

MEMORY COMES FROM THE FORGOTTEN: ANALYZING PHOTOGRAPHIC ALBUMS
CREATED BY CANADIAN MILITARY PERSONNEL FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR

By

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Abstract

This thesis evaluates four photographic albums created by Canadian military personnel who served in the First World War from 1914-1918, housed at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. The albums depict the personnel's time spent in overseas service during the First World War and reflect their personal representations of the conflict. The evaluation of these photographic albums supports the argument that stronger historical context, and in turn a stronger collective memory of the event, can be developed by deep exploration of how active Canadian military personnel of the war chose to remember the event through the subject matter depicted within their albums.

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1. Introduction

Present day historians view the First World War (July 1914 – November 1918) through hindsight, accessing archival materials both official and personal, in order to write the history of the conflict. Regardless of having access to personal archival materials created by the active participants, specifically photographic albums, there is a considerable gap in the literature regarding Canadian military personnel during the First World War. An in-depth analysis of photographic albums created by Canadian military personnel during 1914-1918 allows for a more socially driven view of this conflict. In addition to contributing to the general wartime history of the First World War, the albums bring to light the personal encounters, events, and memories of the personnel who created them and their experiences throughout the war.

The “memory” in this thesis can be best described as a collective memory¹; however, this term is used with caution. For the purpose of this analysis, when the term collective memory is used it shall be referring to the memory that has been preserved in the photographic albums of Canadian military personnel who served during the First World War. Photographic albums have been physically passed down within the families of the personnel, in some cases being donated to museums, archives and galleries. Now housed in public and educational institutions, several of these albums are now accessible to present-day examination and study, illuminating the participation of the Canadian military and providing new insights.

The Canadian War Museum (CWM) in Ottawa, Ontario is home to an approximate 11, 440 individual photographs and over 250 photographic albums depicting the events of the First

¹For an in-depth analysis of the term collective memory and its implications see James V. Wertsch and Henry L. Roediger, “Collective Memory: Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Approaches,” *Memory* 16, no. 3 (2008): 318-326, doi:10.1080/09658210701801434.

World War. These photographic objects have been frequently used by Canadian historians as illustrations to their histories of the war, however, they have not been the subject of “extensive academic exploration”.² By evaluating the content of photographs included within albums depicting Canadian military personnel’s experience of war, a more personal historical context can be found. This will assist in the development of Canadians’ collective memory of the First World War, keeping alive the memory of the personnel who served on behalf of Canada during conflict despite the expected deterioration of the photographic material over time. Institutions and researchers can ensure the stories do not vanish by recognizing the need for attention, both physical and academic, that these objects require.

This thesis will explore four photographic albums assembled by active Canadian military personnel from the First World War: two albums created by Second Lieutenant Garnet Montague Babbitt and one created by Lieutenant Ralph Gibson Adams, both of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, and one by Nursing Sister Ethel Francis Upton of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps. All four albums consist of photographs that were captured during the First World War. The images are a mix of official war photographs, press photographs, studio photographs and personal snapshots. This thesis considers the range in subject matter included in the albums and explores the factors behind those choices. Do the images in albums reflect the prevailing collective memory of the First World War as being only a dreary and tragic experience? Based upon the albums evaluated for this thesis, the answer is no. A large number of the photographs included within the albums reflect a positive experience during the war. This poses the question

²Former Curator of War Art at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Dr. Laura Brandon, makes this claim in her article “Words and Pictures: Writing Atrocity into Canada’s First World War Official Photographs,” *Journal of Canadian Art History* 31 no. 2 (2010): 110.

of what do photographic albums created by Canadian military personnel contribute to the collective memory of the First World War?

The literature review below will evaluate what has been written thus far about Canadian photography of the First World War, including photographic albums and military history alongside the memory of conflict. The remaining section of this thesis will be a contribution to the literature that has thus far been written, beginning with a brief history of photography that was carried out by Official War Photographers of Canada and Canadian personnel during 1914-1918. This will be followed by a review of policies of censorship on wartime photographic practices, both on an institutional and personal level. This will lead into an evaluation of what types of photographs were chosen by the three selected Canadian military personnel of the First World War. The categories I will be using to understand these individuals' depiction of their experiences of the war are: studio portraits, regimental group photographs, vernacular, local civilians, tourist sites, ruins/destruction, self/fellow personnel, military structures/equipment, and graves/memorials. The depiction of the personnel's individual experiences of the First World War, as illuminated within their photographic albums, will contribute to the concluding discussion on the role that the objects play in the collective memory and history of the war.

2. Literature Review

The literature on First World War photography is mostly written from British, French, or German points of view. There is only a small amount of literature that explores the involvement of Canada to this photographic history of the war. To thoroughly research the topic, one must consult not only the few sources regarding Canadian war photography that do exist, but also, sources on the broader topic of war photography. The next area of research to be analyzed is the creation of photographic albums. As there is a lack of literature specifically on Canadian military photography of the First World War there is also a lack of literature on photographic albums of war created by Canadian personnel. Therefore, one must conduct a more general study of private photographic albums as well as the available literature on military albums from the First World War of other countries. Finally, this literature review will also consider leading theories made by historians that study the subject of military history and memory. These histories, written by military historians specializing in the First World War and Canada's military role within it, provide the historical context needed when studying the photographic albums of Canadian military personnel. In turn, these photographic albums provide a greater comprehension of individual Canadians participation in the war.

2.1 Sources on Canadian War Photography of the First World War

One of the first essays on the topic of Canadian photography from the First World War was written by Andrew Rodger, an Archivist with the Documentary and Photography Division of National Archives of Canada. "Amateur Photography by Soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force" was published in *Archivaria* in 1988. Rodger used the Horace Brown collection at

Library and Archives Canada to argue that amateur photography shows an authentic depiction of the war through the eyes of the personnel themselves, even though the subject matter in comparison to the Official War Photographs appear to be similar.³ He claims that more attention to Canadian photography from the First World War needs to be addressed by archivists and historians in order to explore questions of who was taking the photographs of the war, how and why?

This thesis cannot respond comprehensively to all the questions posed by Rodger, however, the questions outlined in this article were taken into consideration when conducting the evaluation of photographs included within the albums of the CWM. By evaluating these albums and the types of photographs that their creators chose to include, a comparison can be made between the intent of the personnel themselves and how they chose to remember the war in comparison to the official narrative of the war created by the Canadian War Records Office.

Former Director of Collections at the Imperial War Museum in London, England, Jane Carmichael gives one of the most comprehensive guides to First World War photography in her book *First World War Photographers* (1989). The book is based on her research at the Imperial War Museum and its collection of over 5 million First World War photographs. Carmichael argues that by analyzing the origins and publication of photographs taken during the First World War, we can better understand how the images were perceived at the time, as well as the development of the visual record of the war. While Carmichael is reviewing British photography with an emphasis on Official Photography, if we consider Canada's affiliation with the British Commonwealth at this time, much of her historical perspective could be applied to the topic of

³ Andrew Rodger, "Amateur Photography by Soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Archivaria* 26 (1988): 164.

Canadian First World War photography.⁴ The breakdown of different types of photography being captured at the time of the war, such as personal photographs as opposed to official photography commissioned by governments, encourages a more straightforward approach when identifying these different types of photography within a collection. However, by amalgamating Canada's photographic contributions to the war with Great Britain's, the author has left a gap that needs to be considered in order to answer the questions Rodger posed previously in his article from a Canadian point of view.

Janina Struk, a well-known documentary photographer, writer and lecturer who specializes in the area of war photography, wrote the book *Private Pictures: Soldiers' Inside View of War* (2011) that explores the many different instances of soldiers producing their own photographic images throughout many different wars. In the chapter "Learning to Photograph War," Struk explores why soldiers would take photographs when they knew it was forbidden to do so, under the threat of court martial.⁵ Struk theorizes that the reason why soldiers photographed the harsh and gruesome facts of war was because by putting the camera lens between themselves and the scenes, it was as if there was an actual barrier between the two, and they were able to disassociate themselves from reality. She also argues that this might also be the reason why so many hid their war albums, because it was hard for them to look at the scenes that they had grown so accustomed to during times of war, and that now seemed so far away from their 'normal' civilian life.⁶ However, this does not answer the question of why the soldiers

⁴ While there were differences between the Canadian and British military during the First World War, with regards to the way photography was monitored and censored throughout the conflict, the countries were very similar. Because of this, much of the history of photography of the First World War can be interchangeable between Canada and Britain respectively.

⁵ Janina Struk, *Private Pictures: Soldiers' Inside View of War* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 21.

⁶ Struk, *Private Pictures*, 69.

included those images in their album in the first place, leaving another question open for further research.

Like Carmichael's approach of including personnel and official photography of the First World War within her publication, Ann Thomas, senior curator of photographs at the National Gallery of Canada, explored the diverse roles of photography in the First World War in her essay "World War I: The War of the Camera" in *The Great War: The Persuasive Power of Photography* (2014). The difference between Thomas' work and Carmichael's is that Thomas is taking a more emotive stance when exploring the topic of war photography during the First World War; whereas Carmichael approaches war photography with technical and instructional emphasis. Thomas begins her essay with the question: "In what ways are photographs capable of representing an experience as political, as complex, and as visceral as the First World War?"⁷ Her exploration discusses amateur, official and press photography throughout the war and the role these images played within Canadian lives both abroad in uniform, and to civilians on the home front. She claims that photographs are a way of looking into the lives of the individual soldiers and their experiences during the war. Thomas's emotive approach, evaluating the memories of the war encapsulated by the photographic evidence is transformative, and much different from the instructional approach that Carmichael had used twenty-five years before. In comparison, Thomas contemplated the photographs and their power to convey unique histories of the war according to the individual who took the photographs or compiled the images into albums of their own; Carmichael gave the collective history of the topic of photography during the First World War, where individual experiences and sentiment were not on the forefront of her

⁷ Ann Thomas, "World War I: The War of the Camera," in *The Great War: The Persuasive Power of Photography* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2014), 8.

findings. Both approaches to photographic practices of the First World War are necessary to provide a detailed history of the subject.

2.2 Sources on Photographic Albums

One cannot study the photographic album, whether it is of personal snapshots of a vacation or of photographs of war, without consulting Martha Langford's *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (2001). Dr. Langford is a professor of Art History at Concordia University in Montreal, specializing in the history of photography in Canada. This book analyzes 41 photographic albums, with creation dates ranging from 1860 to 1960 that are now housed in the McCord Museum of Canadian History. Langford uses these albums to teach the historian how to view an album not only as physical object, but as a method of remembering the event/person/place/thing photographed. While she does mention the importance of the physicality of the album itself, for instance, the way in which the photographs are cut and glued onto the pages, their sequential orders and captions, her focus is on appreciating the album as its own object. Lanford's analysis of photographic albums can be similarly applied to Canadian photographic war albums, as done in this thesis.

Justin Court, doctoral candidate in the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic at the University of Wisconsin-Madison evaluates personal photographic albums of German soldiers during the First World War in his essay "Picturing History, Remembering Soldiers: World War I Photography between the Public and Private" (2017). Court makes reference to Langford when discussing album's roles as a reminder to the reader to view it as a "mnemonic device for

storytelling”.⁸ He proceeds to argue that it is this link to memory that holds higher importance when researching photographic albums of this nature. Court claims that engagement with amateur, privately made photographic albums from soldiers can help foster what he calls a “empathetic connection” that causes a change in the meaning of the visual representation of the war via photographic illustrations, thus fostering a stronger effect on the contemporary understanding of the First World War.⁹ His article examines these photographic albums, and the amateur photographs within them in a way that can be seen throughout other sources in this review. While Court does not make direct reference to Janina Struk, both authors discovered themes of these amateur albums that can be seen across all sides of the war, both Allies (Serbia, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium and the United States) and the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire); these themes are people, destruction, and travel sites.¹⁰ This observation leads into the next subject of this literature review, where the concepts of conflict memory and histories will be analyzed.

2.3 Sources on Military History and Memory

The research question of this thesis, what do photographic albums created by Canadian military personnel contribute to the collective memory of the First World War, can be approached through the concepts of conflict memory and how these memories have been written

⁸ Justin Court referencing Martha Langford’s book *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 227 in his article “Picturing History, Remembering Soldiers: World War I Photography Between the Public and the Private,” *History & Memory* 29 no.1 (2017): 84.

⁹ Court, “Picturing History, Remembering Soldiers,” 72.

¹⁰ Court, “Picturing History, Remembering Soldiers,” 80.

into wartime histories. This is where the works of Jonathan Vance, Laura Brandon and Tim Cook will be used to develop an answer to this research question.

Dr. Jonathan F.W. Vance, distinguished university professor of military history, Canadian history, and social memory at Western University in London, Ontario, plays an integral role in the research being conducted, not only within this thesis but also in the works of many others. In his book *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (1997), Vance asserts that the construction of the “mythic version” of the First World War, is based on “mixture of fact, wishful thinking, half-truth, and outright intervention...”¹¹ He claims that literature, art, media and the like conveyed this ‘myth’ to people who did not directly experience the war in order to make sure Canadians ‘remembered’ the war the same way, whether they actively participated overseas or not. He argues that it is incorrect for present day historians (and the public) to assume that the current views of an event are the same as the views of that time. Trench warfare of the First World War is seen as an “appalling slaughter”, however, that does not mean that is how it was viewed in 1914-1918.¹²

Considering Vance’s claim, it would be useful for current day historians to write the history of the event with the aid of intense research into the ways in which the participants felt towards the war. This can be done by analyzing the ways in which personnel chose to remember the war through photographic albums. Vance draws from numerous source materials, which are for the most part literature; there is a lack of the use of photography as source material to better explain his position. This thesis seeks to fill the gap presented by the lack of discussion regarding

¹¹ Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia press, 1997), 3.

¹² Vance, *Death So Noble*, 4.

photographic albums as primary sources that provide intimate views into the lives of the personnel.

Dr. Laura Brandon was the Curator of War Art at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa from 1992 to 2015 and is an Adjunct Research Professor in the School for Studies in Art and Culture and in the History Department at Carleton University, Ottawa. Her book *Art or Memorial?: The Forgotten History of Canada's War Art* (2006) looks at why the collection at the CWM has been overlooked by the public, what war art is of merit to provide historical and cultural meaning and how war art has been collected from the First World War to the initiative taken by the Department of National Defence in 2001. She states "The book's conclusion is that the collection has functioned as an under-recognized war memorial or 'site of memory' but that the concern with the works as art has obscured their deeper, collective significance."¹³ Brandon does not make extensive reference to photographic works as being the art that is overlooked in *Art or Memorial?* However, in her article "Words and Pictures: Writing Atrocity into Canada's First World War Official Photographs" (2010) Brandon states in her introduction that the photography collection of the First World War at the CWM has yet to be the subject of any extensive academic exploration."¹⁴ In this thesis Brandon's theory outlined in her 2006 book regarding war art being overlooked and the collective significance undiscovered is applied to the photographic collection at the Canadian War Museum that she suggested needed further exploration in her 2010 article. By using her approach to the evaluation of art, in this case the medium of photography, I seek to provide insight into how these photographic albums influence the affect of the history of Canada's involvement in their First World War.

¹³ Laura Brandon, *Art or Memorial?: The Forgotten History of Canada's War Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary press, 2006), xiii.

¹⁴ Brandon, "Words and Pictures," 111.

In relation to this idea that photographs and photographic albums can aid Canadian historians in the process of writing histories of the First World War, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World's Wars* (2006) by historian at the Canadian War Museum and prominent author Tim Cook, is an exceptional source. Cook claims that "new" military historians are beginning to consider more 'social' aspects of the war within their histories; however, they must not forget the importance that lies behind the original military history topics such as "tactics, doctrine, weapon systems, military ethos, biography, discipline, command, and morale."¹⁵ This social aspect is similar to the ways in which Thomas uses photographs to consider the more personal experiences of the personnel. Cook prefaces this claim noting that it is not only the 'memory' of the active players of the wars that need to be considered when writing these histories, but also the historical foundations that have been laid by official histories like the Canadian War Records Office.¹⁶ It is then imperative to consider the 'memories' in the forms of photographs and albums in relation to the historical groundwork and records laid out by the Canadian War Records Office. Using both avenues of evidence will yield a more well-rounded history of the First World War.

This thesis explores in a more focused manner the collection that Brandon points out has been, for the most part, overlooked up until recently. Canadian historians have previously used photographs and albums of the First World War at the CWM alongside other source materials to illustrate histories that were formed elsewhere. This thesis will use these photographs and albums as the subjects of the history, rather than illustrations to accompany a separate narrative. The theories touched upon in this literature have been considered to formulate a methodology for

¹⁵ Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 258.

¹⁶ Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, 40.

evaluating these albums and prove that these evaluations can give a more accurate and deeper insight regarding the First World War, thus providing the historical context that is needed for the writing of a more complete history of the war.

3. Historical Analysis

This section seeks to answer the question: What do photographic albums created by Canadian military personnel contribute to the collective memory of the First World War? The answer to this question can be found through the exploration of the more specific questions:

1. Who took the photographs included in Canadian military personnel's albums?
2. What censorship occurred in the making and collecting of these images?
3. How did censorship effect which images were chosen to be included within the albums?

This analysis is intended to be used alongside "official histories"¹⁷ written about Canada's involvement in the First World War. It argues that a close examination of photographic albums created by active Canadian military personnel during 1914-1918 provide a personal view of the war that is imperative to writing and contemplating the history of the First World War.

3.1 Canadian Photography of the First World War

By 1914 photography was no longer limited to the professionals; it had become democratized by the world's camera companies and was now accessible to the general public.¹⁸

With the beginning of the First World War, companies like Kodak were offering their smaller,

¹⁷ "Official histories" defined as "...those authorized by an institution, group, or person, where the same agent agrees to support the project financially." Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, 4. Official histories of the First World War tend to be subjective and highly influenced by the sources provided by the CWRO that were so closely overseen by Lord Beaverbrook; therefore, it is important to consider source material that was not so heavily influenced by him and the CWRO, such as personal albums made by the personnel themselves. While there was a level of censorship overseen by the CWRO on the images themselves, the choice of inclusion and representation inside the albums were personal decisions made by the personnel.

¹⁸ By the onset of the First World War most Canadian soldiers knew how to take photographs and had access to their own small cameras to include in their kit. For more information please see Ann Thomas, "World War I: The War of the Camera," in *The Great War: The Persuasive Power of Photography* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2014).

more portable, and easier to use cameras towards military personnel. In one Kodak advertisement the slogan “Make the parting gift a Kodak” was used. This was referring to the Kodak Vest Pocket Camera that was marketed as ‘The Soldier’s Kodak Camera,’ as seen in Figure 1. It measured 2.5 x 6 x 12 cm in size which was extremely small for the time and came with a ‘military’ case that could be attached to a soldier’s belt. The small size of the camera and the 127mm rolled film is what made it so appropriate for use by soldiers, as opposed to early models of cameras that were large and used glass plates for negatives. Shortly thereafter Kodak invented the Autographic Camera, it was essentially the same as the Vest Pocket Camera, but now the user could include a caption upon the print by using a stylus to apply pressure on the sensitive paper between the film and backing after exposure.¹⁹



Figure 1: Canadian Kodak Co., Limited, Vest Pocket Kodak, Model B, ca. 1914-1934. Photograph taken by Vitor Pavao.

¹⁹ Struk, Private Pictures, 26.

The promise of ‘adventure’ and ‘travel’ with the participation of the war meant that Canadian personnel were more inclined to purchase these small cameras. Surely the new countries, with their different landscapes and historical sites, would make for great photographs. For those who were able to afford one, the Kodak Vest Pocket being the most popular, the camera was an essential part of their kit so they could record their experiences and send the photographs back home to their loved ones in Canada.²⁰ However, the British High Command was concerned that photography posed a threat to military intelligence if the photographs were to end up in the hands of the enemy. In 1914 the British Secretary of State, Lord Kitchener, invoked the Official Secrets Act from 1911 which threatened Court Martial to anyone caught carrying a camera in the British Army.²¹ Following suit, the Canadian Army created Routine Order 189, also in March 1915, that forbid the use of cameras by the soldiers for fear that important military intelligence would be exposed to the enemies.²² Despite these orders and the threat of Court Martial if one was found with a camera, Canadian soldiers continued to bring and use their cameras from 1915 to the end of the war.

While government and military officials of Canada concluded that photography was dangerous to war efforts regarding espionage, it was still recognized that photography could be a very useful tool in both military strategy and in documenting the war. In January 1916 Sir Max Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook, a Canadian born British member of Parliament, applied for a grant to create the Canadian War Record’s Office (CWRO) with the goal of collection, analysis, and collation of materials, photographic, cinematic, and textual in order to create a complete

²⁰ Thomas, “World War I: The War of the Camera,” 14.

²¹ Hilary Roberts, “Photography in the Great War,” in *The Great War: A photographic Narrative* edited by Mark Holborn (London: Jonathan Cape, 2013), 500.

²² Thomas, “World War I: The War of the Camera,” 14.

historical record of Canada's involvement with the war.²³ However, the publications created by the CWRO were often biased and painted a picture of the Canadian soldier that was idealized by Aitkens and how he wanted the public to view the war.²⁴

The first Official Photographer of Canada, Captain Harry Edward Knobel, was responsible for the first 650 negatives of the Canadian Official War Photographs until he had to step down due to illness in August of 1916.²⁵ Knobel was replaced by Lieutenant William Ivor Castle who was sent off to France to continue where Knobel had left off. It was later discovered that some of the images that Castle created were composites where he had forged together several different images he had taken, or were staged (fig. 2) in order to create the final product of a scene which he wished to portray.²⁶ This did not sit well with William Rider-Rider, then Assistant Official Canadian Photographer, who did not agree with Castle's methods. Instead, Rider-Rider used his knowledge of impending raids and attacks and traveled to the sites so that he could be present for the action and capture what he felt were more accurate photographs of the events. Rider-Rider is responsible for the official Canadian photographs of the attack on La Coulotte, Hill 70, Passchendaele, Cambrai, Amiens, Second Arras, Hindenburg Line, Valenciennes and entry into Mons; a total of 2500 photographs in the "O" series of the collection.²⁷

²³ Peter Robertson, "Canadian Photojournalism during the First World War," *History of Photography* 2, no. 1 (1978): 4.

²⁴ Tim Cook, "Documenting War and Forging Reproductions: Sir Max Aitken and the Canadian War Records Office in the First World War," *War in History* 10, no. 3 (2003): 285. See source for additional reading on Sir Max Aitken and the Canadian War Records Office.

²⁵ Robertson, "Canadian Photojournalism," 6.

²⁶ Robertson, "Canadian Photojournalism," 7.

²⁷ Robertson, "Canadian photojournalism," 11.



Figure 2: A Canadian Battalion goes over the top, CWM 19920044-776, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum. This photograph was staged by Castle and was not actually taken on the Front, rather at St. Pol training school.²⁸

Canadian official war photography was created to ensure there was a historical record of the war, as well as to persuade soldiers and civilians that the war was winnable and that their wartime efforts were for good reason and aided in the success of the Allies. This must be kept in mind when addressing photographic albums that contain these official images.

3.2 Censorship of Canadian War Photography in the First World War

The application of censorship to what was photographed as well as published for the public must also be considered in order to further evaluate the images that are present in photographic albums created by Canadian military personnel of the First World War. At the beginning of the First World War the threat photography posed was not yet fully realized by

²⁸ For a more in-depth evaluation of staged and composite photography take by Official Photographers of the First World War please see Martyn Jolly, “Composite Propaganda Photographs during the First World War,” *History of Photography* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 154–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2003.10443266>.

government and military officials. It was easier to take photographs and send them home if personnel gained approval from their commanding officer. Newspapers of the time looked to these photographs for their publications and would pay personnel for submitting them. If the regiments were not named, the location remained secret and the subject matter was deemed acceptable and not too gruesome, the photographs usually made it past the censor and were published in newspapers.²⁹ When Routine Order 189 was put in place and cameras were forbidden to military personnel, censorship tightened; however, the original concerns of regimental names, locations, and the question of subject matter, were still the focal points of the censorship of photography.

Despite cameras being made illegal on the Front in March 1915, photographs were still acquired by personnel either through the purchasing of official photographs, or personally taken snapshots. Often military personnel wished to send these photographs back home to their loved ones in Canada. Officers read their subordinates' letters before they could be sent to ensure nothing was revealed that could help the enemy or damage the morale back home in Canada. However, some Officers grew tired of censoring letters and overlooked their job requirement to avoid invading the privacy of the personnel.³⁰ Personnel could avoid such censorship from their commanding Officers by sending the photographs via green envelopes that were extremely rare to procure and were only issued once or twice a month. Green envelopes allowed the personnel to write home without the immediate threat of censorship, however, they could be subject to the censor under suspicious circumstances.³¹

²⁹ Jane Carmichael, *First World War Photographers* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1989), 31.

³⁰ Cook, *The Secret History of Soldiers*, 172-173.

³¹ Cook, *The Secret History of Soldiers*, 173.

Censors were set up throughout Europe so that photographs taken by personnel and civilians alike could not progress to the destination without a stamp of approval.³² There are cases mentioned by Canadian military personnel writing home to their loved ones in Canada where the personnel ask if the family member received the photographs that accompany their letters and make direct references to the censor for being the reason why they were not delivered. For instance, in a letter by Bertram Howard Cox to Mable on January 21, 1917, Cox inquired “Did you receive the photo? Ella’s was returned by the censor.”³³ However, Cox’s question to Mable as to whether she had received the photograph indicates that there was not absolute consistency in the censorships of the photographs being sent back home to Canada.

In other letters from Canadian personnel of the First World War writing home to their loved ones about the ‘snaps’ and portrait photography of themselves while serving abroad, the images described are of overwhelmingly positive nature. In a letter by John Sudbury, a soldier from Montreal, he explains that he had written an eight-page letter to back home, however after re-reading it he decided to destroy the letter and write a new one “on account of its gloom.”³⁴ It can be deduced that individuals did not want to inflict the negative experience of war upon their loved ones back home in Canada, as well as on their future selves, through the choice in what photographs they chose to include in their photographic albums depicting the conflict.

The censor also dictated the Canadian official photography that was used and included in press publications. Official Photographers were allowed on the Front; however, they were

³² Thomas, “World War I: The War of the Camera,” 14.

³³ Bertram Howard Cox to Mabel, Letter, Whitley Camp, January 21, 1917, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-41689>.

³⁴ John P. Sudbury to Mother, Letter, July 13, 1916, Canadian Letters and Images Project, https://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-2497?position=20&list=9xRp2fSjKU9Oau5gHOM3q_jsZwc3gPcvHM7VxLw24_8.

limited to what they could photograph. For example, roll call images of regiments were preferred, actual fighting scenes that could potentially feature a dead Canadian or Allied soldier were advised against.³⁵ Images depicting death that were displayed in the illustrated press were that of the enemy and not that of the Allies. Even so, the bodies were often shapeless, and their faces were not shown. This was done strategically because the death of the enemies was not relatable as they were perceived as foreign by the reader; also it was to signify the victory of Canada and the Allies.³⁶ Eventually, the photographs of the dead were eliminated from inclusion in the British and Commonwealth Press, and in their place, photographs of ruined landscapes, the trench systems, and shell crater fields were published. These images were preferred for the magazines and newspapers because they instilled a sense of shock to the viewer. Many images were of neutral scenes that, while still depicting the brutalism of the war, were not as gruesome, and so invoked a more favourable response by the civilians back home in Canada, as desired by the CWRO.³⁷

3.3 Inside the Albums of Canadian Military Personnel

Both Struk and Court have written literature on the topic of military personnel's photographic albums of the First World War and describe similar content regardless of the country the creators were serving for. The photographs within the albums are often a mixture of personal, professional studio portrait, press photography, and official photographs. One can

³⁵ Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 30.

³⁶ Joëlle Beurier, "Death and Material Culture: The Case of Pictures During the First World War," in *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War*, Edited by Nicholas J. Saunders, 109-21 (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2004), 110.

³⁷ Beurier, "Death and Material Culture," 117.

categorize the photograph by the format, posing, and subject matter of the image. For example, professional studio portraits are usually of personnel in rigid poses with artificial or plain backdrops. This is in comparison to the informal poses of personnel in the trenches, or in villages on leave that can presumably be taken by the personnel themselves.

After reviewing 250 photographic albums created by Canadian military personnel during the First World War housed at the CWM the themes described by Struk and Court, personage, destruction and ruins, and travel sites are found in every album.³⁸ More specifically, the subjects of the photographs can all fit into one of the following categories: studio portraits, regimental group photographs, vernacular³⁹, local civilians, tourist sites, ruins/destruction, self/fellow personnel, military structures/equipment and graves/memorials.

I have chosen four albums to be subjects of exploration for the means of this study that house examples of these images, three created by members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force and one created by a Nursing Sister of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps. All three personnel served on the Western Front, where the Canadian Army was heavily concentrated during 1914-1918.

Two albums were created by Second Lieutenant Garnet Montague Babbitt, born in Trenton Ontario in 1890, who served with the 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles until he was wounded in 1916. After six weeks in convalescence Babbitt served with the 22nd Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers, Tyneside Scottish where he was promoted to Second Lieutenant in 1917. The albums were acquired by the CWM as a donation from Babbitt's family, exemplifying

³⁸ Bodo Von Dewitz, "German Snapshots from World War I: Personal Picture Political Implications," In *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2012), 154.

³⁹ "Vernacular photographs represent the visual culture of everyday life, sometimes poignant and creative but more often banal and utilitarian." Geoffrey Batchen, *Vernacular Photography* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014) 1. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T2254188>.

the importance that was placed on the objects and their sentimental value that enabled them to survive in such great condition for so long. It is likely that both of Babbitt's albums were compiled post-Second World War because of the self-adhesive pages that were not yet developed in the First World War (fig. 3).

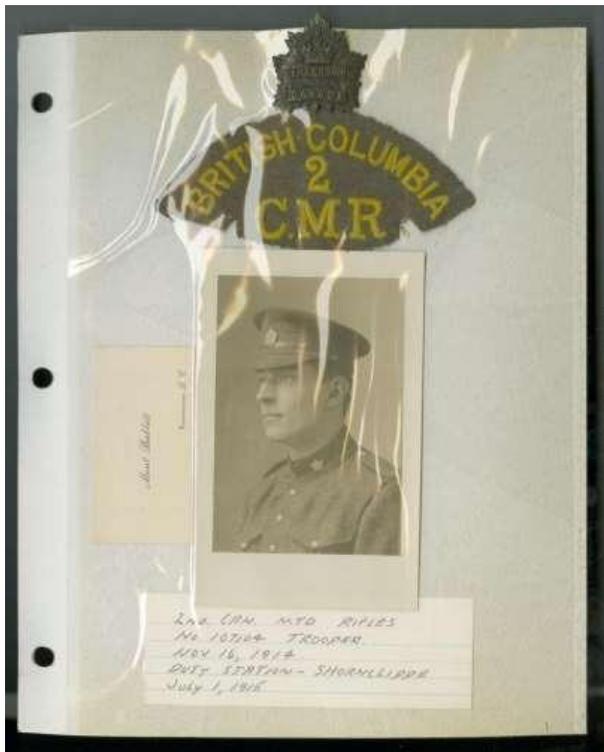


Figure 3: Photograph albums of Second Lieutenant Garnet Montague Babbitt, page 1, CWM 20050165-118_1, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum.

The first album consists of 124 photographs and photographic postcards⁴⁰ comprised of 11 studio portraits, 2 regimental group photographs, 29 vernacular photographs of his non-service friends and family, 4 tourist sites, 1 photograph of ruins, 67 informally posed photographs of himself and fellow military personnel and 10 images of military camps and

⁴⁰ Some of Babbitt's photos appear to be postcards made from negatives that people could bring to printers and get made. These amateur photographed post-cards can often be differentiated from official postcards that can be identified through the image identification number usually found on the front of the postcard.

equipment.⁴¹ The second album of Second Lieutenant Garnet Montague Babbitt consisted of 114 vernacular photographs of himself and his non-service friends and family, 59 photographs of tourist sites, 23 images of ruins and the destruction caused by the First World War, 13 informally posed photographs of himself and fellow military personnel and 4 images of military structures and equipment.⁴²

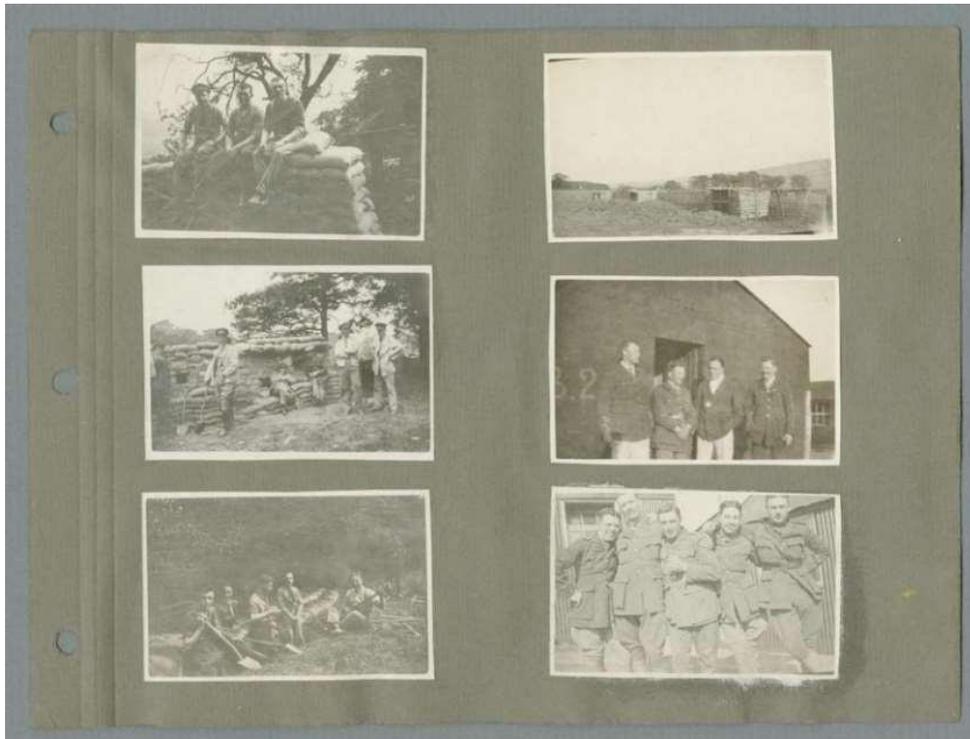


Figure 4: Photograph albums of Second Lieutenant Garnet Montague Babbitt, page 13, CWM 20050165-118_1, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum.

⁴¹ George Metcalf Collection, “Photograph albums of Second Lieutenant Garnet Montague Babbitt”, 1914-1918, album created by Second Lieutenant Garnet Montague Babbitt, Canadian War Museum, accession number 20050165, item number 118.

⁴² George Metcalf Collection, “Photograph albums of Second Lieutenant Garnet Montague Babbitt”, 1914-1918, album created by Second Lieutenant Garnet Montague Babbitt, Canadian War Museum, accession number 20050165, item number 118.



Figure 5: Photograph albums of Second Lieutenant Garnet Montague Babbitt, page 57, CWM 20050165-118_2, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum.

It is apparent in Babbitt's two albums that one is heavily compiled with informal photographs of himself and fellow military personnel (fig. 4), while the second album has an emphasis on vernacular photographs of his non-service family and friends (fig. 5). Tourist sites are the third most popular images depicted with the albums, appearing the most in the second more vernacular album. Babbitt also chose not to include images of graves and memorials, or local civilians. It can be assumed that the lack of images depicting local civilians of the countries visited during his service is because he was stationed in Europe and the European traditions felt familiar to his own. The lack of graves and memorial images will be addressed in the next section of this thesis.

The third album from the collection at the CWM is that of Lieutenant Ralph Gibson Adams born in Ameliasburgh, Ontario in 1892.⁴³ The album is entitled Lt Ralph Gibson Adams en route to Normandy, France from England. Adams served with the 15th Regiment (Argyll Light Infantry) at the beginning of the war, later he served overseas with the Canadian Reserve Cyclist and the 198th Battalion, and finally the 58 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Air Force. Adam's album consists of 58 images on 29 pages and is considerably smaller in size compared to other albums in the collection. This is because a majority of the photographs inside the album are 4 x 6.5 cm, likely taken with a Kodak Vest Pocket Autographic camera, as indicated by the inscriptions on the photographs' recto.⁴⁴ The vast majority of photographs included in Adam's album are of himself and fellow personnel, in total 46 of the 58 images. Tourist sites and military structures follow with five photographs each and by 2 photographs of ruins and destruction.⁴⁵

This album was chosen to be included within this evaluation and to be representative of the collection because it is so heavily centered around photographs of the creator, Ralph Gibson Adams, and his fellow comrades during his service time between 1914 to 1918. The photographs predominantly show the personnel resting or taking part in leisure activities. The captions under the photographs reveal Adam's almost comedic descriptions of the situations that the personnel were enduring overseas. The positive nature of the photographs and commentary beneath the images supports the argument that not all experiences of the war were dreary and tragic. On page 16 Adams selected a photograph of a fellow soldier resting on a grassy hill reading a book and

⁴³ This album at the CWM has no provenance available on record regarding its acquisition. Sometimes this happens in institutions when moves occur or when the artifacts have been acquired by the institution a long time ago.

⁴⁴ Jon Cooksey, VPK: The Vest Pocket Kodak & the First World War (East Essex, UK: Ammonite Press, 2017), 10.

⁴⁵ George Metcalf Collection, "Lt. Ralph Gibson Adams en route to Normandy, France from England", 1914-1918, album created by Lieutenant Ralph Gibson Adams, Canadian War Museum, accession number 20050165-018, item number 53-4-18.

captioned the image “Library and Reading Room” (fig. 6).⁴⁶ It is the selection of photographs, those depicting the active personnel of the war within his Canadian regiments, and the charismatic commentary that is included throughout the album that causes one to consider how the First World War was viewed in terms of the active participants as opposed to present day researchers.

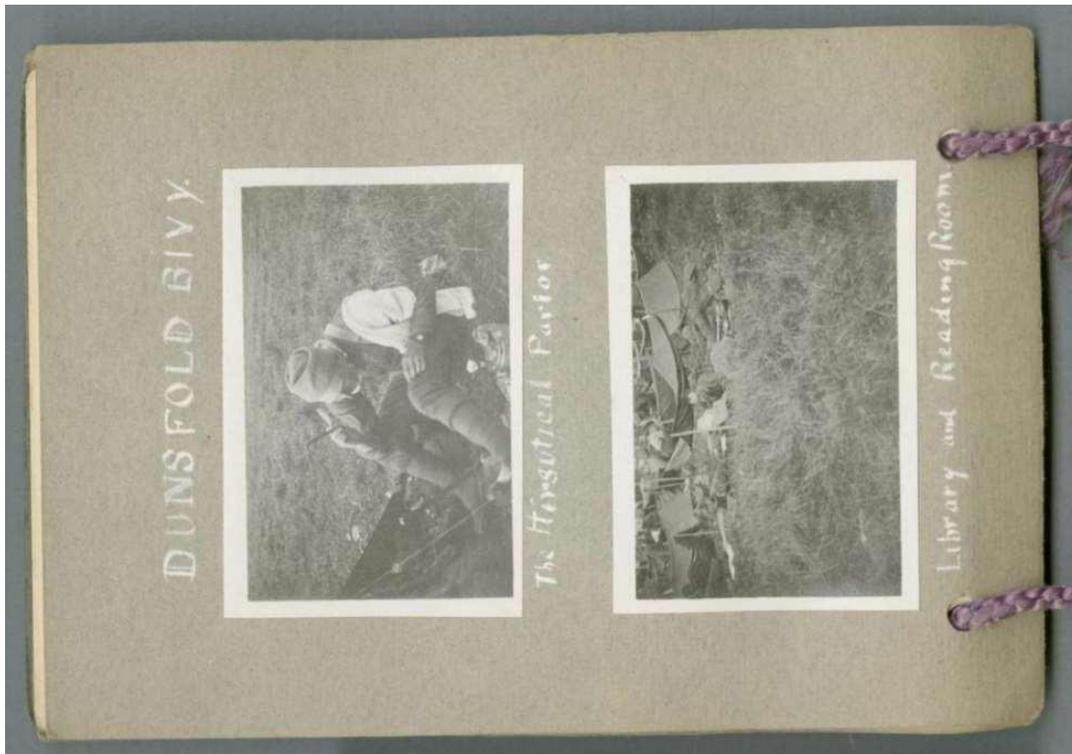


Figure 6: Lt. Ralph Gibson Adams en route to Normandy, France from England, page 16, CWM 19760346-018, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum.

The final photographic album under evaluation is that of Nursing Sister Ethel Frances Upton. Upton was born in Montreal in 1884 and served in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps where she spent four and half years in England, France and the Middle East from 1914 to 1918. Her album is the largest of the four at 74 pages consisting of 456 photographs. Upton possibly purchased some of her photographs she included within her album, as made apparent by

⁴⁶Lieutenant Ralph Gibson Adams, “Lt. Ralph Gibson Adams en route to Normandy, France from England,” 16.

the scenes within the images that she might not have been exposed to as a nursing sister, such as sea explosions (fig. 7); however, most were likely taken by her because of the intimacy of the images and the subjects they depict such as smiling fellow nursing sisters. What is also interesting about Upton's album is the way in which she carefully cut out and placed the images upon the pages (fig. 8). The meticulous efforts reflect the fondness of her memories of her service and pride in the photographs she chose to include in her album. It is this pride and fondness of her time in service that, like Adam's album of memories, reflects a more positive depiction of the First World War on behalf of Canadian military personnel.

Like Adams and Babbitt, most of the photographs Upton chose to include within her album are of military personnel, totalling 160 images. Also high are the images of tourist sites at 129 photographs, 78 of military structures such as camps and hospitals where she lived/served, 66 of local civilians of the countries she was stationed in, 11 of graves and memorials, 5 vernacular photographs, 4 of ruins and destruction and 3 regimental group photographs.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ George Metcalf Collection, "First World War album of Nursing Sister Ethel Francis Upton," 1914-1918, album created by Nursing Sister Ethel Upton, Canadian War Museum, accession number 19790413, item number 012.

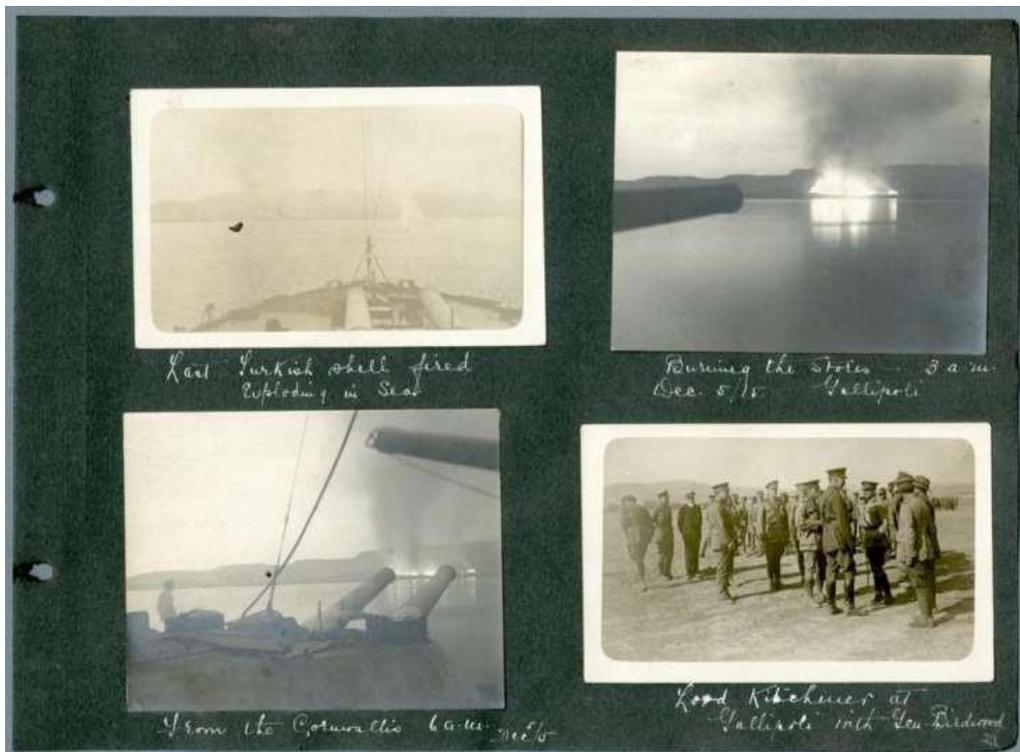


Figure 7: First World War album of Nursing Sister Ethel Francis Upton, page 22, CWM 19790413-012, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum.

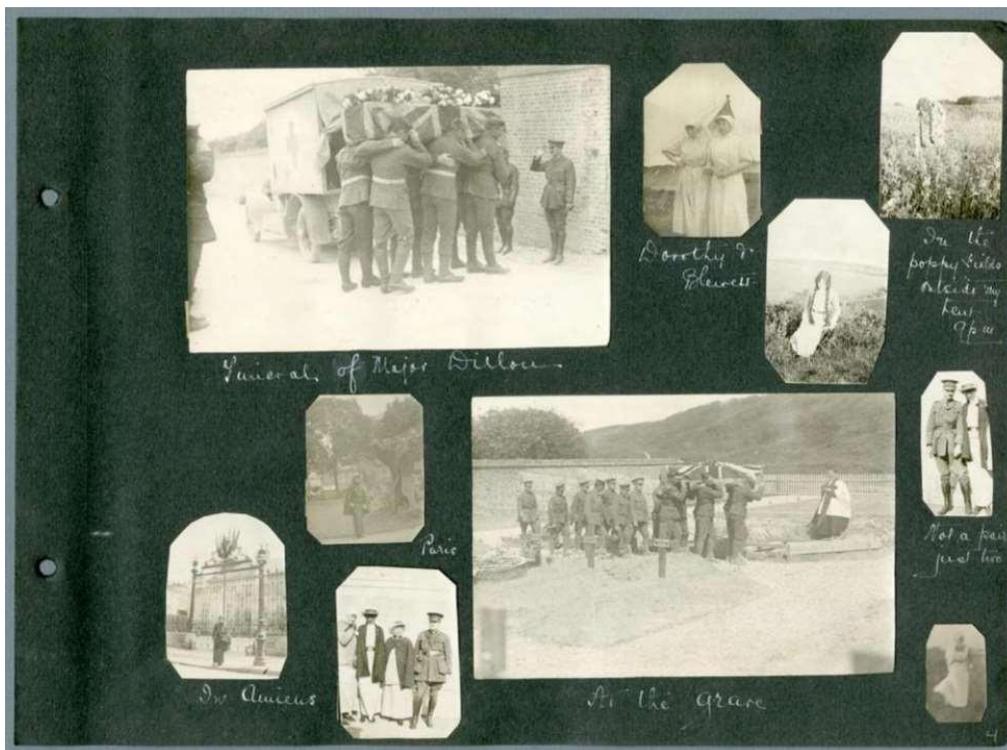


Figure 8: First World War album of Nursing Sister Ethel Francis Upton, page 4, CWM 19790413-012, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum.

Once again, photographs of the personnel themselves as well as her comrades are the most common images chosen by the creator of this album. Many of the images are of Upton and her fellow nursing sisters exploring the towns and villages close by to their camps, enjoying leisure time, and some of the sisters performing their nursing duties on injured soldiers. Most of the images that depict soldiers are scenes of men convalescing. Interestingly, out of the four albums evaluated for this project, Upton chose to include the most images of graves and memorials (fig. 8). Perhaps this is because she had the easiest access to the graves and memorial services held for the fallen soldiers close by to the hospitals. Additionally, Upton's album contains the largest amount of tourist photos (fig. 9), whether it is of tourist scenes or of the local civilians of the places she served. It is a great example of the types of places that personnel were able to experience, and as previously seen in Babbitt's second album, it seems that Upton took advantage of the access she had to these sites amongst her travels.



Figure 9: First World War album of Nursing Sister Ethel Francis Upton, page 27, CWM 19790413-012, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum.

An interesting aspect of the physical composition of Upton's album is her labeling of people and places, especially that of military structures such as camps and stationary hospitals, along with their locations. As previously mentioned, personnel were forbidden to disclose information such as geographical locations of units and military structures, especially when it came to photographic images, even prior to the ban on photography. The fact that Upton labeled the photographs of military sites, such as the British artillery camp in Salonika (fig. 10), is a peculiar one. It is likely that the album was compiled post-First World War in 1919, as the binding and pages are period accurate. Her inclusion of names dates of people and places insinuates that she was no longer under pressure to censor such sensitive details of her service.



Figure 10: First World War album of Nursing Sister Ethel Francis Upton, page 59, CWM 19790413-012, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum.

All four of these albums are primarily made up of photographs of the personnel themselves and their comrades. Also highlighted are the tourist opportunities that arise with overseas duties. It is important to note that most images selected by the creators to include within

their albums show the war in a more positive and social light, this is also apparent in the other albums within the collection at the CWM. This representation can be contradictory to that of the written history of the war that often takes a more institutional approach and describes the war with words like atrocity and tragedy. While this approach is true to the events of the First World War, it is necessary to also consider the war in the way in which the creators of the albums wished to remember the conflict themselves. By doing so a more holistic history can be developed; one that does not only reflect the tragedy of the war in general, but rather the positive experiences of the personnel who experienced the conflict firsthand.

3.4 Conflict History and Memory

In this thesis memory is referring to the way the personnel chose to remember the conflict through the personal photographs, albums, letters, and diaries they created. It is important to look closer at the ways in which the participants wanted to remember the war through their self created primary sources. This approach compliments the official histories and considers the contemporary feelings, attitudes and ‘memories’ of the participants.

As suggested by photographic historian Elizabeth Edwards, photographs are created to have social biographies. These biographies are forever changing based on the different periods of time in which they are viewed, time and place playing a factor in what meaning the photographs will give. Images are an important way in which communities come together to collectively understand and preserve an event.⁴⁸ This theory can be applied to collections of photographs in

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Edwards, “Objects of Affect: Photography Beyond the Image,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 222.

the form of albums as well. Analyzing photographic albums created by Canadian military personnel during the First World War causes the viewer to think more empathetically about the war because the albums humanize the men and women involved in the conflict.⁴⁹ This empathetic view of the war encourages the researcher to read around the popular narrative of the conflict and instead to look at how individuals lived through the event.

When writing history, social aspects of the war inform collective memory of the participating Canadian personnel as contributing to the larger understanding of Canadian society ‘remembrance’ of the war. A close, intimate reading of photographic albums made by active participants of the war would benefit research and study, yielding a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of the conflict. These albums should be viewed at in their original, intended forms so the photographs are viewed in context of what the creator intended to portray. However, this is not always possible as access to the albums may be limited to the public. Institutions that provide online or physical access to entire albums so that the pages can be viewed in their original sequential order enable this accurate viewing. The albums accessed in this manner give a stronger emotional tie to the event of war rather than the ‘mainstream’ history that often uses individual photographs to illustrate a narrative in a less personal way.⁵⁰

Albums can represent the experiences of the First World War in a more complete way than singular photographs because of the context that the images give to each other. This by no means diminishes the value of a photograph as an important singular object. Nevertheless, the albums provide data that can be statistically analyzed, for example, what types of predominant images featured, relative placements, and more than often address the ways the participant

⁴⁹ Court, “Picturing History, Remembering Soldiers,” 76.

⁵⁰ Court, “Picturing History, Remembering Soldiers,” 97.

wanted to personally represent the war. The individual photograph is not unlike a singular piece in a puzzle, the album on the other hand, compares to the completed puzzle.

Albums represent a narrative formed by the reminiscence of events that create a complete story, contrary to the individual photographs which represent what the photographer deems important at that specific time.⁵¹ The individual photographs may have been taken by someone other than the creators of the albums. The intent behind the inclusion of such photographs would likely differ between the original photographer and the album creator. However, the choice of inclusion of these images within the albums created by the Canadian military personnel is what is interesting and representative of their own ‘memory’ of the conflict.

The photographs of destruction are comprised mostly of images of ruined buildings and landscapes. Rarely, if ever, are there photographs of the dead. As mentioned, personnel often chose to leave out the tragedy of the war and instead preferred to remember the positive aspects of the Front. Most of the photographs show optimism, choosing not to show pessimism in the same way they censored what they wrote home to reduce their families’ worry.⁵²

Many soldiers used their service in the military as an opportunity to be ‘tourists’, so many of the photographs chosen to be included within the albums are of tourist monuments, places or people. A large portion of the Canadian military personnel would never have had the chance to see these places and travel outside of Canada if it wasn’t for their service in the war, so capturing these experiences within their albums was a significant way to recall this aspect of war.

However, the most common subject included within these albums were photographs of the personnel or their comrades, as evident in Lieutenant Ralph Gibson Adam’s album. These

⁵¹ Court, “Picturing History, Remembering Soldiers,” 83.

⁵² Rodger, “Amateur Photography by Soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force,” 164.

images are the most personal of all included within the albums, and represent the social, more positive aspects of experiencing the First World War as an active participant. The photographs are often captioned and can cause emotions to arise due to the intimacy of the shared described moment and the people featured within the images.⁵³ Not only Adam's album, but all the albums depict images of personnel more than any other subject and are all predominantly positive in nature.

“When we assume that they perceived events as we have reconstructed them, we deduce at our peril.” Jonathan Vance makes this claim in his book *Death So Noble*.⁵⁴ What he is referring to in this statement is the act of researchers approaching the history of the First World War using only the hindsight that is currently available to them based on their place in time. What is viewed in present day terms as a tragedy, should not be the only way in which to view the events of the First World War. Just as photography taken by personnel of the conflict depicts the war through the eyes of the participants themselves, the albums that they created can offer a glimpse into how they might have perceived the events, or at least, how they wished to remember the events later on.

⁵³ Court, “Picturing History, Remembering Soldiers,” 94.

⁵⁴ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 4.

4. Conclusion

Canadian photography used as evidence of the First World War, taken by the Official Photographers or by military personnel, has predominantly been used as illustrations representing Canada's historical engagement in the First World War. While this common practice can be adequate, and can be one way of using the images as a means of telling the history of the war and in turn solidifying the collective memory of the event, this thesis proposes that studying the photographic images chosen by the military personnel for their albums is an argument for an exceptional tool in the study of memory in a time of conflict. Laura Brandon's theory on war art being underrecognized and obscured by its 'art' qualities⁵⁵ can be applied to the photographic album. These albums are memorials created by the participants of the events; they are mnemonic devices that can be used to help tell the history of the First World War from a Canadian perspective. Perhaps it is not in the individual scenes the images depict, rather, the decision of what to include within the album that formulates the creator's representation of the war.

When photography was not yet forbidden to the Canadian military personnel during the First World War their images were sought out by newspapers and magazines, warranted they did not include any names, locations or subject matter that could be harmful to military strategy or morale. This is not the case for the photographs within the albums of the personnel that often include names, places and sensitive material like camp and trench layouts. Therefore, the study of photographic albums can lead to discovery of information that may not have been available through official records or press images of the war. All aspects of war were not obtainable,

⁵⁵ Brandon, *Art or Memorial?*, xiii.

however, the inclusive decisions made by the creators of the photographic albums often reveal a transparency missing in official representations.

The personnel were more inclined to choose more positive images of their service so that it would not be so difficult to view later and by their loved ones back home in Canada. This could also be the reason why Lieutenant Babbitt chose to create his albums so many years after the end of the First World War. His belatedly assembled albums show the effects on how memory is presented by looking back on his service photographs for construction of his albums. His recollections in hindsight would then determine how he wanted his memories represented in tangible objects. A comparison could be made of Babbitt's album, compiled the farthest away from the end of the war, with Upton's album that was presumably created closer to 1919 based upon the materials used, and that of Adam's small, portable album consisting of only VPK prints would be the perfect size to carry within a kit of a active duty personnel during the war.⁵⁶ By considering the ways photographic albums were constructed in context, whether they were created during wartime or by hindsight after the end of the war, while simultaneously considering institutional histories, a well-rounded history of the First World War would present itself. A more nuanced picture emerges when positive views of events as experienced by the active participants becomes evident, and thereby replacing some of the negativity cast by the darker sides of wartime destruction and losses.

It is often the case that only the negative aspects of war are studied, the number of lives lost, the destruction to the land and sites, but the many worthwhile experiences felt on a personal level of the participants is not often revealed. If the personnel felt it was important to their own

⁵⁶ This comparison could be of future consideration for researchers to explore. How did the time that separated the personnel from their active duty service and the creation of their album affect the ways in which their memory of the war was represented by the albums?

memories of the war to include images of more positive subject matter, then it must be considered equally valuable to consider these aspects when constructing the larger historical narrative. In this context and from a Canadian perspective, the collective memory of the First World War would be enriched by the many personal photographic albums in the collection of the Canadian War Museum and the valuable insight they provide into Canada's wartime participation. Taking into consideration the conflict on the scale of the First World War – a scale never experienced before – that impact upon civilians, societies, and political complexities, have been analysed in-depth and explored critically by many historians. Yet, photographic albums have not been explored in full for their historical potential. The contribution of personal recollections, as evident in the individual experiences represented in the albums discussed in this thesis, indicate the necessity for a more comprehensive history of Canada's involvement. The role of military personnel's experiences viewed in wartime settings convey a personal perspective and extends to a better understanding of the complex nature of conflict. But, more importantly, collected memories in albums are to be valued as first-hand statements of experiences, objects or subjective, either way not to become overlooked as contributors of significant details increasing our understanding of the First World War.

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Albums

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