

Canadian Generals of the First World War and the Popular View of Military Leadership

by A. M.J. HYATT*

Arthur Lower once wrote that during the First World War Canadians "became intensely proud of their fighting men, though characteristically they took little interest in their generals."¹ Whether or not the pride survives, it seems that his observation on Canadian generals is as accurate today as when it was written - at least for the military leaders of the First World War. Perhaps part of the reason why there is little interest in Canadian generals in the first war is the lack of information about these individuals. Very few of those who served in the Canadian Forces of 1914-18 as generals wrote memoirs, the number of biographies of these men can be counted on one's fingers, and even the Canadian Official History, admirable in so many respects, does not provide a complete list of these senior officers or even mention some of them.² In fact, it is very difficult to establish with precision what a "Canadian General" during the First World War was or how many such individuals existed.

Normally all officers of the rank of full colonel or higher are reckoned to be "General Officers," but full colonels are not considered Generals." The British Army List during the First World War shows a separate column for each rank above "Major General," and the next lower category is "Colonels," though many of the individuals listed as colonel are described as "temporary Brigadier." The problem of rank, can be solved if one simply limits consideration only to those who served at the rank of brigadier-general or above during the war. But the adjective "Canadian" is also difficult to resolve. Neither place of birth nor 1914 place of residence by itself is a satisfactory distinction. Men born in Britain, but residing in Canada in 1914, served in the Canadian Forces and the British Army as generals. Men born in Canada and residing in Britain served as

* Department of History, University of Western Ontario.

¹ Arthur M. LOWER, *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Toronto, 1957), p. 456.

² A few of the Canadian generals produced articles on aspects of their experience during the war, which were most often published in *The Canadian Defence Quarterly*. Sam Steele's memoirs deal mainly with his prewar experience. General Alderson's writing also deals mainly with the prewar period, but J.E.B. SEELEY in *Adventure* gives some very interesting personal views of the war. Desmond MORTON's admirable life of Otter, *The Canadian General*, is in a class by itself, though other, more general, histories like John SWETTENHAM's *To Seize the Victory* and D.J. GOODSPEED's *Road Past Vimy* are helpful. Swettenham's first volume on McNaughton is also useful.

generals in the Imperial and the Canadian Forces. Men born in Canada and residing in 1914 in Canada served only in the British army, and Imperial Officers served only in the Canadian Expeditionary Force or in Canada. In the end, one may side-step the issue with a definition: a Canadian general was anyone at the rank of brigadier-general or above who served with the Canadian Forces during the war."³ The tables which accompany this note reflect this definition in the totals. It is still possible and useful to distinguish between officers serving in the Canadian Forces who were seconded from the British Army and those who were members of the Canadian Militia and Permanent Force before the war. In the following tables the heading "Canadian generals" indicates officers of the Canadian Forces who were prewar members of the Militia or Permanent Force; "British generals" indicates generals of the Canadian Forces seconded from the British Army.

In any event, there were more generals serving in the Canadian Forces during the war than most historians have realized.⁴ The Canadian Official History of the war provides a table of "Persons Holding Principal Appointments" which contains seventy-eight names of brigadiers or above of which fifteen belong to British officers serving in the Canadian Corps.⁵ Unfortunately this list does not include the names of Canadian generals serving in administrative posts in Britain, nor does it contain a number of brigadier and major-generals serving in Canada. A review of the *Militia Lists* of 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917, and 1918 adds a number of additional names, but omits generals listed in the Official History and includes only those British generals serving in Canadian positions who had commissions in the Canadian Militia as well as the British forces. It is not simple to check discrepancies by reference to personnel records held in the Public Archives. These records are kept alphabetically without rank designation. Thus, finding the documents of Major-General Henry Smith, Canadian Judge Advocate General for most of the war, provides a genuine test of patience, for there were many called "Henry Smith" among the 620,000 Canadians who served in the war. Moreover, the surviving documents of many individuals are very slim, and the Canadian documents do not include records of the British generals who served in the Canadian forces. The most inclusive of the several lists of generals held in the Armed Forces Directorate of History indicates a total of five officers (two of whom were British) who served as lieutenant-general, forty-three who served as major-

³ The official definition of the composition of the Canadian Expeditionary changed several times throughout the war. Here I am accepting the definition outlined in 1917, General Order 93. See District Order MD1, 4 Dec. 1917.

⁴ A personal survey by the author of more than fifty friends and acquaintances, all of whom were historians or had at some time been associated with the armed forces, supports this conclusion. The survey contained only one question: "how many men served in the Canadian Armed Forces during the years 1914-18 at the rank of brigadier or higher?" The most common answer was "twenty-five." Only two answers, one from a Second World War general and one from a specialist on the eighteenth-century British Empire, were higher than one hundred.

⁵ G.W.L. NICHOLSON, *Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa, 1962), p. 539.

general, and seventy-seven who served as brigadier-general.⁶ Careful collation of all these sources provides reasonable confidence for the accuracy of the following table which answers the question: how many generals were there in the Canadian forces during the First World War?

Table 1. — GENERALS SERVING IN CANADIAN FORCES, 1914-18

| | No. | % of Total |
|---|-----|------------|
| Canadian Generals in Canadian Forces, Non-operational Theatres only* | 37 | 29.4 |
| Canadian Generals in Canadian Forces in Operational Theatres | 69 | 54.8 |
| Total Canadian Generals in all Theatres | 106 | 84.2 |
| British Generals in Canadian Forces, Non-operational Theatres only* | 5 | 3.9 |
| British Generals in Canadian Forces in Operational Theatres | 15 | 11.9 |
| Total British Generals in Canadian Forces in all Theatres | 20 | 15.8 |
| Total Generals in Canadian Forces, Non-operational Theatres only | 42 | 33.3 |
| Total Generals in Canadian Forces in Operational Theatres | 84 | 66.7 |
| Total Generals in Canadian Forces in all Theatres | 126 | 100.0 |

* Non-operational theatres include England and Canada; all other theatres of service are considered operational.

Having established the number of Canadian generals, one then confronts the question: "what can be said about them?" Simply counting generals is an interesting exercise in that a good deal of peripheral information on them can be accumulated in the process. This information is by no means as complete as one would wish. Even the personnel records rarely provide complete biographical data, which suggests that one of the perquisites of being a general, apparently, was to ignore with impunity the tiresome duty of answering personal questionnaires which demanded mundane information like "religion" or "pre-war occupation." Nonetheless, it is possible, after collating the information on all 126 individuals, to describe with a fair degree of accuracy the "average" Canadian general in the First World War.⁷

Given the political history of Canada during the war and the enormous social distress which the war caused, the most important thing which can be said about the "average" Canadian general is that French was not his first language. This fact can be derived only from a detailed consideration of the entire list of generals. For the purposes of this essay

⁶ "Officers of the C.E.F. 1914-1919 Holding the Rank of General Officer," Canadian Armed Forces Directorate of History, cardex file. A very useful biographical source was, Metropolitan Toronto Central Library, *Biographical Scrapbooks* (Toronto, 1973).

⁷ The description of the "average" general is based on the tables which appear as an appendix. These tables were prepared, with the aid of *The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* after a brief profile on each of the 126 men had been prepared.

it is sufficient to note that only eight of the generals were from French-speaking Canadian families. The most senior and best qualified of these in 1914 was General Lessard who never served outside of Canada during the war. Of the eight French-speaking Canadians only three served in France at the rank of brigadier.

Table 2. — AGE, LONGEVITY AND MARITAL STATUS OF GENERALS SERVING IN THE CANADIAN FORCES 1914-1918

| | No. | Age 1914 | | Longevity | | Marital Status | | | | | |
|--|-----|----------|-----|-----------|-----|----------------|------|--------|-----|---------|-----|
| | | | | | | Married | | Single | | Unknown | |
| | | Mean | Med | Mean | Med | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| <i>Canadian Generals</i> | 106 | 46.9 | 46 | 73.3 | 73 | 94 | 88.7 | 7 | 6.6 | 5 | 4.7 |
| <i>British Generals</i> | 20 | 44.8 | 43 | 66.2 | 69 | 16 | 80 | 1 | 20 | 3 | 15 |
| <i>Total Generals in Canadian Forces</i> | 126 | 46.6 | 46 | 69.7 | 72 | 110 | 87.3 | 8 | 6.3 | 8 | 6.3 |

Excluding the twenty individuals who were seconded from the British forces to the CEF, the average Canadian general was nearly 47 years old in 1914. He died in 1941 at the age of 73. The chances are high that he was born in Canada (78.3 percent) which is in sharp contrast to the rank and file of Canadian soldiers of whom only thirty percent of the first contingent were Canadian born.⁸ Our average general was almost certainly a protestant (only ten percent were not), and the chances were slightly better than one in three that belonged to the Church of England. Most probably, he was married, and, if we may judge by his pre-war occupation, reasonably affluent. Although he may have been born in a village or the country, he lived in a city or town in 1914.⁹ His residence in 1914 was in Ontario, Quebec or West of Ontario with a better than even chance that it was in Ontario. After the war, the odds were still high that he would live in Ontario, Quebec, or the Canadian West, reflecting to a considerable degree the demographic and political realities of Canada.¹⁰ In 1914 most of those who were to become generals had been well educated, all had at least attended secondary school of some sort, and better than half had attended university. Parenthetically, one may note that ten had attended the University of Toronto, five had graduated from McGill, eight were from Upper Canada College, and nineteen were Royal Military College ex-cadets.¹¹

⁸ J. L. GRANATSTEIN, *Conscription in the Second World War 1939-1945* (Toronto, 1969), p. 1. See also Carl BERGER, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing: 1900-1970* (Toronto, 1976), p. 171. "The Canadian army in the Second World War was composed of a far larger proportion of Canadian-born than was the case in the First World War."

⁹ Although only the province of birth is recorded in the tables, the original data provided town, county, or city in most cases.

¹⁰ See John ENGLISH, *The Decline of Politics: The Conservatives and the Party System 1901-20* (Toronto, 1977), p. 224.

¹¹ The tables show only "university education" but a complete record by institution is available.

Table 3. — PLACE OF BIRTH, RELIGION OF GENERALS,
SERVING IN CANADIAN FORCES,
1914-18

| | | Place of Birth | | | | | | | Religion | | | | | | | Total |
|----------|-----|----------------|--------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------|-------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------|-------|
| | | Ontario | Quebec | East of Quebec | West of Quebec | Total Canada | U.K. | Other | Roman Catholic | Church of England | Methodist | Presbyterian | United Church* | Other Protestant | Unknown | |
| Canadian | No. | 53 | 20 | 6 | 4 | 83 | 15 | 8 | 11 | 36 | 5 | 18 | 4 | 3 | 29 | 106 |
| Generals | % | 50 | 18.9 | 5.7 | 3.8 | 78.3 | 14.2 | 7.5 | 10.4 | 33.9 | 4.7 | 16.9 | 3.8 | 2.8 | 27.4 | 100 |
| British | No. | | | | | | 20 | | | 10 | | | | | 10 | 20 |
| Generals | % | | | | | | 100 | | | 50 | | | | | 50 | 100 |
| Total | No. | 53 | 20 | 6 | 4 | 83 | 35 | 8 | 11 | 46 | 5 | 18 | 4 | 3 | 39 | 126 |
| | % | 42.1 | 15.9 | 4.8 | 3.2 | 65.9 | 27.8 | 6.3 | 8.7 | 35.7 | 3.9 | 14.3 | 3.2 | 2.4 | 30.9 | 100 |

* United Church of Canada listing shows when religion could be obtained only from a postwar source.

Table 4. — EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF GENERALS SERVING IN CANADIAN FORCES, 1914-18

| | | Nature of Education | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------|-------|
| | | University Education | Royal Military College | University or RMC | Secondary Only | Unknown | Total |
| Canadian Generals | No. | 41* | 19* | 56 | 40 | 10 | 106 |
| | % | 38.7 | 17.9 | 52.8 | 37.7 | 9.4 | 100 |
| British Generals | No. | 4 | 9 | 13 | 5 | 2 | 20 |
| | % | 20 | 45 | 65 | 25 | 10 | 100 |
| Total | No. | 44 | 28 | 69 | 45 | 12 | 126 |
| | % | 34.9 | 22.2 | 54.8 | 35.7 | 9.5 | 100 |

* Four graduates of Royal Military College also held university degrees.

A surprisingly large number of the men who were generals in the Canadian Forces had had some kind of active prewar military experience. While service in the South African war or a colonial campaign was no guarantee that the individual involved would become an effective military leader, it was not likely to hurt. In any event, nearly forty percent of the Canadians who served in France had had some experience with active military operations before 1914. Canadian military leadership during the First World War was not exactly innocent of the nature of war, and certainly was very familiar with military organization and training at least as witnessed in the Canadian Militia. Kenneth Eyre has demonstrated that "in essence the Canadian Corps was built around former officers of the Militia,"¹² and this study supports such a conclusion. Whether or not such service was helpful during the war, 95.2 percent of Canadian generals had been members of either the Permanent Force or the Militia before the outbreak of war. Thirty-seven percent of the total number had received the formal military training provided by either a Staff College, The Royal Military College, or the Militia Staff Course.

If one divides the Canadian generals into two groups, those who served in an operational theatre and those who did not, there is a rough pattern with respect to prewar military experience, service, and training. Among those who remained in Canada or Britain during the war, a higher percentage had had no active prewar military experience (70 percent *vis à vis* 54 percent), had served in the Regular Forces rather than the Militia (51 percent *vis à vis* 29 percent), and had no formal training at Staff College, RMC, or the Militia Staff course (73 percent *vis à vis* 55 percent) compared to those who served in France. One should perhaps also note that none of the Canadian generals who served in Canada or Britain began the war with a rank lower than lieutenant-colonel, while 45 percent of those who served in France began the war with the rank of major or below. A consideration of the "Table of Principal Appointments" provided in the Canadian Official History indicates that generals serving in Canada

¹² Kenneth Charles EYRE, "Staff and Command in the Canadian Corps: The Canadian Militia 1896-1914 As a Source of Senior Officers" (M.A. thesis, Duke University, 1967), p. 151.

Table 5. — PREWAR MILITARY EXPERIENCE, SERVICE AND TRAINING OF GENERALS SERVING IN CANADIAN FORCES, 1914-18

| | | Prewar Military Experience* | | | | | Prewar Military Service | | | | | Prewar Military Training [†] | | | |
|---|-----|-----------------------------|---|---|---------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|---------|-------|
| | | South African War | Colonial Campaigns (other than S.A.W.) | Total, South African War or Colonial Campaigns | No experience | Experience Unknown | Regular Service | Militia Service | Regular or Militia Service | None | Service Unknown | Trained | Untrained | Unknown | Total |
| <i>Canadians who served in Non-operational Theatres</i> | No. | 9 | 1 | 10 | 26 | 1 | 19 | 17 | 36 | | 1 | 8 | 27 | 2 | 37 |
| | % | 24.3 | 2.7 | 27 | 70.3 | 2.7 | 51.4 | 45.9 | 97.3 | | 2.7 | 21.6 | 72.9 | 5.4 | 100 |
| <i>British who served in Non-operational Theatres</i> | No. | 4 | 1 | 5 | | | 5 | | 5 | | | 5 | | | 5 |
| | % | 80 | 20 | 100 | | | 100 | | 100 | | | 100 | | | 100 |
| <i>Total who served in Non-operational Theatres</i> | No. | 13 | 2 | 15 | 26 | 1 | 24 | 17 | 41 | | 1 | 13 | 27 | 2 | 42 |
| | % | 30.9 | 4.8 | 35.7 | 61.9 | 2.4 | 57.1 | 40.4 | 97.6 | | 2.4 | 30.9 | 64.3 | 4.8 | 100 |
| <i>Canadians who served in Operational Theatres</i> | No. | 25 | 3 | 27 | 37 | 5 | 20 | 44 | 64 | 3 | 2 | 24 | 38 | 7 | 69 |
| | % | 36.2 | 4.3 | 39.1 | 53.6 | 7.2 | 28.9 | 63.8 | 92.8 | 4.3 | 2.8 | 34.8 | 55.1 | 10.1 | 100 |
| <i>British who served in Operational Theatres</i> | No. | 14 | 1 | 15 | | | 14 | 1 | 15 | | | 10 | 3 | 2 | 15 |
| | % | 93.3 | 6.6 | 100 | | | 93.3 | 6.6 | 100 | | | 66.7 | 20 | 13.3 | 100 |
| <i>Total who served in Operational Theatres</i> | No. | 39 | 4 | 42 | 37 | 5 | 34 | 45 | 79 | 3 | 2 | 34 | 41 | 9 | 84 |
| | % | 46.4 | 4.8 | 50 | 44 | 5.9 | 40.5 | 53.6 | 94 | 3.6 | 2.4 | 40.5 | 48.8 | 10.7 | 100 |
| <i>Total All Theatres</i> | No. | 52 | 6 | 57 | 63 | 6 | 58 | 62 | 120 | 3 | 3 | 47 | 68 | 11 | 126 |
| | % | 41.3 | 4.8 | 45.2 | 50 | 4.8 | 46 | 49.2 | 95.2 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 37.3 | 53.9 | 8.7 | 100 |

* Experience with military affairs can be acquired in a number of ways. This table attempts to list only the experience acquired in active campaigning. Thus, the category "No Experience" means only that these individuals had not served in a campaign which involved military action.

† Military training, obviously, involves many factors. For this table the category "Trained" means that an individual attended and graduated from any or all of the Royal Military College, Staff College, or the Militia's Staff Course. The category "Untrained" merely means that the individuals did not attend these institutions or courses.

held their appointments for an average of 1,259 days while the average length of appointment in France was 411 days.¹³ The "fighting" generals, in other words, turned over very rapidly compared to those holding posts in non-operational theatres. In spite of this turnover, very few who had experience at the front were subsequently employed training troops in Canada. Of the sixty-nine Canadians who served as general officers in France only seven subsequently received appointments in Canada during the war.¹⁴ Simply put, there was relatively little interchange in generals from France to Canada, and there seems to be two distinct career patterns—one for those who served in operational theatres and one for those who did not. The fighting generals as opposed to those who served only in Canada or Britain, started the war with a lower rank, had more men among them who had experienced active military operations, had fewer professional soldiers among them, but had more formal prewar military training. They also held their wartime appointments for much shorter periods than the generals who were not in operational theatres. In some of these categories the numbers seem too well balanced to be convincing, but they are certainly suggestive.

Probably the most startling figure generated by a study of generals' careers is that 42 percent of the Canadian generals who served in France became casualties. If one compares this with casualty figures in the *Official History* the number is all the more surprising. Some 619,636 served in the Canadian forces and 232,494 became casualties indicating a percentage of 37.5.¹⁵ Two cautions must be recorded in comparing this figure with the casualty figure for generals. First, the 42 percent figure for generals deals only with the percentage of casualties among generals who served in France. If one takes the total number of generals who served in all theatres into account the percentage figure is reduced to 27.3 percent. Second, some of the generals undoubtedly were wounded before they were promoted to the rank of brigadier. Checking personal files indicates, that approximately 46 percent of those wounded received their wounds as generals, the remainder were wounded before promotion to general but usually while senior officers. In any event, a surprisingly high number of those who served overseas as generals found their occupation extremely hazardous.

In summary, the generals who served in the Canadian forces during the First World War could probably be described as middle-class Cana-

¹³ NICHOLSON, p. 529. Six of the officers who served in Canada only, did so for periods which extended beyond the end of the war. For this compilation, their period of service was adjusted to end on 11 November 1918. The unadjusted average for length of service in Canada was 1,968 days.

¹⁴ Although this figure does not show in the tables, it was derived from a computer print showing every appointment held by each general.

¹⁵ NICHOLSON, pp. 546, 548. The figure on casualties used here is the sum of the total deaths from all causes and the total non-fatal casualties expressed as a percentage of total mobilization. C.E.W. Bean has argued that a more meaningful figure is the percentage of total casualties expressed in terms of the total number of embarkations. Thus, he calculates that Canadian casualties were 49.74 percent of those embarked. C.E.W. BEAN, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, vol. XI, Ernest SCOTT, *Australia During the War* (Sydney, 1936), p. 874.

dians.¹⁶ Most of them had had a profession before the war, and the rest were businessmen, mainly self-employed. Only two of them, both farmers, can be supposed to have been accustomed to working with their hands. A very large proportion of these men had experienced warfare before 1914, but they did not cling the military life. In 1919 about one-half of the group returned to prewar occupations and about one-quarter retired. Eighteen of them remained in the Canadian forces as professional soldiers. Only four would serve as generals in the Second World War.¹⁷ It seems likely that the group of Canadians who served as generals in the First World War was richer, better-educated, more urban, and slightly older than the average Canadian male.¹⁸ Also, the heavy concentration from Ontario and the tiny minority from Eastern Canada (1 of 106 lived east of Quebec in 1914 and 6 of 106 had been born there) demonstrates that the principles used to select a federal cabinet did not apply when it came to selecting generals. Being French speaking, apparently, was not a particular advantage.

Since success as a general is more likely to be a function of training, experience, character and luck than it is of geographic or linguistic origin, religious affiliation, or average age, the usefulness of such generalizations may be limited in attempting to assess the nature of military leadership. Nonetheless, a number of commentators have argued that factors like age, urban or rural background, and educational level have been important influences in military success. General J.F.C. Fuller has argued that "courage, creative intelligence and physical fitness" — together he calls them "attributes of youth rather than middle age" — are the "three pillars of generalship."¹⁹ Yet the average age of Canadian generals in 1914 was 47 — clearly within the "middle age" range, and older by two years than the British who were seconded to the Canadian Forces. John Swettenham has suggested that the success of the Canadian Corps in the First World War resulted partly from the rural background of its members, and he quotes approvingly the statement by Hindenburg which "attributed the hardiness of colonial troops to an agrarian life far removed from the softening influences of the town."²⁰ Yet senior Canadian leadership was nearly entirely urban. Formal education, we surely know by now, is no universal remedy for anything. If General Wavell is correct that the modern "commander's studies must have a background of solid common sense and a knowledge of humanity on whose peculiarities... the whole practice of warfare is ultimately based,"²¹ then one might be relieved to

¹⁶ The evidence for this assertion will be unsatisfactory to some. It is based primarily on educational background and prewar occupation.

¹⁷ These figures are not available in appendices but were derived from computer prints.

¹⁸ A glance at Urquhart's *Historical Statistics*, for example, demonstrates a much higher proportion of Roman Catholics in the total population than was the case among Canadian generals.

¹⁹ Major-General J.F.C. FULLER, *Generalship: Its Diseases and Their Cure* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1936), p. 35.

²⁰ JOHN SWETTENHAM, *To Seize the Victory: The Canadian Corps in World War I* (Toronto, 1965), p. 241.

²¹ General Sir Archibald WAVELL, *Generals and Generalship* (New York, 1943), p. 14.

Table 6. — RANK OF GENERALS SERVING IN CANADIAN FORCES, 1914-18

| | | Rank 1914 | | | Rank 1918 | | | |
|---|-----|---------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|------------|-------------|-------|
| | | Lt. - Col. or Above | Major or below | Unknown | General | Lt. - Gen. | Maj. - Gen. | Brig. |
| <i>Canadians who served in Non-operational Theatres</i> | No. | 36 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 17 |
| | % | 97.3 | | 2.7 | | | 54.1 | 45.9 |
| <i>British who served in Non-operational Theatres</i> | No. | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| | % | 20 | 80 | | | | 40 | 70 |
| <i>Total who served in Non-operational Theatres</i> | No. | 37 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 22 | 20 |
| | % | 88.1 | 9.5 | 2.4 | | | 52.4 | 47.6 |
| <i>Canadians who served in Operational Theatres</i> | No. | 36 | 31 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 16 | 51 |
| | % | 52.2 | 44.9 | 2.9 | | 2.9 | 23.2 | 73.9 |
| <i>British who served in Operational Theatres</i> | No. | 8 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 12 |
| | % | 53.3 | 20 | 26.6 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 80 |
| <i>Total who served in Operational Theatres</i> | No. | 44 | 34 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 17 | 63 |
| | % | 52.4 | 40.5 | 7.1 | 1.2 | 3.6 | 20.2 | 75 |
| <i>Total All Theatres</i> | No. | 81 | 38 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 39 | 83 |
| | % | 64.3 | 30.2 | 5.6 | 8 | 2.4 | 30.9 | 65.9 |

find the population of generals well-educated in a formal sense. In the literature on the First World War the picture of generals is overwhelmingly negative. The British Prime Minister in his memoirs could hardly have been more direct: "Our great commanders," Lloyd George wrote, "having refused or neglected to organize a breakthrough where and when it was feasible, and having made ineffective attempts on fronts where such rupture was impossible, thereby throwing away myriads of valuable lives and losing inestimable time and opportunity, being unable to think out anything more original, had fallen back upon attrition - always the game of the poor player."²² Clemenceau has often been quoted as believing that war was too important to be left to the generals. "Lions led by Donkeys," was the judgement of Alan Clark on the men and generals of 1914.²³ Leon Wolff, in summarizing the charges against the British High Command, suggested that the British Commander-in-Chief emerged from the literature as a "stubborn, fame hungry, cold-blooded, deceiving oaf."²⁴ Equally

²² David Lloyd GEORGE, *War Memoirs* (London, 1934), vol. III, p. 1377.

²³ Alan CLARK, *The Donkeys* (New York, 1965).

²⁴ Leon WOLFF, *In Flanders Fields: The 1917 Campaign* (New York, 1958), p. 241.

Table 7. — PREWAR AND POSTWAR OCCUPATIONS OF CANADIAN GENERALS SERVING IN CANADIAN FORCES, 1914-18

| | | <i>Professional*</i> <i>Occupations</i> | <i>Business +</i> <i>Occupations</i> | <i>Retired</i> | <i>Unknown</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-------------------------------------|------------|--|---|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| <i>Prewar</i> <i>Occupation</i> | <i>No.</i> | 70 | 30 | 1 | 5 | 106 |
| | <i>%</i> | 66 | 28.3 | .9 | 4.7 | 100 |
| <i>Postwar</i> <i>Occupation</i> | <i>No.</i> | 49 | 27 | 24 | 5 | 105 |
| | <i>%</i> | 46.7 | 25.7 | 22.9 | 4.8 | 100 |

* Professional Occupations include the following categories: Accountant, Barrister, Civil Engineer, Civil Servant, Dentist, Judge, Physician, Police Commissioner, Politician, Professional Soldier, University President, Veterinary.

+ Business Occupations include the following: Banker, Contractor, Corporation President, Corporation Executive, Farmer, Financier, Grocer, Insurance Official, Manufacturer, Merchant, Mill Owner, Mine Owner, Publisher, Real Estate Broker, Mining Speculator, Stock Broker.

Cross tabulation of prewar and postwar occupations shows that 49 individuals returned to the same occupation after the war and 57 did not.

vitriolic statements on the ability of British generals have continued to appear. Writing in *The New Republic* in December 1977, Leonard Buskoff charged that "many younger officers were appalled — and ashamed — by the consistent misjudgements of the high command" in the First World War.²⁵ Fuller argued that during the war the "ordinary soldier" didn't even see the generals, "now and again, perhaps he heard of them far away, as managing directors sitting in the dug-outs in the chateaux, and in the offices."²⁶

Canadian generals of the First World War have probably fared better in the public consciousness than generals from other armies, but not much better. In the first place, they have not been as carefully studied, nor did they occupy the same positions of high command during the war. Nonetheless, they have probably suffered "guilt by association." A distinguished Canadian political scientist writing about Canadian Defence in the 1920s uses terms which are very similar to the charges laid against British Generals. The "occupational disease" of the military planner manifests symptoms which include "creeping paralysis of the imagination when it comes to assessing the influence of a changing political and technological environment upon the fortunes of a country."²⁷ More recent and more general analyses of generals by social scientists conclude that the "common factor shared by incompetent generals is that their personalities are authoritarian. Dogmatic, inflexible, callous, ethnocentric, conformist, obsessive, the authoritarian soldier yearns for professional success and yet, ironically, is prevented from achieving it because of his personality."²⁸

²⁵ Leonard BUSKOFF, "Books Considered," *New Republic*, 17 Dec. 1977, p. 28.

²⁶ FULLER, *Generalship*, p. 15.

²⁷ James EAYRS, *In Defence of Canada: From the Great War to the Great Depression* (Toronto, 1964), p. 73.

²⁸ Ronald LEWIN, "On the Psychology of Military Incompetence by Norman F. Dixon," *London Times*, 17 June 1976.

Table 8. — WARTIME EXPOSURE OF GENERALS WHO SERVED IN CANADIAN FORCES, 1914-18

| | | Wounded | Wounded Twice | Killed | Prisoner | None | Killed, Wounded or Prisoner |
|--|-----|---------|------------------|--------|----------|------|--------------------------------|
| Canadians who served in Operational Theatres | No. | 17 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 40 | 29 |
| | % | 24.6 | 14.5 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 57.9 | 42 |
| British who served in Operational Theatres | No. | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 13 | 2 |
| | % | 6.7 | 0 | 6.7 | 0 | 86.7 | 13.2 |
| Total who served in Operational Theatres | No. | 18 | 10 | 2 | 1 | 53 | 31 |
| | % | 14.3 | 7.9 | 1.6 | .8 | 42.1 | 24.6 |

Without questioning the competence of Canadian generals, which in any case is not to be revealed by quantitative analysis, we should think of all senior military officers as "authoritarian" in the *OED* definition of the word: "one who supports the principle of authority." Senior officers, it could be argued, must understand the necessity of quick decision in operational situations, and this inevitably involves discipline and the acceptance of authority. In this sense it seems likely that all Canadian generals, indeed all First World War generals, were authoritarian. Yet there is no necessary connection between their "authoritarianism" and the prewar profession of a particular wartime general. If these men had personalities meriting the adjectives "dogmatic, inflexible, callous ethnocentric, conformist and obsessive," and if these qualities were occupationally derived, then they must be accorded to accountants, lawyers, engineers, dentists, physicians, professors, bankers, contractors, and businessmen. A substantial majority of the Canadian generals were employed in these and other civilian occupations before the war, and, as already noted, less than 18 percent of them remained in the army after the war.

In summary, it seems that most of the generalizations about First World War generals, when tested against the Canadian experience are misleading. Canadian generals, regardless of how many people saw them at the front, were certainly not "sitting in the dug-outs in the chateaux, and in the offices" during the war. Not when 42 percent of them became casualties. Nor were they a group of backwoods boys providing charismatic, frontier leadership. They were products of the city which had no measurable "softening influence" upon them. If they were authoritarian, it did not stem from their prewar occupation, but more likely was a product of their understanding of modern warfare.

That stereotypes of generals were false is not a new claim; Theodore Ropp argued in 1959 that "the picture of universal military incompetence was... overdrawn."²⁹ But the extent of exaggeration, at least in the Canadian case, gives special emphasis to question of how such stereotypes arise. The answer to the question is probably beyond the

²⁹ Theodore ROPP, *War in the Modern World* (Durham, N.C., 1952), p. 271.

evidence derived from historical records. It is quite possible, of course, that the stereotypes applied to general officers are not derived from observations of the group at all, but are based on observed characteristics of only the most senior commanders. For the First World War, when the most senior commanders were described by polemicists like Liddell Hart, J.F.C. Fuller, and Lloyd George, this argument surely is plausible. Judgements on officers like Haig and Sir William Robertson may well have carried over and have been used to characterize all generals. But pejorative statements about generals did not originate in the First World War. "A general who is stupid and courageous is a calamity" is a sentence which could have been written to describe C.S. Forester's famous *General*, but was composed by Sun Tzu sometime in the fourth century B.C.³⁰ Whatever the reason it is clear that the stereotypes continue to appear and seem, in the Canadian case, as distorted as ever. The British officers considered within this study are too few in numbers to make a similar claim with respect to British generals, though these men seem closer to the Canadian pattern than the standard negative stereotype.

Military history, "told as a tale of great states, key inventions, or great captains," Professor Ropp has warned, presents "partial views of a complex social phenomenon" which are "usually false."³¹ Though a description of Canadian generals during the First World War is hardly a tale of great captains, one could argue that the quality of generalship among Canadians in France was very high. Nonetheless the story is a partial view of a complex social phenomenon and its conclusions are inevitably incomplete. Still it may be less incomplete than judgements which have ignored the social composition of the corps of generals. Social background may not dictate the nature of generalship, it merely demonstrates what the generals were not.

³⁰ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford, 1971), p. 114.

³¹ ROPP, *War*, p. 15.