



DND/Carte postale 1

The camp of No. 2 Construction Company at La Joux was originally all tents until October 1917. Note the wooden walkways, required because of the wet summer of 1917.

No. 2 Construction Battalion: The Operational History

by Mathias Joost

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Introduction

Black History Month has been celebrated in Canada since February 1996, providing further recognition of Canada's cultural mosaic. It commemorates the contribution made by black Canadians in all aspects of Canadian society – culturally, politically, socially, militarily – dating back to before Confederation. In fact, people of African origin were present in Canada when it was known as New France, and they have been part of our cultural mosaic ever since.

In the military realm, one of the most cited contributions has been that of No. 2 Construction Battalion, a First World War labour unit that served in the United Kingdom and France, being authorized in part as a result of pressure from the black community in Canada to be allowed to participate in the First World War. The 100th anniversary of No. 2 Construction Battalion will be marked on 5 July 2016, and the unit is celebrated as Canada's only black unit of the First World War. Since 1993, the town of Pictou, Nova Scotia, has celebrated annually the battalion and the

town's role in its formation and training. Market Wharf in Pictou was designated a National Historic Site in 1993 to commemorate its role as headquarters for the battalion.

One issue associated with commemorating No. 2 Construction Battalion is the fact that no operational history of the unit has been written.¹ The resurgent recognition of the battalion started in 1986 when Calvin Ruck published his history on the formation of the unit. Other works followed soon thereafter in academic journals.² Over the next 25 years, there would be generated both a Master's Thesis and a Bachelor's Thesis that examined aspects of the unit.³ The common thread throughout these modern works was that of the attempts by black Canadians to enlist. Some description was provided on the activities and working conditions of the battalion. However, the brevity of these works and the nature of the topic resulted in the omission of details about the unit's work.⁴ For a unit as celebrated as this one, it would seem appropriate that the commemoration not only be about the formation of the unit, but also about its achievements.

This article will provide an overview of the operational history of No. 2 Construction Battalion. The aim is to provide a sense of the work done by the unit, and hopefully, inspire others to pursue further research on the operational aspects of the unit. Of necessity, this article can only be a synopsis as a more detailed history would consume many more pages.



The men of No. 2 Construction Company helped operate the mills of the other forestry companies at La Joux. Note the French lady in the centre of the photo. Local civilians would have been regular visitors to the camp. Note also the horses (far right), the primary source of transportation for the CFC in this area.

Background

The starting point has to be battalion's duties while still garrisoned in Nova Scotia, even before leaving for the United Kingdom (UK). As the men of No. 2 Construction Battalion were busy recruiting or training, the call was placed for them to remove railway tracks in western New Brunswick. Between January and early-March 1917, a company of 250 men removed railway rails from the Grand Trunk Railroad sidings at Edmundston, Napadogan (north of Fredericton), and Moncton, from whence it was shipped for use by the railway troops in France.⁵ By the time the company returned to Truro, the unit was preparing to deploy to the UK.

No. 2 Construction Battalion arrived in Liverpool on 7 April 1917, having been transported from Halifax on the *S.S. Southland*, a ship operating under the White Star-Dominion Line.⁶ Unit personnel made their way to Seaford, which was to be their home for the next five weeks. On arrival at Seaford, one of the first things to happen was that the unit was placed under quarantine for ten days. This was normal for all newly-arrived units and men to allow for the detection of any contagious diseases and to prevent their spread.⁷ Being quarantined did not mean being inactive. They were soon employed on work parties and were digging trenches for troops in training. They also built and maintained roads within the base.⁸ With Seaford being a major Canadian base and one that would soon expand, this work was necessary.

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Around 1 May 1917, they also formed a permanent air picket in case of air raids. Britain had earlier been subject to Zeppelin attacks and, anticipating that a series of attacks could occur in the relatively near future, the chief constable for the area had begun appropriate preparations in March 1916.⁹ The possibility of being called to action so soon after arrival in England would likely have stirred the hearts of many members of the company, especially those who had been rejected for service in CEF infantry battalions, but now found themselves potentially on a front line. However, the zeppelins did not show up. And as did many other CEF units in England, they planted potatoes as a supplement to the regular food supplies.¹⁰ Thus, for the period in which No. 2 Construction Battalion served in the UK, their activities were not much different than what would be considered for other construction or labour units.

While all this was happening openly, behind the scenes, there was much activity that most soldiers did not see, particularly with respect to the employment and size of the unit. The British War Office would not send an under-strength battalion to France. Therefore, the solution was to use a British labour company establishment as the model. This initiative provided a blueprint establishment of nine officers and 495 other ranks.¹¹

To the Continent

On 17 May, the newly renamed and redesignated No.2 Construction Company left Folkestone for Boulogne, France. The company arrived at Jura at 1:00 AM on 20 May, having had one ‘hearty’ meal at Abbeville on the 18th and only one meal on the following day.¹² Jura is a Department (district) in the foothills of the French Alps, west of Lac Lemman, on which the Swiss city of Lausanne is located. For Canadian purposes, Jura was part of No. 5 District, Canadian Forestry Corps (CFC), a relatively new district for the CFC in France. The District itself had only begun to receive its first companies at La Joux, a small community in the Jura Department, a few weeks before the arrival of No. 2 Construction Company.

On arrival at La Joux, one of the first things to happen was for the company to be placed in quarantine for ten days due to a case of measles. This did not mean that the men of No. 2 Construction Company did not work – this they did. On the 22nd, 300 of them were working – felling trees, cutting logs, hauling them to the mill and then doing the millwork. To this was soon added preparing the finished wood products for shipment, and carrying out the shipping operations.¹³ These wood products included railway ties, and board and stakes for use in the trenches.

There was more to their work than just assisting in logging operations. An important requirement for any camp is water. No. 2 Construction Company was responsible for ensuring the camp, shared with the Forestry Companies, had an adequate water supply for cooking, drinking, and washing for over 1,300 men,

and more importantly, for use in the mills. Getting the water to the camp meant supervising the water stations with their pumps and ensuring the lines were not damaged or leaking as the water was moved by a series of pumps up a rise of 1,500 feet.¹⁴ When a power plant was installed and began operations in January 1918 to provide electricity for the camp, it was the men of No. 2 Construction Company who operated and maintained it. The plant provided 125 volts/80 amps DC, and was fed by a small boiler in the washroom.¹⁵

Transportation was one of the main roles for No. 2 Construction Company, transporting the logs from the forests, down the logging roads to the mills, and then bringing the finished products to the railroad junction. The area in which the men of No. 2 operated was not easy terrain for mechanized operations. Heavy rainfall in the summer washed away logging roads or left them rutted, while snow made the roads very slippery in the winter. Further, the narrowness and steepness of these logging roads were beyond the capabilities of the vehicles then in use. Horses were the answer, and they were used in large number in the La Joux area. Similarly, the roads to the railhead were also affected by the rain and snow. Therefore, continual road maintenance was necessary.¹⁶

Most of the horses allocated to the CFC were either old or Category “B” animals. Already in poorer condition, these horses had suffered from work-related injuries, debility from overwork, and neglected grooming that facilitated the spread of the mange. By the end of the war, most of these animals were in such condition that they could not be resold as farm or transport animals, but were deemed fit only to be killed and used for human consumption.¹⁷



It is unknown if No. 2 Construction Company at La Joux used mechanical or horse power. However, if it was horse power, the logging railway would have looked similar to this.

No. 2 Construction Company likely possessed between 70 and 100 horses. They made the best of their poor steeds, keeping them well-shod and groomed. The horses were regularly inspected by veterinarians of the Canadian Army Veterinary Corps (CAVC), while a sergeant from the CAVC was attached to the unit to ensure daily inspections and first aid treatment of the animals. Of the nine forestry districts of the CFC in France, only No. 5 had a dipping tank into which horses could be soaked in a calcium sulphide solution to control the mange.¹⁸ Grooming after work was important for the health of the horses as they could have picked up ticks and other insects while in the forest. This would have been done by the horse-handlers at the end of the work day and was serious enough that if it was not done or done properly, a soldier could be charged for failing to groom properly, or with mistreating the animals. This was the case with at least two soldiers of No. 2 Construction Company.¹⁹

Having moved the logs to the mills, it was now the company's responsibility to move the finished products to the railhead. This they did by maintaining the roads and driving the trucks that carried the lumber. About 100 men were employed on roadwork, operating a rock-crusher, a steam drill, a steam roller, and trucks. As Lieutenant-Colonel Sutherland noted, "the roads were kept in a good state of repair where the heavy traffic demanded the best roads possible."²⁰ For over a year, No. 2 Construction Company kept the roads functional until No. 833 Area Employment Company arrived in August 1918 to take over this duty.²¹

As production started to ramp up at La Joux, it soon became obvious that the supply of logs was insufficient to meet the capabilities of the four mills located there. Horses, although strong

and inexpensive, could not move the necessary number of logs, while the trucks could not manage the roads. Logging railways had operated in North America for over 50 years, and so the example existed for an alternate means of transport. The decision was made at higher levels that a rail line should be built that ran from the timber lots towards La Joux. A detachment from No. 22 Company and fifty men from No. 2 Construction Company built a two-mile long, 24 inch gauge railroad from Le Glacier, south-southeast of La Joux Station. The construction continued through September.²² It is unknown to what extent the men of No. 2 Construction Company operated the finished railway. However, Lieutenant-Colonel Sutherland indicated that they did operate it.²³

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The variety and diversity of the work accomplished can be seen in where the men of No. 2 Construction Company were employed in February 1918, when the unit strength was 257 men, two large contingents having been detached in November and December 1917. Thirty were employed as teamsters, 50 in the various mills, 50 in bush operations, 30 in shipping, 15 as cooks, 20 in other district employment and the rest in miscellaneous tasks.²⁴ The last included the less glamorous work that had to be done such as mess duties and piquet duty at the main gate.

The effort to produce more wood products was continual, and one to which the men of No. 2 Construction Company were co-opted. The small size of each forestry company meant that they could not operate their mills for more than one 12 hour shift. For most of the month of June 1917, No. 2 Construction Company provided a night crew of about 65 men to operate the local mill.²⁵ In January 1918, a letter from No. 5 District CFC, which called for greater output, was read to the men. This meant that the unit



DND/ Carte postale 13

The railhead at nearby La Joux was the loading point for the wood products produced at the local CFC mills. While there are members of No. 2 Construction Company and of the Canadian Forestry Corps companies in this photo, it was the men of No. 2 who did most of the transportation of the finished products.

would be working nights and Sundays.²⁶ The Sunday effort did give them some respite, as work did not commence until after the church service, instead of at the normal 7:00 AM.²⁷ In these efforts, they assisted No. 21 Company, CFC in setting a record of over 95,000 Board Measures cut in 10 hours.²⁸ The letter from CFC asking for greater output was obviously taken to heart, and the record production showed the level of co-operation between No. 2 Construction Company and the forestry companies they supported. The men of No. 2 had to ensure that there were ample logs ready to be cut and brought forward quickly.

Not all the effort and thought was put towards production. On 6 December 1917, the *SS Mont Blanc* collided with the *SS Imo* in Halifax Harbour. The resulting explosion leveled much of Halifax and Dartmouth. It did not take long before the word reached the men of 2 Construction Company, a large proportion of whom were from the Halifax area, or had family residing there. There was a great amount of anxiety on 8 December, but even more when the extent of the damage became known.²⁹ Major Sutherland made immediate inquiries as to casualties among family members, while a relief fund started at No. 5 District for relatives of Halifax explosion. It must have seemed a miracle to the men of the company when, on Christmas Day, they received a message from Colonel H.F. MacLean that no such casualties had been reported.³⁰

The speed with which the news of the Halifax explosion reached the ears of the men of No. 2 Construction Company demonstrated that despite the distance, and what by modern standards were not very rapid communications, the men of the Company were not isolated. News, as they say, travels fast. The actions upon hearing the news of the explosion also demonstrated that events at home had an effect on the troops in France. Although both of the above conclusions seem intuitive, it is worth noting as the men at La Joux were in a remote region of France, and at the end of a long postal and communications chain.

Other members of the Company found means of amusing themselves, or at least, demonstrating a *lack of or difficulty in* adjusting to military discipline. Within a short time of arriving in La Joux, a number of the members had already made names for themselves by appearing in front of Major Sutherland. Some of these defaulters were put to work building a log cabin jail as a reminder of what would happen if they continued in their errant ways.³¹ However, the behaviour did not improve, and in September 1917, CFC Headquarters in France decided to send them closer to the front lines where their labour could be used, and hopefully, where greater discipline could be instilled.³²

On 12 November 1917, one officer and 54 other ranks from 2 Construction Company were attached to 37 Company, CFC, which was operating near Peronne in northeast France, arriving there on 14 November.³³ Here, their work consisted of manual labour, such as cutting logs, moving them to the mills, and keeping the roads repaired, these activities thus being very similar to what they had been doing at La Joux.

During the German spring offensive that commenced on 21 March 1918, 37 Company was in the path of the German advance, and some shells fell in the area of the camp. On 23 March, they were forced to leave Forêt de Bias, and ordered to leave their lumber, machinery, and mill intact.³⁴ All important parts for the machinery were buried, and 22 wagons were loaded

with the most important stores. They marched out of camp at 5:00 PM with the Germans then only about 2,000 yards away.³⁵ On 25 March, they took over the mill at Wail and began operations the next day. By August 1918, there were only 37 of the original 54 personnel remaining from 2 Construction Company. Some had actually changed their recidivist ways, while others had not.

A second major detachment of company personnel was sent to serve in northern France at the end of 1917. They were sent there when the medical officer in Jura initiated a process, since he believed the men from the United States and the West Indies could not handle the winter in Jura, at the base of the Alps. He therefore suggested they be sent to warmer climes.³⁶ As may be imagined, his beliefs were unfounded, the proof arising when the rain and damp weather of November 1917 gave way to the cold dry weather in December, and the 'southern' enlistees had no trouble adapting to the new temperatures. However, by this time, the decision had been made to transfer these soldiers, and CFC Headquarters in France would not request a reversal, since it would have made both themselves and the medical officer who initiated the transfer appear ridiculous.³⁷

On 30 December 1917, a detachment of 180 men led by two officers left La Joux for No. 1 District, CFC, with its headquarters at Alençon. They arrived there on 31 December near midnight.³⁸ The men were then broken up, with one group joining No. 38 Company, CFC, at Andaine, with whom they remained for the rest of the war.³⁹ Another group was attached to No. 54 Company, CFC, operating at Bois Pelay. They remained with No. 54 until 25 May 1918. When No. 54 Company moved to Forêt de Senonches, the detachment was also transferred, now becoming attached to No. 42 Company at L'Évêque.⁴⁰ A further group of men served with No. 43 Company, CFC, at Les Sausseux, in all probability from mid-1918.⁴¹

As with the detachment at 37 Company, these men performed manual labour, helping the forestry companies they supported produce and ship their timber products. When the decision was made to start demobilizing No. 2 Construction Company, these men, along with those from No. 37 Company, were recalled at the same time.

When No. 2 Construction Battalion left for France, it left behind 89 of its men in England where they would become part of the Nova Scotia Regiment.⁴² For most of these soldiers, they spent their time doing menial work in between periods of infantry training, being posted between No. 17 Reserve Battalion and No. 26 Reserve Battalion. In late March, a group of 50 was sent to join their parent unit in La Joux as reinforcements, arriving on 8 April. They were followed on 6 June with a further 17 members.⁴³ These troops were sorely needed, as the number of men in the company at La Joux had been steadily declining, due to injury and illness. By February 1918, the complement at La Joux was just 257, which was not enough to provide all the manpower required to support four forestry companies.⁴⁴

Of those remaining at Seaford, some joined CFC companies in England and France. Twelve were posted in October 1918 to No. 7 Company and to No. 8 Company CFC, six to each, where they participated in the construction of airfields for Lord Trenchard's Independent Air Force.⁴⁵ Only a few of No. 2 Construction Battalion's 600+ men were to see combat.



The black soldiers of No. 2 Construction Company worked alongside their white compatriots at La Joux, as illustrated in this photo.

One of these was Private R.G. Bonnette, who first served with the Canadian Veterinary Corps before being transferred to the 10th Battalion, where he was shot in the chest on 2 September 1918.⁴⁶

It had been the desire of many black Canadians to fight against the Germans. This apparently remained a desire of many if not most of the members of No. 2 Construction Company while they were in France. However, as previously noted, only a few were able to do so, although the men attached to 37 Company came very close to combat. For the men at La Joux, the opportunity was more fleeting.

As mentioned earlier, on 21 March 1918, the Germans launched their massive Spring Offensive. With the approval of the Quartermaster General, the CFC in France prepared to form two 800-man battalions for a reserve unit, issuing orders for each district to begin squad and musketry drill for all ranks in their spare time.⁴⁷ Both the offer and the preparations were a bit premature. The General Officer Commanding the Canadians in London did not approve the plan, while the Canadian Corps indicated they did not have the transport available for these men, but they could be used for digging trenches in rear areas. Further, both commands indicated that the men of the Forestry Corps could not be spared from their forestry duties.⁴⁸

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The hopes of 2 Construction Company were raised that they may become involved in the fighting as they followed the progress of the German advance with “intense interest.” Major Sutherland sent a telegram to the Director of Timber Operations, stating in part, “...will you please recommend my unit which is organized for construction work for transfer to the Western front.” It would be almost a month before a reply was received. It stated simply that it was “not expedient at present time” to detach the company away from their work.⁴⁹ Despite this rejection and the often contradictory messages being sent down from headquarters, No. 2 Construction Company conducted military training during the week and on Sundays including rifle drill and training in nearby French trenches, all the while continuing their timber work.⁵⁰ This continued into June by which time all threats from the German advance had passed, as did hopes of seeing combat.

One aspect of No. 2 Construction Company’s efforts that has gone unnoticed was their supervision of Russians who were attached to the Company as labourers. In

April 1916, the first Russian brigade arrived in France, having left Moscow on 3 February. They went on to fight with the French Army. However, after news of the February 1917 Revolution, followed by a mutiny among a large number of the men that lasted from June to early September, they were deemed to be unsuitable for combat, and some were transferred to work with the CFC

in France.⁵¹ This was thus to be a difficult task as the Russians No. 2 Construction Company had to supervise included mutineers who had railed against the established order.

The first Russians destined for service with No. 2 Construction Company arrived in January 1918. It soon became obvious that this was a very mixed group in terms of character, politics, and suitability for the work. In mid-March, 22 were sent to Reims considered as “unfit,” while a number of others were actually considered “useless.”⁵² Unfortunately, what “unfit” meant is not stated, whether it was a medical categorization, or related to other issues. The posting out of 22 soldiers may have reduced the number of *problem children*, but it did not eliminate the *problem*.

By April 1918, there were 100 Russians attached to No. 2 Construction Company,⁵³ and some of these men were busy spreading “socialistic doctrine.” By 16 May, issues with the quality of their work and political agitation had reached the point where an armed guard from No. 2 Construction Company had to be placed over 56 “malcontents” in one hut. They were still under guard at the end of the month.⁵⁴ Regrettably, there is not enough detail to state whether they refused to leave the hut, or if they had been confined there. By the time No 2 Construction Company left La Joux for the UK in December, there were 150 Russians attached to the unit, who were then taken on strength by No. 40 Company.

On 11 November 1918, the armistice came into effect. On 30 November, the CFC ordered that 1000 “low category men” and No. 2 Construction Company were to be returned to the UK for demobilization.⁵⁵ Over the next months, the men of the Construction Battalion were shipped back to Canada, and over time, their legacy was forgotten. In November 1919, Lieutenant-Colonel Sutherland indicated that he was anxious to have the identity of No. 2 Construction Battalion preserved by making it an active militia unit organized from black Canadians.⁵⁶ However, this was not to be, as units of the Canadian Forestry Corps and Canadian Railway Troops were not continued after the war, and hence, there was no unit to carry on their legacy.

Until Calvin Ruck brought the contribution of No. 2 Construction Battalion to the public’s attention in 1986, the only celebration of their wartime effort occurred in Toronto in 1926, when a plaque was unveiled at the Provincial Legislature. The event was inspired by the 76th annual general convention of the British Episcopal Church, which was held at that time, bringing in blacks from across Canada and the United States. Premier Howard Ferguson took time out from his duties to attend, and he advised the more than 200 black attendees that the members of the battalion had a right to be proud of the part they had played during the war.⁵⁷



Dept. of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/PA-022752

La Joux had men of various nationalities working there. Here, Russian soldiers are mingling with the men of No. 2 Construction Company and other military services.



Although there are no known photos of the camp of No. 2 Construction Company after they built wooden huts, their lodgings would have been similar to those of a CFC company at La Joux.

Conclusion

No. 2 Construction Battalion has been celebrated as Canada's only all-black unit.⁵⁸ This was to be the last major segregated unit in the Canadian military, since the militia in the inter-war period became integrated, and government policy prevented segregated units from being formed during the Second World War. Its men supported three major forestry operations in various skilled and unskilled capacities, demonstrating that they were ready to serve in whatever manner was required.

The men of the Battalion also put their skills to good use, operating boilers, pumps, rock crushers and other pieces of what was considered complicated equipment at the time. They maintained and operated vehicles and railway equipment, and they employed and cared for their horses. These may not seem like great skills in today's world, but they were of considerable value at the turn of the last century. Their work was also of great value, providing railway ties to keep supplies moving to the front, as well as boards and stakes for use in the trenches. It was of enough value that the military commands did not want to disrupt the flow of these supplies, even when the need for combat manpower was great.

The men of No. 2 Construction Battalion should be celebrated, not just for a government decision that created their unit, but for their contribution to the war effort. While they may have wanted to make a more direct contribution, their efforts and those of all the men working behind the front lines, provided the support the men at the front needed to help defeat the Germans.



NOTES

1. A brief history had appeared in a 1920 compilation of Nova Scotia's part in the First World War, but this was soon forgotten. M. Stuart Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War* (Halifax, N.S.: The Nova Scotia Veteran Publishing Co. Ltd., 1920), p. 150. Hunt's work provides a brief overview of the province's units and their activities. The section on No. 2 Construction Battalion contains some details not mentioned in the unit's war diary. These details should be considered as accurate as Hunt had access to many individuals who would have had first-hand knowledge of the war effort of Nova Scotia's units. In fact, in the preface, Hunt thanks Lieutenant-Colonel D.H. Sutherland for having contributed to the book. Preface, x.
2. Calvin Ruck, *The Black Battalion, 1916-1920: Canada's Best Kept Military Secret* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Ltd., 1987); John G. Armstrong, "The Unwelcome Sacrifice: A Black Unit in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1917-19" in *Ethnic Armies: Polyethnic Armed Forces from the Time of the Habsburgs to the Age of the Superpowers*, N.F. Dreisziger (Ed) (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1990), pp. 178-197; and James W. St.G. Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," in *Canadian Historical Review*, Volume LXX, No. 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 1-26.
3. Sean Flynn Foyn, *The Underside of Glory: African Canadian Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1917* (Master of Arts Dissertation, University of Ottawa, 1999), and Danielle Pitman, *Moving Mountains: The No. 2 Construction Battalion and African Canadian Experience During the First World War* (Bachelor of Arts Dissertation, Mount Saint Vincent University, N.S., April 2012).
4. See, for instance Armstrong, Pitman, and Walker at previous references.
5. Hunt, p. 149. He indicates that this was the only volunteer unit to engage in any work prior to proceeding overseas.
6. The ship was launched in 1900 as the *S.S. Vaderland*, operating for the Red Star Line on the Antwerp-New York run. Converted into a troop ship at the start of the war, she was renamed *Her Majesty's Troopship (HMT) Southland* in 1915 to avoid having a German-sounding name. Initially carrying CEF members to the UK under the operation of the White Star-Dominion Line, she saw service in the Aegean Sea (Gallipoli Campaign), where on 2 September 1915, she was torpedoed by UB-14. After being beached and then repaired, she returned to service in August 1916. On 4 June 1917 she was again torpedoed, this time by U-70, and sunk off the coast of Ireland with the loss of four lives.
7. Hunt, p. 150.

8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, and Kevin Gordon, *Seaford and Eastbourne in the Great War* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Swords Books Ltd, 2014), p. 105.
10. Library and Archives Canada (LAC), War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 17 May 1917. Routine Order issued by Headquarters and found in *Canadian Routine Orders, Volume 1* have a number of entries that demonstrate the importance of gardens. For example, Routine Order 4250, 25 June 1918 allowed Officers Commanding to use the lettuce, radish, and spring onions grown in unit gardens to supplement the diet of the unit. Root vegetables that were to be stored could be saved in straw, for which indents could be made from their own stores officer – Routine Order 2655, 13 October 1917. A warning was also issued about carefully peeling potatoes to avoid wasting too much of them – Routine Order 2561, 28 September 1917.
11. LAC, RG 9, III-A-1 Volume 8, File 10-9-40; Letter, Chief of the General Staff, OMFC to Col G.S. Harrington, D<. OMFC 12 April 1919, and Letter, Lieutenant-Colonel D.H. Sutherland to Sir George Perley, 27 April 1917. One result of the establishment change was that Lieutenant-Colonel Sutherland had to accept a reduction in rank to major if he wished to remain with the unit.
12. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 17-20 May 1917.
13. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 21 and 23 May, 1917; and Hunt, p. 151.
14. Hunt, *Ibid.*
15. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 8 January 1918.
16. LAC, War Diary, No. 5 District, 28 June 1917.
17. Cecil French, *A History of the Canadian Army Veterinary Corps in the Great World War, 1914-1919*, C.A.V. Barker and Ian K. Barker (Eds.), (Guelph, ON: Crest Books, 1999), pp. 82-83. By the end of the war, cattle had been so reduced in number that horses were substituted as a form of meat intake for many French civilians.
18. French, pp. 82, 83, and LAC, War Diary, No. 5 District. See, for example, entries for 16 June and 8 July 1918, where all horses in the La Joux area were inspected. The dipping tank was built at the instigation of Capt W.F.R. Stubbs of the CAVC, and was likely assembled by 2 Construction Company, although this cannot be positively confirmed.
19. See personnel file of 931198 W. Allison, who was charged with failing to properly groom his horse, while 931609 W. Douglas, was charged with mistreating the horses. The personnel files are available at the LAC, about half of which can be downloaded from the LAC website at <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>
20. Hunt, p. 151.
21. LAC, War Diary, Canadian Forestry Corps Headquarters, France, entry for 18 August 1918
22. Hunt, p. 151; LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, June, July and September 1917; and LAC, War Diary, No. 5 District, 3 July 1917.
23. Sutherland's comments are in Hunt, p. 151.
24. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 1 February 1918.
25. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 1 June 1917. The normal establishment of a Forestry Company was about 170 other ranks.
26. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 14 January 1918.
27. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 26 January 1918.
28. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 30 January 1918.
29. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 8 and 13 December 1917.
30. LAC, War Diary, No. 5 District, 20 December 1917; LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 25 December 1917.
31. Armstrong, pp. 188-189.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
33. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 12 November 1917; and Hunt, p. 151. Hunt provides the date of 9 October. However, this should be considered an error, as the war diary would provide the more exact date. The men were attached to No. 37 Company, but were not part of the unit. They still belonged to No. 2 Construction Company.
34. LAC, War Diary, Canadian Forestry Corps Headquarters, France, 23 March 1918.
35. LAC, RG 9, III-C-8, Volume 4499, 37 Company folder, H.S. 7-D-37-1, Narrative of 21 to 23 March 1918.
36. Armstrong, p. 191.
37. Summarized in Armstrong, "The Unwelcome Sacrifice," pp. 191-192. Greater detail of the process, which started in November 1917, can be found in LAC, RG 9, III-C-8, Volume 4516.
38. LAC, War Diary, No. 1 District Headquarters, Central Group, Canadian Forestry Corps, 31 December 1917 and 1 January 1918; LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 28 and 30 December 1917; and Hunt, p. 151. As with the men sent to support No. 37 Company, these 150 men were never *part* of any unit of No. 1 District, but were *attached* to these units. This was similar to the way that units of the Chinese Labour Corps were attached to the Forestry Corps.
39. See personnel file of 931209 Julian Sullivan, who was struck off strength of No. 38 Company on 9 February 1918, at which time he proceeded to hospital. 931502 John Sullivan, was charged with being absent without leave on 22 February 1918. He served with No. 38 Company until at least September 1918 and he was admitted to hospital in the UK on 5 September while on leave.
40. LAC, War Diary, No. 1 District Headquarters, 25 May, 30 June 1918.
41. Personnel Files 931836 Harry Franklin Suttles and 931287 Frank Bennett.
42. LAC, RG 9, III-A-1, Volume 8, File 10-9-40, Letter Deputy Adjutant General to Minister, OMFC, 20 December 1917; and Routine Order 2055, 21 July 1917, Headquarters, *Canadian Routine Orders, Volume 1*
43. LAC, War Diary, Canadian Forestry Corps Headquarters, France, 3 April 1918 notes that 50 OR reinforcements for 2 Construction Company arrived from England. War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 8 April and June 1918.
44. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 1 February 1918.
45. LAC, RG150, Volume 191, Folder No. 7 Company, CFC and Volume 192, Folder 8 Company, CFC. The daily orders for both units have a nominal roll as well as attachments and detachments. The soldiers from No. 2 Construction Battalion were identified by their service numbers, as well as being compared to the Battalion's March 1917 sailing list.
46. Personnel file of 931404 R.G. Bonnette. He transferred to the 10th Battalion on 6 February 1918.
47. LAC, War Diary, Canadian Forestry Corps Headquarters, France, 10 and 11 April 1918. The two CFC battalions were to form a brigade with a Royal Engineer battalion and be placed under the command of Lord Lovat, who was the Director of Timber Operations in France.
48. LAC, War Diary, Canadian Forestry Corps Headquarters, France, 13 and 15 April 1918.
49. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 25 March, 3 and 29 April 1918
50. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 5, 12 and 18 May, 1 June 1918
51. G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (Ottawa: Roger Duhamel, Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1962), p. 500. Some Russians remained loyal and continued to fight with the French forces.
52. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, February, 22 March 1918.
53. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, April 1918.
54. LAC, War Diary, No. 2 Construction Company, 2 April, 16, 31 May 1918.
55. LAC, War Diary, Canadian Forestry Corps Headquarters, France, 30 November and 2 December 1918.
56. Canadian Armed Forces, Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), 74/672, Box 19, Folder 12, Note - H.Q. 462-16-1, Volume 2, Folio 73. The meeting took place in Halifax on 21 November 1919. On returning to Canada, Lieutenant-Colonel Sutherland's rank was restored.
57. "Negro Soldiers of Britain Praised," in *Border Cities Star*, 18 September 1926.
58. No. 2 Construction Battalion was not the only all-black unit created in the First World War. The author has discovered at least one other unit composed of black soldiers and white officers that participated in the war in Europe. Further research is being conducted to gather the required information on the unit's officers, men, and activities.