CANADA'S FORGOTTEN WAR IN RUSSIA

by

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Abstract

The Russian Civil War and the Allied interventions therein are understudied in the Western world. Canada's place in the interventions remains particularly obscure, though Canadian connections in Russia before and during the Russian Civil War are numerous and often peculiar, beyond the deployment of significant contingents of soldiers in support of Allied efforts in Russia's White Sea ports and the Far Eastern city of Vladivostok. This article aims to contribute to our understanding of this episode in Canadian history, an obscured aftershock to the First World War. Wartime strategy against Germany found Canadian soldiers deployed in North Russia, among the remotest fronts of the war, where they were ultimately locked into combat with the fledgling Bolsheviks. The Armistice meant little to these soldiers, who continued to fight until the summer thaw permitted their withdrawal. Having effectively constructed from scratch a significant military in the preceding four years, the young Canadian dominion sought to translate its newfound military might and status as a middle power into what ultimately became a debacle in Siberia. While personal narratives and military events are touched upon, this article is primarily a work of diplomatic and strategic history. This article navigates Canada's place and emphasizes the agency it asserted within an immensely complex, confused, and dysfunctional diplomatic and strategic environment, in consultation with primary sources and the work of other scholars. Novelly, this period's relevance to the present is analyzed by incorporating Russian historiography and popular memorialization of the interventions.

Preface

This undergraduate thesis, in conformance with the standards set out by Acadia University, consists of two parts: an article and a historiographical essay attached as an appendix. They are presented here in the opposite order in which they were written. The article, *Canada's Forgotten War in Russia,* contains my arguments and novel contributions to analyzing Canada's place in the Allied interventions in Russia. Appropriately, the attached historiographical essay consists of an analysis of the existing body of work on the topic. Both works can be read independently or in either chronological order. The article was an outgrowth of the research performed for the historiographical essay. It is my hope that both works can be of use for future scholars.

Canada’s Forgotten War in Russia

Introduction

On three fronts around the outermost periphery of the former Russian Empire, Canadian soldiers fought and died in an enigmatic war which quietly dragged on for the better part of a year past the Armistice of 1918. The Russian Civil War and the Allied involvement within remains little understood in the West, despite the profound consequences of the Bolshevik victory. Canada's role in the intervention has been relegated to the same obscurity. Yet, these events have found renewed relevance within Russian historical memory; Russian nationalists reconstructed a decaying Soviet-era museum of the intervention in 2014, a year coinciding with the resumption of conflict with the West via the first post-Soviet aggression against Ukraine and the subsequent, overwhelmingly unrecognized, annexation of historically Russian territory, the Crimea. Ongoing geopolitical conflicts such as these, on the territories of Imperial Russia and the USSR, demand a reanalysis of the West's first international foray into military intervention and institution-building in Eastern Europe. The Allied intervention in Russia was perhaps the first international conflict to set a precedent that would echo throughout the next century, demonstrating the effects of mission creep, conflicting commitments, and discordancy among allies. It concluded with the withdrawal of Allied troops and the failure of the White Russian project. This article analyzes and reassesses Canada's role in the Allied interventions – drawing upon Canadian sources and the work of other scholars – while connecting its relevance to the present by an examination of both Canadian and Russian historiography on the matter. While the interventions in Russia were justified by the Allies as part of anti-German strategy throughout 1918, there was a failure to reorient or coordinate a broader Allied policy following the Armistice in November, when troops

were already committed throughout the former Russian Empire. This article traces the unique Canadian thread that runs through this immensely complex period and demonstrates that the young Canadian dominion exerted diplomatic and strategic agency throughout its role in this unduly obscured war—one born from and near equal to the First World War in devastation and consequence.

It is beyond the scope of this article to attempt a thorough analysis or explanation of the Russian Revolution. However, a brief orientation to the facts and an emphasis upon the existing Allied presence in Russia, the genesis of later intervention, is necessary. Russia's civil war was an international affair from the beginning. The Russian Empire in 1917 stood among the Allies engaged in war against the Central Powers. Port cities such as Arkhangelsk in the Arctic and Vladivostok in the Far East teemed with military materiel from the Western Allies, bottlenecks of cargo arriving by sea which overwhelmed Imperial Russia's antiquated and inefficient system of logistics. More generally, Russia's rural, monarchical society buckled under the pressures imposed by 20th century industrialized warfare. In March of that year, the Romanov dynasty which had autocratically ruled Russia for three centuries was ousted. It was replaced by a series of failed governments which were unable to reverse the disintegration of the Russian state, which continued to be locked into an increasingly unpopular war with the Central Powers. Since the toppling of the Romanov autocracy, power in Russia was divided between these successive governments and the revolutionary workers' and soldiers' councils, or Soviets. Eventually, the Provisional Government came to be headed by Alexander Kerensky, who attempted to establish a functional Russian Republic. The toppling of the Romanov monarchy by ostensibly progressive elements within Russia was widely greeted with enthusiasm among the Western Allies, including Canada, who redoubled their support of the new regime now governing their old ally. However,

the Provisional Government faced a crisis from the Right—from Tsarist elements who wished to return the Romanov dynasty to some form of power. In crushing this uprising, which could only occur through the support of the Bolsheviks, Kerensky decisively shifted the balance of power in favour of the Bolshevik Left.[1] Later in 1917, the Bolsheviks launched a coup in Petrograd known as the October Revolution, proclaiming power to the Soviets. The remaining support for the Provisional Government melted away and the Bolsheviks ascended to power on Lenin's promise of peace, land, and bread. But Bolshevik control was initially restricted to a few cities in European Russia; settling the question of overall control of the state led to a civil war, extinguishing millions of lives in conflict, famine, and terror.

Canadians were present in Russia throughout many of the dramatic events of 1917, as attachés in support of their cobelligerent. One such figure was the honourary Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph W. Boyle, a Canadian businessman who had earned notability during the Klondike Gold Rush. Boyle's recollections were published posthumously in the *Canadian Defence Quarterly* in 1927. His recollections of his work in Russia and Romania provides a fascinating window into the chaotic period between 1917 and 1918, during which the established Russian state dissolved. The Allies and their personnel in Russia had a complex relationship with the Bolsheviks prior to the latter's signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk which established peace between Russia and the Central Powers.

[1] Events in September 1917 known as the Kornilov Affair ultimately broke the already faltering discipline of the Russian Army upon which Alexander Kerensky's regime was dependent. Characterized variously as an attempted coup d'etat or a series of miscommunications, staunch anti-communist General Lavr Kornilov was ousted while the previously marginalized Bolsheviks underwent a quasi-official rehabilitation because of their role in defending Petrograd against Kornilov's advance. See: Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Revolution : A New History* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Hachette Book Group, 2021), 189-191.

In June of 1917, Joseph Boyle was attached to the Stavka, the headquarters nominally in command of the faltering Russian army. Through the Stavka and the military, Russia experienced brief and dysfunctional institutional continuity from the Tsarist regime into the early months of Bolshevik rule. Dispatched by commander-in-chief General Aleksei Brusilov to the front in Western Ukraine to examine and improve the railway system, Boyle witnessed the chaos that was enveloping the Russian army; "[t]he Officer [sic] in charge at Tarnopol had disappeared, the people were in a highly excited condition, and what had only been confusion, was rapidly developing into a riot, when, with the assistance of two young Russian officers, and by assuming an authority I did not have, I got a 'Death Battalion' to throw a cordon round the town, and establish patrols and restore some semblance of order."[2] Boyle then reported that he endeavored to address the logistical issues which plagued the Romanian front. Following the Kornilov Affair, Alexander Kerensky assumed the position of commander-in-chief of the Stavka in September of 1917. Kerensky granted Boyle an independent command, separate from the British and American transport missions within Russia. Boyle had complained about difficulties in working with the British and Americans; the command awarded to Boyle gave him freedom of action over the "Military Area [which] was all the area back of the fighting line, and to a line drawn practically due North and South between Petrograd and Odessa."[3]

Lieutenant-Colonel Boyle was consumed with this transport work in the last weeks of Kerensky's government, and was in fact present with the Stavka in Petrograd where he witnessed the Bolshevik coup in November.[4] His descriptions of the Bolshevik takeover in Petrograd and

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[2] J. W. Boyle, "A Canadian Officer's Adventures among the Bolsheviks," *Canadian Defence Quarterly* IV (July 1927): 225. It is not explicitly clear whether "Death Battalion" refers to one of Kerensky's famous all-women units which proliferated during this time.
[3] Boyle, "A Canadian," 226.
[4] Boyle, 226.

the more substantial combat which occurred in Moscow are brief and coupled with lengthier descriptions of the brewing logistical disaster which his work was attempting to avoid:

> The Russian Northern and Western Armies were very short of food, and owing to the street fighting in Moscow, which lasted six days, during which no trains left Moscow at all, there was a freight blockade, and Moscow itself was starving. The Bolsheviks were in a hopeless state of disorder, and had no one to handle the situation. They got General Maniekovski [the] Minister of War, out of prison, and put him back into the War Ministry with instructions to feed the Army, and I was sent for, and requested by General Maniekovski to proceed to Moscow, and try and untie the knot. At this time, the Northern Army was starting back and in addition to destroying estates, was destroying villages and killing peasants, but we got the freight moving out of Moscow within 48 hours after starting, and had things going fairly smoothly in a week.[5]

There is a cruel irony in the fact that a Canadian, among other Allied advisors, assisted the early Bolshevik state in cementing its control over the railroads which were so essential to its ultimate victory in the civil conflict to follow. It also appears ideologically peculiar that a figure like Boyle served under the direct command of Alexander Kerensky and came to operate, however indirectly, under Vladmir Lenin, as the Stavka and the remnants of the old Russian Army trudged on until the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk brought an end to the war with the Central Powers in March of 1918. Yet, this is hardly commented upon when Boyle's recollections were published in the 1920s, though he boasted that "[d]uring the period from October, 1917, on, the Canadian Transport Mission was the only Allied unit of any sort that had any freedom whatever in Bolshevik Russia."[6] A picture of Allied involvement in Russia emerges which is far less ideologically-driven or adequately organized, being the greater part ad hoc and concerned

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[5] Boyle, 227.

[6] Boyle, "A Canadian," 234. Joseph Boyle referenced a British officer, Captain George A. Hill of the "4th Manchesters," who worked under him and the two of whom together formed what Boyle referred to as the "Canadian Transport Mission."

initially not with any threat posed by the Bolsheviks but with maintaining the Russian war effort against the Central Powers.

Intervention Begins

The Russian Civil War may be characterized as a confused, chaotic extension of the Russian Empire's involvement in the First World War. But so too was Canada's intervention. Characterizations of the Allies as mere imperialists interfering in Russia's internal affairs appear flimsy given that these opening moves occurred in a complex and highly unstable period as their cobelligerent collapsed into civil conflict, increasingly unable to meet its commitments to the Allies, however loudly Kerensky's Provisional Government promised them. Initial Allied involvement in Russia, which began in this period of flux, was oriented more against Germany than towards combating Communism. These interventions began where the Allies had vested materiel and strategic interests. The port of Archangelsk was built up in wartime as Russia's subarctic link to the Western Allies; starting in September of 1915, Canadian engineers loaned for the purpose to their Russian ally had directed Chinese and Korean labourers, along with Austrian and German prisoners of war, in the construction of rail lines connecting Archangelsk and Murmansk to the capital in Petrograd.[7]

The Arctic port of Murmansk itself was entirely constructed during the course of the war, being "largely the result of Britain's need for year-round facilities through which to supply the

[7]John Swettenham, *Allied Intervention in Russia 1918-1919 and the Part Played by Canada* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1967), 56; Clifford Kinvig, *Churchill's Crusade : the British Invasion of Russia, 1918-1920* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2007), 19. Some 40,000 prisoners of war died during the construction of the Murmansk line.

vast quantities of stores required to sustain the war effort of her Russian ally."[8] Archangelsk's port facilities were expanded to support the intake of up to 260,000 tons of materiel monthly, restricted to the warmer half of the year.[9] In the spring of 1918, prior to any intervention, some 200,000 tons of war materiel and another 300,000 tons of coal remained in Archangelsk, with smaller but still substantial stores in Murmansk,[10] as Russia's war machine ground to a halt. Russia's Siberian port of Vladivostok was reported to still hold 900,000 tons of undistributed war materiel by 1919.[11] In short, the first interventions were extensions of an already-extant Allied presence in Russia's outermost logistical terminals, where they had made extensive investment in wartime materiel and infrastructure, and primarily a measure to prevent this materiel from falling into German or German-aligned hands.

Strategic necessities underlined the first deployment of Allied troops into revolutionary Russia. As established, these strategies were ad hoc and aimed against Berlin, not the Bolsheviks. It was precisely the lack of a unified and international Allied command or strategy which led, after the Armistice of 1918, to disorganization and competition between national interests. This disunity would be one of several factors that would prove fatal to any attempt to dislodge the Bolsheviks after the war against Germany had concluded, when efforts could be refocused. Even Canada's forces, and those forces to which Canada supplied personnel, from North Russia to

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[8] Kinvig, *Churchill's Crusade*, 18.
[9] George Bolotenko, "Wartime Explosions in Archangel, 1916-1917: 'Bakaritsa is Burning'; 'Ekonomiia is Now a Wasteland,'" *The Northern Mariner* 21, no. 4 (2011): 379. Archangelsk, like Canada's Atlantic port of Halifax, experienced explosive devastation caused by accidents resulting from the shipping of wartime munitions. These remain little known compared to the Halifax Explosion, owing to strict Russian censorship during the war.
[10] E. Altham, "The Dwina Campaign," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 68 (February 1923): 229.
[11] Benjamin Isitt, *From Victoria to Vladivostok : Canada's Siberian Expedition, 1917-19* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 124, 232.

Siberia to Caucasia, had separate chains of command and objectives. Intervention was initiated during and immediately after the period in early March 1918, when Bolshevik-led Russia withdrew from the First World War under the punitive terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, overwhelmingly favourable to Germany. The Bolsheviks themselves, owing to their discontinuation of the war, especially under such concessions, were by this time viewed suspiciously by the Allies as mere puppets of Germany.[12] It is important to note that Germany was conducting interventions of its own across the former Russian Empire which was dissolving into breakaway states across their Eastern Front, deploying forces from Finland to Ukraine.

The undoing of the old Russian Army was part and parcel of Bolshevik strategy. As historian Sean McMeekin stated, "Lenin's imperative was to transform the 'imperialist war' into a civil war."[13] The Germans would tolerate the early assembly of the Red Army as a bulwark against the Allies, but it was not until a German defeat became clear in the final months of the war that the Lenin ceased to cooperate with German demands, implemented conscription and began constructing an army in earnest.[14] In the meantime, the disintegration of Russian strength had far-reaching effects even prior to the peace attained at Brest-Litovsk; it led to the dissolution of the Eastern Front which allowed Germany to shift its forces to the Western Front. Moreover, it led to vulnerabilities in the Middle East, Persia and Caucasia as the Russian forces facing the Ottoman Empire faltered. The Allied interventions of 1918 responded in a relatively piecemeal and disorganized fashion to address these strategic concerns.

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[12] Anglo-Canadian Colonel C.H.L. Sharman of the 16th Brigade Canadian Field Artillery states this view in his postwar recollection of the necessity of the North Russia intervention. *N.R.E.F. 16th Brigade C.F.A. 67th and 68th Batteries in North Russia September 1918 to June 1919. Toronto, n.d*, 4.
[13] McMeekin, *The Russian*, 281.
[14] McMeekin, *The Russian*, 281-282.

The following two sections will provide an analysis of Canadian activities during the Allied interventions, across the fronts of North Russia and Siberia. Though Canada also contributed troops to British operations in the Caucasus, and Canadians in British service were present elsewhere in Russia, this article focuses on the Canadian diplomatic and strategic decision-making related to the Canadian units deployed in the North Russia and Siberia. There is fertile ground for more expansive work.

North Russia

Direct intervention in North Russia arose from an immensely complex and shifting strategic situation involving multiple factions shrouded in the chaos of overlapping international and internecine conflict. Momentarily, the strategic interests of the Bolshevik leadership in Petrograd, the local Murmansk Soviet, and the Allies aligned. This was in no small part due to confusion and miscommunication. Nearby Finland was enveloped in a brief though vicious civil conflict of its own from the end of January through to May 1918, and its anti-Communist White movement received support in the form of materiel and troops from Germany in a dynamic peculiarly inverted from the Russian counterpart. The Murmansk Soviet, owing to its isolation and to the city's extensive existing connections with the Allies, telegraphed to Petrograd that "representatives of the friendly powers, the French, American, and English missions currently at Murmansk, continue to show themselves inalterably well-inclined towards us and prepared to render us assistance, running all the way from food supply to armed aid, inclusive."[15]

[15] John Silverlight, *The Victors' Dilemma; Allied intervention in the Russian Civil war* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1971), 31.

Simultaneously, Bolshevik representatives were in Brest-Litovsk negotiating the treaty of surrender with Germany, though a delayed telegraph gave the impression to Bolshevik leadership in Petrograd that Germany had refused to accept their offer.[16] On March 2nd, 1918, fearing a German advance, Leon Trotsky telegraphed the Murmansk Soviet: "The peace negotiations have apparently broken off. It is your duty to do everything to protect the Murmansk Railway … You must accept any and all assistance from the Allied missions."[17] Thus, the first Allied troops landed in North Russia not as invaders but at the invitation of Soviet leadership. Complete with a salute fired to the Red Flag of Communism by British battleship HMS *Glory*, a company of Royal Marines was sent ashore and occupied a barracks in Murmansk on the 6th of March, while confusion over Brest-Litovsk was resolved among the Soviet leadership. Trotsky's implicit authorization of the Allied landing was later held against him during Stalin's negative recasting of his legacy.[18]

The unideological nature of these initial interventions is starkly apparent; the Allies were fully prepared to support a Bolshevik Russia as they had Kerensky's Russia, were they to commit to continuing war against the Central Powers. Indeed, Allied representatives tried, unsuccessfully, to stall ratification of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk by the Congress of Soviets with promises of Allied aid and anti-German intervention; Lenin humoured these proposals, determining that peace with Germany even if it meant the surrendering of immense amounts of territory, was the best way to ensure the survival of the nascent Bolshevik state.[19] Further strategic considerations faced by the Allies which brought about intervention were now cemented

[16] Silverlight, *The Victors'*, 32.
[17] Silverlight, 32.
[18] Silverlight, 32.
[19] Ian Campbell Douglas Moffat, "The Diplomacy of Chaos: The Allied Intervention in Russia 1918-1920" (PhD diss., Royal Military College of Canada), 88-89.

with the generous surrender terms extracted from the Bolsheviks by Germany at Brest-Litovsk, formally ratified in March. Germany in the spring of 1918 held the initiative in the war, and the closing of the Eastern Front freed divisions to be transferred to renewed offensives in the West. Measures to reopen the Eastern Front in any form became strategically critical to prevent, as much as possible, the westward transference of German forces. Fears of Murmansk's capture by Germany for use as a year-round submarine base to circumvent the "immense anti-submarine mine barrage running from Scotland to Norway"[20] spurred initial interventions when it was thought that a German offensive from Finland could seize the port, and post Brest-Litovsk when the Bolsheviks appeared to be wholly submissive to German interests.

Complex international diplomatic developments between Allied nations with competing national interests and foreign policy and the deft diplomatic play of the Bolshevik leadership who "refused to accept any Allied accommodation, but continued saying they were willing to do so, all just to keep their options open"[21] would delay further intervention. The United States in particular was reluctant to intervene,[22] yet their support in manpower and materiel undiminished by the war was critical to the endeavour. The arrival in late April of a German delegation to Soviet Russia under ambassador Wilhelm von Mirbach would convince the American

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[20] *N.R.E.F. 16th Brigade C.F.A. 67th and 68th Batteries in North Russia September 1918 to June 1919* (Toronto, n.d.), 4.
[21] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 147.
[22] The Americans were generally the most sympathetic of the Allies to Bolshevik Russia. President Woodrow Wilson's famous "Fourteen Points" from January of 1918 outlining his foreign policy towards ending the war in Europe called for "[t]he evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest cooperation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire." Yale Law School, "President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points," The Avalon Project, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp.

ambassador and attaché of the necessity of further intervention. Fears of German influence and a potential offensive towards Murmansk from Finland were validated on May 8th when von Mirbach threatened to do so unless the small Allied presence was withdrawn.[23]

The British acted first, without consulting the other Allies owing to the urgency of deploying more substantial forces to Murmansk, spurred in part by multiple German submarine attacks against Norwegian and Russian vessels in the area.[24] These attacks off their coast would drive a further wedge between the Bolshevik leadership and the Murmansk Soviet, which still suffered from isolation and food shortages. Two British forces were ultimately formed, given the codenames "Elope" and "Syren," with the former destined for Archangelsk on the White Sea and the latter allocated to Arctic Murmansk. On May 16th the War Office met to determine the composition of Elope. Five Canadian officers and eleven N.C.O.s from units stationed in England who were not necessarily fit for general service joined an overall contingent of less than 500 personnel, under the command of British Major-General F.C. Poole.[25] On July 30th, the War Office requested additional Canadian officers and N.C.O.s for the formation of a special force to operate in the vast Arctic wilderness of the Murmansk region; some ninety-two volunteers would depart from Scotland under Canadian veteran Lieutenant-Colonel John Leckie in September.[26] This special contingent, eventually known as the Canadian Malamute Company,[27] would quietly perform some of the most unique and challenging tasks of the war.

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[23] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 147-148.
[24] Moffat, 150-151.
[25] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention,* 52.
[26] Swettenham, 53.
[27] Damien Wright, *Churchill's Secret War with Lenin : British and Commonwealth Military Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1918-20* (Havertown: Helion & Company, 2017), 43.

Archangelsk fell to a haphazardly formed transnational Allied armada under the command of Major-General Poole on August 2nd. On the approach to the city, the force encountered two batteries on the White Sea island of Mudyug. In the face of the advancing Allied warships and seaplanes one battery eagerly accepted a demand for surrender, while the other fell following a brief fight between landed troops supported by aerial bombing and fire from naval guns[28] – notably the first combined sea-air attack ever performed by British forces.[29] With these defences overcome, Allied troops disembarked peacefully in Archangelsk, as a simultaneous coordinated anti-communist coup had caused the Bolshevik leadership to flee.[30] Bolshevik Russia had been invaded from the vast north by a pitifully small force. These events, coupled with the uprising of a significant body of Allied-aligned troops in Russia fighting for Czechoslovak independence from Austria-Hungary, which had become dispossessed following the Brest-Litovsk settlement, permanently soured Allied-Bolshevik relations and set a path to direct armed conflict.

While an initial request for a Canadian infantry battalion of troops fit for general service to take part in the Elope force was denied, as Canada needed all able manpower to prioritize the reinforcement of the Western Front, a later request on August 3rd for two artillery batteries to support the forces which had landed in Archangelsk was accepted.[31] These batteries, the 67th and 68th, formed the 16th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery. This force totaled eighteen officers and

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[28] Leonid I. Strakhovsky, *Intervention at Archangel: The Story of Allied Intervention and Russian Counter-Revolution in North Russia 1918-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 17.
[29] Anna Reid, *A Nasty Little War: The Western Intervention into the Russian Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2024), 52.
[30] Kinvig, *Churchill's Crusade*, 34.
[31] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention*, 52-53.

469 enlisted personnel.[32] Alongside a large multinational contingent departing from Dundee, Scotland, the 16th Brigade braved a rough, seasick and influenza-stricken journey which led to the death of a French soldier before arriving in early October. Canadian commander Colonel C.H.L. Sharman reflected that a burial at sea north of the Arctic Circle seemed the "least likely of all places for a Frenchman viewed from the standpoint of August 1914."[33]

From the standpoint of August 1914, it would have been unthinkable that Canadian soldiers would fight and die combating Bolsheviks in North Russia after Germany had surrendered. But these forces that disembarked in the warm months of 1918 would not depart until after the thaw (and well after the Armistice) in 1919. Their winter spent in the subarctic darkness saw the most combat action of any of the fronts in Russia in which Canadians were involved. The bravery shown and official awards granted to the artillerymen around Archangelsk and those special units around Murmansk have resulted in this front receiving the lion's share of Canadian historical attention, relative to the numerically smaller contribution in the Caucasus and the unblooded though substantial Canadian force deployed in Siberia. This article does not detail the extensive military actions undertaken by Canadians in North Russia; analysis of the tactical complexities has been performed by other scholars.[34]

The guns of the 16th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery were sorely and constantly needed during operations in North Russia. Ten days after their arrival, the 67th battery was brought by tugboat 250 miles up the Dvina River to a region of muskeg interspersed with small villages, to bring indirect fire support to the Allied forces assembled there. Major F.F. Arnoldi, commanding

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[32] Swettenham, 53.
[33] C.H.L. Sharman, "Operation Order No. 1," October 2, 1918, accessed January 7, 2025, http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=2004783&lang=eng.
[34] See: Swettenham, *Allied Intervention*, 187-231.

the 67th battery, sardonically recalled that it was "a very uneventful but … pleasant trip, outside of having to threaten to shoot the captains of our tugs several times to stop them from deserting us."[35] Bolshevik sabotage of logistics along Siberia's railways by partisan disruption and sympathetic rail workers crippled White efforts there, while in North Russia riverways and boatmen occupied an analogous position. On Armistice Day, November 11th, Canadian artillerymen participated in an engagement that is perhaps the best known and commemorated of all fought in North Russia. The 67th battery in the village of Tulgas had engaged in back-and-forth shelling with a Bolshevik force consisting of a gunboat flotilla on the Dvina River. The Bolsheviks were equipped with naval guns which outranged their 18 pounders, and whose "approximately 3,500 troops" vastly outnumbered the "between 900 and 1000 all ranks" of the battery and adjoining companies of British and American infantry.[36] Major Arnoldi provides the following description of the battle in Tulgas:

> On November 11th, his gun boats opened up a heavy bombardment on Tulgas at daylight, and his Infantry attacked at 8 a.m. in front, our right section being heavily engaged in support of the Infantry. At 9 a.m., a large body of the enemy, 600 strong, who under cover of the woods had pushed round to the rear of our guns, were discovered by the drivers of the section, who were in their billets at the time, advancing from the village in their rear about 200 yards distant. The drivers, some 20 in number, rushed out, armed with their rifles, and met the Bolos' advance, temporarily checking it. They fell back in open order on their gun pits fighting all the way, giving the guns time to be somewhat prepared for the Bolo when he arrived. As already stated the guns were in action at the time, firing to their front. "B" Sub. Gun. was run out of its pit and reversed, opening up over open sights at the enemy.[37]

[35] *N.R.E.F. 16th Brigade C.F.A.*, 15.
[36] *N.R.E.F. 16th*, 17.
[37] *N.R.E.F. 16th*, 17.

The attack was ultimately repulsed with the assistance of a platoon of the British infantry, who suffered ten dead while remarkably only two Canadians fell. While their fellow soldiers were celebrating victorious peace on the Western Front, the war would not end for the small contingent of Canadians and their allies in North Russia for another long winter.

The Armistice was less destabilizing to the effectiveness of the North Russia intervention than was the case with Canada's forces destined for Siberia. Canada's full force of volunteers in the North had been deployed and continued to effectively fight after and indeed on the day that the German threat which had justified their intervention was rendered null. However, having succeeded at securing Russia's northern ports from Germany, the Allies failed to sufficiently reorient a strategy towards the now entrenched Bolsheviks. The resolve of these soldiers fighting a quiet war in Russia's far north would be tested, as by November the White Sea was freezing over and withdrawal of forces would be impracticable until the spring thaw.

Siberia

Historian Stuart Beattie argued that Canada's involvement in the Allied intervention in Siberia was "motivated basically by two myths – one that in the summer of 1918 intervention in Siberia was essential to victory over Germany, and the other that those who intervened would profit from trade with Siberia."[38] Canada's entrance into Siberia was thus brought about by a series of decisions made during crisis and marred by chaos. As a member of the Imperial War Council, Canadian policy towards Siberia was influenced by the British. However, unified Allied policy

[38] Steuart Beattie, "Canadian Intervention in Russia, 1918-1919" (master's thesis, McGill University, 1957), 67.

overall was appallingly absent – Canada, while dwarfed by the other intervening powers of Britain, Japan and, reluctantly, the United States, nevertheless also sought to assert its own national interests in Siberia. These interests were both strategic and economic in nature.

As stated previously, Canada exercised autonomy in refusing a request for a battalion of infantry to outfit the North Russia intervention, owing to acute manpower shortages and a primary commitment to reinforce the Western Front. The strategic situation was sufficiently different in Siberia, however, that Canada would eventually agree to assemble a significant force for deployment there. A pressing factor was the Allied-aligned Czechoslovak Legion. An exiled army without a country, the Legion was being evacuated eastwards along the Trans-Siberian Railway until a breakdown in relations with the Bolsheviks led to an uprising which swiftly captured an enormous length of territory and entrenched the anti-communist White movement in Siberia. While, as described above, the British had landed forces in Murmansk in March of 1918, official Soviet historiography depicted the Czechoslovak Legion's uprising as the start of the Russian Civil War,[39] a nationalistic narrative which greatly bolsters the significance of foreign intervention. In addition to the issue of the Czechoslovak Legion, Allied leadership had reason to believe in the continued strategic necessity of reopening the Eastern Front. The apparent solution was to bring this anti-Bolshevik, anti-Central Power force westwards. Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden came to support this view, saying on June 26th that "…our real objective was to endeavor to induce the anti-German elements in Russia to unite in opposing Germany. It was quite clear that they could not make any headway without Allied involvement."[40]

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[39] Ivan Kurilla, "Allied Intervention From Russia's Perspective: Modern-Day Interpretations," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, December 19, 2019, 571.
[40] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 172.

Borden warmed to the idea of intervention earlier than American President Woodrow Wilson. Wilson's *aide memoire* to Allied ambassadors expands on the view stated in his Fourteen Points: "It is the clear and fixed judgment of the Government of the United States … that military intervention there would add to the present sad confusion in Russia rather than cure it … and that it would be of no advantage in the prosecution of our main design, to win the war against Germany."[41] American and British policy differed sharply, and while Canadian leadership adopted the general British view there were also distinct Canadian reasons for interventions when other requests for commitments had been refused. Borden was acutely aware of rising Canadian death tolls on the Western Front and the domestic conscription crisis; he had also been critical of the way the British high command was conducting the war since 1917 and sought to assert greater agency.[42] Any strategic measure that could provide relief to the Western Front would be welcome, even if it necessitated constructing a new force. Unlike North Russia, where forces were assembled from volunteers already deployed overseas, Canada's Siberian contribution would need to be mustered domestically – ultimately incorporating conscripts – in an environment of increasing political radicalization over the issues of conscription and labour conflict.

While Prime Minister Borden (who was in London attending the Imperial War Council) had adopted the view that a Siberian intervention would be strategically valuable, Britain performed a diplomatic faux pas towards the senior dominion. As historian Ian Moffat describes, "On 20th July, W.H. Long, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, took an unusual step and communicated directly with the Governor General of Canada, laying out the requirements for the

[41] "Aide Memoire," "Detroit's Own" Polar Bear Memorial Association, accessed January 18, 2025, https://pbma.grobbel.org/aide_memoire.htm.
[42] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 171.

Canadian contingent and stipulating that all save one infantry battalion coming from Hong Kong would be Canadian units … London's communication was sent without consulting Borden or Mewburn [Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence]… The two Canadian ministers were sufficiently incensed that Borden promptly retorted 'no reply shall be sent to the British Government's message except through me.'"[43] This demonstrates Borden's commitment to asserting the dominion's autonomy within the framework of Empire.

Following these proceedings, the process of assembling and deploying the force bound for Vladivostok began in earnest. Canada's commitment in Russia had grown enormously, and now encompassed two of the remotest fronts of the war. The dominion had contributed to its first foreign war only twenty years earlier during the Second Boer War and had effectively constructed its entire military in the preceding four. Now, in part to boost Canadian prestige and further induce its commitment to Siberia, Canada was to lead the overall imperial venture. Under Major-General J.H. Elmsley, a veteran of the Western Front, the Canadians were to take command of both the British 25th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, which had landed in Vladivostok on August 3rd, and exercised an independent chain of correspondence with Ottawa.[44] The entire Allied operation in Siberia, however, was to be formally commanded by the Japanese General Otani Kizuzo. This relationship was established as the Japanese had established Allied command from the first landings in Vladivostok and were to wield the largest Allied force in Siberia other than the Czechoslovak Legion.

North Russia and Siberia were perhaps the remotest fronts of the global conflict, and even within Russia they were separated by thousands of kilometers and accessed by the fringes

[43] Moffat, 173-174.
[44] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention*, 126, 129.

of two different oceans. Canadian involvement "demanded two separate planning operations, one to fulfill the promise of instructors and artillery units for North Russia and one to organize and transport a fully self-sustaining brigade for Siberia."[45] The former would remain the responsibility of Canada's Minister of Overseas Forces, based in London, while Siberia fell under Militia Headquarters in Ottawa.[46]

The units composing the Canadian Expeditionary Force Siberia (C.E.F.S.) were, in addition to headquarters elements, as follows:

> 'B' Squadron, Royal North West Mounted Police (Cavalry),
> 85th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery,
> 16th Field Company, Canadian Engineers,
> 6th Signal Company,
> 259th Infantry Battalion,
> 260th Infantry Battalion,
> 20th Machine Gun Company,
> No. 1 Company Divisional Train,
> No. 16 Field Ambulance,
> No. 11 Stationary Hospital,
> No. 9 Ordnance Detachment.[47]

The approved strength was set at 5,000 personnel, though ultimately only 4,210 would depart for Vladivostok.[48] This significant and self-sustaining formation, augmented by British forces in Siberia, could have constituted a substantial fighting force, were it appropriately utilized in a timely fashion.

The economic component of trade potential with resource-rich Siberia also influenced Canadian decision-making towards Siberia. Borden sought to leverage Canada's new military

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[45] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 175.
[46] Moffat, 175.
[47] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention* 128.
[48] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 72.

might and prestige built up over the past four years and translate it into further political and economic influence on the international stage. Siberia was Canada's first attempt towards this objective, though one that would ultimately end in failure. National self-interest was to sabotage international Allied efforts in Russia. When Britain and the United States incorporated trade commissions into their intervening forces, Canada followed suit.[49] The two "myths" Stuart Beattie identified as motivating Canada's intervention in Siberia did not come to fruition, but there was coherency behind Borden's reasoning regarding both the strategic and economic value of Canadian involvement.

Newton Rowell, President of the Privy Council, vice-chairman of the War Committee, and recent attendant to the Imperial War Council along with Borden disseminated the government's policy towards Siberia in a September 1918 talk given to three hundred members of Victoria's Canadian Club. Rowell's lengthy speech, republished in *The Daily Colonist*, under the heading "Siberia Offers Vast Opportunity," outlines the approximate objectives and attempts to persuade the well-to-do attendants of the Canadian Club of the value of intervention. The Armistice of November was a sudden one, and as late as September 1918 Rowell incited the fear of a German-occupied Vladivostok, while also warning that "[e]very Canadian should be deeply interested in the Russian situation, for it vitally affects the Western Front and the whole issue of the war." Canada's newfound (and ultimately overextended) strength was extolled, and the Canadian economic mission depicted selflessly as one "sent to Siberia to give such advice and assistance in the work of reorganization and reconstruction as the people of Siberia may desire." Notably, ideological anti-Communism was thoroughly absent; anti-Bolshevism was synonymous with anti-Germanism and the March Revolution which toppled the Romanov autocracy was

[49] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 175.

heralded as the "dawn of a new day for liberty and democracy and its consummation as one of the greatest triumphs of this war."[50] Anti-German strategy, not anti-Communist ideology, was what committed Canadians to Siberia, and this anti-Germanism is also reflected in the Canadian government's public facing statements justifying their interventions.

General George S. Patton famously wrote regarding command that "a good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan next week."[51] This simple principle of military leadership was not exemplified by the Allies through any of their strategy towards Russia, most damagingly so in Siberia. An adequate plan was never developed, and delay, the lack of a transnational strategy and unified command, coupled with infighting among the Allied interveners was to hamper all their efforts. The entire expedition, in the words of Canadian historian John Swettenham, had been "formed in a way that doomed it to failure even at the outset."[52]

Having been approved in August, it was not until the 11th of October 1918 that the first Canadian contingent departed for Vladivostok. An advance party of 680 soldiers along with Major-General Elmsley landed on the 26th of that month.[53] As soldiers – volunteers and conscripts – assembled westwards from across Canada, the majority of the troops of the Canadian Expeditionary Force Siberia would remain languishing in Victoria's Willows Camp. They did not depart until after the Armistice of November 11th. Quartering under canvas in the damp British Columbian fall whilst outbreaks of Spanish Flu struck the camp was a miserable prospect. Matters were further aggravated by the fact that around one third of the non-

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[50] "Siberia Offers Vast Opportunity," *The Daily Colonist* (Victoria, B.C.), September 28, 1918, 5, 13.
[51] George S. Patton, *War As I Knew It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), 354.
[52] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention* 124.
[53] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 78.

commissioned soldiers comprising the force were conscripts.[54] Most of the volunteers were veterans of the Western Front;[55] the war in which they fought and which the Siberian venture was ostensibly to support of was finished. Low morale sapped the effectiveness of the C.E.F.S. as a fighting force before it had departed Canadian shores.

Armistice obliterated the unifying goal of intervention. The pressing and foreseeable possibility of a German victory that was used to justify the various Allied interventions across the territory of their former ally was removed from the equation. Failure on behalf of the Allies to adequately reorient their strategy in Russia laid bare the lack of Allied unity. Allied coordination fell apart on the level of grand strategy when the Supreme War Council ceased involvement in Russian affairs.[56] The principal powers of Britain, France, Japan, and the United States had profoundly different national interests which had committed them to Russia as baggage along with the overarching strategic purpose which was rendered void on November 11th. With that purpose gone, those conflicting national goals were all that remained. Canada's path to Siberia up until Armistice had strategic coherence and like the other intervening states incorporated national self-interests. However, Canada's continued involvement and the eventual deployment of further forces beyond the Armistice is least understandable among the intervening powers overall. Canada had the least to gain by further involving itself, the least to contribute to the overall mission, and the government had the most at stake domestically with a particularly acute and worsening political crisis over conscription and the increasingly loud clamour for the return of soldiers still overseas.

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[54] Isitt, 72.
[55] Isitt, 84.
[56] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 251.

The advance party which landed in Vladivostok on the 26th of October was dead weight on arrival. Difficulties arose in merely unloading the ships as personnel were "insufficient to supply the guards and working parties necessary" and limited space of the wharves would "only hold ordnance and supplies from one ship at a time."[57] Major-General Elmsley met representatives from the absurdly varied "British, American, French, Italian, Czech, Japanese and Chinese Forces, to discuss international affairs."[58] The involved parties were disparate, their command uncoordinated in any meaningful sense, and their forces ineffectively engaged against the Bolsheviks. The Trans-Siberian railway, a critical artery of logistics and communication, had been wrenched from the Bolsheviks by the Czechoslovak Legion in their uprising; by the time control was assumed by the Allied interveners over the summer of 1918, its efficiency was greatly reduced. This was wrought by a combination of sabotage by Bolshevik partisans along its long and undefendable track, uncooperative Russian railway workers, and, perhaps most damagingly, by Allied infighting – particularly between the competing interests of Japan and the United States.[59]

Though domestic political unity had been broken by the Armistice, Borden continued to offer lukewarm support of a timid form of interventionism. While Borden was still in London, Acting Prime Minister Sir William Thomas White cabled him three days following Armistice to say that "All our colleagues are of the opinion … that public opinion here will not sustain us in continuing to send troops, many of whom are draftees … now that the war is ended. We are of the opinion that no further troops should be sent and that Canadian forces in Siberia should, as

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[57] "War Diary for October 1918 Force Headquarters Canadian Expeditionary Force (Siberia)," https://canadiangreatwarproject.com/diaries/viewer.php?u=forces_headquarters_siberia.
[58] "War Diary for October 1918."
[59] "Notes on the Railway Situation in Siberia, as on October, 31st, 1918.," October 31, 1918, https://canadiangreatwarproject.com/diaries/viewer.php?u=forces_headquarters_siberia.

soon as the situation will permit, be returned to Canada."[60] Borden weighed this proposal for withdrawal with the War Office's commitment that British and Canadian troops would not be engaged in an offensive campaign.[61]

Their mission, the British intended, would be one of stabilizing the anarchic region and assisting the White government in Siberia, now that the original war goals of opposing the Germans and rescuing the Czechoslovaks were rendered null. Politically, the White movement in Siberia came to be headed by Admiral Alexander Kolchak, who seized power in a coup in Omsk by the 18th of November. Supported by the British and nominally recognized as Supreme Ruler of Russia by the disparate White Movement, Kolchak was an authoritarian ruler who would ultimately fail to construct a viable alternative to the Bolshevism he vigorously opposed.

To Canada, a new economic incentive also arose as in addition to goodwill for trade with a future White Russia; an immediate demand for munitions could sustain Canada's expanded war industry while it transitioned to a peacetime economy.[62] Borden's adjusted policy was communicated a week after White's cable, on November 20th, stating that Canada's forces would remain in Siberia until the spring of 1919 and that "the additional forces originally arranged for should proceed to Siberia for the purposes indicated, as well as for economic considerations which are manifest."[63] Canada's Siberian commitment was thus to carry on with its aims half-way adjusted. When intervention began on an anti-German basis, a timescale into 1919 appeared likely, and the Armistice of November was a sudden one. However, both the post-Armistice timescale and the uncertainty over the goals of intervention were to severely sap the strategic

[60] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention* 154-155.
[61] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention* 155.
[62] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 260.
[63] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention* 155.

effectiveness and morale of the intervention. Nonetheless, Borden sought to uphold his commitment and reap both short and long-term economic and diplomatic benefits from Canadian participation. These would not come to pass.

Militarily, Major-General Elmsley complained at the end of November that "[t]he policy of helping Russia in every way except by armed troops is only a half measure, and at this critical period this course will undoubtedly prove dangerous."[64] Canada had mobilized a force for Siberia, at great difficulty during a critical point of the war in Europe, and yet it would never permit it to fight through critical points of the war in Russia. Already, the Bolsheviks who controlled Russia's European heartland came to wield Russia's longstanding military strength: sheer manpower. While the Bolsheviks had allowed the old Russian military to dissolve, Leon Trotsky had been through 1918 rapidly building up the new Red Army. Intelligence passed to Elmsley from the Czechoslovaks placed Bolshevik strength at not less than half a million, while White forces were estimated to be between 250,000 and 300,000.[65] The numerical advantage held by the Bolsheviks would only expand, multiple times over, by the end of the war.

British and Canadian policy remained distinct. Arthur Balfour of the British Foreign Office continued his now infamous pattern of destructively contradictory foreign commitments. On the 9th of December, Balfour communicated to both Vladivostok and Archangel the British policy in Russia, acknowledging that the original strategic justification for intervention was rendered null by Armistice though he restated that those circumstances brought about the

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[64] "War Diary for November 1918 Force Headquarters Canadian Expeditionary Force (Siberia), Appendix XXIX," https://canadiangreatwarproject.com/diaries/viewer.php?u=forces_headquarters_siberia.
[65] "War Diary for November 1918, Appendix XXIX"

presence of Allied troops, not "an attempt … to carry out a campaign against Bolshevism."[66] While asserting that the Russians were to choose their own form of government and that the British "have no desire to intervene in the domestic affairs of Russia," on the other hand Balfour cites the Czechoslovaks and the various fledgling anti-Bolshevik administrations reliant on British support for why "[i]t does not … follow that H.M. Government can forthwith disinterest themselves wholly from Russian affairs."[67] Also on the 9th of December, General Elmsley received from Ottawa a cable outlining Canada's revised policy. While the original composition of the C.E.F.S., including conscripts, was to be deployed, the force was expected to be withdrawn by spring and the government promised the return of any soldiers who so desired to return by one year from the signing of Armistice.[68] This disharmony between Britain and the Canadian Dominion was minute relative to the dysfunction between the other Allied nations, which was continuing to hamper the running of the essential railroad across Siberia. Canada was continuing to extend itself, without meaningful strategic objectives or national interests, while already placing one foot out the door on the entire operation.

An additional party of 425, along with a Canadian Red Cross contingent, had arrived in Vladivostok on December 5th, while smaller components proceeded westwards to distant Omsk to support the British units there.[69] On the home front, a significant portion of the C.E.F.S. remained in a state of uncertainty in Willows Park, Victoria, while the decision-making for their venture occurred in a way that appeared confused and disconnected from themselves. One officer

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[66] "War Diary for December 1918 Force Headquarters Canadian Expeditionary Force (Siberia), Appendix X," https://canadiangreatwarproject.com/diaries/viewer.php?u=forces_headquarters_siberia.
[67] "War Diary for December 1918, Appendix X."
[68] "War Diary for December 1918, Appendix XI."
[69] "War Diary for December 1918, 2-3."

of the 260th Infantry Battalion, Stuart Ramsay Tompkins, enjoyed a comparatively comfortable existence in Victoria with regular tea at the Empress Hotel, yet expressed uncertainty towards the mission up until the days of embarkation. His letters to his sweetheart hint at the other phenomenon developing: "[t]here has been a lot of socialistic agitation here and two weeks ago there was a meeting here largely attended by 259th [Infantry Battalion] men—French Canadians. At this meeting the Siberian Expedition was discussed and a strong resolution was taken against it. Last Sunday night our fellows went down and broke up the meeting but the harm was done."[70] Ramsay also mentions an incident of mutiny on the 21st of December, in which elements of two companies of the 259th – being Francophone conscripts from Québec – refused to embark. As historian Benjamin Isitt describes a century later, "the military authorities used force – revolvers, canvas belts, and bayonets – to ensure their deployment to Russia."[71] This contingent would not arrive in Vladivostok until January of 1919.

Withdrawal

With the turn of the new year into 1919, Canadian intervention was to drag on in North Russia and in Siberia, though the experiences of the two disparate contingents differed significantly. While both bore witness to the internecine violence between domestic factions within Russia that was growing in brutality and scale, only in North Russia would Canadian soldiers be continually deployed in combat against the Bolsheviks.

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[70] Stuart Ramsay Tompkins, *A Canadian's Road to Russia: the Letters of Stuart Ramsay Tompkins: Letters from the Great War Decade*, ed. Doris Pieroth (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1989), 358.
[71] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 101. This episode and its connections to the Canadian labour movement is given extensive analysis in Isitt's fifth chapter, 96-107, and is a central focus throughout his monograph.

Prime Minister Borden had come, by this time, to align with the Privy Council in Ottawa in opposing further Canadian participation.[72] Any national benefit to be wrought by Canada was becoming increasingly unlikely, whilst entanglement in Russia was becoming increasingly difficult to disengage. However, under pressure from the British, he compromised by allowing Canada's committed forces to remain, though with the set deadline of withdrawal by no later than June of 1919.[73] Canada was thus the first of the Allies to establish a definitive timeline for withdrawal.

The Allies, victorious in the Great War, were paralyzed by diplomatic chaos over the Russian question, which itself was overshadowed by the redrawing of Europe occurring during the Paris Peace Conference.[74] From this disharmony emerged the naïve proposal that the factions fighting the Russian Civil War form a truce and meet on the island of Prinkipo off the coast of Istanbul, with the intention of reaching a ceasefire and settlement to Russia's domestic strife. Set to occur on February 14th, 1919, the Prinkipo proposal was an outgrowth of a suggestion by Robert Borden in late December that the numerous warring contingents of Russia meet, in lieu of further intervention.[75] This would-be conference was described by diplomatic historian Ian Moffat as "at best, a compromise between the Anglo-American wish to halt further military intervention and the French and Italian policy to nip Bolshevism in the bud."[76] Strategically, a truce would benefit only the Bolsheviks, who were expanding the Red Army within the centralized base of European Russia they controlled, while the Whites were confined,

[72] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention* 178.
[73] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 300.
[74] For a detailed treatment of this period, see Moffat, "The Diplomacy," Chapter 11 284-318.
[75] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 152-153.
[76] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 301.

uncoordinated, to the margins. Despite this, the Whites were in fact enjoying some success in their spring offensives, adding to the impracticality of a ceasefire.[77]

The Prinkipo Conference was advanced by American President Woodrow Wilson who was readily aiming to remake postwar Europe in his internationalist image. His championing of the proposal echoed with his earlier Aide Memoire for the American forces which were then deployed within Russia, again displaying a naïvety towards the actual situation on the ground. Borden held a more pragmatic view and harboured doubts as to the prospects for the conference's success.[78] However, when requested by Britain's Lloyd George to attend Prinkipo as chief delegate on behalf of the whole British Empire, Borden accepted, despite his reservations about being absent from the Paris Peace Conference.[79]

Prinkipo never materialized. Establishing a ceasefire and coordinating diplomatic meetings between the warring factions proved impossible. As the Allies did not formally recognize the Soviet government, indirect invitations through the Moscow press and radio were replied to by the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, expressing a conciliatory attitude and a willingness to negotiate.[80] Calls to meet were rejected out of hand by White leadership, and drew ire from Allied diplomats and generals within Russia.[81] During the chaotic and ultimately futile negotiations, Thomas White, acting as Prime Minister *pro tem* while Borden remained abroad, asked Borden once more for a date for the withdrawal of Canadians in Russia. Borden

[77] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention* 183.
[78] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 303.
[79] Moffat, 302-303.
[80] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 153.
[81] Isitt, 153.

subsequently communicated to Lloyd George that Canada's deadline had moved nearer, to April.[82]

As 1919 rolled on, brutal violence occurred as the Civil War intensified with multiple White offensives in Siberia and from Anton Denikin's Volunteer Army in Southern Russia. Canadians in North Russia continued their quiet campaign in the subarctic darkness. The distant diplomacy and decision-making occurring in London and Ottawa was not part of their world. The brutality and viciousness of Russia's war increased, as ideological lines intensified and domestic conditions continued to deteriorate. Canadian soldiers in Russia were not sheltered from a form of warfare very different from that which began in 1914. Sergeant Francois "Frank" Maheux described the conditions in Karelia, during an engagement with the Bolsheviks on February 18th. After trekking for three days through the snow towards a strategic point on the railroad, the nominally White Russian levies under command of Canadian N.C.O.s dissolved upon receiving fire from the Bolsheviks. Another Canadian sergeant was severely injured, and fearing abandonment, Maheux reported that "he ask to be finish [sic] with my revolver the poor man he thought we were going to leave him & here you know if they catch you prisoner they cut off your ear, nose, monkeys, everything and then after you suffered for a long time they killed you."[83] Both men were veterans of the Western Front, and while this civil war was a very different affair, Canadian soldiers committed acts of brutality as well. After saving his fellow sergeant and receiving reinforcements, they set upon the Bolsheviks: "The poor buggers they got coward and they think if they put their hands up we was going to safe [sic] their lives … Well, poor wife, we was [sic] like wolves."[84] These descriptions of massacre were sent in letters to

[82] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 321.
[83] Morton, "A Canadian," 9.
[84] Morton, 9.

Frank Maheux's spouse back in Canada, along with a piece of his undershirt bearing a bullet hole from an injury he received during the engagement.[85]

A week later on the 26th of February, one Canadian artillery section even refused orders, in a wave of brief mutinies across the intervening Allied forces of various nationalities in North Russia.[86] While Canadian soldiers never balked in combat, the effectiveness and morale of the Allied mission was faltering as the date of withdrawal approached. The White Russian forces fared far worse. North Russia's anti-communist government was almost entirely an Allied construct, and it was largely propped up by Allied resources. As we have seen above, however, locally recruited soldiers proved unreliable under fire. The anti-communist project in North Russia crumbled as the Allied disengagement approached.

In Vladivostok, the moribund bulk of the Canadian force vacillated while performing unfulfilling and routine duties, garrisoning the port city. While they were spared from combat, they were not altogether spared from witnessing the brutality of the civil war. Alexander Kolchak's authoritarian regime employed conscription and repression against the peasants of Siberia, driving many to the Reds. Bolshevik partisans harassed and sabotaged Allied efforts, in one case displaying the crucified and disfigured remains of two White Russians on a road, their hands nailed to their shoulders in a mockery of a Russian officer's epaulettes.[87] Canadian officer Raymond Massey, later to find considerable fame as an actor in Hollywood, described how "[w]e continually found the bodies of these men, bearing obscene evidence of torture before death. Many times through the winter, we were alerted to take action stations according to prearranged

[85] Morton, 9.
[86] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention* 205.
[87] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 129-130.

anti-riot plans, but nothing happened 'above-ground.'"[88] These harassing guerilla tactics were the standard among Red partisans in the Siberia. When a Canadian contingent was dispatched 30 miles from Vladivostok to confront a Bolshevik advance, they found that their opponents had melted away before their arrival.[89]

As winter progressed a sense of aimlessness and frustration permeated across the ranks in Siberia, manifesting in an attitude of "home or fight." While Elmsley remained keen to commit his forces, Ottawa and Borden were not swayed. The great majority of the C.E.F.S had never left Vladivostok, besides the short jaunt against the elusive partisans and the few who had made the immense journey westwards to Omsk to serve as headquarters staff for the British units there. As one Lance-Corporal in Siberia reflected in his diary in mid-March, 1919:

> I have come to the conclusion now that it should rest with the Russians to settle her own internal affairs … To me there appears only one course for the Allies to adopt. If it has been decided that the outside Powers should intervene, then the intervention should be on a large scale, and not insignificant as it has been during the past four months. But such an effort to suppress Bolshevism and establish a stable government in Russia would involve tremendous casualties for the Allies, and sacrifices which I cannot conscientiously feel that we should bear. Therefore, I maintain that our policy should be one of non-intervention.[90]

Or more succinctly, as Sergeant Maheux on the other end of Russia wrote to his wife: "let the bloody Russians settle their business themselves."[91]

Prime Minister Borden had committed to an April withdrawal, and on April 21st, the first major departure from Vladivostok occurred. Prioritizing conscripts, 1,076 soldiers, predominantly of the 259th Infantry Battalion which had mutinied as they boarded ships in

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[88] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 130.
[89] Isitt, 145-146.
[90] MacLaren, *Canadians in Russia*, 202.
[91] Morton, "A Canadian," 87.

Victoria, would board again four months later in Vladivostok, this time bound for home.[92] This departure was followed by two large contingents on the 9th and 19th of May, and finally, on the 5th of June a final contingent containing Major-General Elmsley and Force Headquarters sailed for Victoria.[93] Canada's Siberian misadventure had concluded.

In the North, relief came with the spring thaw. Quite literally, as in May, Royal Navy gunboats dynamited their way through remaining river ice to support the recapture of Tulgas, where Canadian artillerymen had fought a second pitched battle against the Bolsheviks since the day of Armistice.[94] The 67th and 68th Batteries fell out of the lines on the 28th of May, and were extracted by river and bound for Archangel on June 7th, where the dispersed elements of the 16th Brigade would unite once more before departing.[95] Canada's smaller contingent in Murmansk, which was more closely integrated with British forces, would be delayed by the urgent protest of British leadership, who were concerned that their departure in the tactical situation in June would endanger the other Allied troops.[96] This was the last of many delays affecting the withdrawal of these troops, who, unlike their countrymen south of Archangel, were not bound by the ice. The ninety-two Canadian troops deployed around Murmansk had seen extensive action since they arrived in September of the preceding year,[97] and finally departed in August of 1919.[98]

When weighed against the size of the Canadian Expeditionary Force Siberia, and the intense and enduring combat in which Canada's North Russia contribution engaged, Canadian

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[92] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 155.
[93] Isitt, 155. It should be noted that fifty-three Canadians remained in Siberia attached to the British, while a small rear party of thirty-three returned via Japan in late August. See Isitt, *From Victoria*, 156, 249.
[94] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention* 219.
[95] *N.R.E.F. 16th Brigade C.F.A., 29, 48-49.*
[96] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention* 213.
[97] Moffat, "The Diplomacy," 359.
[98] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention* 212-213.

casualties in Russia were remarkably light. The war album of the 16th Brigade begins with an honour roll, listing seven names, of which six fell in combat or succumbed to wounds.[99] Among the C.E.F.S., not a single soldier fell to the enemy, though nineteen deaths occurred among the large contingent; sixteen to disease, two to accidents, and one man from suicide.[100] Canada's withdrawal precipitated the piecemeal withdrawal of all Allied forces and the final doom of any alternative to Bolshevism in Russia.

Remembrance and Legacy

In February, 2024, one American political commentator achieved something remarkable: a sit-down interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin concerning the war in Ukraine. Immediately, President Putin stated that "if you don't mind, I will say only thirty seconds or one minute to give you a short reference to history."[101] A significant amount of the following two-hour interview consisted of Putin's retelling of Russian history, beginning with the Rurikid dynasty of the Kievan Rus'. History, its interpretation, and its public memorialization have been made key pillars of Putin's government and it is used to generate interpretations that explicitly influence and justify Russian foreign policy. Beyond differing historiographies between Russia and the West, particular importance has been placed on public memorialization and the remembrance of grievances suffered by the Russian people. Indeed, Russia suffered immensely throughout the 20th century, being the anvil which absorbed the blows of Hitler's Germany and

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[99] *N.R.E.F. 16th Brigade C.F.A., 2.*
[100] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 157.
[101] "Exclusive: Tucker Carlson Interviews Vladimir Putin," video, 127:19, YouTube, posted by Tucker Carlson, February 8, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOCWBhuDdDo&ab_channel=TuckerCarlson.

ultimately turned the tide of the war. In doing so, the Soviet Union absorbed most of the territory of the former Russian Empire which had been lost at Brest-Litovsk. The veterans and victims of the Great Patriotic War have retained a near-sacred reverence within Russian memory and memorialization. A fundamental dissonance remains regarding the Civil War which preceded these later developments. Millions of people within the former Russian Empire in fact fought against Bolshevism, be they the breakaway nations which earned brief interwar independence (and once more fear Russian expansionism), or the anti-Communist White forces within Russia itself. Since the renewal of conflict with Ukraine in 2014, there has been a redoubling by the Kremlin on Soviet-era narratives of the Civil War and the Western interventions.

Mudyug, the island which guarded the sea-approach to Archangel, was repurposed by the Allies as a prisoner of war camp for captured Bolsheviks in August of 1918, before being transferred to North Russia's White government in May of 1919.[102] The prison was a centrepiece of Soviet propagandization of the North Russia intervention. Widely published memoirs of a Bolshevik prisoner and ideologue described the lack of food and ill treatment from their jailers, while the site was physically preserved as a Soviet museum to showcase the conditions of the camp. However, food shortages also generally affected both White forces and the civilian population, and the structures were adequate for their purposes and climate and later repurposed to house Soviet military personnel during the Second World War.[103] As discussed previously, food shortages were present in North Russia prior to Allied intervention even beginning, and indeed they were a factor in spurring their involvement. These factors, in addition to testimonial

[102] Natalia Golysheva, "Digging up Old Stories: How the Soviet Myths of Allied Intervention into the Russian North in 1918-1919 are used in the Context of Russia's War in Ukraine. The Case of Mudyug Concentration Camp Museum," *Politologija - Vilniaus Universitetas* 112 (2023): 49.
[103] Golysheva, "Digging up Old Stories," 57-58.

conflicts, seriously undermine the Soviet narrative constructed around Mudyug,[104] described previously even in Western media as a "concentration camp."[105]

Mudyug, converted into a museum, was regarded as propaganda, abandoned and left to decay along with the collapse of the Soviet Union.[106] The site's renovation and reopening by quasi-state historical associations following a presidential grant in 2022[107] is a potent metaphor for the Russian state's reversion to Soviet-era narratives post 2014. This connection was made explicit by Vladimir Medinsky, a historian and aide to President Putin, who stated "These lessons are very relevant even now, when they (the Western countries) are trying to cordon off Russia in the same way as the Entente [Allied] powers once tried... And various conflicting domestic forces are turning to the West in the hope of getting help."[108]

While memorialization of war dead altogether is by no means improper, Mudyug and other alleged Allied atrocities during the Civil War ascended, and have re-ascended, to the level of propaganda utilized for explicit political purposes. These propagandistic narratives have always been politically flexible. Joseph Stalin's own work of history, authored in 1938, suitably emphasizes the nationalistic character of the Bolsheviks opposing foreign interventionists.[109] That same year, a British-made Mark V tank captured from the White Volunteer Army in Ukraine was shipped north to Archangelsk's city centre as a monument to cement the increasingly

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[104] Golysheva, 60.
[105] Lucy Ash, "'Death Island': Britain's 'Concentration Camp' in Russia," BBC, last modified October 18, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-41271418.
[106] Golysheva, "Digging up Old Stories," 48, 50.
[107] Golysheva, 51.
[108] Golysheva, 46.
[109] Kurilla, "Allied Intervention," 571.

mythological memory of victory over foreign invasion.[110] During the interwar period, Soviet historiography had not inaccurately depicted Britain as the primary force behind intervention, whereas the Cold War brought a pivot to anti-Americanism which attributed to the United States atrocities in Siberia that were in fact committed by Japanese and White Russian forces, or fabricated them outright.[111] Perestroika and rapprochement with the West saw a decline in interest in the theme of foreign interventions altogether. They have returned to the forefront of discourse and popular memorialization under Putin's leadership, particularly since the conflict with Ukraine began with the Russian annexation of Crimea and the launching of interventions of their own through Eastern Ukraine. Since this renewed conflict with the West, Kremlin "propagandists have produced a variety of narratives and conspiracy theories about the War that further the aims of the regime and an enemy image of the West."[112]

Soviet historiography went so far as to claim the entire White Russian project was borne of foreign intervention, and further employed it to wash Bolshevism's hands of Red Terror.[113] Early Bolshevik leadership explicitly sought Communist world revolution, a fact which undermines criticism of foreign interference into their own affairs on a nationalist basis. Even some Western scholars have advanced the idea that foreign intervention and the Civil War fundamentally changed the form of Communism in Russia, setting it on a path towards terror and repression which were not innate to its nature.[114] However, the Russian Civil War was inherently

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[110] Vladislav Sergeevich Staf, "From Civil War to War of Liberation: The Formation of Soviet Memory of the Intervention in the North of Russia (1918-1920)." Translated by David Freeland Duke. *Siberian Historical Research* 2: 84.
[111] Kurilla, 571.
[112] Kurilla, 572.
[113] Kurilla, 572.
[114] This line of reasoning is considered by Benjamin Isitt in his concluding paragraphs. Isitt, *From Victoria*, 168-169.

an international affair from the beginning. Bolshevism's establishment is inseparable from the wartime context in which the October Revolution occurred, conflict with both foreign nations and domestic opposition were inevitabilities. That revolutionary idealism and slogans of peace, land, and bread, were warped into terror and eventual totalitarianism upon their first and inevitable tempering, are no less condemnations of the Communist project.

Canada's interventions have been tied to an overall class-based criticism of Canadian foreign policy, one in which "Canada bowed to the most powerful imperialist and its initiative of the day – demonstrating an enduring pattern in Canadian foreign policy."[115] This interpretation is uncharitable to Borden, to say the least. Benjamin Isitt, one of the few historians since the turn of the century to author a work on Canada's intervention, has this conclusion undermined by his own excellent research, which demonstrates that British appeals for further Canadian commitments in Russia were resisted up until May of 1919, mid-withdrawal.[116] Central to his monograph, Isitt examined the mutiny in Victoria among soldiers embarking for Siberia in December 1918. The Canadian military has a quiet though extensive history of mutiny and protest in response to grievance. While connections to the domestic labour movement make the mutiny of the soldiers of the 259th Battalion in Victoria unique, during the same period, thirteen instances of protest occurred between November 1918 and June of 1919 in the United Kingdom during a wave of frustration among soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force still deployed overseas following the Armistice.[117]

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[115] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 170.
[116] Isitt, 154-155.
[117] G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919 : Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War*, reprint ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 532.

From a military and strategic standpoint, Canada's mission in Siberia was a failure, insofar as it achieved no tangible objectives. However, it must be emphasized that it was Canada's own failure. Prime Minister Borden continually diverged from policies he deemed unbeneficial to Canada, and his decisions to commit to Siberia were not without coherency in the confused and chaotic environment in which they were made. Canada's contribution to North Russia assisted in achieving legitimate military objectives in an extremely volatile and isolated region. As operations to counter the Central Powers, Allied efforts in the former Russian Empire saw successes. Following the Armistice, the Allies were left committed to Russia's domestic conflict in which they had neither the political will nor strategic coordination to achieve a productive outcome. Canada's withdrawal was expedient and prescient to the overall Allied withdrawal, and itself constituted an assertion of Canadian agency. Assessing the overall success or failure of the Allied interventions is a difficult task owing to the piecemeal and ad hoc nature in which they came about and the lack of unifying objectives.

The Allied interventions in the Russian Civil War are deserving of further study, considering their renewed relevance in Putin's Russia. Canada's place within them remains little known and minimally studied, despite their occurrence adjacent to and immediately following the First World War, in which Canada's involvement is widely celebrated and memorialized. The Allied interventions in Russia were arguably the first of a new type of multinational war which would reoccur into the present; wars of institution-building, insurgency and counterinsurgency, of broken and conflicting commitments and of withdrawals which abandoned once-allies to succumb to former mutual enemies. The legacies of these interventions have been scars of resentment and failure. As Vladimir Putin's aide stated, "[t]hese lessons are very relevant even

now."[118] They must be reflected upon by a West finding itself with renewed geopolitical conflict against Russia, commitments in Eastern Europe, and multinational dysfunction. The lessons from this obscured episode in Canada's past must inform decisions Canadians make now and in a developing future.

[118] Golysheva, "Digging up Old Stories," 46.

Appendix A — Historiographical Essay

Historiographies of the Russian Civil War remain particularly contentious. The events themselves were of world-historic consequence. Beyond the mere interpretation of facts, of which historians vary widely, there is great difficulty in establishing common touchstones of truth. Communism and anti-communism were two of the driving forces of the 20th century, and this divide is reflected in works related to the creation of the world's first communist state. Many primary sources from the revolutionary period within Russia originate from the major actors themselves and are burdened with biases. Western sources which scholars of the Allied interventions have worked with come with their own challenges, be they Hansards, war diaries, or newspapers; all are imprinted with the limitations of the highly confused and fluid information environment between the closing of the First World War and the withdrawal of the last intervening troops in Russia. The historian today is tasked with navigating this confusion. Those categories of "Red" and "White" which agonizingly cleft Russia apart can be applied as well to the biases of subsequent historiography. Soviet (and by extension communist-aligned) historiographies often interpret the Allied interventions as actions intended to strangle the Soviet state in its infancy. Older Western works contextualize them within the war against the Central Powers, a conflict which often overshadows events in Russia. Much of this work was done to the backdrop of the Cold War and without full access to primary sources across archival borders. This historiography paper provides an analysis of the existing body of scholarship on the topic of Canada's place within the Allied interventions. Moreover, it will touch upon an aspect often neglected by Western scholars: the position of contemporary Russian historiography towards the

interventions, using both translated academic works and clues inferred from Russian popular memory.

One of the earliest quasi-official sources is an album titled *N.R.E.F., 16th Brigade C.F.A., 67th and 68th Batteries in North Russia, September 1918 to June 1919.* This work, compiled by the officers of the brigade, consists of a retelling of events in North Russia derived from the official war diaries and the personal experience of the authors. Beginning by listing those killed in service and ending with a complete nominal roll of personnel along with a list of British and Russian awards granted to members of the brigade, this source was a cornerstone for the first generation of scholars examining Canada's role in the North. The retelling of events written by Colonel C.H.L. Sharman (C.O. 16th Brigade), Major F.F. Arnoldi (C.O. 67th Battery) and Major W.C. Hyde (C.O. 68th Battery) – the latter supplemented by the war diary kept by Lieutenant J. Roberts – constitute a thorough description of the affairs of the 16th Brigade, though it is imprinted with the biases inherent to a work created by the commanding officers of the respective units. The album itself, also featuring many excellent photographic sources, appears to have been aimed in a large part as a commemorative memento for the officers and men of the brigade. Its tone is often triumphant, nostalgic, and humorous. Additionally, it does not touch upon the involvement of other Canadians in North Russia outside of the 16th Brigade, an aspect which has been omitted or caused a degree of confusion in later histories. Frustratingly, the album, published by Bryant Press of Toronto, fails to provide an exact date of publication, though it can be contextually assumed to be relatively near to the events described.

Canada's officially authorized history of the First World War, the monumental *Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919* by Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson is a demonstration of how marginal Russia was regarded compared to the glories won on the Western Front and the place of

honour those victories were granted in Canada's historical memory. Published in 1962, the penultimate chapter of this work mentions the military exploits of the Dunsterforce, North Russia and Siberia briefly. Even in this official source, the debacle of the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force is plainly regarded as "a complete failure."[119] The dearth of official writing or other forms of recognition is particularly true in the case of the Siberian front, where there were no victories to glorify.

There have been several notable monographs written focusing specifically on aspects of Canada's involvement in the interventions. The first work of book length is John Swettenham's *Allied Intervention in Russia 1918-1919 and the Part Played by Canada*, published in 1967. This work, which encapsulates all three fronts in which Canadians provided units or personnel in the composition of British forces, focuses primarily on the military and diplomatic aspects of the conflict, drawing upon official sources available at the time. Decidedly anti-communist and written to the backdrop of what the author identified as "the ills which now beset the free world – the Berlin Wall, the missile race, space domination, and the expansion of communism throughout the world,"[120] Swettenham argued throughout his examination of the war for the realistic possibility of a White victory. Swettenham was critical of the domestic White movement's leaders and strategy, but more so of the intervening Allied powers. His criticisms come from the position of postwar anti-communism and a hindsight that Allied leaders did not have in the chaotic periods before and after the Armistice of 1918, though his speculations as to the fragility of the Bolsheviks right up through to their rout from Poland in late 1920 seem to hold weight.

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[119] G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919 : Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War*, reprint ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 523.
[120] John Swettenham, *Allied Intervention in Russia 1918-1919 and the Part Played by Canada* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1967), 275.

Despite the book's focus on Canada's role in the interventions, the counterfactuals he ponders focus on Allied and particularly American policy; his closing remarks lament that "it was not until after the Second World War that American eyes were opened; and when they were, the determination to check the spread of Communism (demonstrated by the Marshall Plan, and resistance in South Korea) at last began to offer an effective barrier to Communist expansion."[121] The sort of internationally unified anti-communism of the Korean War was alien to the Allied actors intervening in Russia both before and after the Armistice. Moreover, Swettenham consistently aims at a delegitimization of the Bolsheviks throughout the key state-building period of the revolution and civil war and, pointing out their lack of democratic mandate. Operating with the sources accessible at the time and with very little other scholarly work available, Swettenham makes several minor errors, such as listing Canadian Captain Royce Dyer as killed in action,[122] although he in actuality succumbed to pneumonia,[123] being described by General Ironside as having simply "died while commanding [his men]."[124] Nonetheless, Swettenham produced the first book-length and published scholarly contribution specifically focused upon Canada's role within the interventions which has served as a touchstone for future scholars.

Following Swettenham comes Roy MacLaren's *Canadians in Russia, 1918-1919* published in 1976. MacLaren's work is in a similar vein to Swettenham's, though he more extensively incorporates elements which were only touched upon in the latter. His book is more comprehensive in its treatment of Canadians who served in Russia outside of the Dunsterforce, 16th Brigade of the N.R.E.F., and the C.E.F.S. Relative to Swettenham, MacLaren's work is more

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[121] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention*, 285.
[122] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention*, 78.
[123] Roy MacLaren, *Canadians in Russia, 1918-1919* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976), 85.
[124] Edmund Ironside, *Archangel 1918-1919* (Uckfield, UK: Naval & Military Press, 2007), 91.

specifically focused on Canadians in Russia than merely contextualizing Canada's role within a broader telling of the Allied interventions. MacLaren gives an in-depth analysis to the diplomatic and economic aspects of the intervention in his fourth chapter *Sir Robert Borden and Russia*. An attached appendix at the end of his work details the actions of the Canadians who served in the Royal Air Force in support of the White Volunteer Army, around the Black Sea.

Swettenham and MacLaren's books both tie in with the existing body of work on the broader Allied intervention done in the earlier half of the 20th century. As these other scholars were among the first who sought to interpret the Allied intervention as a whole, their works thus go beyond the scope of this paper, though several are notable in relation to the first generation of Canadian scholars. Leonid I. Strakhovsky was a witness to events in North Russia, later an academic whose central contribution was *Intervention at Archangel: The story of Allied Intervention and Russian Counter-Revolution in North Russia 1918-1920,* published in 1944. Despite being originally published by Princeton University Press, his book has faded into obscurity and become difficult to attain. Making only passing mention of Canada, it nonetheless was one of the few academic works that the first generation of Canadian scholars had available. History is always inseparable from the present, and it is interesting that while other works relate the interventions with their contemporary conflicts with Russia, Strakhovsky's preface compares the events in North Russia to the ongoing war Second World War, attempting to draw parallels with North Africa and the administration of occupied territories.

A few other oddball Canadian works from the 20th century are worth noting. Among these are an unpublished Master of Arts thesis written by McGill student Steuart Beattie in 1957. Titled *Canadian Intervention in Russia, 1918-1919*, it appears as the first attempt at an academic examination focused specifically on Canada's role in the intervention. His bibliography reveals

the dearth of other work on the topic. Notably, Beattie made use of the private papers and interviews with several senior officers of the C.E.F.S. Other sources cited in his bibliography consist of official and unofficial documents from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, various primarily Canadian newspapers (including those of the labour movement), and a variety of secondary sources; most British or American and none focused on Canada's place in the interventions. Beattie's thesis is not cited in Swettenham's subsequent book, and the two share a differing source base and focus. Notably, Beattie does not cite the N.R.E.F. album described above nor the official war diaries of Canadian units, implying their inaccessibility. MacLaren is the first later scholar to acknowledge Beattie's thesis. Curiously, Beattie focuses upon several themes that would remain relatively dormant before again becoming the concentration of more recent scholarship; these being the questions of Canada's foreign policy autonomy and domestic politics in relation to the interventions. Several theses were written in the latter half of the 20th century touching upon aspects of Canada's interventions, such as a Masters thesis written by a Royal Military College student in 1967,[125] though Beattie's was first, touched upon most by later scholars, and was book-length and comprehensive in its scope.

Another unusual couple of 20th century sources worthy of note, if falling short of deeper consideration as accurate and scholarly works of history, are those of Canadian communists. One of these, *Canada and the Russian Revolution* published in 1967 contemporaneous with Swettenham, was authored by chairman of the Communist Party of Canada, Tim Buck. Buck himself was a participant in the period of labour radicalism he described, five decades prior. This

[125] This work, by student B.D. Hunt, created in the same year (1967) as Swettenham's book was published, is titled *Canada and Armed Intervention in Russia 1918-1919.* It appears to be inaccessible beyond the archives of the R.M.C., though it is referenced to in Moffat, "The Diplomacy," iv-v.

unacademic work depicts a popular opposition to the war, to conscription, and a sympathy for the October Revolution among the Canadian working class. In addition to this fanciful depiction of the domestic political environment, the book falsely states that Canadian soldiers were sent to North Russia "without reference" to the Canadian government or overseas commander-in-chief.[126] In actuality, the first contributions of Canadian soldiers to the N.R.E.F. were made with the agreement of the Canadian government via Overseas Minister Sir Edward Kemp, who exercised agency in rejecting further requests for troops depending on Canadian needs in the Western theatre.[127] Canada voluntarily committed the two batteries of artillery towards North Russia, all soldiers which comprised them were volunteers.[128] Curiously, in between the various rudimentary factual errors Buck makes in his depiction of events, the phenomenon of labour-related protest among Canadian soldiers awaiting transport to Vladivostok receives only passing mention. Buck enlarges the significance of the pro-Soviet labour radicalism in which he took part and demonstrates ignorance of the policymaking occurring in Borden's government. However, this communist's identification of Canadian foreign policy during the interventions as wholly submissive to British imperialism and the events in Russia as being central to a wave of domestic revolutionary strife that would force the hand of Borden's government in withdrawing troops have been enduring canards that make Buck's otherwise unscholarly work worthy of note.

Published in 2010, one of the most recent book-length monographs on Canada's involvement in Russia is *From Victoria to Vladivostok*, by Benjamin Isitt. Through both an extensive scholarly apparatus of endnotes, and the creation of the Canadian Siberian Expedition

[126] Tim Buck, *Canada and the Russian Revolution* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1967), 43.
[127] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention*, 52.
[128] Swettenham, 53.

Virtual Exhibition along with the University of Victoria,[129] Isitt has made an extensive contribution to the cataloguing of sources and the study of Canadian effort in Siberia and its domestic implications. Despite its significance as both the largest contingent of Canadian soldiers and being the first overseas force under independent Canadian command, the Siberian front had been relatively overlooked by other historians due to its inaction and strategic failure. Moreover, Isitt examines the domestic ties to the labour movement and its opposition to the intervention. Thus, his work belongs more to the tradition of social and labour history than military history. Isitt draws heavily upon newspapers, particularly those of the labour movement of the time as sources, such as the British Columbia Federationist. In regard to this use of newspaper sources, he states that they provide "a clarity undiluted by historical hindsight."[130] He is correct that clarity can only be established by sorting through the mud of misinformation and flaring ideology inherent to the topic, and few other historians on the subject have engaged as extensively with non-official sources such as newspapers, diaries and letters as Isitt. Notably, the radical BC Federationist is often extracted to construct the driving narrative of the book. It is questionable whether such sources can be taken to provide a clarity of both events and popular feelings, given the explicit ideological allegiance of such papers.

Isitt emphasizes, and perhaps overdraws, the significance of the mutinous actions taken by participating Canadian soldiers. The brief mutiny of conscript soldiers of one company of the 259th Battalion, in part influenced by labour organizations, as they boarded their Siberia-bound ships in Victoria, has been granted a place of honour in his work. Isitt's treatment of this episode

[129] University of Victoria, Canada's Siberian Expedition Virtual Exhibition, https://www.siberianexpedition.ca/index.html%3Flang=english.html.
[130] Benjamin Isitt, *From Victoria to Vladivostok : Canada's Siberian Expedition, 1917-19* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 9.

and other incidents of protest by soldiers in Siberia – and one brief event in February 1919 in which Canadian and other allied troops in Murmansk refused orders – differ significantly from those of other scholars. For military-focused historians of the past generation, these events of protest, if described at all, are described to contextualize the cracks in discipline and low ebb of morale that arose in the dreary environment of subarctic Russia as Canadian soldiers overwintered. Little has been made of the mutiny of boarding soldiers bound for Siberia in Victoria. To Isitt, these acts of protest which have been regarded as marginal by other historians become central to his depiction of the interventions, and moreover are connected to the broader anti-interventionist labour movement. There is a very critical difference between insubordination arising from miserable conditions and a mission that appears aimless, and mutiny implied to be connected to an at least partial ideological sympathy for the enemy and/or the domestic labour movement. Swettenham drew a cleft between the domestic labour movement and the Bolsheviks, stating that "the nature of Bolshevism was improperly understood becomes quite obvious from the tone of the many letters submitted to the government by Labour organizations from coast to coast" citing a letter from a rural British Columbian Labour Hall which demands the withdrawal of the C.E.F.S. on the basis that "the working class in Russia are fighting for a Real Democracy and a lasting peace."[131] In contrast, Isitt ties the domestic opposition to intervention and the revolution itself to the same common international labour movement surging in the immediate post-war period. From Victoria to Vladivostok, as one of the most recent, comprehensive, and rigorously cited works on the topic, has had a substantial impact on the perception of Canada's role in the intervention among more recent scholarly works.

[131] Swettenham, *Allied Intervention*, 153.

The interpretations of labour protest and soldier's mutiny provided by Isitt in particular have been influential; in *A Nasty Little War*, by Anna Reid in 2023 – one of the most recent books published on the Allied interventions – the popularity of the interventions in Canada as a whole are assessed only through the anecdote of mutiny among soldiers in Victoria.[132] While previous authors have criticized the Allied interventions insofar as they were insufficient or failed in the objective of militarily dislodging the Bolsheviks, assuming the *a priori* goodness of anti-communism, Isitt sharply criticizes Canadian foreign policy itself. While other historiographies have emphasized the degree of independence gained by Canada during the First World War, and noted the foreign policy autonomy exercised by the Borden government in withdrawing troops from Russia and commanding the Siberian theatre, Isitt argues that "[r]ather than emerging from the First World War as an autonomous 'free agent' in an egalitarian world system of states, Canada bowed to the most powerful imperialist and its initiative of the day – demonstrating an enduring pattern in Canadian foreign policy."[133]

Another recent Canadian publication is *The Allied Intervention in Russia 1918-1920: The Diplomacy of Chaos,* by Ian C.D. Moffat. First written as an M.A. thesis in 2012 for the Royal Military College of Canada (Moffat himself being an officer of the Royal Canadian Navy), the work was republished as a book in 2015. This work exists in a half-way point between being a monograph on the Canadian participation in the events and a broader, comprehensive history of the Allied intervention in whole. As the title implies, the work primarily focuses on the diplomatic goings-on between the Allied interveners, and a recurring motif is the chaos of Allied military/diplomatic coordination as well as war-wrought Russia itself. Along with Isitt, Moffat

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[132] Anna Reid, *A Nasty Little War: the Western Intervention into the Russian Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2024), 108-109.
[133] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 170.

makes extensive use of archival primary sources. As one reviewer notes, it is peculiar that Moffat's work claims to be a history of the broader Allied intervention, given its focus on British, Canadian and American documents and complete lack of any French primary sources, whereas secondary sources concerning Japan are not cited at all.[134]

Where the work excels is its detail in the diplomatic goings-on between Canada and the United Kingdom. Moffat situates himself within the existing historiography of the interventions, including that of Canadian scholarship. Usefully, he describes and critiques the big three authors of monographs on Canada's involvement which we have already discussed: Swettenham, MacLaren, and Isitt. Swettenham's book he notes as lacking in access to primary sources, while MacLaren's work is criticized as unacademic and narrative-focused, being light on citations.[135] Moffat characterizes both Swettenham and MacLaren as being Canadian-flavoured derivatives of the then-existing body of work on the Allied interventions in general, such as that of Strakhovsky. It is Isitt's work he devotes the most space criticizing, though he praises his extensive use of archival primary sources in contrast to the other two. Beyond the clear ideological divide between Moffat and Isitt, the two are paired as the only 21st century published monographs on the topic and utilize similar archival methods, though with differing historiographical approaches.

Moffat characterizes Isitt's book as biased towards socialism, a "paean to old-school class warfare pitting working class labour against the monolithic establishment," and points out such grievous errors as referring to Churchill as the Lord of the Admiralty instead of the *First* Lord of

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[134] Charlotte Altson, "Reviewed Work: The Allied Intervention in Russia: The Diplomacy of Chaos by Moffat, Ian C. D.," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 96, no. 2 (2018): 377, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5699/slaveasteurorev2.96.2.0376.
[135] Moffat, *The Allied*, x.

the Admiralty.[136] As well as these various differences, the sharpest departure between the two is Moffat's rejection of the notion that domestic labour unrest was key to influencing the government of Sir Robert Borden to withdraw Canada's forces in Siberia. Moffat instead emphasizes the foreign policy independence that Borden's government practiced in evacuating Canadian soldiers under its own initiative and on its own time frame, regardless of pressure from Churchill's War Office. Borden is characterized as "one of the key decision-makers" in the overall Allied intervention, despite Canada not playing the major military role, due to the diplomatic pressures he applied. This too differs sharpy from Isitt's condemnation of Canada's foreign policy as one which "kowtowed to Winston Churchill and other British 'hawks' by engaging in an unpopular and dangerous intervention" to "use force against Russia's revolution and to prop up a decaying imperial order" moreover stating that "Canada bowed to the most powerful imperialist and its initiative of the day – demonstrating an enduring pattern in Canadian foreign policy."[137] Moffat's diplomatic analysis and his deployment of underutilized primary sources are his most substantial contributions to understanding Canada's intervention. The departures between his work and Isitt's demonstrate that there remains an ongoing discourse on the topic, which is worthy of further contributions among a newer wave of scholarship, of which Isitt and Moffat are the first.

There exists a challenge in discerning exactly how many "fronts" Canadian soldiers can be properly said to have operated on within Russia's civil war. The Canadian Expeditionary Force Siberia was a brigade-size formation which acted under independent Canadian command, confined mostly to far-eastern Vladivostok but with a small contingent shipped west to serve as

[136] Moffat, *The Allied*, ix.
[137] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 169-170.

headquarters staff for the British units present in Omsk.[138] Canada's contribution to the multinational North Russia Expeditionary Force was under British command, yet two Canadian units – 67th and 68th Batteries, Canadian Field Artillery, operated within the broader Allied order of battle. In addition to those two units there were numerous Canadian soldiers and airmen embedded among other allied forces. There is a difficulty in identifying the exact number of Canadians who served in different capacities in Russia as a whole, due the presence of attachés in various roles prior to Brest-Litovsk, the lack of a unified command, and the presence of Canadians in British and other allied service.[139] The Caucasus is usually regarded as a "front" in Canadian histories of the intervention, even though no Canadian units operated there, independent in command or otherwise, owing to the significant portion of the Dunsterforce's officer and N.C.O. cadre being drawn from Canadians. Only the Dunsterforce and N.R.E.F. engaged in sustained combat in what could be described as a "front," whereas the C.E.F.S existed in a state of limbo far to the east of the fighting, excluding partisan activity. The lack of a centralized Canadian (or broader Allied) strategy or command is apparent, though ironically Borden's government appears to have formed the most coherent policy towards Russian intervention through its blanket withdrawal of Canadian troops in 1919.

Among sources notable to Canadians in Russia operating beyond Canadian units is *A Canadian Officer's Adventures among the Bolsheviks*, a posthumous article authored by J.W. Boyle. Boyle offers a unique perspective as a Canadian witness to the October Revolution in Petrograd. It is also a testament to the fluidity of the period in late 1917; Boyle was dispatched to assist the Provisional Government with surveying railways and horse transport under the

[138] Isitt, *From Victoria*, 111.
[139] Swettenham notes the presence of a French-Canadian officer, Captain Barbateau, in service with the French Foreign Legion in North Russia. Swettenham, *Allied Intervention*, 193.

authority of the British Transport Mission, where he witnessed and acted to restore order among the disintegrating front in western Ukraine. Following frustrations from a lack of freedom of action, Boyle was dislodged from British authority and independently given charge of "all the area back of the fighting line, and to a line drawn practically due North and South between Petrograd and Odessa."[140] This Canadian officer would continue to operate in Russia as the Bolsheviks assumed power, working indirectly for them as he continued his work on infrastructure and taking part in the peace brokerage between the Bolsheviks and Romania. Boyle stated that the Canadian Transport Mission under himself held an exclusive level of freedom among all Allied units that continued to operate in Bolshevik Russia.[141] Boyle's writing itself unfortunately appears somewhat confused and fragmentary, with incomplete paragraphs and one unfinished sentence, which could not be rectified owing to its posthumous publishing. Frustratingly, Boyle writes without providing coherent dates, often referring instead to the days of the week, requiring contextualization to infer the timeline of events described.

A small peculiarity appears concerning a formation referred to as the "Canadian Malamute Company" or the "Canadian Malamutes" in some sources. It is referred to as such extensively in the book *Churchill's Secret War with Russia: British and Commonwealth Military Intervention in the Russian Civil War* by author Damien Wright. One of the most comprehensive and recent contributions, Wright's book is exceptional in its international focus given to all the intervening forces in North Russia, and notable in its heavy focus on Canada by a non-Canadian author. However, it suffers from its lack of citations, is light in Canadian sources, and makes

[140] J. W. Boyle, "A Canadian Officer's Adventures among the Bolsheviks," *Canadian Defence Quarterly* IV (July 1927): 256.
[141] Boyle, "A Canadian," 234.

rudimentary errors such as identifying a Canadian officer as belonging to a nonexistent unit called the "Nova Scotia Regiment."[142]

This article examined Canada's role in the intervention while weighing the Russian perspective, particularly in light of renewed conflict between Russia and the West. Understanding the Russian perspective is critical for understanding the interventions themselves, and particularly so in understanding their enduring relevance. In addition to tying the interventions to the present geopolitical conflicts, there are two specific elements of the Russian perspective which were examined. The first is the perspective of Russian historical scholarship, for which the sources *Foreign Historiography of the Canadian Military Contingent's Participation in the Intervention in the Russian North in 1918-1919*, written by professor A.V. Nerovny and *From Civil War to War of Liberation: The Formation of Soviet Memory of the Intervention in the North of Russia, 1918-1920*, written by Vladislav S. Staf, both translated from the Russian into English by Dr. David Freeland Duke, were utilized. The article *Foreign Historiography* is a compilation of relevant sources written towards an academic audience in a series presenting the historiographies of different intervening nations. Detached from the English-speaking academic tradition, Nerovny's work creates an interesting and original body of sources, despite noting the inaccessibility of some of these Western works in Russia. Nerovny notes a comparative lack (Australia's 16 to Canada's 12)[143] of publications focusing on Canada's involvement in North Russia relative to Australia, despite Canada's military contingent being significantly larger. In contrasting historiographies, he notes how Soviet-era works on the topic

[142] Damien Wright, *Churchill's Secret War with Lenin : British and Commonwealth Military Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1918-20* (Havertown: Helion & Company, 2017), 43.
[143] Nerovny, "ЗАРУБЕЖНАЯ ИСТОРИОГРАФИЯ," 10.

of intervention have overwhelmingly focused on Britain and the United States while Canada's has been relegated to the domain of Canadian scholars.

The other element examined here is the Russian popular memory of the interventions, particularly the revitalization of Soviet-era narratives towards the intervention in the context of renewed conflict with the West. One of the best focuses for this research is the phenomenon of the "Mudyug Concentration Camp." This site is one of the starkest examples of the difference between Russian memories of the intervention and the histories created by Canadian scholars examined above. To the latter the camp which existed on Mudyug Island is either omitted entirely as irrelevant or mentioned passingly as a prisoner of war. Vladislav Staf's article touches upon these themes of the political manipulation of Soviet memorialization of the interventions. Despite their renewed relevance, these elements involving Russian sources have been minimally touched upon by other scholars working within English academia.

Like those Cold War scholars before us, the historian of today again writes to a backdrop of conflict between Russia and the Western world. Despite this, there has been relatively little work in Western academia which explicitly relates the interventions to the present conflict. It is hoped that this article has contributed to rectifying this gap. As we have seen, there is still much work left to be done in understanding this chapter of Canadian history, and a need for greater emphasis upon the Russian conception of history in relation to the broader, ongoing conflict.

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