ as opposed to 470 who were born in Canada. As for the 163rd Battalion, it was quite different in character, since only 34 of its members

61. J.-P. Gagnon, Chapters IV and V.

62. PRC, Ledger 'Units of Canadian Expeditionary Force, Infantry'.

63. PRC, file 'Enlistment of French-Canadians, 1915-1916', section relating to 163rd Battalion, Officer Commanding Military District No. 4 to Secretary, Militia Council, 23 May 1916.

64. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 5, the Officer Commanding Military District No. 4 to the Adjutant-General, 19 May 1916.

65. J.-P. Gagnon, p. 166.

66. Birthplaces break down thus: England, 490; Scotland, 67; Ireland, 54; Guernsey Island, 1; Channel Island, 1.

67. Birthplaces break down thus: England, 349; Scotland, 83; Ireland, 36; Wales, 3.

(4.42 percent) were from the British Isles.⁶⁸ It was also much more homogeneous from the point of view of geographical origin of its members: 81.56 percent were born in Canada. There was a higher percentage of ORs of British origin in the RCR than in the 38th Battalion, because many British soldiers had been enlisted in the RCR to alleviate the recruitment difficulties being experienced at the time. According to Roger Sarty, the “British personnel who transferred to the Canadian service in 1905-1906 and came out from England in 1907 and 1910-1914 provided a total of at least 1,014 experienced NCOs and ORs for the permanent force.”⁶⁹

Table 2 Country of birth of members of the RCR, the 38th Battalion and 163rd Battalion

Country of Birth	RCR		38th		163rd	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Canada	257	28.37	470	47.09	628	81.56
England	490	54.08	349	34.97	29	3.77
Scotland	67	7.40	83	8.32	4	0.52
Ireland	54	5.96	36	3.61	1	0.13
United States	5	0.55	20	2.00	40	5.19
Russia			10	1.00	12	1.56
Other Countries or areas	33	3.64	30	3.01	56	7.27
Total	906	100.00	998	100.00	770	100.00

Source: Sailing lists of units concerned.

The men’s experience was another factor differentiating the units from one another. We have already seen that the RCR was made up for the most part of regular soldiers, who thus all had varying degrees of military experience at the time of the outbreak of hostilities. It is worth noting that in addition, volunteers who enrolled after 4 August 1914 also had military experience. The 38th Battalion did not have any permanent ORs, but 306 of the NCOs and ORs (31.78 percent) had served previously in the Canadian Militia or in the armed forces of another country. For the 163rd Battalion, this number was 130 (17.71 percent).⁷⁰ This smaller proportion does not come as a surprise, since the 163rd Battalion did its recruitment later in the War, at a time, consequently, where there were less experienced volunteers. It may be presumed that citizens with some military experience preferred to enrol in units like the 38th or the 163rd Battalion, where the quality of the recruits was highly important. Experienced men who had not yet answered the call to duty must certainly have felt inclined to volunteer their services to battalions commanded by respected men in their community. Such was the case for the units under Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards and Major Olivar Asselin.

68. Twenty-nine were born in England, 4 in Scotland and 1 in Ireland.

69. Sarty, p. 184.

70. These statistics were compiled from data in the sailing lists for these units.

It seems clear that the RCR, the 38th and the 163rd Battalions had specific characteristics which made each unique.

IV — Service in Bermuda: grudgingly tolerated by the RCR and the 38th Battalion

Once they had landed in Bermuda, the troops of each unit were dispersed to various points on the islands: Prospect, where their headquarters were located, Boaz Island, St. George's Island and St. David's Island. Their task was twofold: to do their military service as such, and to begin or continue their training. Sergeant John Anderson Church, who served with the 38th Battalion from 23 February 1915 until 18 November 1916, summed up the assignment thus: "Our military duties consisted of drills, mounting sentries on the look-out for German [submarines], patrols along the beaches and in the town (...)." ⁷¹ Drill, in fact, represented the major part of the soldier's job. "The days were drill, drill and more drill", ⁷² except, of course, during the summer when the heat prevented drilling, or on days of extreme bad weather. ⁷³ Instruction in shooting and rifle handling added a measure of variety to an otherwise monotonous program. The same was true of gymnastics led by two British instructors during the 38th Battalion's stay in the Islands. "They were good at their job", wrote Church, "but quickly became unpopular as every morning before breakfast, they put us through an hour's exercise." ⁷⁴ At times, extraordinary events might occur to alter the daily routine. Such was the case, for example, for the men given the task of forming the guard of honour, which the duty battalion was called upon to provide at the opening and closing of the Bermudian parliament. ⁷⁵ Similarly, on 7 and 8 September 1915, the signallers of the 38th Battalion took part in rescuing the crew of a ship in distress that had sunk after running aground on the reefs. ⁷⁶

On the whole, however, military service as such was hardly exciting for volunteers who really wanted to fight overseas. It is not surprising under the circumstances that five months after the arrival of the RCR in the Summer Islands, the Officer Commanding asked that his unit be sent to the front. ⁷⁷ In spite of the support he received from the Chief of the General Staff, the Militia Council refused to grant the request. ⁷⁸ This caused concern in the battalion, especially among the officers. On 25 February 1915, the Commander in Chief,

71. Church memoirs, p. 9.

72. Church memoirs, p. 12.

73. NAC, RG 9, III, D1, vol. 4694, file 57, folder 1, Historical Report of 38th Battalion, p. 4.

74. Church memoirs, p. 12.

75. Fetherstonhaugh, p. 203.

76. Horsey diary, p. 46.

77. Officer Commanding the RCR to Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General, Bermuda, 22 January 1915, quoted in Swettenham, *loc. cit.*, p. 3.

78. Swettenham, *loc. cit.*, p. 3.

Bermuda, Lieutenant-General Sir George Mackworth Bullock, wrote to the Militia Council:

I have the honour to request that I may be informed, confidentially, whether it is likely that the Royal Canadian Regiment will proceed on active service and if so, it will not be in a fit state if all the best and experienced Officers are taken away for duty elsewhere.

If the regiment is likely to remain in Bermuda until the end of the War, or for any long period, I do not wish to thwart the chances any Officer might be offered with a view to advancement by retaining his services here.⁷⁹

This pressure did not bring about the immediate transfer of the battalion to the front, but it seems to have forced the authorities to act. As we have seen, Hughes apparently considered the replacement of the RCR by the 38th Battalion in mid-March. Moreover, on 29 March 1915, Gwatkin hinted at the possible transfer of the battalion to Europe in May or June, as soon as the Canadian 2nd Division had left the country.⁸⁰ Within two months, the latter had gone to England, without the fate of the RCR having been decided.

At that point, discontent — a discontent that was always there⁸¹ — grew among the group of volunteers from Valcartier. “Insubordination and discontent”, wrote Lieutenant-General Bullock to the War Office on 11 June 1915, “are being shown by Valcartier draft of Canadian Militia enlisted for the front. A letter to a Canadian newspaper voicing this discontent, which is common knowledge, has been stopped by the Censor.”⁸² This time, the authorities decided to act. Nine days later, the Minister of Militia, on the War Office’s suggestion,⁸³ volunteered the services of the RCR at the front in return for another battalion being sent to Bermuda.⁸⁴ Three days later, on 22 June, Bullock was informed of the British decision to accept this proposal.⁸⁵ The prospect of having to count on an unseasoned battalion did not appeal to him at all,⁸⁶ but he had to bend to the decision of the War Office.

79. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2516, file HQC 1540, vol. 3, Commander in Chief, Bermuda, to Secretary, Militia Council, 25 February 1915.

80. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2516, file HQC 1540, vol. 3, Chief of the General Staff to Adjutant-General, Canadian Militia, 29 March 1915.

81. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 4, the Commander in Chief, Bermuda, to Secretary, Militia Council, 11 June 1915.

82. NAC, Colonial Office 616, B-3991, vol. 46, Commander in Chief, Bermuda, to War Office, 11 June 1915.

83. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 4, Perley to the Prime Minister, 5 May 1915.

84. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 4, Minister of Militia to War Office, 20 June 1915.

85. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 4, War Office to Commander in Chief, Bermuda, 22 June 1915.

86. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 4, Commander in Chief, Bermuda, to War Office, 23 June 1915.

The 38th Battalion also would have preferred combat to garrison duty. The Officer Commanding the 38th hinted at this as soon as he received instructions from the military authorities. Accordingly, three months after the unit's arrival in Bermuda, the Governor General of Canada, the Duke of Connaught, intervened on its behalf to ask that its stay in Bermuda not exceed 12 months, in the event that the War had not ended by that time.⁸⁷ Lieutenant-General Bullock, for his part, felt on 18 February 1916 that the battalion would be ready to leave for the front at the beginning of April.⁸⁸ Then, the following spring, according to Church, A Company

...on Boaz [Island] rioted. We were all getting pretty well fed up and a rumour started that we were booked to stay in Bermuda for the duration and not see France at all. After the situation was brought under control and things quieted down, we found out that the Colonel had called the officers together and announced that he was resigning his commission in order to get to France as a private, if necessary. Immediately, all the officers, with the exception of [two], handed their resignations to the Colonel. With [the resignations] in his pocket, he set sail for Halifax, en route to Ottawa. Apparently, the Minister of Defence, Gen Sam Hughes, got wind of what was happening and when Col Edwards landed at Halifax, he was handed a telegram advising that "since we had completed our training", we were ordered overseas. He caught the next boat back....⁸⁹

Finally, on 3 April 1916, Bullock notified the Canadian military authorities that the 38th Battalion had completed its training and was ready to leave for the front. The authorities reacted promptly this time, and ten days later, the Commander in Chief, Bermuda, was advised of the decision to replace the 38th Battalion with a French-Canadian unit "as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made, and transport and escort are available."⁹⁰ The 38th greeted the news joyfully, and Church wrote:

The knowledge that we were going brought a marked uplift in the spirits of the men, and there was an end to the grouching over drills. Parties were held all over the island, as many of us had made friends. The sergeants from Prospect held a big party at a downtown hotel, paid from surplus mess funds.⁹¹

The 163rd Battalion, for its part, did not have to worry about spending too much time in Bermuda. Indeed, only three months after arrival of the 163rd in Bermuda, the Canadian government was notified, on 26 September 1916, of the War Office's firm intention to mobilize a garrison to relieve the battalion

87. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-3, Chief of the General Staff to Adjutant-General, 26 November 1915.

88. Commander in Chief, Bermuda, to Secretary, Militia Council, 18 February 1916, quoted in Swettenham, *loc. cit.*, p. 4.

89. Church memoirs, p. 12.

90. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-3, Deputy Minister of Militia and Defence to Commander in Chief, Bermuda, 13 April 1916.

91. Church memoirs, p. 13.

recruited by Olivar Asselin.⁹² Nine weeks later, this was done with the arrival of a battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment on 18 November.⁹³ I did not find any document hinting that the Canadian government had anything whatsoever to do with the British decision. Why did Great Britain take such a rapid action? No explanatory document have been found, but it must be said that the decision was made before Bullock sent to the War Office, on 9 October 1916, a negative report on the 163rd Battalion, as it will be seen later.

The British authorities' action, however, resulted in the disappearance of one of the War's best French-Canadian infantry units. At the same time as this decision concerning the replacement of the 163rd Battalion reached Bermuda, a rumour was circulating to the effect that the French-speaking battalion would be disbanded upon arrival in England.⁹⁴ This was indeed sad news for the men and officers of the 163rd, and for Olivar Asselin, a cruel twist of fate. His representations to Prime Minister Borden⁹⁵ and to the Minister of Militia and Defence⁹⁶ were in vain: his unit was in fact disbanded, on 8 January 1917, and its members sent to the 10th Reserve Battalion.⁹⁷ The RCR and the 38th Battalion, by contrast, had their wish: both units had an opportunity to participate in combat. The same was true for members of the 163rd, but they had to be content with acting as reinforcement for other units, the 22nd Battalion in particular.

While service in Bermuda was relatively easier, it was not free of difficulties. Regulars, used to discipline and garrison duty, seem to have adapted themselves more readily than some CEF volunteers who enlisted for fighting.

V — Daily life in Bermuda

While in Bermuda, the men became gradually more impatient, because they had enrolled for active combat. After experiencing it, however, the harsh reality of the front quickly aroused their nostalgia for the peaceful Atlantic islands. "We were all excited at leaving Bermuda", wrote Church, "but were not in France two weeks before we were all wishing we were back there."⁹⁸

Such a change of feelings was quite understandable. Life in Bermuda may have seemed very monotonous for some of the volunteers anxious to see combat action in Europe, but it had been very pleasant compared to the

92. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1512, file HQ 683-16-3, telegram from Carson to Ottawa, 28 September 1916.

93. PRC, file 'Enlistment of French-Canadians, 1915-1916', section devoted to 163rd Battalion (French-Canadian).

94. M.-A. Gagnon, *La vie orageuse d'Olivar Asselin*, tome II (Montreal, 1962), p. 189.

95. J.-P. Gagnon, p. 168.

96. M.-A. Gagnon, pp. 189-190.

97. D Hist, Regimental file, 163rd Battalion.

98. Church memoirs, p. 13.

hardships of the front, and the islands did have their charms. The setting, of course, was obviously enchanting. Here is how Sgt Church described it in his War memoirs, written in 1973:

[Bermuda Islands] seemed almost a paradise with rich verdant growth and surrounded by seas of deep blue. The houses were mostly bungalows built of soft white limestone that could be sawn into blocks. Actually, they were the deposits of sea life over the years. With their red and yellow roofs, the houses stood out in the clear air and were surrounded by a profusion of flowers that seemed to grow everywhere. The oleanders were in bloom and the scent was heavenly to we Canadians who were not used to it.⁹⁹

At the front, by contrast, the landscape was sinister and desolation was everywhere. But in Bermuda, in addition to the exceptional environment, the troops who served at headquarters in Prospect enjoyed quarters among the most modern in the British Empire.¹⁰⁰ The accommodations consisted of “a splendid group of store buildings, including Officers’ Mess, Quarters for Officers and men, Married Quarters, Band Room, Sergeants’ Mess, Barrack Stores, Chapel, Hospital,...Gymnasium, together with barrack square and recreation field.”¹⁰¹ The men of the 38th Battalion played exciting baseball and football games on this field in their off hours.¹⁰² They could also attend concerts and had a regimental reading and recreation room where they could read, write letters or play parlour games. According to the chaplain of the 38th Battalion, the troops made maximum use of this room.¹⁰³ Elsewhere on the islands, conditions were a good deal more Spartan, with the men living in tents.

The temperature in the islands was not the subject of much commentary in the available documents, except when mention was made of the prevailing heat and the storms that blew up from time to time. Community life in Bermuda at the time was, however, of some interest. In 1901, there were 6,383 whites and 11,152 blacks;¹⁰⁴ in this population, racial divisions were very distinct. The situation was such as to surprise Canadian soldiers, who were more familiar with language differences than racial differences. Church wrote:

Communication between St. David’s [Island] and the mainland was by a ferry that was just a long launch. The whites sat in the bow, the negroes in the stern, and the mixed amidships. One of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen was [the] daughter [of a British retired soldier], but neither the whites nor the negroes would have anything to do with her as she sat amidships. Some of our lads tried, but were repulsed. It took a while to become adjusted to the colour line, and there were some brawls before we accepted it.¹⁰⁵

99. Church memoirs, p. 8.

100. Horsey diary, p. 44.

101. Horsey diary, p. 44.

102. NAC, RG 9, III, D1, vol. 4694, file 57, folder 1, Historical Report of 38th Battalion, p. 4.

103. Horsey diary, p. 45.

104. *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, 1910, vol. 3, p. 794.

105. Church memoirs, p. 9.

Church himself experienced the rigid social barriers separating the white and black communities:

One Sunday morning, I was in St. George and decided to go to church. A big white Anglican church was built in the side of a hill and the notice board said services at 10 and 11 a.m. Not wishing to wait for the 11 a.m. service and seeing some people going in, I went in too. The service was in the basement and I sat down at the rear. It was then I noticed that the congregation was all black and they were turning around to give me some hostile stares. Presently, two big blacks came up to me. "White man, you are in the wrong place." "But this is a Christian Church?" "Yes sir, but we don't want you. You go upstairs at 11 o'clock." They stood there till I got up and went out. Naturally, I was too upset to go to church that morning.¹⁰⁶

This incident was exceptional: a white soldier victimized by racial segregation rules made by whites. Canadians serving in Bermuda were subsequently to learn much more about the inhuman relations human societies often establish. But in these Atlantic islands, the soldiers could enjoy themselves, in spite of those unfamiliar rules.

And enjoy themselves, the men of the 163rd Battalion did during that summer they spent in Bermuda, to take Olivar Asselin's word for it. Asselin was a deeply passionate man, who never lost the taste for combat and always reacted with great feeling, whether of joy or of pain, in battle as in adversity. He had wonderful memories of "that summer, that extraordinary, fantastic summer in Bermuda."¹⁰⁷ The first days there, however, were marked by disappointment. He wrote:

It came back to us from all quarters that our friendly comrades from Ottawa [members of the 38th] were going around, no better than the Jerries, telling the Bermudians that French-Canadians in general, and the ones in the 163rd in particular, were a bunch of savages...[Fortunately, the single officers] were quick to meet the hospitable, intelligent local population and set them straight. The officers were young, polite, chivalrous, witty, sometimes mischievous, and they captivated this little lost world in the middle of the ocean, which until that time had known no other foreigners than hypochondriac, drunk or lecherous Americans, proper and generally gloomy British officers, and less proper English-Canadian officers who apparently felt obliged, in order to keep up their standing, to drink too much bitter ale (it was 20 percent alcohol) and throw up all over their brother-in-arms. Doors opened for the officers, mothers were less strict, the girls more tender. Under the cedars and palm trees, along the white roads framed by oleanders, on the coral beaches, in the grottoes, by day and by night, the shrewd French spirit gained its revenge...What a fine time that was.¹⁰⁸

The other ranks also thoroughly enjoyed their stay in the islands as well, according to Olivar Asselin's biographer, Marcel-A. Gagnon:

106. Church memoirs, p. 9.

107. O. Asselin, 'Trois disparus', *La Revue moderne*, 3, 3 (15 January 1922), p. 14.

108. Asselin, *loc. cit.*, p. 14.

The Canadians bought rum at ridiculously low prices and drank as much as they could. After their escapades, they spent some time in the clink or appeared before the disciplinary officer, Léonce Plante, who did not know where to turn first. Alcohol was prohibited in camp, but the natives smuggled bottles in, hidden in large baskets full of laundry.¹⁰⁹

Like all love stories, these descriptions sound a little idyllic, but they do testify to the affection Asselin and several of his men felt toward Bermuda during the months they spent there in the summer of 1916. These writings enable us to better understand the decision by Lieutenant-Colonel Desrosiers and his Second in Command Asselin to enlist 17 black Bermudians “to act as Officers’ servants”. Their initiative offended the Commander in Chief, Bermuda, who brought the matter to the attention of the Secretary of the Militia Council in Ottawa.¹¹⁰ For Bullock, enlistment of the black Bermudians was contrary to the policy of both the British government and the local government in Bermuda. The Officer Commanding the 163rd Battalion had hired these men so as to enable the soldiers they replaced to engage in training. Bullock acknowledged that the move was not entirely devoid of sense, but did not think these coloured men “would work into their places as part of a unit of the Expeditionary Force.” As to the outcome of the story, we know only that the Deputy Minister of Militia and Defence, Surgeon General Eugène Fiset, recommended that the Commander in Chief, Bermuda, take up the matter with the Officer Commanding the 163rd Battalion.¹¹¹

Life in Bermuda was a change, but not everyone enjoyed it. The French-Canadians liked it best and their second in command, Olivar Asselin, best of all. His reaction might appear hard to understand, when compared to his more rigid attitude at the front,¹¹² but knowing that his unit was not ready for the front, he probably preferred to see it complete its training in Bermuda than in Montreal, close to the 206th Battalion, that he despised so much.

VI — How the Bermudians viewed the Canadian soldiers

We were unable to find Bermudian commentaries of any kind on the presence of the RCR in the islands. The 38th Battalion, for its part, prided itself on the “splendid record this Battalion won for itself when in Bermuda for good conduct and morality.” “Crime”, wrote the battalion chaplain, “was at a minimum and Courts Martial did not afford the studious subaltern many opportunities to attend ‘for instruction’ District Court Martial.”¹¹³ We found no testimony to contradict Reverend Horsey, and have no reason to doubt his word. Statements by Lieutenant-General Bullock tend to confirm Horsey’s

109. M.-A. Gagnon, p. 189.

110. D Hist file, ‘Enlistment of Coloured Men in the CEF’, Commander in Chief, Bermuda, to Secretary, Militia Council, 18 August 1916.

111. D Hist file, ‘Enlistment of Coloured Men in the CEF’, Deputy Minister of Militia and Defence to Commander in Chief, Bermuda, 30 October 1916.

112. J.-P. Gagnon, p. 302.

113. Horsey diary, p. 61.

views. At its departure from Bermuda, the 38th Battalion, according to the testimony of the Commander in Chief, was ready for combat. Bullock could not fail to take legitimate pride in this and to express his satisfaction at the time of his final inspection on 24 May 1916. The correspondent for the *Ottawa Evening Journal* reported Bullock's speech in the 26 June edition:

From the hour of your arrival in Bermuda, declared Sir George, you have, without exception, devoted yourselves enthusiastically to every duty connected with your training, with the result that today, you leave to take an active part in that struggle for which you have been preparing yourselves these many months. In no uncertain manner have you proven to me your fitness to take your place alongside the finest troops in the Empire, and I have no hesitation in predicting that you will more than sustain the fine reputation you have made here, in meeting every emergency and task which may present itself in the months to come. Naturally, in view of the affection I entertain for all of you, I am sorry to lose you from my command, nevertheless, I realize that your ambition is to be in the forefront of the terrible struggle now being waged, and you leave to perform your duties there with the best wishes of all circles in Bermuda, who have learned to esteem and respect you for the good name your discipline and conduct has established for you here. In concluding, let me say I consider the 38th "Ottawa" regiment a credit to Canada and a source of pride to the Capital City from which you come.¹¹⁴

According to the *Journal*, the Bermuda police inspector also said some very flattering things about the battalion commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards:

It will be a source of pleasure to the people of Ottawa to learn that the inspector of police in Bermuda, who has occupied this position for 18 years, stated that in all his experience he and his officers had never witnessed a battalion the members of which maintained such a high standard of conduct. (...) the reputation they made (...) has caused all classes in Bermuda to feel a keen sense of regret for their departure.¹¹⁵

The *Journal* correspondent accompanied the regiment on its journey from Bermuda to England, writing that:

...fully 5,000 Bermudians had assembled to participate in the farewell demonstration. While embarking in tenders to proceed to the troopship at the dockyard, commercial and social circles of Bermuda showed in no uncertain way their appreciation and esteem of all ranks of the 38th "Ottawa", the send-off being fully as enthusiastic and heartfelt in proportion to numbers as was the memorable farewell given this corps by the people of Ottawa on Parliament Hill on 1 August.¹¹⁶

We do not know whether the Bermudian people greeted the departure of the 163rd Battalion with the same warmth. Olivar Asselin felt "that the

114. 'Torpedo Boats Encircled SS Grampian as Transport Nearing England With 38th', *Ottawa Evening Journal*, 31, 169 (26 June 1916), p. 1.

115. '38th Battalion Lands in Britain, "All Well" Report in Private Gable', *Ottawa Evening Journal*, 31, 158 (12 June 1916), p. 1.

116. 'Torpedo Boats Encircled SS Grampian as Transport Nearing England With 38th', *Ottawa Evening Journal*, 31, 169 (26 June 1916), p. 1.

President of the Bank of Bermuda...was sincere when he declared, upon our departure, that no battalion had left behind a more pleasant memory on the island than the 163rd."¹¹⁷ Lieutenant-General Bullock, by contrast, was much less enthusiastic toward the unit commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Desrosiers than he had been toward the 38th.¹¹⁸ According to Bullock, the troops were complete novices when they arrived in Bermuda, and they made slow progress, the language barrier being a sizeable obstacle between them and their British instructors. Also, the officers of the 163rd, "though mostly of a good type, were not capable of acting as instructors at first". Bullock also maintained that "the discipline of the Battalion has been distinctly bad".¹¹⁹ It cannot be denied that the 163rd Battalion arrived in Bermuda less well prepared than the 38th. The latter had benefited from longer training in Canada, six months as opposed to four, and had spent two full months at the Barriefield camp, while the 163rd had taken its instruction in the heart of downtown Montreal.¹²⁰ When, on 14 May 1916, Major-General Gwatkin, Chief of the General Staff, Canadian Militia, informed Lieutenant-General Bullock of the sending of the 163rd Battalion to Bermuda, he warned Bullock that this was a "young battalion, still in the rough." Also, he gave Bullock to understand that he would have to show flexibility in his relations with the new unit. According to Gwatkin, the French-Canadian soldier "[responded] to good leadership, but he [was] easily upset, and it is difficult at times for the unimaginative Englishman to understand him."¹²¹

Bullock, however, with his long military career — he celebrated his 65th birthday on 15 August 1916 —, seems to have had very set ideas about the military and life in general, ideas which did not enable him to easily understand Asselin's men. This point can be illustrated through each man's account of an incident that involved the company serving on Boaz Island.

...we had, Bullock wrote,...what was practically a small mutiny in the company stationed at Boaz Island...on 3 October 1916, the men resented what appears to me to have been a not wholly judicious order of the officer (in charge), and a number of them refused to obey an order. Others, when

117. Asselin, *loc. cit.*, p. 14.

118. I have described elsewhere his remarks concerning the 163rd Battalion. See J.-P. Gagnon, p. 167.

119. NAC, RG 9, III, vol. 49, series 8, file 8-5-108, Commander in Chief, Bermuda, to Secretary, War Office, 9 October 1916, quoted in J.-P. Gagnon, p. 167.

120. PRC, file, 'Enlistment of French-Canadians, 1915-1916', section devoted to 163rd Battalion (French-Canadian), Gwatkin to Bullock, 14 May 1916.

121. It is of interest to add that many men of the 163rd Battalion had enlisted only one or two months before the unit departed for Bermuda in May 1916. The data appearing on the sailing list for England on 27 November 1916 shows that 61 percent of the enlistments took place in March, April and May 1916. The detailed figures are: 221 enlistments (30.5 percent) for February 1916 and preceding months; 234 (32.3 percent) for March 1916; 169 (23.3 percent) for April 1916; 61 (8.4 percent) for later months; 12 at an unspecified date. *Source*: Sailing list of the 163rd Battalion for England.

directed to arrest them, refused to do so. The Officer Commanding applied to the Captain of H.M.S. Caesar for assistance, and the men were placed in confinement on H.M.S. Caesar.¹²²

Asselin's interpretation was much less dramatic:

[...] for a half-dozen drunken soldiers who had to be arrested, the old governor, Sir George Bullock — a nice chap, but gone a bit soft — had the crews of the fleet mobilized.¹²³

Years had their effect on Bullock. "The general", Church wrote in a mocking way, "was an old soldier, decrepit and bleary eyed, walking with two canes, though he held himself erect. We [my comrades and I] all felt that [the inspection] would be a farce as the general would be unable to see whether we were slovenly or smart."¹²⁴ Physically, Bullock perhaps did not look well. Meanwhile, he performed his duties with authority and he was fully conscious of his responsibilities. He seems to have been one of those out of the ordinary personalities who played a role in the presence of Canadian troops in Bermuda. Hughes and Asselin were others, as were Edwards and Desrosiers, but in other respects.

Bullock experienced certain hardships in dealing with the Canadians. But he would apparently have welcomed 2,000 more soldiers if Canada had been willing to train troops in Bermuda during the winter.¹²⁵ The Militia Council, however, rejected the suggestion. This invitation from the Commander in Chief, Bermuda, was flattering for Canada. It might be thought that the military authorities refused to take up the idea for reasons relating to the training of recruits or sending reinforcements for the Canadian troops at the front. This was not at all the case. The reason given was much simpler: the Militia Council was not prepared to build barracks in Bermuda, and the heavy storms in the islands tended to blow away the tents.¹²⁶ Under the circumstances, the military authorities deemed it preferable to reject Lieutenant-General Bullock's suggestion.¹²⁷

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122. NAC, RG 9, III, vol. 49, series 8, file 8-5-108, Commander in Chief, Bermuda, to Secretary, War Office, 9 October 1916.

123. Asselin, *loc. cit.*, p. 14.

124. Church memoirs, p. 11.

125. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1115, file HQ 54-21-48-30, Governor of Bermuda to Governor General of Canada, 30 August 1916.

126. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1115, file HQ 54-21-48-30, Secretary, Militia Council, to Chief of General Staff, 6 September 1916; General Bullock to Department of Militia, 8 September 1916.

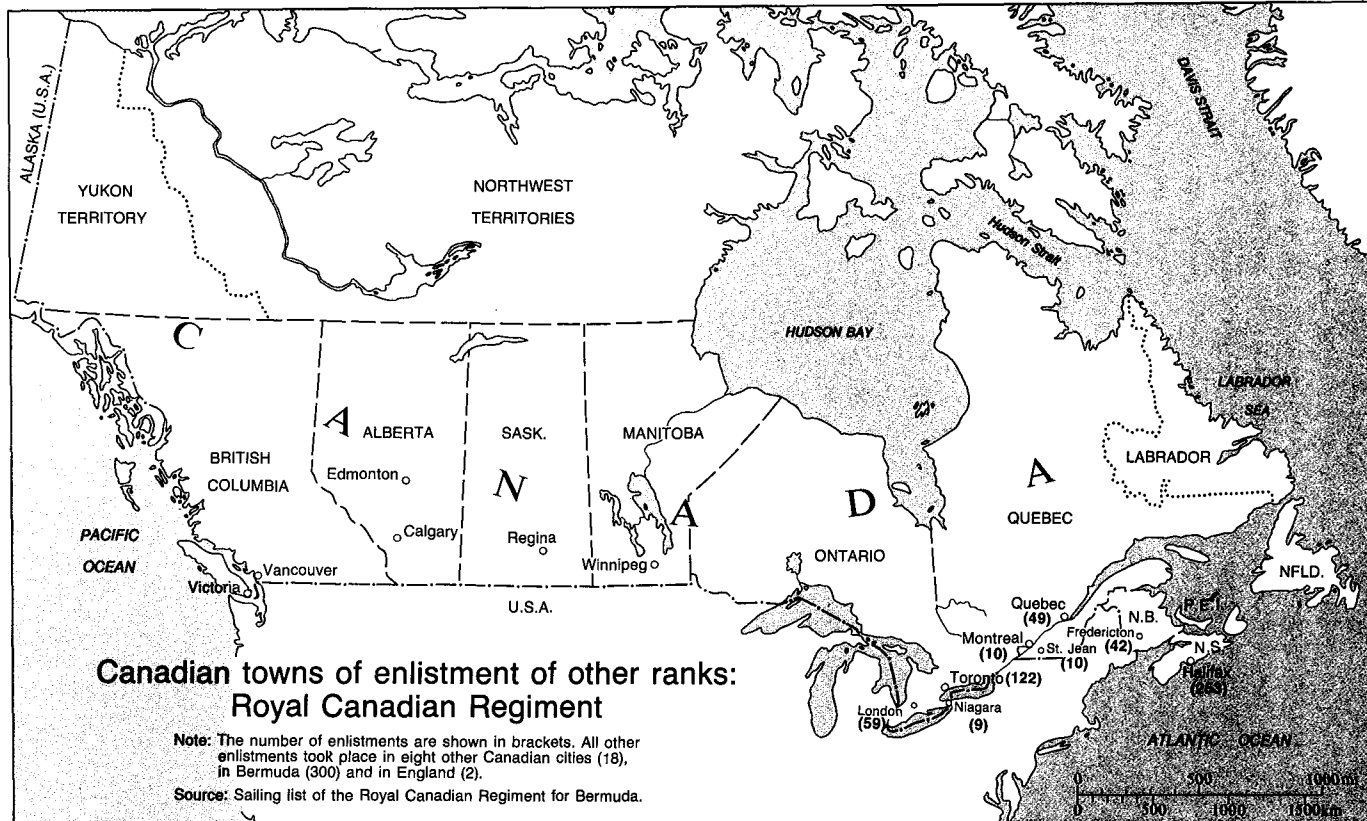
127. NAC, RG 24, vol. 1115, file HQ 54-21-48-30, Secretary, Militia Council, to Chief of General Staff, 11 September 1916.

Three Canadian infantry battalions were thus garrisoned in Bermuda during the First World War, at public expense. The Government considered those units as part of the CEF, during their stay in the Summer Islands, and spent \$340,708.90 for their upkeep.¹²⁸ Today, in the eyes of Canadian historians, that mission seems out of place. And yet, it was in keeping with the changes that had marked relations between Britain and Canada in North America, beginning in the latter third of the 19th century.¹²⁹ To begin with the departure of British troops in 1871, Canada had to take over its own defence. When the Boer War broke out, in 1899, some Canadian political leaders looked favourably upon providing an infantry battalion for the fortress of Halifax, where Great Britain had maintained a garrison after 1871. In January 1900, the Laurier government formed the 3rd (Special Service) Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment and assigned it to the Halifax fortress. Such an initiative met with widespread approval; dispatching the same unit overseas to South Africa would have created considerable political controversy. During debates on these matters, the Conservatives proposed that Canada also supply replacement troops to Bermuda, in order to release British soldiers for combat duty in South Africa. Finally, in 1905, Great Britain transferred all responsibility for Halifax and Esquimalt in Canada. The August 1914 call on Canadian troops was part of that development, leading Canadians to play a role of ever increasing importance in the defence of British interests in North America. The mission entrusted to Canada was therefore founded on a more rational basis than simple colonial dependence. During the Second World War, Canadian servicemen would again be called upon to serve in Bermuda.

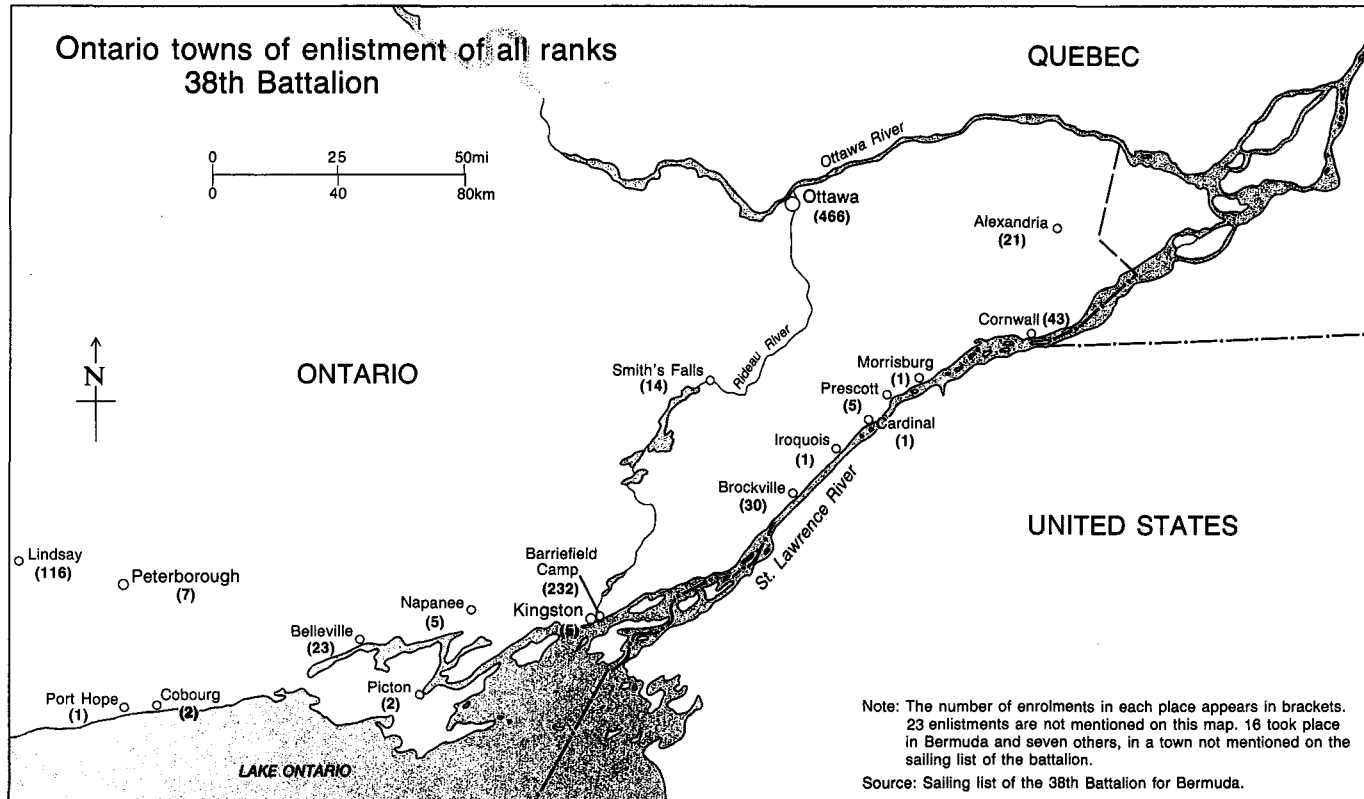
128. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2517, file HQC 1540, vol. 5, Deputy Minister, Militia and Defence to the Under-Secretary of State to the External Affairs, 22 February 1916; vol. 6, Chief Accountant to E.E. Stockton, Auditor General's Office, 1 June 1920.

129. In this connection, *see* Sarty, pp. 106 sq.

Map 1



Map 2



Map 3

