

To Pardon or Not to Pardon? The Twenty Five Great War Canadians Shot at Dawn - Part Two

by Diana Beaupré and Adrian Watkinson

Three hundred and forty-six soldiers were executed by the British Army during the Great War. Of these, twenty five were Canadians, all volunteers, unmarried and with ages ranging from 19 to 37. They were executed between March 1916 and August 1918. But in the microcosmic military world of the Great War, a few thousand unfortunate soldiers were subjected to what could be described as 'cruel and unusual punishment' whilst totally innocent of any crime. With each execution carried out, an average of nine men formed the firing party. When multiplied by the 346 men shot, this amounts to a total of over 3,000 men. Additionally, the officers had the ultimate responsibility for issuing the order to fire. Although the condemned man was blindfolded, it would have done nothing to ease the guilt of the men being ordered to kill a comrade. Were they permanently affected by their part in the execution? Diane Beaupré and Adrian Watkinson conclude their article.

With all the emotion surrounding the Pardon Debate, few recollections have been recorded about the men who formed the firing squads. Teresa Iacobelli writes that some soldiers who served on these details saw it as an unenviable duty. Post war, they were very reticent about speaking of their experiences. She goes on to say that Captain Georges Vanier of the 'Van Doos' described his duty commanding the troops taking part in the execution of Arthur Charles Degassé as a '*sad task, a sad command*'.³² Corns and Hughes-Wilson also cover the subject briefly but succinctly:

*'In particular the firing squads haunt our imagination. They were squalid little affairs that sickened all concerned, but they are really only a detail at a time of much greater tragedy. We must never forget that in every case, not far from the drab little barns, abattoirs, fields and quarries, that were used as execution sites, equally frightened men were being slaughtered every day for doing their duty without running foul of military laws.'*³³

Instead, many writers ignore or skim over this aspect and restrict their focus to the executed men as a single group who suffered a great injustice because they were traumatised. Whilst that is certainly true for a few, a different picture emerges for the majority through close examination of each military personnel file. After separating out Auger and the 'Van Doos' from the generalisation, the remaining nineteen cases can be divided into four distinct sets.

Previous Good Character

There are seven who fall into the category of being ill, traumatised or likely not responsible for their actions.

Gunner Frederick Stanley Arnold was hospitalised three times between January to May 1916 with wounds and concussion. Once discharged and returned to his unit, Gunner Arnold went AWOL on 6 June and was arrested twenty-two days later in Boulogne. The question of '*intent to desert*' was proved at his Court Martial because he was wearing civilian clothes. No mitigating circumstances or

evidence of previous good character was offered to the Court. It would have been reasonable to contend at his trial that Arnold was suffering from brain damage following his concussion.

With an unblemished record until summer 1916, Private Edward James Reynolds of the 3/Toronto Battalion had fought at Ploegsteert and Mount Sorrel. On moving forward from the Ypres salient, the soldiers learned of a large explosion under the Allied front lines at 'The Bluff'. His unit was ordered to help close the breach in the trenches. At this point, it would appear Reynolds lost his nerve and went AWOL but reported at the rear transport lines two days later.

Came From Mexico.

PTE. EDWARD, JAMES REYNOLDS was killed in action on August 23. Official word came yesterday to his mother, Mrs. M. R. Reynolds, 152 Hamilton street. He was only 18 years old and had been in the trenches ten months. Having enlisted in the fall of 1914, he went overseas in July, 1915, in a draft from the 35th Battalion. He was born and brought up in this city, but had just returned from spending a year in Mexico when he enlisted.



Two brothers, Drivers Frank and John C. Reynolds, are also at the front, serving in the 2nd Divisional Ammunition Column. Frank was formerly a despatch rider and had two horses shot under him. The youngest brother, Norman, is at home and works in an ammunition factory.

Private E J Reynolds. The Toronto Star reported as *'killed in action'*.³⁴
The REYNOLDS family memorial located at St. John's (Norway) cemetery, Toronto, Ontario
is engraved *"killed in action, buried in France"*³⁵

Next day, he was ordered to deliver rations at the Front, but again doubled back to the rear. Reynolds was charged with Desertion, found guilty and sentenced to death. In *'For Freedom and Honour'*, Godefroy writes that both the Battalion and Brigade Leaders considered commuting the sentence. However, they were overridden by General Sir Arthur Currie who confirmed the verdict. *'Currie felt that the offence was gross and deliberate'*.³⁶ Against a background of the fierce fighting at the Battle of Ypres, it is highly likely Reynolds was executed as a harsh example to his comrades. A case of wrong place and wrong time to desert.

Lying about his age in November 1914, Private Elsworth Young became an officer's batman with the 25/Nova Scotia Battalion, which suffered particularly heavy losses at Courcellette. Previously, he had committed just one minor offence at East Sandling camp in England. His record states: *'2.8.15. Forfeits one days pay & 2 days CC'*.³⁷

On 16 September 1916, Private Young went AWOL and was arrested ten days later in Abbeville. Aged only 19 years old when he was executed on 29 October 1916, no leniency was shown to him either for his youth or almost clean military record.

'Unlucky Russian'

The case of Private Dimitro Sinizki does throw up some questions as to the motives that lie in the shadow of this man's execution. Godefroy calls him *'The Unlucky Russian'* ³⁸. It was perhaps no coincidence that the Russian Revolution had taken place in March 1917 just a few months before his execution. Sinizki had no prior convictions and his military file shows only a couple of minor transgressions for which he forfeited just a few days' pay. However in August 1917, as the battles of Lens and Mericour were raging, he refused to move up the line to the trenches of Vimy Ridge and don his equipment.

"The private had made known his unwillingness to serve in the trenches prior to this act of defiance and as a consequence was being escorted up the line." ³⁹

Is it correct to question the motives of the Commanding officers in this case? Politically motivated speculation would have been doing the rounds at that time and no doubt would have coloured the staunch conservative views of the British and Canadian Corps Commanders. Godefroy writes of a paranoid fear that had taken hold within the allies that Bolshevism could spread to all Russian-born troops.

'A mutiny of Russian troops had taken place in the French Army and the Canadian Corps had reacted to a similar potential threat by transferring many of its Russian-born troops out of its front line units and into the Canadian labour and railway battalions. In the fear that a more serious incident may occur the Commander-in-Chief may have seen fit to make an example of Private Sinizki to suit a political as well as military agenda.' ⁴⁰

Sinizki was the only soldier executed for cowardice. There were other soldiers who had good records before they were executed for one out-of-character act which sealed their fate. Should greater attention have been paid to their personal circumstances in considering clemency?

Much has been written about Company Quartermaster Sergeant William Alexander of 10/Battalion. As a veteran of the Second Boer War, Alexander would have been acutely aware of the penalties for desertion or cowardice. In September 1917, the Battle of Hill 70 was intended to cause a diversion and draw Germans away from Passchendaele to Lens. As leader of 'D' Platoon, Alexander chose that time to abdicate his responsibilities and put all of his men at even greater risk. Instead of heading the attack, he ordered the Platoon Corporal to take command of the advance party, which was wiped out in the attempt. Alexander went missing and maintained that he had been wounded. But, there is nothing in his record to substantiate his claim.



Company Quartermaster Sergeant William Alexander ⁴¹

In 1922, a book entitled *'The Great War As I Saw It'* was written by Canon Frederick George Scott, CMG, DSO and Senior Chaplain to the First Canadian Division. In Chapter XX11 – *'A Tragedy Of War'*, Canon Scott recounts comforting a condemned soldier during the night before he was due to be shot. The soldier's name is never mentioned but Alexander was the only member of the First Canadian Division to be executed during 1917. Therefore, the chapter is almost certainly referring to the last hours of CQMS Alexander as witnessed by the Chaplain. ⁴²

The following warning had previously been issued to all troops by Brigadier General Victor Odlum, Commander of 7/Battalion. Clearly, Alexander should have been in no doubt about the almost inevitable consequences of his actions.

"Any NCO or man who absents himself without leave from the trenches, from a parade to proceeding to the trenches, or from a working party which is to work in an area exposed to fire, will be tried for desertion. The penalty for Desertion is death". ⁴³



Brigadier General Victor Wentworth Odlum. ⁴⁴

Murder

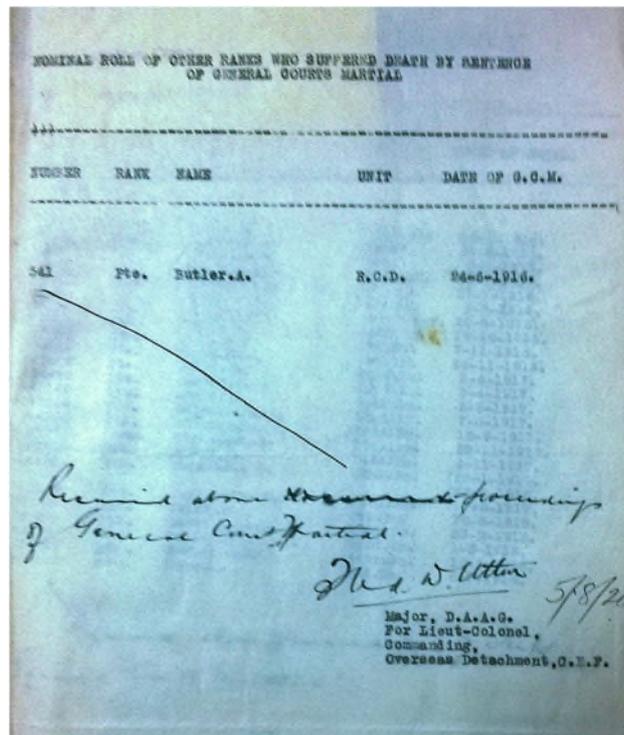
There is one group of soldiers never adequately considered in the 'Pardon Debate'. With capital punishment for murder continuing into the latter half of the twentieth century the pro Pardon lobby has ignored the potential case for the thirty seven soldiers executed for 'wilful murder'. There were two Canadians shot for this offence. Did the extraordinary conditions of wartime cause some men to act entirely out of character? Are there sufficient grounds to pardon them as well?

On 19 July 1916, Driver Benjamin DeFehr loaded his gun and shot Regimental Sergeant Major James Reuben Scott through the back, killing him instantly. With no prior misbehaviour on his record, DeFehr stated at trial that he had been drinking at the time. Unfortunately for him, none of his fellow soldiers could confirm his claim. There are no answers as to why he selected Scott rather than any other officer. Certainly, Scott was a figure of authority. Perhaps the only mitigating factor in this case may be that a battle weary DeFehr had become insane. If so, was he responsible for his actions? His death sentence was confirmed and signed off by Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig.

Part of the military record for Driver DeFehr which states the execution was confirmed by Sir Douglas Haig.⁴⁵

The second man executed for murder was Trooper Alexander Butler of the Royal Canadian Dragoons. Apparently unprovoked and without warning, Butler blasted five shots into Trooper Ethelbert Mickleburg whilst they were in billets. He was the only Canadian to be subjected to a full General Court Martial rather than a FGCM.

Two bad falls from a horse had previously contributed to a new and uncharacteristic pattern of behaviour by Butler. This information was submitted into the proceedings and advanced as mitigation at his trial. The evidence was accepted by the Court and a plea for mercy was expressed when the verdict of Death was announced. However, Haig overrode the Court's request for clemency and ordered that the sentence be duly carried out.



Nominal Roll for GCM – 1916 listing Private Butler, A. ⁴⁶

If Butler's strange and altered behaviour had been examined, tested and proved by a doctor prior to his trial, it is feasible that the injuries would have rendered a different verdict. He could still have been found guilty but on the grounds of diminished responsibility as mitigation for his offence. Should Butler have been awarded the Silver Wound Badge and discharged from service as medically unfit after his two falls? If the military had taken a more pragmatic view of his injuries, Butler and Trooper Mickleburg may both have survived the war.

Previous Bad Character

There is little tangible evidence regarding the motivation of the following men to desert. However, does their behaviour indicate there were undiagnosed psychological issues which contributed to their actions? The mother of Private John Roberts was one of a few unfortunate parents to be told of his true fate. In a forthright notification, it stated that her 19 year old son was a deserter and had been executed by a firing squad. After being in the army for about fifteen months, he had reported sick in order to be sent to a Boulogne hospital and went AWOL soon after. Private Roberts might never have been caught, but he had continued to draw his military pay. His downfall came in June 1916 when he was apprehended wearing civilian clothes, clearly demonstrating his intent to remain free. In his absence, Roberts had avoided the bloody battle at Ypres.

Having fought at Ypres throughout the summer, Private Côme Laliberté left the ranks and refused an order to return but remained at the transport lines. Some months previously, he had received gunshot wounds to his face and head. It is possible Laliberté had lost his nerve. However, being a long term undisciplined soldier with several infractions on his record, he was executed in August 1916.

Another persistent nuisance Private Maurice Higgins, had gone AWOL several times. In June 1916, he was posted to Belgium as part of reinforcements for his Battalion who were fighting at Mount Sorrel and later at Courcellette. His deliberate desertion at that point saw him being arrested and tried. Higgins had the dubious distinction of being the eleventh and final Canadian soldier to be executed during 1916.

Both being described as good soldiers for the first two years of service, what caused a reversal in the conduct of the following two men? Private Edward Fairburn vanished without trace and his record reflects that he was '*Previously rep't missing, now for official purposes presumed to have died on or since 9th April 1917.*' He was absent while the Canadians were fighting for survival at Vimy Ridge and later at Passchendaele. Proving himself to be a true deserter, Fairburn had been missing for ten months when arrested at Bruay in France.

On his way to join the fight at Passchendaele in November 1917, Private Harold Edward Lodge suddenly dropped out of line but fell back in when ordered to do so. Lodge went missing the same evening and later was arrested whilst wearing the uniform of a Red Cross corporal. He promptly escaped a week later, stowing away in a ship that was due to cast off but detained just prior to it sailing. Finally four days later, he jumped from a train to elude his guard and was re-arrested in Boulogne. Private Lodge was tried for a record *three* counts of desertion. His death penalty was an almost foregone conclusion.



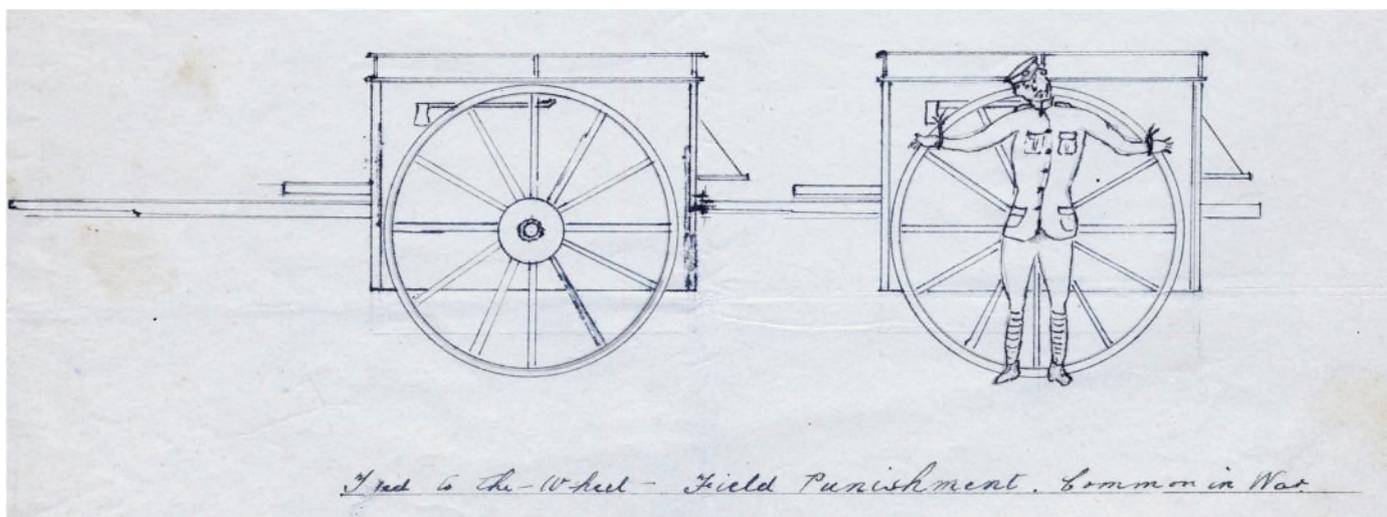
As with Private Reynolds, Private Lodge was also reported '*killed in action*' in the Toronto Evening Telegram newspaper dated 1 April 1918 ⁴⁷

Patterns

There is a group of three men who appeared to have a subconscious 'death wish', Whether they simply were 'chancers', sociopaths or of low intelligence, a pattern emerges which highlights their defective thought processes and inability to modify their consistent bad behaviour.

The Army only dealt with a physical disability they could see and prove. As Private Henry Hese Kerr had contracted syphilis during 1914, there is possibility that he became mentally affected by it. Shortly after enlistment in June 1915, three Commanders noted that Kerr was of bad character and was later charged with five disciplinary offences in just five months before being shipped to the Front. As he constantly demonstrated his unsuitability as a soldier, should Kerr have been discharged from the Army or at least left in England in a support unit? His insubordinations toward Officers graduated to threats against them. Godefroy writes that Kerr's conduct was so bad under shell fire that his platoon mates requested that he be left behind.⁴⁸ With such a complete lack of trust in him, it is unsurprising no-one stepped forward to support Kerr at his trial. He was finally arrested for desertion several miles behind the lines during one Somme Offensive.

Private James Wilson was a problem for the military authorities from the start of his service in September 1914. Before he even left Canada, his lamentable record catalogues many breaches of discipline. In England, he went AWOL several times. During 1915, he compounded his offences by kicking an NCO, using abusive language, absconding four times in quick succession and for having a camera in his possession. One of Wilson's most anti-social habits was to urinate in the billet, which would not have endeared him to his fellow occupants. Obviously no amount of penalties, including confinement, loss of pay or Field Punishment No 1, persuaded him to modify his atrocious behaviour.



One form of Field Punishment No 1 – being tied to a wheel for several hours in full view of everyone and fed only bread and water. Its intention was to shame the soldier. ⁴⁹

Wilson was clearly a very disturbed and troubled man who should have been discharged from service whilst still in Canada. In January 1916, he was tried for disobeying an order and again for having a camera in his possession. The sentence was 18 months hard labour, commuted to just ninety days. Shortly after his release, Wilson went AWOL which coincided with the battle of Mount Sorrel. It raged for two weeks at the beginning of June 1916 and resulted in two and a half thousand Canadians deaths. Surrendering himself after the battle ended, Wilson was found guilty on two

counts of desertion and shot. Almost certainly few if any, of his fellow comrades shed a tear at his demise. The case of Private Wilson certainly bolsters the opinion of some historians and other commentators who are convinced that a blanket pardon was misplaced.

Despite his earlier warning that all deserters faced execution, Brigadier General Victor Odlum mysteriously issued a reprieve from the death sentence handed down to Private Thomas Moles for desertion. Having absconded several times during his army service, coupled with additional charges of drunkenness and theft, his final and fatal misdeed was to flee and hide behind the lines for three weeks. However, Odlum was overruled by Haig and the execution took place in October 1917.

One bluff too many

Once tried for a serious offence like desertion and already serving under a suspended sentence of death, it would be reasonable to assume that any soldier would modify his behaviour. In the case of the following four men, it is evident that they were unable to acknowledge that they had been given numerous opportunities. They simply did not appear to 'get it', resolutely continuing to defy the odds and call the army's bluff in implementing the ultimate penalty.

Confusingly, the Army was prepared to bend the rules if it suited them and blur the certainty of justice. Should the military have been held accountable for the uncertainty it had created? Private Harold Carter had several long detentions on his military record when he deserted in January and October 1916. The second offence resulted in a trial by FGCM and a sentence of death, subsequently commuted to ten years penal servitude. Six months later, Private Carter was returned to his unit under a suspended sentence. It is permitted to speculate that the Army would have given him a severe warning about his future conduct. With the Canadians preparing to mount a full assault on Vimy Ridge, Carter absented himself yet again. This time, his luck ran out. He was tried by a second FGCM, found guilty again and executed.



Private Harold Carter deserted three times.⁵⁰

Again, the Army exercised inconsistent and very poor judgment by allowing Private Charles Welsh to 'buck the system' with his apparent contempt for the rules and consequences. After enlisting in early 1915 he seemed determined to fight against military discipline from the start. His first fine and detention was for going AWOL in July 1915, found not guilty of desertion by a FGCM and received six months hard labour in March 1916. Just five months later, he was charged with deserting as well as casting away his arms and equipment. Sentenced to be executed this time, Welsh must have felt invincible when his penalty was commuted to seven years in jail, then reduced to two years and suspended after ten months. One month later and despite the leniency shown to him, Welsh absconded for a fourth time during the Battle of Passchendaele. After three years of acting as if he was invincible, Welsh faced a firing squad.

Suspension of Sentences

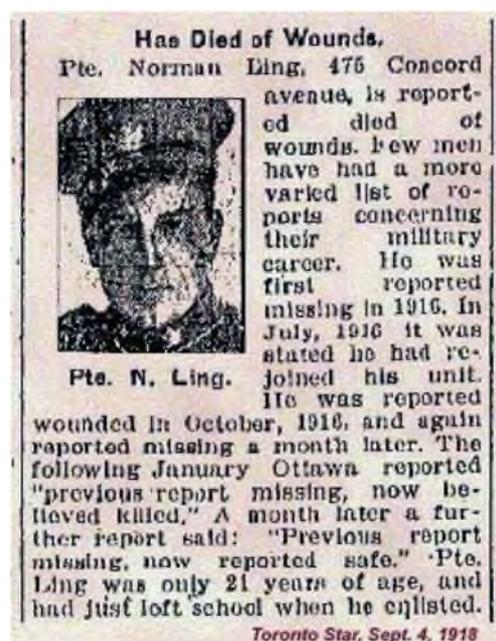
For a while, the '*Army (Suspension of Sentences) Act 1915*'⁵¹ worked in favour of some soldiers including Private Stephen McDermott Fowles. By the time of his third Court Martial in May 1918, he had already received two sentences of death, which had been commuted to long jail sentences and subsequently suspended. In spite of two reprieves, Fowles chose to abscond for a third time just eight days after his second sentence was suspended. At this point, his luck ran out.



Private Stephen McDermott Fowles
– who received three death sentences ⁵²

Last Canadian execution.

The last Canadian to be shot at dawn was Private Wilson Norman Ling who had twice gone AWOL in June then in July and October 1916. His personnel record states that he was *'missing believed killed on 5/10/16'* and later corrected to state *'now reported safe'*. Ling was tried for desertion and his death sentence was confirmed by Lt General Byng but commuted to two years hard labour. By mid-June 1917, he had been returned to his platoon. Apparently contemptuous of the mercy extended to him, Ling absconded once more just a week later and was missing for almost a full year. Giving false details to the military police who detained him, he was back behind bars awaiting another trial. Ling was found guilty for a second time and executed on 12th August 1918.



On 4 September 1918, in the effort to protect his family from the truth, the Toronto Star reported Private Ling had died of wounds.⁵³

The Pardon

*'The Great War devoured them all, hero and coward, shell-shocked and rogue alike'.*⁵⁴

In 2001, Ronald Duhamel, the Canadian Minister for Veteran Affairs, issued a statement of regret from the Canadian Government to the twenty three volunteers who had been 'lawfully executed' for desertion or cowardice. Subsequently, their names were added to the Canadian Books of Remembrance. The two executed for murder did not receive a pardon. This is his Statement:

"Mr. Speaker, Hon. Colleagues, I rise in the Chamber to speak about the First World War and the fate of some Canadian soldiers, a fate that has been essentially forgotten in the pages of history. For the young nation of Canada, the promise and optimism that infused the dawning 20th century was abruptly cut short by the First World War. No one anticipated such carnage, or that we would soon be sending young citizens into a war that would see 65 million people from 30 nations take up arms, where 10 million people would lose their lives and 29 million more would be wounded, captured or missing. Never before had there been such a war, neither in the number of lives taken, nor in the manner of their taking. New weapons would turn fields of battle into slaughter grounds, while the rigours of life in the trenches would kill many of those who escaped bullet or bayonet.

This "War to end all wars" challenged our small country of 8 million to its limits. Almost 650,000 served in the Canadian Forces in the Great War. Over 68,000—more than one in ten who fought—did not return. Total casualties amounted to more than one third of those who were in uniform. Thousands came home broken in body, mind, and spirit.

The service of Canadians in uniform was as remarkable as it was distinguished. History records their sacrifice in places whose names resonate even to the present day. Battle names such as Ypres, The Somme, Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele and Amiens. Those who lived then and the historians who followed would declare that Canada came of age because of its actions and ingenuity during World War I. But where history speaks of national sacrifice and achievement, it is too often silent on the individual stories of triumph, tragedy and terror of those who fought and died on the terrible killing fields of France and Belgium. Those who went to war at the request of their nation could not know the fate that lay in store for them. This was a war of such overwhelming sound, fury and unrelenting horror that few combatants could remain unaffected. For the majority of the Canadians who took up arms and paid the ultimate sacrifice, we know little of their final moments, except that they died in defence of freedom.

Today I want to talk about 23 of our fallen. I would like to tell the House about these soldiers because these circumstances were quite extraordinary. These 23 soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force occupy an unusual position in our military history. They were lawfully executed for military offences such as desertion and, in one case, cowardice.

We can revisit the past but we cannot recreate it. We cannot relive those awful years of a nation at peril in total war, and the culture of that time is subsequently too distant for us to comprehend fully. We can, however, do something in the present, in a solemn way, aware now, better than before, that people may lose control of their emotions, have a breakdown for reasons over which they have little control. For some it would have been known today perhaps as post-traumatic stress disorder. To give these 23 soldiers a dignity that is their due and to provide a closure for their families, as the Minister of Veterans Affairs on behalf of the Government of Canada, I wish to express my deep sorrow at their loss of life, not because of what they did or did not do but because they too lie in foreign fields where poppies blow amid the crosses row on row.

While they came from different regions of Canada, they all volunteered to serve their country in its citizen-army, and that service and the hardships they endured prior to their offences will be recorded and unremembered no more."⁵⁵

Five years later, Des Browne, British Defence Secretary, informed Parliament that 309 soldiers executed during the First World War were to be granted posthumous pardons. This figure includes every Commonwealth nation but excludes the total of thirty seven men who were shot for murder. However, Browne stated that the original convictions would stand and the pardons did not signify the verdicts had been quashed. In addition, he affirmed the pardons did not place any blame on either the officers or courts martial that had acted lawfully.⁵⁶ Each one of the pardoned men is now individually remembered by a special memorial at the National Arboretum near Lichfield in Staffordshire, England.



The National Arboretum 'Shot at Dawn' Memorial ⁵⁷

Divided opinion

Whilst there was great celebration around the world following the announcement of the pardons, opinions continue to be sharply divided. For the past three years, the Royal British Legion has invited the 'Shot at Dawn' campaigners to take part in the march past the Cenotaph in London on Remembrance Sunday. They said:

'We don't want pardons for villains. We want justice for people who were shot for insubordination because they refused to put on a hat, or who fell asleep at their post, or were just so terrified they simply could not cope.' ⁵⁸

But, many people are not convinced that a blanket pardon should have been handed out when the specific offences of some men are put under close scrutiny. Former Intelligence Corps officer Colonel John Hughes-Wilson, who co-wrote *'Blindfold and Alone'* is adamant that history should not be rewritten:

*"Some men, and there are tragic cases, were undoubtedly suffering from what we would now recognise as combat stress. But our great-grandfather didn't understand that any more than they knew about blood transfusions or penicillin. If these men were alive today, we would not kill them. But we must be very wary about applying our modern sentiments and values to the 1914-18 war. We cannot re-invent the past to suit ourselves today. And even now we expect our servicemen, and women, to do what they presumably signed up to do - risk their lives and fight."*⁵⁹

Amongst the twenty five Canadians, there were clearly those who suffered a fate which can only be described as arbitrary and capricious at the hands of military justice. However, there were also those

soldiers who were 'villains' or 'ne'er do wells' and were executed on the basis of the undeniable seriousness of their offences.

Many questions can also be asked about the Canadian Army. Why did the Canadian Government not emulate the Australians and refuse to allow their own soldiers to be executed? When serial offenders were identified in the field, why did the army not extract them from their units and redeploy them elsewhere?

For instance, there were units such as the Depot Regiments and the Canadian Forestry Corps operating as vital support troops all over Great Britain. Offenders could have been made to serve the War effort in many other forms of hard physical labour. Clearly, it was not an option to return the men to Canada as that would be viewed as rewarding bad behaviour and be severely detrimental to morale. Alternatively, to reinforce discipline, the men could have been sent to prison knowing there was little or no possibility of their long sentences being reduced or ultimately suspended.

Hughes-Wilson is correct when he states these cases must not be viewed from a twenty-first Century standpoint. Our judgement should be informed by an appreciation of the attitudes of the society in which the men grew up. A sense of perspective can only come from an understanding of their life and times. For example, capital punishment was not abolished in Great Britain and Canada until the second half of the last century. Also, in the context of early twentieth century civilian law, the two Canadians shot for murder would have recognised the inevitability of their execution. Today, the prevailing liberal philosophy decries both corporal and capital punishment. Instead, we try to understand what has driven a person to offend and accept there might be mitigating circumstances which gave rise to their actions.

The Veteran view

It is now far too late to ask the comrades of the executed men what they thought at the time. Did they feel betrayed and let down? Did they consider the deserters put everyone around them at even greater risk? Was it an insult to their sense of patriotism at a time when every single man was traumatised by the sights and sounds of war? With the passage of time, these questions and many more can never be answered.

One soldier who did fight in The Great War, Albert 'Smiler' Marshall from Ashted in Surrey had lived and survived through all the terrors. But, this veteran still believed that it would be wrong to pardon those who were shot at dawn. He said:

'I didn't know anyone who was executed or who had anything to do with a firing squad but we all knew about the penalty. But it didn't occur to you not to fight. You didn't think about it, you just did it. And you just took what came your way. You lived in these trenches for days and days with nothing happening but bombardments, but you regularly lost a friend, or someone near you. The thought never left you that you could



The Great War veteran, Albert 'Smiler' Marshall from Ashted in Surrey, England ⁶¹

Before announcing an across the board pardon for the twenty three Canadians, would justice have been much better served if their conduct and crimes had been carefully examined on an individual basis. Clearly, it can be seen there was a wide disparity between the seriousness of their offences which led to their execution. With the exception of a minority of the soldiers highlighted in this article, the majority deemed it their prerogative to simply challenge authority and go missing whenever they chose. Their records exhibit a reckless disregard for their fellow comrades and the retribution which might befall them. Especially in times of war, soldiering has always been a calling which binds men together when they are all fighting for survival.

Diana Beaupré graduated from Canterbury Christ Church University in 2007 and Adrian Watkinson from Hendon back in 1967. As independent, post-retirement researchers for the past ten years, they have investigated all of the 3898 WW1 Canadians commemorated across the UK. Their work can be viewed on their website: www.canadianukgravesww1.co.uk and they plan to complete their project by the end of 2018.

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- ⁵² www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/Fowles
- ⁵³ www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/Ling
- ⁵⁴ Corns and Hughes-Wilson p461
- ⁵⁵ <https://openparliament.ca/debates/2001/12/11/ronald-j-duhamel-1/>
- ⁵⁶ World War 1 Veterans (Pardons)
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/vo060918/wmstext/60918m0001.htm>
- ⁵⁷ The Chase Project, Richard Pursehouse
- ⁵⁸ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/shot_at_dawn
- ⁵⁹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/shot_at_dawn
- ⁶⁰ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/shot_at_dawn
- ⁶¹ Image: Albert Marshall <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1490377/Smiler-Marshall->