

Editors' Introduction

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Editors' Introduction

MARK OSBORNE HUMPHRIES, LYND SAY
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GUEST EDITORS

IN THE AFTERMATH of conflict, it is worth asking: how did trauma and hardship shape the lives of ex-soldiers, their spouses and children? Did the various state and voluntary programmes developed for veterans succeed in helping families meet their social, economic and medical needs? Did the status of 'veteran' mitigate or contribute to the marginalisation of minority groups, the disadvantaged and those with disabilities? These are important questions for historians and policy makers. Although there is a broad literature on soldier re-establishment policy during the twentieth century, we still know relatively little about veterans' personal experiences after coming home from war—less still about how state policies worked for or failed military families.

The long-term effects of war on soldiers has been well studied by veterans' historians, especially in Europe and the United States.¹ In

¹ James W. Oberly, "Gray-Haired Lobbyists: War of 1812 Veterans and the Politics of Bounty Land Grants," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, 1 (1985): 35-58; Theda Skocpal, "America's First Social Security System: The Expansion of Benefits for Civil War Veterans," *Political Science Quarterly* 108, 1 (1993): 85-116; Megan J. McClintock, "Civil War Pensions and the Reconstruction of Union Families," *Journal of American History* 83, 2 (1996): 456-80; David A. Gerber, ed., *Disabled Veterans in History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Jeffrey E. Vogel, "Redefining Reconciliation: Confederate Veterans and the Southern Responses to Federal Civil War Pensions," *Civil War History* 51, 1 (2005): 67-93; Joanna Short, "Confederate Veteran Pensions, Occupation, and Men's Retirement in the New

Canada, research has centred on twentieth century veterans' policy and its effect on the development of the welfare state.² Canadian historians have analysed the development of universal programmes like Employment Insurance, Old Age Security and healthcare, which grew out of early efforts to provide services for veterans of the First World War and were later expanded to the general population.³ This

South," *Social Science History* 30, 1 (2006): 75-101; Thomas R. Saxton, "In Reduced Circumstances: Aging and Impoverished Bucks County Continentals and their Families in the Young Republic," *Pennsylvania History* 74, 1 (2007): 21-73; Larry M. Logue and Peter Blanck, "'Benefit of the Doubt': African-American Civil War Veterans and Pensions," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, 3 (2008): 377-99; Russell L. Johnson, "'Great Injustice': Social Status and the Distribution of Military Pensions after the Civil War," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10, 2 (2011): 137-60; James Marten, *Sing Not War: the Lives of Union and Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Beth Linker, *War's Waste: Rehabilitation in World War I America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: "Soul of a Nation"* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Brian E. Donovan, "Like 'Monkeys at the Zoo': Politics and the Performance of Disability at the Iowa Soldiers' Home, 1887-1910," *Annals of Iowa* 71, 4 (2012): 323-46; David J. Appleby, "Veteran Politics in Restoration England, 1660-1670," *Seventeenth Century* 28, 3 (2013): 323-42; Simon Parkes, "Wooden Legs and Tales of Sorrow Done: The Literary Broken Soldier of the Late Eighteenth Century," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36, 2 (2013): 191-207; and D. Carroll, "'The God Who Shielded Me Before, Yet Watches Over Us All': Confederate Soldiers, Mental Illness and Religion," *Civil War History* 61, 3 (2015): 252-80.

² Charles Roland, "War Amputations in Upper Canada," *Archivaria* 10 (1980): 73-84; Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Nelson Joannette, "Petticoats and Pensions: Civil War Influence on the Canadian Military Widow's Pension," *Journal of American and Canadian Studies* 17 (1999): 49-59; Peter Neary and J. L. Granatstein, eds., *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999); and Peter Neary, *On To Civvy Street: Canada's Rehabilitation Program for Veterans of the Second World War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).

³ J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975); Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "'Pigeon-Holed and Forgotten': the Work of the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women, 1943," *Histoire Sociale* 15, 29 (1982): 239-59; Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, "The Bonus Campaign, 1919-21: Veterans and the Campaign for Re-establishment," *Canadian Historical Review* 64, 2 (1983): 147-67; Barry Broadfoot, *The Veterans' Years: Coming Home from the War* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1985); Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985); Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986); Desmond Morton, "Resisting the Pension Evil: Bureaucracy, Democracy, and Canada's Board of Pension Commissioners, 1916-1933," *Canadian*

has cast veterans as agents of state formation—the very embodiment of Foucault's “ideal citizens.”

Recently, scholarship has begun to shift, emphasising the diversity of veterans' personal experiences while challenging the construction of an idealised homogenous but largely imaginary “veteran.”⁴ This is not to say that many ex-soldiers did not share the values of the state or that many would not have seen themselves as “ideal citizens.” Undoubtedly many did. But many historians now argue that this is only the most highly visible aspect of a much more diverse veteran experience. As more recent explorations have revealed, veterans who

Historical Review 68, 2 (1987): 199-224; Alan Moscovitch and Jim Albert, eds., *The Benevolent State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: Garamond, 1987); C. David Naylor, ed., *Canadian Healthcare and the State* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993); Doug Owsram, “Canadian Domesticity in the Postwar Era,” in *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*, eds. Peter Neary and J. L. Granatstein (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 205-23; Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers' Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); Peter Neary, *The Origins and Evolution of Veterans Benefits in Canada, 1914-2004* (Ottawa: Department of Veterans Affairs, 2004); Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006); Raymond B. Blake and Keffrey A. Keshen, eds., *Social Fabric or Patchwork Quilt: The Development of Social Policy in Canada* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006); Peter Neary, “Without the Stigma of Pauperism’: Canadian Veterans in the 1930s,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 22, 1 (2009): 31-62; and Mark O. Humphries, *The Last Plague: Spanish Influenza and the Politics of Public Health in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

⁴ Peter Leese, “Problems Returning Home: The British Psychological Casualties of the Great War,” *Historical Journal* 40, 4 (1997): 1055-67; Terry Copp, “From Neurasthenia to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Canadian Veterans and the Problem of Persistent Emotional Disabilities,” in *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*, eds. Peter Neary and J.L. Granatstein (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 149-59; Ben Shepard, “‘Pitiless Psychology’: The Role of Prevention in British Military Psychiatry in the Second World War,” *History of Psychiatry* 10, 40 (1999): 491-524; Eric Leed, “Fateful Memories: Industrialized War and Traumatic Neuroses,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, 1 (2000): 85-100; Simon Wessely and Edgar Jones, “Psychiatry and the ‘Lessons of Vietnam’: What Were They and Are They Still Relevant?” *War and Society* 22, 1 (2004): 89-103; Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, “War Syndromes: the Impact of Culture on Medically Unexplained Symptoms,” *Medical History* 49, 1 (2005): 55-78; Mark Humphries, “War's Long Shadow: Masculinity, Medicine, and the Gendered Politics of Trauma, 1914-1939,” *Canadian Historical Review* 91, 3 (2010): 503-31; Terry Copp and Mark O. Humphries, *Combat Stress in the 20th Century: The Commonwealth Perspective* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 2010); Lucy Robinson, “Soldiers' Stories of the Falklands War: Recomposing Trauma in Memoir,” *Contemporary British History* 25, 4 (2011): 569-89.

did not fit a variety of social and cultural norms could sometimes (but not always) become marginalised within larger veterans' movements and had difficulty accessing state-funded programmes.⁵ This was all the more true for those who came from communities that were already excluded from political participation or socially and culturally marginalised. In light of these studies, Canadian historians have only recently started to examine the personal experiences of re-establishment and policy in light of lived experience, re-evaluating our image of "the veteran" to include women, visible minorities, the disabled, Indigenous peoples and Francophones.⁶

This collection of research papers by some of the leading scholars in the field begins to address these gaps in the literature while raising new questions. The contributions in this issue, written by established and emerging scholars in the field of Canadian military history, are based on the pension files of First World War soldiers that were

⁵ Eric T. Dean, Jr., *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Jessica Meyer, "'Not Septimus Now': Wives of Disabled Veterans and Cultural Memory of the First World War in Britain," *Women's History Review* 13, 1 (2004): 117-38; Marina Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs: Living with the Scars of War* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2009); Chelsea Clark, "Not Attributable to Service: First World War Veterans' 'Second Battle' with the Canadian Pension System" (MA Thesis: University of Calgary, 2009); Carolyn Malone, "A Job fit for Heroes? Disabled Veterans, the Arts and Crafts Movement and Social Reconstruction in Post-World War I Britain," *First World War Studies* 4, 2 (2013): 201-17; and Eric Story, "The Indigenous Casualties of War: Disability, Death, and the Racialized Politics of Pensions, 1914-39," *Canadian Historical Review* 102 (2021): 279-304

⁶ Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990); Mike Wert, "From Enlistment to the Grave: the Impact of the First World War on 52 Canadian Soldiers," *Canadian Military History* 9, 2 (2000): 43-58; Serge M. Durlinger, *Veterans with a Vision: Canada's War-Blinded in Peace and War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010); Magda Fahrni, *Household Politics: Montreal Families and Postwar Reconstruction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Mark O. Humphries with Kellen Kurchinski, "Rest, Relax, and Get Well: A Re-Conceptualisation of Great War Shell Shock Treatment," *War & Society* 27, 2 (2008): 89-110; Eric Story, "'The Awakening Has Come': Canadian First Nations in the Great War Era, 1914-1932," *Canadian Military History* 24, (2015): 11-35; Mark O. Humphries, *A Weary Road: Shell Shock in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); and R. Scott Sheffield and Noah Riseman, *Indigenous Peoples and the Second World War: The Politics, Experiences and Legacies of War in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

digitised by undergraduate and graduate students between 2012 and 2017 at the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies (LCMSDS). This involved digitising over 200,000 individual First World War pension files comprising eleven million pages of documentation covering the lives of Canadians and their interactions with the state from 1915 to the mid-1950s. This unprecedented archive, now available through Veterans Affairs Canada, provides a window into the lives of ordinary veterans and their families, giving historians and researchers a wealth of data spanning the lives of an entire generation of former soldiers.

In our first article, Amy Shaw explores the Canadian government's response to the needs of Anglo-Boer War veterans in the 1930s and 1940s. She argues that the pensions offered to veterans of the South African War during the Great Depression can best be seen as a bridge between the nineteenth-century ideology of morals- and means-tested residual welfare approaches to social problems and the universal programmes that came to the fore after the Second World War. In this way, the pension files reveal a significant transition in perceptions about the relationship between citizen and state in Canada.

Jonathan Vance's article examines the darker side of post-war veterans' culture, specifically the relationship between veterans and alcohol in Canada during the interwar period. While the excessive drinking culture of veterans' organisations provided a way for veterans to reclaim their masculinity and a sense of community after returning home, it also led to alcohol abuse as well as violence. Vance reminds us that for veterans struggling to reintegrate into civilian society, veteran culture was not always helpful. In a similar vein, Jonathan Scotland explores veterans' lifespans and mortality, arguing that many pensioners died long before other men of their generation. In fact, Scotland's analysis shows that tens of thousands of pensioners died young and that younger pensioners actually died at higher rates and had shorter lifespans than their older comrades.

Heather Ellis looks at the experiences of another group that had difficulty reintegrating into civilian society: shell shocked veterans. This chapter reminds us that emotional suffering affected men in both private and public spaces. Paradoxically, although veterans were expected to be idealised men, seeking support forced them to perform their symptoms in ways that flouted dominant masculine norms. Many ended up in federally supported institutions, some for

the rest of their lives. But Ellis also emphasises the importance of the support provided by family members, highlighting the resilience and determination of veterans and their families.

Serge Durflinger examines the experiences of the French-Canadian veterans of the 22nd Battalion, challenging Anglo-centric conceptions of the idealised veteran. In a detailed analysis, he finds that language was not a factor in pensioning and that the men of Canada's most famous French-Canadian battalion were as likely to fall into poverty and despair as other working-class veterans. His analysis raises a sobering question: "were the Canadian Expeditionary Force's poor soldiers worth more dead than alive?" The evidence Durflinger presents, as well as the evidence found by other historians in this collection, sadly suggests that might have been the case. In contrast, Will Pratt focuses on the experiences of Indigenous veterans and the unique challenges they faced upon returning home. While many Indigenous men enlisted to escape the legal restrictions imposed by Canadian colonial and assimilationist policies, they found that despite government promises, they could not evade settler colonial power structures upon returning home. Even though they were war veterans, Indigenous ex-soldiers often found their benefits and rights restricted by racist policies and the paternalistic control of Indian Agents.

In our second last paper, Lyndsay Rosenthal looks at another forgotten group of pensioners: war widows. Focusing on the financial insecurity faced by widows, she shows that welfare programmes were insufficient in addressing their familial and personal needs. Although widows' pensions were more generous than other welfare programmes, eligibility was nevertheless governed by strict moral regulations. Even so, war widows adeptly tried to navigate and manipulate the pension system to their benefit. Sarah Glassford concludes our collection by looking at the lives of Canadian nursing sisters who served in the First World War, focusing on the unique and shared challenges they faced upon returning home, particularly those suffering from health issues and financial struggles. In a case study of forty nursing-sister veterans from Southwestern Ontario, she reveals that a majority applied for pension support for health-related reasons and that they used their medical knowledge and professional networks to advocate for themselves in the aftermath of the war. Like other ex-soldiers, these women experienced long-term effects on their health, careers and

family relationships and they too dealt with a pension bureaucracy that aimed to minimise expenses at all costs.

In summary, this collection of papers offers the first comprehensive examination of the diverse experiences of Canadian veterans and their families in the aftermath of the First World War. By exploring the diversity of the veteran experience, these authors suggest that we need to expand our traditional conceptions of the idealised veteran. While all veterans and their families were forced to navigate the same byzantine pensioning structure if they sought government assistance after the war, the way that system was experienced often varied depending on one's identity and background. Yet at the same time, veterans' struggles were also universal in nature: many had difficulty adjusting to civilian life while many others felt let down by a system that failed to grant them the status they believed they had earned on the battlefield. This reveals the importance of understanding the complexities and nuances of the veteran experience in Canadian history: almost every Canadian family would have had a veteran amongst its ranks given the two global conflicts fought between 1914 and 1945. Understanding how those experiences shaped politics, culture and society throughout the twentieth century and beyond is a complex task made more approachable through the digitised pension files available through Veterans Affairs Canada.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

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Guest Editors.

