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Adventurers, patriots, and loyal British subjects: U.S. citizen enlistees in the First
World War Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF)

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The border between the United States and Canada has always been porous with considerable and continuous cross border movement over the last almost four hundred years for purposes of immigration and emigration, as well as for work and family. The early years of the First World War brought another element of border crossing as U.S. citizens sought to join the war effort by joining the Canadian military and as it turns out, Canada was quite happy to accept them.

While the United States formally entered the First World War on April 6, 1917, its northern neighbor Canada automatically joined the conflict with Great Britain's declaration of war on August 4, 1914. Canada achieved Dominion status in 1867 and with that some measure of independence, but it was not until 1931 and the formation of the Commonwealth that Canada achieved true independence from Great Britain under the Statute of Westminster, so Great Britain's entry into the war instantly obligated Canada's participation.¹ The population of early twentieth century Canada was still small at approximately 8 million people but ultimately, the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) consisted of 619,636 men and women with 424,589 of them serving overseas.² The expectations put upon Canada to produce sufficient numbers of recruits, officers, medical staff, and other technically skilled personnel such as engineers were enormous.

The Canadian War Museum estimates that approximately 40,000 U.S. citizens served in the CEF and this paper explores a small sampling of who some of these individuals were and why many wanted to serve so badly in a war their own country was endeavoring to stay out of. A study of 1,000 individual service records for U.S. born enlistees in the form of Attestation (individual enlistment) Papers digitized by the Library

¹ See: <http://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/canada>

² See Library and Archives Canada: <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/>

and Archives Canada demonstrates a wide range of ages, occupations, urban and rural backgrounds, as well as a variety of home states. The Attestation Form also indicates religion and, not unexpectedly, a majority of enlistees noted various Protestant denominations, although good numbers of Roman Catholic and Jewish enlistees show up as well. Many in the U.S. still had close familial and cultural ties to Great Britain, including many with Irish roots. However, at this time, Great Britain was in the midst of dealing with the issue of Irish Home Rule and the outbreak of war brought postponement of a pending bill proposing an independent Ireland. The Easter Rising of 1916 was a direct result of this postponement. Feelings on Irish independence ran strong in the U.S. as well and while many U.S. enlistees in the CEF were of Irish descent, most indicated Protestant denominations, not Roman Catholic.

While maintaining an official position of neutrality regarding the war, the United States clearly favored the Allies to the point of allowing the British-Canadian Military Mission to run recruitment operations across the United States to the extent that as of April 1, 1918, recruiting stations were open in most major U.S. cities.³ The Canadian government viewed the U.S. as having “a vast and untapped pool of manpower” given the significantly larger U.S. population and the appeal of the British cause.⁴ However, the actual legality of such recruitment efforts were highly suspect and not without controversy as aggressive Canadian and British recruiters often looked the other way regarding underage recruits. Reports note that state and local U.S. politicians received a

³ Pawa, J.M. “Manpower, Diplomacy and Social Maladies: Canada, Britain, the United States and the Recruitment Controversy of 1917-1919”, *The Canadian Review of American Studies*, Volume 11, No. 3, Winter 1980, 295-296.

⁴ Pawa, 296.

number of frantic requests from upset parents requesting their help to get their underage sons discharged from the Canadian military and returned home.

The romantic and misguided notion of glory to be had by serving on the Western Front captured the imaginations of many young American boys and men. While Europe always seemed to have a succession of conflicts with plenty of opportunity for heroism and valor, the last major war for the United States was the American Civil War. At the end of the nineteenth century, Civil War veterans, often near-deified for the past thirty years as “model citizens and men” were aging out and with the frontier declared closed, many looked to war as a “character-building endeavor.”⁵ As noted by James M. McPherson, “Patriotic and ideological convictions were an essential part of the sustaining motivation of Civil War soldiers” and this remained true for the American men enlisting to serve with the Canadians.⁶ Of note, while the enlistees were overwhelmingly men, there were also instances of American women enlisting with the Canadians as nurses. For U.S. enlistees in the CEF, bonds of common ancestry, culture, language, religious and political beliefs (with the notable exception of French Canada) among Great Britain, Canada, and the United States remained strong at this time propelling both Americans and Canadians alike to rally to the aid of Britain. Deep-rooted feelings of loyalty and love for Britain as well as the view that Britain served as the torch-bearer for the preservation of democracy in the face of German militarism appear as reasons for enlisting in a number of soldier’s accounts. Additionally, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were periods of high immigration from Britain to both Canada and the

⁵ Hoganson, Kristin L. *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gendered Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 201.

⁶ McPherson, James M. *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 114.

United States, so many families were either recent transplants or within a generation of emigrating from Britain.

The Spanish-American War which lasted for about sixteen weeks in 1898 was a brief, albeit welcome, defining moment for the sons and grandsons of the Civil War generation, but for the young men born late in the nineteenth century, their only choice was to look to Europe. The United States of the early twentieth century had turned more inward after its brief and mostly unsatisfactory forays into imperialism with the colonization of Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines received in the settlement with the Spanish. Theodore Roosevelt, a man both privileged and powerful, was a primary architect of early twentieth century ideals about American manhood with military service and war representing integral parts of the equation.⁷

Two of the most well-known American men born at the close of the nineteenth century were Ernest Hemingway who was born in 1899 and F. Scott Fitzgerald who was born in 1896. Hemingway's volunteer service in the ambulance corps in Italy formed an important cornerstone of the eventual Hemingway legend and the wounds he suffered only enhanced it. While barely out of high school, young Hemingway worried that he would miss out on the war. There was speculation that Hemingway chose the ambulance service after reading *The Dark Forest* by Hugh Walpole. Walpole chose service in the Russian Red Cross in 1914 after suffering rejection by the British army for poor eyesight, coincidentally, the same rejection reason Hemingway would give to explain joining the ambulance corps.⁸ In a letter to his parents dated October 18, 1918, Hemingway explains his need to serve stating that he cannot come home until the war is over, and that he could

⁷ Bederman, Gail. *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago and London: The Chicago University Press, 1995), 216.

⁸ Lynn, Kenneth S. *Hemingway* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 66.

not enter the U.S. military whether there is conscription or not because he had already been rejected due to an eye condition. It is unlikely that Hemingway actually had an eye condition other than needing glasses which was not grounds for rejection as proved to be the case for Harry S. Truman who relied heavily on his glasses.⁹ There is speculation about whether or not he ever actually tried to enlist in the army or thought instead that rescue work allowed one to be close to the action without actually being a trench soldier.¹⁰ Still, Hemingway wrote adamantly to his father, who wanted him to come home and join the American forces,

“You Dad spoke about coming home. I wouldn’t come home till the war was ended if I could make fifteen thousand a year in the states. Nix, here is the place. All of us Red X men here were ordered not to register. It would be foolish for us to come home because the Red X is a necessary organization and they would just have to get more men from the states to keep it going. Besides we never came over here until we were all disqualified for military service you know.”¹¹

Hemingway suffered shrapnel wounds from mortar fire during his service in Italy. A friend wrote to his parents on July 14, 1918 that “Ernest was not satisfied with the regular canteen service behind the lines.”¹² His wounds in the legs, mostly superficial, occurred while dispensing chocolate in the trenches. In fact, he narrowly escaped death.

In contrast with Hemingway, Fitzgerald joined the American army and received his commission as a second Lieutenant in the 45th Regiment. He attended three months of officer’s training at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas under Dwight Eisenhower, and while viewed on the whole as a good officer, Fitzgerald frequently lacked good judgment, a flaw that would plague him for the rest of his short life.¹³ His division received orders to go north in October 1918 to prepare for embarkation, however several delays, including

⁹ Lynn, 73.

¹⁰ Lynn, 73.

¹¹ Spanier, Sandra and Robert W. Trogdon, editors. *The Letters of Ernest Hemingway, 1907-1922*, vol. I. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 146-147.

¹² Spanier and Trogdon, 115.

¹³ Turnbull, Andrew. *Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 80, 88.

the flu epidemic, delayed their departure. The armistice was signed on November 11, 1918 just as Fitzgerald was about to be sent overseas. One of Fitzgerald's biographers, Jeffrey Meyers, conjectures that he enlisted because it was "the fashionable thing to do" and, no doubt, this was the same reason many of his contemporaries had for enlisting.¹⁴ He wrote to his mother on November 14, 1917 that he fully expected to be sent to France and the trenches, advising his mother that he "was delighted to get my commission" and that he "went into this perfectly cold-bloodedly" which is more likely reflective of Fitzgerald's penchant for dramatizing rather than the words of a tough young man about to become a soldier.¹⁵ One of Fitzgerald's biggest regrets was never making it overseas and it was a sore point frequently exploited by Hemingway who had served overseas and been wounded. Fitzgerald wrote about his disappointments in *The Crack Up*. Many of the same reasons that propelled Hemingway and Fitzgerald to serve in the war effort, namely proving their courage, gaining the acceptance of their peers, and achieving glory and recognition also resonated with other American men.¹⁶

A Look at some of the Americans who served with the CEF

The First World War is as much a North American story as it is a European one. For Canada, the war proved to be its entry onto the international stage and the United States became a world power as a result. Both countries had a deep affinity with Great Britain, fueling the desires of each country's citizens to serve in the war effort. Additionally, as noted earlier, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were

¹⁴ Meyers, Jeffrey. *Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), 38.

¹⁵ Brucoli, Matthew J., editor. *A Life in Letters: F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1994), 13-14.

¹⁶ Meyers, 43.

periods of high immigration from Britain to both Canada and the United States, so many families in North America continued to retain very close ties to Britain.

Getting to the war in Europe before it ended became a high priority for many young American men. Their letters and journals noted reasons both serious and superficial, ranging from a desire to defend democracy from the incursions of a militaristic Germany, to the need for adventure, the desire to attract the attentions of young women with their smart looking uniforms, to a strong need to serve as a means to prove their manhood and officially enter adulthood.

One such case involved Lt. Joseph S. Smith who was born in Philadelphia and had the distinction of serving in the Canadian, British, and American Expeditionary Forces. He wrote two books about his experiences, *Over There and Back*, the story of his service in three different armies during the First World War and *Trench Warfare*, a how-to manual for officers and enlisted men written while he was a second lieutenant in the British Expeditionary Force. When the war broke out in August 1914, Smith was working as a cowboy on a ranch deep in the interior of British Columbia. As he described, his sole ambition at that point in time was earning enough money so he could attend the Panama Exposition scheduled to open in San Francisco in the autumn.¹⁷ He was referring to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition held in San Francisco during 1915 to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal. Smith notes that even out on the range, word spread quickly about the war in Europe and it was a frequent topic of dinner time conversation.¹⁸ Men frequently made their decision to enlist, not to say on a

¹⁷ Smith, Joseph Shuter. *Over There and Back in Three Uniforms, being the experiences of an American boy in the Canadian, British and American armies at the front and through no man's land* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1918), 9.

¹⁸ Smith, *Over There and Back*, 10-11.

whim, but often after intense conversations with friends and peers. Smith, an American, made his decision to join the Canadian forces in just this way. He recalls riding into Dog Creek, British Columbia, a ranching settlement near the Fraser River on a Saturday afternoon where he found the place abuzz about the recent British retreat from Mons as the Germans chased them. Smith notes, “I wasn’t English; I wasn’t Canadian. I was from the good old U.S.A. and from all we could understand the States were neutral” and he reasoned that he should be as well.¹⁹ So what changed his mind? He recalls an atmosphere of excitement when he went to a local establishment to eat and how his attitude began to shift as he listened and took part in the conversation about the war. Smith notes that few, if any, could really articulate the reasons for the war but their decision to enlist hinged on the fact that England was at war. He notes, “She had sent out a call to all the Empire for men; for help. Dog Creek heard and was going to answer that call. Even if I were an alien I had been in that district for more than a year and I owed it to Dog Creek and the district to join up with the rest.”²⁰

Smith’s timeline in his book describes quitting his ranch hand job and heading to Vancouver with several others to enlist within a week of that late summer conversation but his Attestation Paper shows him enlisting in Vancouver on November 9, 1914.²¹ Smith was born in Philadelphia but listed his birthplace as Port Hope, Ontario on his Attestation Paper.²² In fact, he does note in his book is that he altered his place of birth to seemingly make it easier to enlist. Smith notes that “By the simple expedient of moving my birthplace a few hundred miles north I became a Canadian and a member of the

¹⁹ Smith, *Over There and Back*, 11-12.

²⁰ Smith, *Over There and Back*, 12.

²¹ Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession, 1992-93/166, Box 9081-22, item 239253.

²² Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession, 1992-93/166, Box 9081-22, item 239253.

expeditionary force...’’²³ Since he enlisted early in the war, it may have been felt prudent to say he was born in Canada. However, as the war progressed, enlistees plainly indicated their U.S. birthplaces on their Attestation Paper. The 1,000 individual Attestation records pulled for analysis all contain U.S. birthplaces. Of note, the information on the Attestation Paper was taken as declared and did not undergo the scrutiny or verification we would routinely undertake today. Smith was twenty one at the time of his enlistment. Date of birth was another frequently misstated item as underage boys sought to join up but this has been the case in most wars and is not unique to the First World War. Smith who was not married listed his occupation as cattle rancher and his mother Catherine who lived in Oakland, California as his next of kin.

What did Smith think of the war? He spoke of the realities of trench warfare and he was part of a number of highly dangerous missions, miraculously surviving to publish his second book, *Over There and Back* in 1918. Smith notes that everyone feared disgracing their battalion and the Canadians – the men thought as a unit, an essential part of military training, rather than as individuals.²⁴ He notes that the troops in the trenches exhibited very negative attitudes toward pacifists and as a result, troops going on leave could not take any form of ammunition with them due to some unfortunate prior incidents. Smith was an observant soldier, producing a book of practical instruction for officers and troops called *Trench Warfare* based on thirty one months of instruction and service, fifteen of which occurred on the Belgian and French fronts. He offered his book as a means to assist rather than the work of an expert, recognizing the changing nature of warfare in the trenches as technology was evolving around them continuously.

²³ Smith, *Over There and Back*, 14.

²⁴ Smith, *Over There and Back*, 81.

Smith entered the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the fall of 1914 as a private in the 29th Vancouver Battalion. He underwent several months of training and sailed from Halifax, Nova Scotia to England in May 1915. Smith served in France until August 1916 when he received orders to report to the War Office in London where he received a commission as a second lieutenant in the Royal Scots regiment. He went on to serve with the British Expeditionary Force in France until August 1917 when he resigned his commission and returned to the United States. Smith then received a commission as a first lieutenant and served in the American Expeditionary Force. He served in several major battles on the Western front, including St. Eloi, the Somme, the Ancre, and Arras. Interestingly, he dedicated his book, *Trench Warfare* to American officers and men “serving their country under alien flags”.²⁵

Edwin Austin Abbey’s Attestation Paper indicated he was born in Kilmacolm, Scotland in 1888 but he was a U.S. citizen and his parents resided in Philadelphia when he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force on October 2, 1915.²⁶ Abbey and his family are an example of the continuing close ties between immigrant families and Great Britain. He was a recently graduated civil engineer when he enlisted in the 2nd Canadian Pioneer Battalion at the Toronto Recruiting Depot. Abbey died on April 10, 1917 at the Battle of Vimy Ridge, which was part of the larger Battle of Arras. The Battle of Vimy Ridge was a defining moment for Canada as a fledgling nation sparking intense patriotic fervor and national pride at Canada’s successful part in the battle. Edwin Abbey’s grave is located in the Thelus Military Cemetery at Pas de Calais, France which is about 6.5

²⁵ Smith, Joseph Shuler. *Trench Warfare: a Manual for Officers and Men* (New York: E.F. Dutton & Co., 1917), v.

²⁶ Library and Archives Canada. RG 150, Volume 02-3, item 42.

kilometers north of Arras.²⁷ At the time of Abbey's death, he was a lieutenant with the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles. The *Toronto Star* reported Abbey's death in an article on May 2, 1917 and he received a commemorative memorial panel in the St. Thomas Church Baptistry in Toronto, Ontario.

As was the custom of the time, Abbey wrote regularly to both of his parents, generally individually. After his death, his mother Katharine Eleanor Abbey gathered his many letters as well as those they received from his superior officers and had them published in May 1918. Both of his parents note in the Foreword that Abbey never expected to have his letters published but they felt the need to do so because they provide both "illumination and inspiration".²⁸ They provide significant insight into the thoughts and feelings of a young officer on the Western Front.

Abbey expresses his extreme upset over the May 1915 sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German submarine and he is not alone in that view. Over one hundred Americans were among the dead and this was a key event in turning American opinion in favor of entry into the war. Even Woodrow Wilson, a proponent of neutrality was compelled to express a strong protest to the Germans. Abbey noted in a letter dated May 12, 1915 that the "dishonor to the flag is great, but it seems to me more a dishonor to manhood and humanity."²⁹ In the same letter, he expressed strong concerns over Germany, noting that "Germany has shown herself a terrible menace, and she is beginning to feel confidence in her own resources to defy the world."³⁰

²⁷ See: Commonwealth War Graves Commission at www.cwgc.org. The Commission was founded by Royal Charter in 1917 to commemorate the men and women of the commonwealth forces who died in the First and Second World Wars. Also, Veterans Affairs Canada at www.veterans.gc.ca.

²⁸ Abbey, Edwin Austin, 2D. *An American Soldier; Letters of Edwin Austin Abbey, 2D*) Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), Foreword.

²⁹ Abbey, 3.

³⁰ Abbey, 3.

Abbey received a serious shoulder wound on Easter morning, April 23, 1916. Ironically, he died in battle a year later on April 10, 1917, just two days after Easter. Abbey's service record notes that he was wounded on April 23, 1916 while on duty in the trenches at St. Eloi and on April 26, he had surgery to remove the bullet/shrapnel and was confined to bed for ten days.³¹ Abbey received a transfer to King George Hospital in London to recuperate and then went on to the Canadian Convalescing Hospital in Bromley, England on May 31, 1916. He recovered and returned to duty later in the year. On December 2, 1916, he wrote to his mother from the British Officer's Club in France that he anticipated joining his new unit, the Fourth Canadian Mounted Rifles in a day or two. He downplayed the seriousness of his wound in letters to each of his parents, no doubt an attempt to ease their worries. Of note, while in London, he went with his aunt to have his uniforms fitted at the tailor's as was common practice for officers at this time.

Interestingly, Abbey's service record contains conflicting information in one section about his place of birth. While his Attestation Paper, which is part of the service record, indicates he was born in Kilmacolm, Scotland, further notes in his service record indicate that he was born in Mount Holly, New Jersey but his Medical Records indicate Kilmacolm, Scotland as his place of birth. Throughout his letters, Abbey steadfastly refers to himself as completely American and so this discrepancy requires further investigation. It appears that Abbey's mother was U.S. born because he notes to her in a letter dated January 1, 1917 that "How little you thought, when you were a child, with the echo of the terrible Civil War in your heart, that you would some day have a son in the battle line!"³²

³¹ Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Volume 02-3, digitized service record: V002-S003.

³² Abbey, 96.

Additionally, Abbey was deeply religious as was prevalent for the times and his return to the front after being wounded saw him expressing thoughts of entering religious service if he survived the war. The experience had so changed him that he felt it unlikely that he wanted to return to his engineering career once the war ended. He expresses that “Life, here, is such a feeble little thing, so uncertain from hour to hour, that one cannot help knowing that it is a gift and entirely in God’s hands.”³³

On December 29, 1916, Abbey wrote to his mother that “there can be no doubt that we must fight on until Germany is willing to make full reparation” and he notes, “we are all willing to pay the necessary price.”³⁴ He prays that he will be a good enough officer to lead his troops. After the U.S. declared war on Germany in April 1917, Abbey wrote to his father that he was “more glad than ever that I am here” (France) and he referred to himself as an “American soldier” even though he was serving with the CEF.³⁵ He expresses his wish to transfer to the American forces if it should come to pass, noting in a letter to his mother on February 7, 1917 that “If by any chance we do have an army here, and it is possible for me to transfer to it, I surely will.”³⁶ Edwin Abbey longs to fight under the American flag.

On April 6, 1917, Lieutenant Edwin Austin Abbey prepared his last will and testament, no doubt in preparation for that battle that was expected to occur at Vimy Ridge within the next few days. The one page document says,

The Last Will and Testament
of Edwin Austin Abbey, Lieutenant
I, Edwin Austin Abbey, do bequeath
To my mother, Katharine Eleanor

³³ Abbey, 92.

³⁴ Abbey, 95.

³⁵ Abbey, 161-162.

³⁶ Abbey, 125.

Abbey, all personal
effects and possessions, to all
monies to my credit in the
Bank of Montreal, London
England, and all monies
due to me from the Canadian
Government.³⁷

The will which was witnessed by another lieutenant, Gregory Cluske, proved to be prophetic and on a practical basis, necessary. From the service record, the preparation of a last will and testament was standard procedure. The next entry in the service record lists Abbey's death, April 10, 1917 and his next of kin as his father, William B. Abbey. He was only twenty eight years old.

In 1928, Charles Yale Harrison (1898-1954) published the story of his time in the trenches, *Generals Die in Bed: A Story from the Trenches* in serial form and it was published as a book in 1930. Harrison was born in Philadelphia and enlisted as a private in the CEF at Montreal on January 24, 1917 when he was eighteen years old, listing his occupation as student.³⁸ He had spent much of his life to this point living in Montreal which helps to explain his choice of enlistment location and although he listed his occupation as student, he had in fact, been working for the *Montreal Star* at the time of his enlistment and after the war, he continued his career as a journalist and novelist and moved to New York City in 1931 where he lived until his death in 1954.³⁹

Writing his memoir ten years after the war provides a much different perspective than that of Joseph Shuter Smith which was published in 1918 while he was still serving and the letters of Edwin Austin Abbey written during the war and published in 1918, following his death at Vimy Ridge in 1917. Harrison's memoir contains little to none of

³⁷ Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Volume 02-3, digitized service record: V002-S003.

³⁸ Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, 1992-93/166, Box 4101-44.

³⁹ See: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/charles-yeale-harrison/>

the patriotic fervor of Abbey or the desire to serve and provide technical knowledge displayed by Smith in his book, *Trench Warfare*, published in 1917 as a practical guide for officers and enlisted personnel. Harrison's point of view is more unvarnished and cynical, more reflective of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Lost Generation.

Harrison's dedication at the beginning of his book speaks to the disillusionment of his generation when he states, "To the bewildered youths – British, Australian, Canadian, and German – who were killed in that wood a few miles beyond Amiens on August 8, 1918, I DEDICATE THIS BOOK."⁴⁰ He is referring to the Battle of Amiens which began on August 8, 1918 and dealt a crushing blow to the Germans. The Canadians and Australians led the charge as shock troops and the battle plan incorporated an all-mechanized approach with tanks, artillery, aircraft, and well-armed infantry. It is not unusual for soldiers to wait for several years before being able to open up and speak or write about their experiences in battle. As noted in the Introduction to Harrison's book written by Robert F. Nielsen in 2001, by the late 1920's several authors, including Ernest Hemingway with *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and Erich Maria Remarque with *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) and Harrison had published realistic portrayals of the war.⁴¹ While the works of Hemingway and Remarque were turned into well-known films in 1932 and 1930 respectively, Harrison's work was well-known but did not achieve quite the same status as the other two works in the United States. However, it remains quite well-known in Canada.

Harrison describes the soldier's list of enemies as "the lice, some of our officers, and Death" and he notes with irony that "strangely, we never refer to the Germans as our

⁴⁰ Harrison, Charles Yale. *Generals Die in Bed: A Story from the Trenches* (Annick Press, Ltd., 2002), Original 1928, 3.

⁴¹ Harrison, 6.

enemy.”⁴² He describes the purpose of life in the trenches as a constant fight to save one’s self and get as much food as possible. Harrison dismisses the concept of the troops as a band of brothers as something made up by journalists for the public’s consumption. This is in contrast to the more idealistic Edwin Abbey who worried that he would not be good enough to properly lead his men, who spoke reverently about his religion upon which he clearly depended, and whose letters to his parents speak regularly of the higher purpose of the war as a fight to save democracy. While Harrison notes they have all prayed during bombardments, he questions how anyone who has been through what the troops serving in the trenches have endured will be able to return to peacetime religion. The three men examined here, Smith, Abbey, and Harrison approached the war in very different ways. Smith, who joined up when war fever swept the area where he lived, took a more pragmatic approach to the war evidenced by his book, *Trench Warfare*, a book intended to provide practical guidance on technical aspects of warfare at the time. Abbey, more of a romantic, seems almost resigned to making the ultimate sacrifice with this life while Harrison, who appears to be more cynical in his memoir, fights to stay alive while endeavoring to exhibit little concern, at least outwardly, for either side.

That is not to say that Harrison did not feel anguish and pain at what he saw and experienced. At times, the death of a particular man would hit him in unexpected ways. He questions the death of Cleary who was an office clerk in civilian life, asking why tears choked him at the sight of Cleary’s fatal head wounds, even though as he notes, he had already seen hundreds, perhaps thousands of other men die.⁴³ The intent of Harrison’s book is to present an unvarnished portrait of the life and viewpoint of the soldier in the

⁴² Harrison, 36.

⁴³ Harrison, 88-89.

trenches, rather than a glamorized depiction of battles and brave deeds. The title of the book, *Generals Die in Bed*, was part of a conversation that Harrison recollects following a company inspection by their remote and out of touch commanding general.⁴⁴

Harrison recalls a final indignity to the enlisted men after he suffers a wound in the foot and finds himself aboard a transport train on his way back to a hospital in England. A young German officer, a prisoner of war, is loaded onto a car full of enlisted men, including Harrison. The German promptly and speaking in perfect English demands that the orderly bring the commanding officer to him and when the officer arrives, he demands placement in a car with officers and almost incredibly, his request is granted.⁴⁵ For Harrison, this demonstrated that in the end, there really is no difference between the Canadians, British, or Germans. Each has enlisted men, officers, and generals and each understands his place in the military hierarchy.

The young men (and some young women) from the United States who went to Canada to enlist in the Canadian Expeditionary Force long before the U.S. entered the war in 1917 did so for many reasons from adventure-seeking to protecting democracy and as a means of entering adulthood. The close ties at this time period between large segments of the population in North America and Great Britain provided all the reason many needed for answering Britain's call for assistance.

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⁴⁴ Harrison, 96.

⁴⁵ Harrison, 173-174.

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Commonwealth War Graves Commission: www.cwgc.org

Canadian Great War Project: www.canadiangreatwarproject.com

- Soldiers with 'U.S.A.' as Country of Birth (Database)

The National Archives: <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/humanrights/1914-1945/default.htm>

Veterans Affairs Canada: www.veterans.gc.ca