

Canada Fit for War: Image and Development of the Canadian Soldier, 1870–1914

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Abstract

This paper traces the development of the Canadian soldier through the early post-Confederation period, from 1870 to 1914, and draws a parallel to the Dominion's own national development. Canada's gradual ascent towards political maturity can be seen illustratively in the newspaper cartoons of the period, which metaphorically portray the Dominion as an individual at various stages in its natural development. Initially self-depicted as an infant dressed in feminine garment, Canada is later depicted as a dapper young man eager to impress Mother Britannia and don a uniform, and eventually, as a soldier coming to Britain's aid in war. The culture of masculinity, muscular athleticism, competitive sport and games, scouting, poetry, song, and juvenile literature that was infused with Christian servitude and military training, imbued Canadian youths with a strong sense of duty both to their country and to the Empire. By 1914, as Canadians seized the opportunity to heroically defend the motherland, collectively they embodied the maturity of their country, which was at last, 'fit for war'.

In 1870, three years into Confederation, the Dominion of Canada was in an uncertain environment, geo-strategically vulnerable to both American annexation and British abandonment. The United States had long since coveted Canadian lands, rendering the inhabitants to the north insecure in their territorial integrity, a peculiar situation that has been likened to "men living on the slopes of a volcano".¹ By the postulates of Manifest Destiny, the United States considered itself entitled to the lands, and for many Americans, it was only a matter of time before the lands were rightfully annexed.² Given the expansionist and military zeal of the Americans, it was only Britain's military presence in North America that protected its Colony from being absorbed into the United States. Canadian recognition of this fact was made clear in the wake of Confederation that "had we not had the strong arm of England over us, we should not now have had a separate existence".³ In the following year however, Brit-

ish garrisons would depart Canada's shores; thereby leaving a vacuum in the Dominion's defences that would be filled by Canadian soldiers.

This paper charts the progressive development of Canada's soldiers while considering their development to encapsulate a microcosm of the Dominion's ascent towards political maturity. It was *in tandem* that the Canadian soldier and the Dominion both developed, and this parallel can be traced through the use of political metaphor during the period under study. Between 1870 and 1914, Canadian newspapers and magazines often referred to the Dominion metaphorically as an individual, which grew in natural progression from an infant to an adolescent and, finally, to a young adult. The illustrated depiction of the Dominion's charted progress towards maturity is encapsulated in various political cartoons, which featured prominently in newspapers and magazines in order to appeal to the widest possible audience.

Appearing alongside news stories and political satire, political cartoons neatly captured the political affairs of the day in a medium that was most readily comprehended. Canada's first illustrated newspaper, the Montreal-based *Canadian Illustrated News*, began publication in 1869, and its images had an enormous impact on the newspaper's popularity. Cartoons also featured widely in other newspapers, such as *Grip*, *Montreal Star*, *The Globe*, *The Canadian Courier*, and *The Moon*, to list only a few. The cartoonists played a significant role as political critics and communicators in their own period, producing an invaluable visual documentation that can be examined as an analytical tool to understand the period under study. As Thomas Kemnitz has noted, 'Cartoons are frequently fascinating, but their value to the historians lies in what they reveal about societies that produced and circulated them.'²⁴ The cartoons that featured in Canada's early post-Confederation period depict a vast panorama of an era of intense nation building, and particularly, reveal the Dominion's gradual ascent in political stature as interpreted through the eyes of the Canadian public.

In the young Dominion, many English Canadians maintained an emotive and cultural bond to the 'Mother' Empire, and also held a thinly disguised distrust of the Americans. Anti-Americanism was particularly prevalent among the socially elite descendents of the Loyalists, who could trace their lineage to those who fought against the American revolutionaries (1776–83) or in the War of 1812. Canadians differed from their southern neighbours most prominently by their loyalty to the British Crown, and by their steadfast adherence to British constitutional principles and institutions. An innate sense of duty was directed towards Britain, as it was British military forces that had protected

the early Canadian settlers from repeated American aggression, and it was also British finance that had covered the cost of building forts and other defence works to fortify the frontier.⁵

By the mid-nineteenth century, Britain's financial expenditure towards its colonies led a disgruntled Benjamin Disraeli, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, to write in a letter to his Cabinet colleague, Lord Malmesbury, in 1852: "These wretched colonies... are a millstone round our necks."⁶ Disraeli's 'millstone' reference applied only to the North American colonies, and while it was written in a moment of irritation over the fisheries issue, the statement reflects a growing sentiment in Westminster that the colonies should be sharing the financial burden borne by Britain. In particular, Disraeli felt strongly that, as the most important of the North American provinces that was subsequently prone to an American assault, Canada should take measures to provide for its own defence.⁷

In the years before Confederation, the defences of British North America consisted of the royal navy, imperial troops, and a Canadian militia. In material the Canadian militia was deficient and often ridiculed, consisting of an untrained 'sedentary' militia consisting of men of military age, and an 'active' or 'volunteer' militia; some of whom were regarded as 'unserviceable old fogies', who were not qualified for combat.⁸ British troops in the Colony consisted of the muscular thrust of Canada's defences, but by 1855, with the Crimean War in progress, there were only 1,887 imperial troops in Canada, at a cost of 150,000 pounds sterling.⁹ To fill the vacuum caused by the removal of British regulars, the Militia Act of 1855 reorganized the Canadian militia to consist of separate cavalry, infantry and artillery units made of volunteer and part-time soldiers. However, during the American Civil War of 1861–1865, it was largely the British forces that defended the territorial integrity of its Colony from the frequent American raids, without adequate help from the ill-assembled Canadian militia. The General Officer commanding British forces in Canada, Lieutenant-General Sir William Fenwick Williams, grumbled in 1864 that the Canadians seemed "to look on their coming dangers with the eye of a child, under the protection of a Parent who is bound to fight".¹⁰ Paradoxically, the physical presence of British garrisons in the Colony had the inadvertent affect of acting as an anaesthetic on the development of Canada's own military system.

In 1866 a raid into Canadian lands by Irish-American Fenians did much to highlight the inefficiencies of Canada's defences, and prompted Disraeli to refer to British North America as a 'colonial deadweight'.¹¹ The situation was

all the more precarious given that the Fenian raids might prelude an all-out American assault on Canada, thereby entangling Britain into an undesirable war against the United States. As the defence of Canada became too dangerous a burden for Britain, the British Government gladly took up the idea of Confederation as a means of imparting to Canada a greater autonomy for its own defence, without granting full independence.

As a Dominion from 1867, Canada held a responsible parliamentary government to settle domestic affairs, but in the area of foreign affairs, Britain maintained precedence. The British government also exercised exclusive power to declare wars, leaving the Dominion somewhat limited in its ability to act as a sovereign state, a political situation that would not change until the Statute of Westminster in 1931. Canada's quasi-independent status as a Dominion in its early post-Confederation years has been likened to a 'faulty imitation' of a sovereign state; comparable also to a 'soft-nosed torpedo', which 'looks' and 'acts' like a torpedo, yet does not function as one.¹²

By the Militia Act of 1868, Canada acquired political control over its Canadian forces but they were still led by a British General Officer. Although the Canadian militia had successfully fought against the Métis in the Red River Rebellion of 1869–1870 and had also achieved some success in driving back another Fenian raid in 1870, Canada's militia remained an undeveloped and rather meagre auxiliary to British garrisons. Given the long-standing presence of British forces in the Colony, the prospect of losing them rendered many Canadians particularly concerned about the preservation of their country's territorial integrity and physical security.

The British decision to withdraw its military forces from Canada was strategically weighed against the impossibility of securing the enormous North American land frontier, and its unwillingness to enter into a war with the United States over Canada, coupled with the rising threat from Prussia, which re-directed British priorities overseas. British troops were to be re-located to meet the Empire's more pressing concerns, and the young Dominion would have to look after itself, at least until its maternal protector, the Royal Navy, could sail to its defence.

Historian J. B. Brebner highlights Canada's sense of vulnerability in the wake of Confederation,

The New Dominion's position was most delicate and precarious.
On the one hand, practically all Americans who were interested at

all assumed that Canada must immediately or quite soon be embodied in the United States, either by bullying, or by an American bargain with Great Britain [...]. On the other, the governing class in Great Britain [...] was profoundly ignorant of, and uninterested in, Canada, and therefore conceived its problem to be merely the ethical one of abandoning the Dominion in a decent, dignified way.¹³

A cartoon that appeared in the *Canadian Illustrated News* in 1870 wonderfully depicts the Canadian sentiment of the time (Figure 1).¹⁴ British and American figures stand on either side of a musket-wielding wobbling infant labelled as 'Canada'. The depiction of Canada as an infant with unsure footing reflects the Dominion's own sense of vulnerability at the prospect of British abandonment. This image of a young child brandishing a musket arouses concern that the young child is not only wholly unprepared for battle, but may also tragically inflict harm upon itself as a result of being prematurely outfitted with a weapon. In addition, the boy child's feminine dress, a typical fashion of the period, further reflects the infant's lack of masculinity at this stage in its development. Mother Britannia, who stands at arm's length, praises, 'See! Why, the dear child can stand alone!' On the other side of the infant is Uncle Sam, commonly the Canadian symbol of questionable moral influence, who helpfully offers with his hands outstretched, 'Of course he can! Let go of him, Granny; if he falls I'll catch him!' The message inferred is that while the United States encourages Britain's withdrawal and appears to support the Canadian Dominion's autonomous well-being, it is *really* harbouring its own interests to grasp the child, waiting for an opportunity for the weak and still young country to fall conveniently into its lap.

On 8 May 1871, before the withdrawal of British garrisons from the Canadian Dominion had been completed, the Treaty of Washington peacefully settled a host of differences between Britain and the United States, and produced a negotiated settlement on Canada's fate. Canada was to remain a barrier to American Manifest Destiny, and Britain thereafter withdrew its military presence from the Dominion (except for a small detachment which remained at the Royal Navy base in Halifax), fairly assured that the United States would not declare war on Canada. As Brebner astutely remarked, "Canada may seem to have been unlucky in beginning her career on the international stage as the puny third party to a grand settlement between two Great Powers, but she had to realize her standing in an unfriendly world sometime".¹⁵

Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald welcomed the British departure, but had aspirations for Canada to be a more useful country to Britain, as he declared in a speech on 3 May 1872:

Let Canada be severed from England—let England not be responsible to us... I hope to live to see the day, and if I do not that my son may be spared to see Canada the *right arm of England*, (cheers) to see Canada a powerful auxiliary to the Empire.¹⁶



CHILD CANADA TAKES HER FIRST STEP
MOTHER BRITANNIA: See! Why, the dear child can stand alone!
UNCLE SAM: Of course he can! Let go of him, Granny; if he falls I'll catch him!

Figure 1. 'See! Why, the dear child can stand alone!' *Canadian Illustrated News*, Montreal, July 23rd, 1870. Library and Archives Canada, Reference: C-050366.

The emotional sentiment in reference to the Empire was intertwined with an emerging Canadian nationalism. As Carl Berger has suggested, Canadian imperialism was one 'variety' of Canadian nationalism.¹⁷ Indeed, as an ardent Canadian nationalist, John A. MacDonald is renowned for having made the loyalty cry: "A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die"; an emotive sentiment which conveys that many Canadians considered there to be an inherent compatibility between nationalism and imperialism. Douglas Cole, in contrast, suggests the Canadian imperialism was rather, a variety of *Britannic* nationalism, based

on common British ethnicity and loyal affection for the ‘motherland’ and Empire, which innately excluded non-British factions of Canadian society.¹⁸ The reflective remarks on Canadian imperialism by J. W. Dafoe lend strength to Cole’s interpretation: “English-speaking Canadians were more British than the British, they were more loyal than the Queen...Imperialism, on the sentimental side, was a glorification of the British race”.¹⁹ Much of the visceral support behind Canadian imperialism lay in its aspiring vision for Canada to maintain political bondage to Britain, which offered a pleasing alternative from the other options; namely, that of full independence as advocated by the separationists, or, that of political merger with the United States, as advocated by the continentalists.²⁰ The opposing variants of Canadian nationalism cohabited uneasily for much of the early post-Confederation period: Canadians commonly expressed affection for both country and Empire, although not necessarily always in that order.

From the 1870s onwards, Canadian imperialists hoped that Canada could develop a ‘great national destiny’ in service to the British Empire. The most active proponents of Canadian imperialism were members of the country’s Protestant elite, such as Presbyterian Reverend George M. Grant, principal of Queen’s University, Colonel George T. Denison, and Sir George R. Parkin, whose personal mission was to promulgate imperial loyalty among their fellow Canadians, and gear up the country in preparedness for war.²¹ The Royal Canadian Military College, established in Kingston Ontario in 1876, was largely to meet the aspirations of Canadian imperialists; the college provided a ‘stepping stone’ to enlistment in the British army. Although further military reforms were needed if Canada was to one day serve as Britain’s ‘right arm’, in the socio-economic depression of the 1870s many considered military reforms a ‘luxury’ that Canadians could ill-afford. The reported sighting of the Russian cruiser *Cimbria* off Canada’s east coast in 1878 did cause a stir over a possible Anglo-Russian war, but was not sufficient to persuade the political elite that Canada should invest in a standing army of its own. The valid argument remained: as long as Britain controlled the Dominion’s external policy, any threat of war concerning Canada would be Britain’s responsibility to subdue.²² Many Canadians felt assured in the knowledge, whether real or perceived, that ‘Mother’ Britain would come to the Dominion’s aid in the event of an aggressive strike on its territory and more broadly rejoiced appreciatively in the mightiness of the Empire.

Rekindled in the 1870s was the sense of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, which had previously reached its zenith in Britain and the United States during the 1840s. An offshoot of Darwin’s theory of natural selection introduced in *On*

the Origin of Species (1859), Social Darwinism implied that 'inferior' human races would be naturally eliminated through 'survival of the fittest'. As many Britons and Americans were keen to point out, the greatness of the British Empire and the rising strength of the United States was testimony to the physical superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, further justifying their imperial exploits on the religious grounds of doing 'God's work' to civilise the lesser breeds and advance human progress.²³ The superior 'race' was variously described as 'Anglo-Saxon', 'British', 'English', 'English-speaking', 'white', 'northern', or 'Teutonic'. English Canadians, who considered themselves to be of such 'superior' racial stock, took pride in having the same 'blessed' blood in their veins, and felt it to be their Godly mission to support the work of their kinsmen overseas. As a religion that fostered social gatherings of communal worship, Christianity provided a convenient medium through which the imperial message was promulgated in sermons and hymns; devotion to 'Mother' Britain, and even imperial conquest, were encouraged as part of good Christian citizenship.

In order to serve the Empire as a useful auxiliary, leading Canadian imperialists promoted the need for men of strong bodies in possession of a martial spirit. The maintenance of strong bodies was a challenging task during the industrial age of the late nineteenth century, as men worked long hours in factories often without heavy physical labour. In addition, as the fathers were away at work, their sons were spending increasing time at home with the mother, raising concerns that boys were being 'mothered' too much, at the expense of their masculinity. For youth who dwelt in the city, their physical condition was a major cause of concern, which if left unchecked, could ultimately jeopardise their country's national physique and limit the scope for progress. The prospect of physical infirmity during the industrial age was countered by a culture of masculinity, which was already underway in Britain, and which swept across Canada in the 1870s and 1880s.²⁴ Masculinity was to be encouraged among boys and men, by promoting 'manly' styles of dress and behaviour, physical activity, especially athletic sport and outdoor exercise.

Sport offered a tremendous opportunity for boys and men living in the burgeoning industrial cities. Popular 'manly' games included cricket, soccer, baseball, football, lacrosse, and, weather permitting, curling and ice hockey. These games were approved forms of recreation that abided with the Protestant work ethic, because they trained the mind as well as the body and, as team sports, they encouraged discipline and reliance on one another.²⁵ Such sports facilitated the development of physical strength and stamina and also possessed a strategic element which required mental skill in reacting to a quickly

changing environment. Sports attracted large audiences and the best players acquired a heightened status as revered icons to the youth. The physical and mental skills obtained in playing manly games prepared the players not only for the playing field, but also for the battlefield.

Games that did not harness physical strength or team spirit were considered 'less manly' sports, and Protestants, as representing the largest denominations in Canada,²⁶ found it difficult to approve of card-playing, cock-fighting, and to some extent also ping-pong, various lawn sports, or similar sports that did not serve a dual purpose.²⁷ In contrast, individual sporting activities that were popular in rural areas, such as trapshooting, hunting, rifling, and snowshoeing were viewed as 'manly' because they tested skills in precision shooting, camouflage, and physical endurance in bitter elements, all of which would be useful in battle.

The advantages of athleticism were nurtured in schools, and it was customary for students to partake in compulsory sporting games every afternoon. Outdoor exercise became a part of the new educational ideal, and students were encouraged to excel in athletic sports for the physical fitness they provided, and for the character training that came along with being in a team. There was also a utilitarian, 'higher' purpose to encouraging athletic games in schools, as J. A. Mangan argues: "The games system not only assured control over the children of the middle classes within the schools, in due course it was believed it also assisted those children in their attempts to control in turn the native 'children' of the Empire."²⁸ Athleticism in Canadian schools nurtured the development of the Canadian soldier by providing him with the physical training, mental skills and moral responsibility necessary to conquer the 'backwardness' of natives throughout the Empire, thereby furthering British progress in the world. As the Canadian youths improved their brain and brawn on the field, concurrently the country itself was developing its national strength.

By the early 1880s, there was growing sentiment among Canadians that they had something to offer Britain. The culture of masculinity had turned the degenerated infant of 1870 into a healthy and 'manly' adolescent, full of potential benefit to the Empire. The new image of Canada as a 'chip off the old block' is represented on the front cover of the *Canadian Illustrated News* in 1882 (Figure 2).²⁹ Britannia, depicted as a Greek goddess of warfare, is dressed in flowing robes and adorned in an impressive military helmet. To her side is John Bull, dressed in a traditional suit and hat, over a stocky, rotund figure; he embodies the look of a successful and indulged man of business. The young man in front of them is Canada, as labeled by his maple-leaf emblazoned hat.

Dressed in a smart suit with handkerchief in his blazer pocket, as was custom-



Figure 2. 'A Chip of the Old Block,' *Canadian Illustrated News*, Montreal, August 12 1882. Library and Archives Canada, Reference: C-077277.

ary of a gentleman's attire in the day, Canada has the look of an adolescent youth indicated by his youthful expression and light moustache. His posture is erect, his body is strong, and he lifts his hat to greet Britannia and John Bull, suggesting both loyalty and respect to each respectively. The sight of this dapper young man prompts Britannia to claim, "There, John, I'm proud of him. A regiment or two of such fellows would do us credit in the East. Eh?" This kindly depiction of Canada as a source of pride to Britain reflects the sentiment of many Canadians that their country had positively matured. The 'Eh?' uttered by Britannia is of course, a Canadian idiosyncratic term, used to prompt John Bull to agree with Britannia's kindly observation.

Canada's defence forces had made corresponding progress; by 1883, both infantry and cavalry schools were created, which provided men to instruct the militia. With this first step, Canadian defence forces had taken on the beginnings of a professional character which would lead it one day to its own defence army. The notion that Canada itself had reached adolescence by the early 1880s is mirrored in William Canniff's *A Patriotic Address* in which he asserted that, "nations, like individuals have their period of infancy, or adolescence, maturity, and, judging from the past, inevitable decline." Canada, he continues, had "already emerged from a state of infancy" and was "fast passing through the adolescence of life." Canada, as he saw it, was "[n]o longer an infant colony, but a country possessing many of the features of an independent nation". It was Canniff's belief that this "healthy development" towards maturity would one day lead the country to take its place among the nations of the world.³⁰

Canniff's desire for an independent Canada pitted him against the sentiments of many Canadian imperialists who considered that Canada's brightest future lay as an auxiliary to the British Empire, or better still, absorbed into an Imperial Federation. At the forefront of imperialist sentiment in Canada was Colonel George T. Denison, a descendent of the Loyalists and regarded by his contemporaries as 'the watchdog of the Empire' and 'her majesty's most loyal colonial born subject'. The disunity that existed in Canadian society, between the advocates of independence on the one hand and the imperialists pinning for closer attachment to Britain on the other, was strikingly evident during the 1884 centennial celebration to commemorate the arrival of the Loyalists in Canada, an event marred by social factionalism.³¹

Although Canadian independents and imperialists differed in their political aspirations, the drive towards masculine maturity continued throughout Canadian society. As dictated by Reverend J. B. Silox at a Y. M. C. A. meeting in

Winnipeg, God had no use for “soft, pulpy, effeminate” types, and that the first duty of each listener was to “make a man” of himself.³² The ultimate test for manhood was found on the battlefield, and the men who returned from fighting under British command overseas or who fought in the Canadian Militia against domestic insurgents, were considered to be of higher calibre to those who did not engage in battle. Motivation for preparedness on the battlefield came not only from those wishing to serve the British Empire in its defences, but also from those men wishing to prove their own manhood. The motivation to develop or demonstrate ‘manliness’ led many young men to attend a militia camp in the summer months. The militia camp had become a popular undertaking for young men since 1875; approximately twenty thousand attended each summer for the opportunity to learn training, drills and marches, all in uniform.³³

In 1884–1885 the ultimate test of manhood presented itself; the Sudan campaign and the Russian threat to Afghanistan produced military enthusiasm in Britain and an upsurge in Canadians volunteering themselves for service. In response to Major General Charles Gordon’s request for Canadians to form part of his Nile Expedition, 386 Canadian boatmen were recruited and sent to Egypt. Additional Canadians could have been sent were it not for Prime Minister John A. Macdonald’s reluctance to sacrifice Canadians and capital on a crisis that he considered ‘wretched business’ and unthreatening to Britain’s own security.³⁴

More pressing in 1885 was the North-West Rebellion led by the French-Canadian leader of the Métis, Louis Riel. The crisis so violently shook the societal fabric of the young Dominion that it has been described as Canada’s ‘first real war’. Following the attacks at Duck Lake and Frog Lake, hundreds of volunteers joined the militia led by Major General Frederick Middleton, while thousands of Canadian troops relocated across country on board the unfinished Canadian Pacific Railway. Upon surrendering, Riel was sentenced and hanged, amidst much public opposition in Quebec and among the Métis community. The aftermath of the rebellion left a lasting bitterness between the French Canadians, Métis, and the English-speaking Canadians. To the men in the Canadian militia, overcoming the rebellion was a test of their competence and of their manhood, and their merits in both were glorified in English newspapers and among their fellowmen.

The connection between masculinity and readiness for war is examined by Joshua Goldstein, who argues that it is societal culture that is the root cause of men yearning to ‘prove themselves’ on the battlefield: “Cultures need to coax

and trick soldiers into participating into combat – an extremely difficult challenge – and gender represents a handy means to do so by linking attainment of manhood to performance in battle”.³⁵ The process of encouraging Canadian males to take on an imperial military mindset was done gradually.

From a tender age, Canadian children were imbued with imperial loyalty from their family, their schoolteachers and the pulpit, as well as from popular toys and games. In the home, gendered segregation took place as girls were reared towards domesticity, while boys were socialised into a more ‘masculine’ role, which invariably meant endowing young boys with a military mindset. By the 1880s, child clothing for boys included masculine sailor suits and military overcoats, the most popular toys were tin soldiers and toy guns. Boys that did not like to play with such toys were chastised for being ‘effeminate’. The culture of masculinity in Canada echoed the same trends that were occurring concurrently in Britain.³⁶

Socialisation continued at school, where a reliance on imported textbooks from Britain had the effect of teaching Canadian students that the British Empire was “the epitome of all that was good, true and beautiful”.³⁷ In Ontario in 1890, the Minister of Education, George Ross, approved requests from fellow imperialists Colonel George T. Denison and Sir George R. Parkin to provide a patriotic education to the youth, which required all schools in the province to raise the red ensign flag and participate in the annual celebrations of Loyalist Day and Empire Day. To instil further patriotic feeling among schoolchildren, Denison prepared a small volume of songs and poems entitled, *Raise the Flag*, which he sent to the headmasters of each school.³⁸ In addition, Ross published a similar volume in 1893 entitled, *Patriotic Recitations and Arbor Day Exercises* intended for wide circulation in schools. Schoolchildren were often instructed to recite imperial verse, such as the following poem, ‘Canada to England’ by Toronto’s superintendent of schools, James L. Hughes:

Oh! Mistress of the mighty sea!
Oh! Motherland so great and free!
Canadian hearts shall ever be,
United in their love for thee.

An engendered affection for the British Empire also reached youths by recreational juvenile literature. Schoolboys took an interest in popular magazines from Britain such as the *Boys’ Own Paper*, *Chums*, *Pluck*, *Young England* and *Union Jack*, all of which were richly steeped in imperial loyalty and stories of heroes on thrilling overseas adventures for the Empire.³⁹ Canadian magazines

such as *The Young Canadian* and *Young Canada* were also popular forms of juvenile literature, and their stories also featured themes of adventure, manliness and militarism.⁴⁰ These stories appealed to young and adolescent boys, and instilled in them a sense of wonder and admiration for the Empire and, for many, a romantic desire for war.

When the prospect of war did loom in 1895, it was between Britain and the United States over the Venezuelan boundary dispute with British Guiana.⁴¹ The crisis had the unfortunate effect of placing Canada in a position where it feared for its security, perceiving that in the event of war between the two Great Powers, Canada was likely to be the first casualty or at the least, an American 'hostage' against British belligerence. As tensions between Britain and the United States increased to the point of an imminent military clash, several English Canadians took it upon themselves to de-escalate the crisis by serving as a 'match-maker' or 'linch-pin' to Anglo-American reconciliation.⁴² Reverend George M. Grant and the Canadian Minister of Parliament, Sir Louis H. Davis, called on Canadians to reduce tensions, and linked such efforts to imperial servitude, "every Canadian who helps forward such a blessed consummation, makes a substantial and national offering to the Empire."⁴³ The public furore against a war was so great that thousands of British and Americans signed petitions against the war, as it would be in the nature of pitting 'brother against brother'. A poem written by an Ontario man was published in the *Canadian Magazine* and embodied the anti-war sentiment of many:

War with our brother?
Sooner let our hands
Fall paralysed forever by our sides;
Forbid it, Heaven, that these fair fields run red
With blood we deem no other than our own.⁴⁴

The employment of Anglo-Saxon familial rhetoric reached its highpoint during this crisis, and popularised the sentiment that Britons, Canadians and Americans shared more than a common lexicon of the English language. A more deeply rooted element to their likeness was the perceived tie of blood and familial kinship; a war among them would be, in the words of the British Colonial Secretary, Sir Joseph Chamberlain, an abhorrent 'fratricidal strife'. For Canada, the de-escalation of the conflict came as a resounding relief, but also as a sharp reminder that its own security was still inextricably dependent upon Anglo-American friendship.

Imperial loyalty among English Canadians reached spirited heights the following year during Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, in which Her Majesty's sixty-year reign was celebrated on 22 June 1897 by a grand procession through London. Among the dignitaries invited to attend the lavish event was Canada's recently elected and soon to be knighted Prime Minister, Wilfred Laurier. As a French-Canadian, Laurier did not feel the visceral emotive bond that held English Canadians to Britain and to fellow English-speaking peoples, but he made great efforts to straddle the divisions in Canadian society and obtain greater Canadian autonomy. During the Spanish-American war over Cuba in 1898, English Canadians followed the British lead in approving American conquest, as stated in the Toronto *Globe*, "We who speak the English language, under whatever flag, under whatever skies we dwell, cannot but believe the United States right in the grand point at issue."⁴⁵ English Canadians also took up Britain's position in encouraging America's imperial experiments in Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines in 1898, and basked in the glow of their brethren's imperial successes.

As part of the British Empire, Canada would not engage in imperial conquests of its own. However, when the Boers in South Africa declared war against Britain on 10 October 1899, an opportunity presented itself for those Canadian soldiers who wished to demonstrate their loyalty, preparedness and masculinity in fighting a common foe. The question of whether Canada should send troops overseas became a hotly contested issue among society's factions. In favour of contributing to the war, the Minister of Militia Dr. Frederick Borden considered the war an opportunity to enhance Canada's status within the Empire and demonstrate that Canada was a "mature nation of the Empire".⁴⁶ To appease the Francophone Canadians who largely wished to remain out of the war, Prime Minister Laurier sent only a limited number of volunteers. One thousand Canadian men were recruited nationwide to form the semi-autonomous Canadian militia under commanding officer Lieutenant-Colonel William Otter, to fight alongside British and imperial troops in South Africa against the two Boer republics, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal Republic. By the end of October, the Canadian troops were ready to set off from Quebec City to board the *Sardinian*, where some ten thousand spectators congregated along the wharf to bid them an enthusiastic farewell.

As Canadian men participated in their Dominion's first military expedition abroad, imperial sentiment was at its zenith, and appeared extensively in poetry, song and even nursery rhymes. Mrs. Ernest Ames' *An ABC, for Baby Patriots*, became a popular choice for young British children learning their alphabetical letters, and soon afterwards Canadian children also learned to re-

cite the rhymes: “A is the Army that dies for the Queen; it’s the very best Army that ever was seen.”⁴⁷ Jingoistic verse encouraged men to take up arms for the Empire, as in the popular, ‘To Arms! To Arms!’ by a Quebec man:⁴⁸

To arms! To arms! For mother land, and strike the deadly blow!
Let crimson blood wash hill and dale, and stain the ocean’s flow!
[...]

In another poem, ‘Canada’s gift’ by a Toronto mother, the unswerving loyalty to the Empire is evident:⁴⁹

My land is rich in stalwart sons,
I’ve picked for thee my choicest ones;
Those without blemish in my eyes,
Of them I make the sacrifice.
I give the best I have to give,
I send them forth—to die or live—
Forth, where the fires of war are burning,
I speak no word of the lads returning.

Although imperial loyalty and a sense of service to Britain prompted the men forward, the men were also Canadian patriots and their helmets bore the proud badge of the maple leaf. The military victory of the Canadians at the Battle of Paardeberg in February 1900 quickly turned into popular legend and instilled a sense of pride in the young Dominion, thereafter considered to have passed its ‘initiation rite’ in imperial war.⁵⁰ The subsequent battles at Zand River, Mafeking, Diamond Hill, Liliefontein, Lydenberg, Harts River and elsewhere confirmed that Canada had grown from an imperial dependency to a partner. By the end of the war in May 1902, the Canadian government had sent 7,000 troops to South Africa to supplement Britain’s force of 450,000 British and colonial troops. Canadian confidence in the aftermath of the Boer War led the Canadian forces to acquire a more self-reliant nature; in 1904 the Militia Act replaced the Briton who had commanded the militia with a Canadian appointee as the General Officer.

In spite of the triumphant outcome of the Boer War, it had been an unexpectedly protracted and costly war for Britain, which had aggravated the socio-economic burdens associated with its symptoms of ‘imperial overstretch’. The British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, eloquently captured Britain’s imperial fatigue in 1902: “the weary Titan staggers under the too vast orb of its fate”.⁵¹ The Boer War had highlighted the fact that there was still much to

do to improve Britain's imperial defences if it was to maintain its colossal Empire, and that it required Britain's 'children' overseas to assist in its imperial defences. The disturbing results of a study released in 1903 revealed that only two out of five British recruits had actually been physically qualified to be in the army, meaning a sixty percent failure rate to reach physical standards.⁵² There was a perceived need for more men of physical readiness for battle, so that in the event of another war, recruits would not only pass their physical examination, but would also be able to exert their hardiness on the battlefield and endure the disease-ridden camps.

Considered a national priority to prevent the decay of the Empire, the Board of Education in Britain introduced compulsory physical training for all school-children in 1904, subsidised school meals in 1906, and compulsory school medical inspection in 1907.⁵³ Drills and imperial dances were also included in early education to nurture the development of an 'imperial mentality' among the young.⁵⁴ Given the importance of the colonial troops for Britain's imperial defences, Britain's dominions were also encouraged to implement similar policies in their schools. In Canada, schools followed the British lead, by including physical exercise in the curriculum to promote the overall health of their young and instil in them a penchant for outdoor exercise.

Young boys were further targeted in recreational activities outside of school, and the established Boys' Brigade and Cadet Corps were popular choices for parents wishing to instil a sense of military discipline into their boys. Another movement that offered wider appeal was the Boy Scout movement launched in 1908 by Lord Baden-Powell, acclaimed hero of the Battle of Mafeking.⁵⁵ Baden-Powell had served as Inspector-General of the Cavalry from 1903 to 1907, and understood that the fate of Britain's Empire depended upon the battle readiness of the next generation. Scouting, through its structured games, codes of conduct, and outdoor camping activities, was conceived from the beginning as a remedy to Britain's physical and military weakness. With no barriers to membership, scouting was intended as a mass movement that would give direction to all boys including those prone to loitering in the streets and pool-halls, and ultimately turn them into 'men' who would one day fight for their Empire. Scouts would learn practical outdoor skills such as how to aim and shoot with miniature rifles, judge distance, scout, woodcraft, prepare meals, maintain hygiene, drill and take-cover. In his official handbook for scouts, *Scouting for Boys*, a certain code of conduct was laid out to shape the character of the scouts towards kindness, chivalry, discipline, obedience, honour, and a sense of duty. The scouting movement immediately gained enor-

mous appeal in Britain, and the scouts came to be regarded as future soldiers of the Empire.

The activities undertaken by the scouts were not entirely recreational, indeed their motto, “Be Prepared”, a clever use of Baden-Powell’s initials, reflects that there was subtle military training involved; the boys were to *be prepared* for all dangers, including the event of war. In order for the movement to appeal to anti-military parents, Baden-Powell stressed the peaceful, non-military nature of the scouts, but in his private correspondence he did reveal an underlying goal: “Personally, I should like to see all Boy Scouts drilled. I look upon the Movement as a further saving of the situation for the nation in the future, and that it will pave the way directly for its national service.”⁵⁶ Teaching military training to the boys, albeit camouflaged as recreational ‘games’, had the intended effect of luring them into the army.

We put patriotism and self-sacrifice into them, and there is no doubt that after they have learnt a certain amount of that, and of their duty to their country, they will feel bound to take up the defence in one form or another, should it be necessary, when the time comes.⁵⁷

Inasmuch as images help to shape public perceptions, the popular cartoon by Bernard Partridge that appeared in *Punch* magazine in 1909 did much to implant the idea that the scouting movement actually harboured a discrete military agenda. In the cartoon entitled, ‘Our Youngest Line of Defence’, a young scout smartly clad in traditional uniform is kindly taking the arm of an old woman who is seemingly too weak to walk by herself. She is dressed in black Victorian dress typical of the period, and on her head is a somewhat frayed military headdress, giving her the semblance of an aged and weary Mother Britannia. The young scout gallantly offers, “Fear not, Gran’ma; no danger can befall you now. Remember, *I* am with you!”⁵⁸ The future of the Empire seemed to depend upon the scouts.

Scouting became the most successful youth movement in world history, entering the British dominions quickly after its launch in Britain. In Canada, boys learned about scouting through their favourite magazines such as the *Boy’s Own Paper* and *The Boys’ Herald*. Copies of *Scouting for Boys* reached Canada by the hands of English immigrants and Canadians returning from a visit, in addition, copies were sent to governors general of the dominions with a letter from Baden-Powell to seek support for the movement.⁵⁹ By the time Baden-Powell arrived in Canada for his cross-country tour in 1910 the movement was well underway, and the ‘fitness and good class’ of the scout leaders,

largely drawn from military backgrounds, impressed him. In his address he urged the growth of the movement, and promised it would build up character in the rising generation and enable Canada to be “one of the greatest and strongest units” in the British Empire.

The movement was considered to have such an important bearing on the future of the Empire that the British Secretary of War, 1st Viscount Haldane, approved of Baden-Powell’s resignation from the army so that he could devote himself to the movement.⁶⁰ Under his leadership as ‘Chief Scout’, the Boy Scout Movement continued to flourish throughout the Empire and gained merit as a means of preventing the onset of imperial collapse. Two years after the launch of the Boy Scout movement, there were already 100,000 scouts who were being instilled with a sense of duty and ‘trained’ for preparedness on the battlefield. The scout’s anthem, written by the popular imperial poet Rudyard Kipling in 1913, was replete with reminders to ‘Look Out’ for dangers lurking in the bush.

In the international arena, danger to the British Empire had taken the form of the rising Russian naval power, which had interfered with Britain’s commercial interests in China, and ultimately prompted the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902, which was renewed and extended in 1905 and 1911. Britain’s alliance with Japan did not appease Britain’s ‘white’ dominions, particularly Australia or New Zealand, in which there was virulent racialism against the feared ‘yellow peril’. In Canada’s Pacific-coast province of British Columbia, the Japanese navy was considered too powerful to be trusted, prompting some concerns that Canada should spend more on its own naval defences. However, Prime Minister Laurier did not share the Japanophobia of the British Columbians; in contrast, he considered the Anglo-Japanese alliance was a very positive alliance for Canada as it rendered the Dominion “absolutely free from the fear of invasion”.⁶¹ Laurier’s sense of physical security provided by the Anglo-Japanese alliance contributed to the wavering slow pace of Canada’s defence activity.

An additional danger at this time was the German threat, which was bent on an aggressive world policy or *Weltpolitik* that launched Britain into a fierce naval arms race. Britain’s grand strategy to defend its naval integrity required the Dominions to divert their manpower and defence preparations to British benefit. Progress towards Britain’s goal was achieved at the Imperial Defence Conference in 1909, in which the defence chiefs of the Dominions agreed to combine their military forces into “one homogenous Imperial Army” for the “general defence of the Empire” in the event of a real emergency. The Impe-

rial General Staff established sections in each of the Dominions to advise on military and naval matters.

In Canada, the establishment of the Canadian Defence League in Toronto in 1909, the Royal Canadian Naval College in Halifax in 1910, and the increase in the military budget from \$1.6 million in 1898 to \$7 million in 1911, all marked defence reforms that were underway. In addition, the number of men that volunteered to train at military camps also increased, from 25,000 men in 1904 to 55,000 men in 1913, which necessitated the establishment of new camps to accommodate the rising numbers of willing men.⁶² However, it was altogether challenging to convince Canadians that they needed to spend more on developing their military system when most felt assured that their country remained inviolate from outside attack.

At the Imperial Conference of 1911, Britain stepped up its tactic to elicit further military reforms and support across the Dominions. The speech by the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, did much to tug at the bond of loyalty, when he announced that it was Britain's sea power that maintained the Empire, and as it was now under threat from the German navy, the whole Empire lie in grave jeopardy: "It would not only be the end of the British Empire as far as we are concerned, but all the Dominions would be separated from us, never to be rejoined."⁶³ Although Grey's emotional speech did not persuade Prime Minister Laurier, who objected to the prospect of Canada taking part in imperial military operations, there were many English Canadians who felt the tug of unswerving loyalty to Britain. Laurier had clearly underestimated the strength of that visceral bond among English Canadians, a failure that was sharply apparent by the virulent public outcry against his party's re-election proposal for a free trade agreement with the United States in the same year. English Canadians voted during the general election with their umbilical cord intact; Laurier was out after fifteen years of Liberal leadership, to be replaced by Robert Borden, an Anglophile who was very much in favour of Britain's imperial defence agenda.

Prime Minister Borden and his Minister of Militia, Sam Hughes, were both keen to put Canada on a more militaristic path to be of greater use to Britain in times of war, yet proposals for massive defence spending to the tune of \$35 million failed to pass the Senate. Despite a severe economic depression, the defence budget increased to \$11 million in 1914, but it was not enough to purchase dreadnoughts for the navy. As a result, Canada's naval defences, consisting of two training cruisers, His Majesty's Canadian Ships, *Niobe* and *Rainbow*, remained a loosely organised, poorly equipped, and insubstantial

auxiliary to the Royal Navy. Canada's land forces were more significant, with 3,000 permanent officers and 74,000 militia troops. However, compared to the colossal strength of the German engine, Canada's forces were still terribly slight.

A lack of military preparation would not forestall Britain's call to arms in the summer of 1914. The assassination of Archduke Franz-Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo by Serbian terrorists unleashed a rapid succession of events leading to the First World War. Britain became involved in the tense military build-up when German troops entered Belgium, violating Belgian neutrality. Britain's declaration of war against Germany and Austria-Hungary on 4 August 1914 meant that its Dominions would also be called to arms for compulsory service. In a rushed crescendo of excitement, the message was spread: the British Empire was at war. A popular cartoon entitled, 'Answering the Call', was widely circulated around Britain's colonies the following day, which depicted Britain as a majestic and powerful lion, standing on a cliff's edge overlooking the ocean and letting out a strong roar, or call to arms. Climbing over the cliff's edge are the lion's overseas cubs, labelled 'S. Africa', 'New Zealand', 'Australia', 'India', and 'Canada', each obediently coming to the lion's aid. The caption read, 'Mother Britain summons her children to war'.⁶⁴ The image was not far removed from reality.

Across the British Empire, men rushed to enlist. In Canada, streets were filled with a jubilant air of excitement. One Canadian veteran, who was nineteen years of age in August 1914, reflects: "When the war broke out—you cannot *believe* unless you were there. The country went mad! People singing on the streets and roads. Everybody wanted to be a hero, everybody wanted to go to war."⁶⁵ The men were spurred to enlist by a myriad of feelings, from patriotism, loyalty to Britain, and social pressure, to a yearning for overseas adventure. To the young men who had been brought up to strive for 'manliness', the call to arms offered a sure route to manhood, and many were encouraged to enlist by their families, friends and sweethearts. Given the stale economic climate in Canada, many men enlisted as a means to ease the boredom of unemployment; others, particularly recent immigrants from the British Isles, saw enlistment as a means of returning to the old country where their friends and family lived. The assuredness felt when joining Britain's call to arms is neatly offered by one veteran of the war: "I had that belief that Britain always won its wars and that they were always right."⁶⁶

The Canadian soldier became idealized in poetry and songs of the period. A popular theme represented the soldier in his pre-war days, often as a rugged

outdoorsman chopping wood or a farmhand tending to his crops; when news of the war reaches the young man, he drops his tools and dutifully comes to the defence of his 'Mother' overseas, as the following excerpt exemplifies: "We have chucked the tools and ledgers, we have left the bench and mine / We are sailing east to Flanders to Join the khaki line."⁶⁷

A consistent twin theme in the soldier's image, intertwined like two threads, is the soldier's devotion to his mother, and of his own youthful innocence at the onset of his departure for overseas. In one image published in *The Welland Telegraph* in August 1914, entitled, 'His New Suit' (Figure 3), a very young Canadian soldier, clean-cut and wearing a smart military uniform, stands before his mother.⁶⁸ He appears of small stature, almost child-like, as if he is dressed up in a play-costume that does not quite belong on his body. In his right hand stands a rifle, the height of it reaches just over his shoulders; it seems too large a weapon for him to carry, let alone for him to use. His mother's hands are placed squarely on his shoulders, and she looks steadily at him with a look of forlorn concern. She has the appearance of a harried housewife by her full figure, greying hair tied up in a bun, and apron; and her



Figure 3. 'His New Suit' *The Welland Telegraph*, August 1914. Library and Archives Canada, Reference: C-144129.

relatively larger size seems to be attributed to the burdens of age, wisdom, and life's hardships. The image speaks volumes of a mother's concern over her soldier-son, ever a child in her eyes and ever unready for the embroiling tasks of war. In this image, the mother is 'Canada', and her son represents the Canadian soldier.

To reflect upon the image on another level, the youth of the soldier also represents the youthfulness of Canada itself, while his devotion to his mother also represents Canada's devotion to 'Mother' Britain. With his youthful innocence comes optimism, an outlook not yet tarnished by the weight of aged experience; and his youthful body is full of vitality, ready to exert its energies on the foreign foe. As other interpreters have duly noted, the individual soldier *was* Canada: he was Canada personified.⁶⁹ The soldier's departure across the ocean and his perilous experience in battle, would become recognised as his rite of passage into manhood. By the steps of the 630,000 Canadian soldiers that made the journey, Canada itself passed into a new era, acknowledged thereafter as a 'mature' nation that had achieved such status at a cost of the 60,000 casualties that remained in the overseas soil.

Canada's cartoonists in the early years following Confederation have provided an invaluable visual commentary on the foremost political issues of the day. In an era of nation building, the cartoonists, acting as the nation's first independent editorialists, charted the Dominion's progress by metaphorical illustration, from which the historian's eye may discern many political nuances. As Britain hankered for the Dominion to develop its own defence forces, Canadian soldiers developed against a backdrop of an emerging Canadian nationalism that was curious in its incongruous strains, which respectively advocated imperialism, separatism, or continentalism. The ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and political cleavages in Canadian society represented the Dominion's 'growing pains' into nationhood, and likewise, retarded the soldier's progress into 'manhood'. Through the formative early post-Confederation years, the Dominion gradually ascended towards political maturity, along with the soldier, who was at one moment a youthful son inexperienced in life's tribulations, and the next, a grown man who had endured the task of war.

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