

1-24-2012

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### Recommended Citation

Lackenbauer, P. Whitney (2001) "The Military and “Mob Rule”: The CEF Riots in Calgary, February 1916," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 4.  
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol10/iss1/4>

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# The Military and “Mob Rule”

## The CEF Riots in Calgary, February 1916

**P. Whitney Lackenbauer**

During the First World War, unruly and ill-disciplined Canadian soldiers, on “assorted ‘patriotic’ pretexts,” damaged local property and battled with local police forces in Victoria, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Campbellton, New Brunswick, and other Canadian centres.<sup>1</sup> The riots in Calgary in February 1916 involved members of Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) battalions encamped near the city. While historians have focussed on the anti-German nature of the attacks, several other considerations must be examined to explain the unlawful behaviour. Although a court of inquiry into the riot failed to conclude who was responsible, the contemporary evidence suggests strongly that soldiers, rather than civilians, started the disturbances. But what conditions allowed such behaviour to occur? The military context of the time offers insight. Recruitment, training and discipline were all factors, as was the nearness of the soldiers’ camp to Calgary. The military, however, denied responsibility, arguing that the culprits were “civilians” in uniform. By refusing to compensate the owners of local establishments for the damages caused during the riots, local and national military authorities made worse a problem they should have prevented.

When the First World War broke out in August 1914, Canada was ill-prepared for war. Sam Hughes, the Minister of Militia and Defence, believed firmly that the virtues of the ‘citizen soldier’ were superior to those of his professional counterparts. In Hughes’s vision, the permanent force existed merely to train the militia; the real Canadian fighting spirit was in the broad populous who had rallied to the cause in 1812 and had (in the popular consciousness at least) thwarted American Manifest Destiny. Rather than abide by pre-war mobilization plans created by

permanent force officers, Colonel Hughes decided to adopt his own. Through a series of night telegrams, Hughes invited newly-formed, numbered battalions to an uncompleted military camp at Valcartier, near Quebec City.<sup>2</sup>

Of the first contingent of soldiers at Valcartier, one third hailed from west of Ontario, a proportion that far exceeded the west’s population. Sam Hughes first pushed aside suggestions that centrally located depots were needed to gather and train unbrigaded recruits. But as the war progressed, officials decided that the majority of units raised in Western Canada would receive preliminary training in their military district of origin and then proceed directly to England.<sup>3</sup>

In Alberta, there was a dire need for a mobilization camp. As the headquarters of Military District No.13, Calgary was a natural focal point for such a concentration, and by 1915, new recruits began to gather in the city. Unfortunately, as Ottawa authorized Alberta’s militia units to recruit to war strength, Calgary had no barracks, and virtually no uniforms or equipment. The shortages became even more acute when, in late 1915, Sam Hughes authorized the 56th, 82nd and 89th Infantry Battalions to recruit from the Calgary area.<sup>4</sup> A large military camp teeming with young men pleased local business owners, especially hotel owners (prohibition was not introduced until 1918), and the city prospered early in the war.

Brigadier-General Ernest A. Cruikshank was the commander of the Alberta district. Cruikshank had joined the militia as an ensign in 1877, rising in rank to become a lieutenant-colonel in the militia. In 1909, he transferred to the permanent force and was appointed to

command the district. He soon developed a reputation as an able administrator, one "with scrupulous regard for the public purse" who strove for "economy and efficiency when extravagance and waste were palliated in other districts."<sup>5</sup> When Sir John French, the Inspector General of the Imperial Service, inspected the Calgary camp in 1911 he deemed Cruikshank a "most conscientious, zealous, reliable and intelligent officer, with strong common sense."<sup>6</sup> The Chief of the Canadian General Staff, Major-General Colin Mackenzie, was even more laudatory the following year. He concluded: "[Cruikshank] has an intimate knowledge of the character and military aptitude of officers serving in his Command. He might be relied on to do well on service."<sup>7</sup> Cruikshank also had a reputation of being strict when dealing with his officers, a trait he had displayed during his militia days and carried with him to the regular force. Rather than distancing him from his officers it appeared to earn him the respect, even affection, of his subordinates.<sup>8</sup>

By the cold winter of 1916, soldiers on the streets of Calgary were commonplace. Over the winter, the trainees were billeted in barracks at the old Victoria Park or in the newly-converted Price Jones and Calgary Furniture Company buildings in Calgary. The temperatures forced most of the training indoors; only platoon and parade drill and the occasional route marches broke the monotony.<sup>9</sup> So did the search for new recruits. Soldier Harvey Daniel Duncan described the situation in Calgary in early 1916: "On Eighth Avenue and over the country, recruiting offices were operating at full strength. White feathers were being handed out to eligible bachelors! Young recruits swaggered around the streets and



*Brigadier-General Ernest A. Cruikshank, commander of the Alberta militia district, was the officer in command during the 1916 riots.*

Glenbow Archives NA-2077-11

bars. Many recruits were getting restless and anxious to get overseas!"<sup>10</sup>

This volatile mix was further stirred up by other influences circulating within the community. As the dream of a short war died, so did tolerance for ethnic groups associated with the enemy. Across the country, as macabre tales of German atrocities began to circulate, anti-German hysteria swept through Anglo-Canadian society. The rhetoric helped transform the war: instead of participating out of obligation to Britain, Canadians began to view the war as a defence of civilization itself.<sup>11</sup> In mid-January 1916, Senator James A. Lougheed of Calgary fed the paranoia, arguing before the Senate that Germany's designs for "world power" and "territorial conquest" extended to the Western hemisphere and Canada itself. "Germany, through its system of espionage, has a

more thorough knowledge of Canada in the pigeon-holes of its foreign office than would be found in the departments of our own Government," Lougheed proclaimed, and "the greatest menace to Canada from this war lies in this situation."<sup>12</sup> Conspiracy-minded Canadians blamed the burning of the Parliament Buildings in February 1916 on Germans, compounding existing tensions. In Calgary, home to the largest German population of any city or town in Alberta (2,608 in 1911), came strong demands to terminate the employment of Germans, revoke the voting rights of "enemy aliens" and intern Germans and Austrians.<sup>13</sup>

Within this context, soldiers stationed at barracks in Calgary decided to take matters in their own hands. Rumours were circulating that the White Lunch Company had fired returned soldiers and employed enemy aliens in their



*In this staged photograph, Calgary firemen attack effigies of German soldiers.*

places. A handwritten sign reiterating this belief was posted in the camp canteen for all to read: "Keep away from the 'White Lunch.' They fired two British waiters and engaged one German and one Austrian in their places."<sup>14</sup> On the afternoon of 10 February 1916, F.H. Naegel, the manager of the White Lunch on 8th Avenue, called the General Officer Commanding (GOC) and warned him of rumours that there might be trouble. Brigadier Cruikshank did not act on the warnings, later claiming that he could not do anything unless Naegel put a request in writing (which the latter did not do). Unfortunately, as events unfolded, the White Lunch manager's foreboding proved to be well founded.

At about 8:00 pm, four soldiers walked into the White Lunch Restaurant at 128 8th Avenue East. They stood around the checkout counter, where a woman at the counter overheard their conversation; when they departed she informed the manager that there was going to be trouble. A group of soldiers soon headed steadily eastward on the south side of 8th Ave. towards the restaurant. By the time it reached the restaurant, the crowd numbered several hundred soldiers. In front of the establishment, a soldier gave the order for the men to halt, and they turned in formation to face the White Lunch. They then rushed across the street. The Calgary Chief of

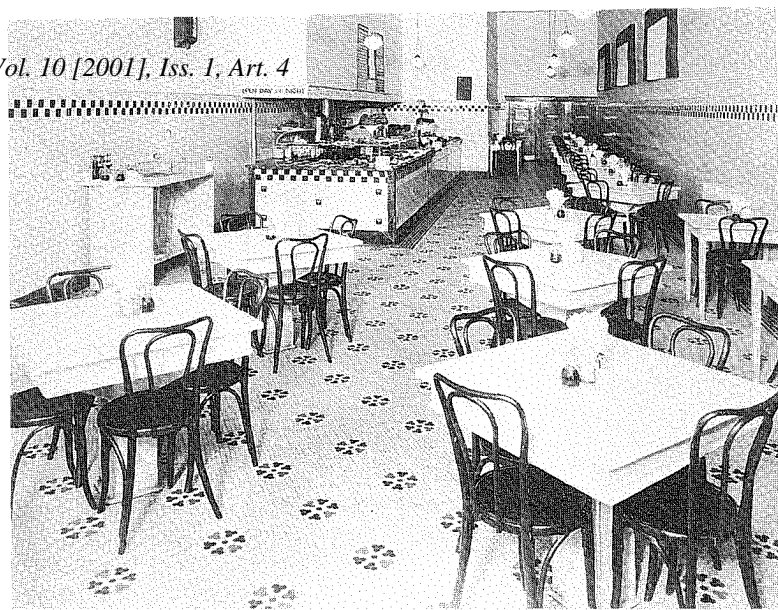
Police first heard of the raid at 8:15 pm. He gathered up about 15 men to try and counter what appeared to be ominous developments.<sup>15</sup> An Ottawa newspaper painted a vivid picture of what transpired:

Chief of Police Cuddy, half a dozen constables and plainclothesmen hurried to the place. All customers were sent out and the doors locked. When the soldiers arrived the chief asked them to disperse and not to behave in an unlawful manner. He was disregarded, and as a preliminary a shower of missiles went crashing through the big plate glass windows [and made an entrance through this route]. A woman cashier, trying to save some plants, was slightly hurt, and Police Constable Fraser so badly cut by flying glass that he had to go to the hospital. The policemen were swept aside like chips in a gale and for an hour the mob did its will with the place. The crowd was increased to two thousand and the officers were helpless. The furniture fixtures and cooking apparatus were smashed to fragments. Marble counters and stands looked as though artillery shells had exploded. A cash register was ripped open and looted. Coffee urns and gas stoves were torn from their places. Electric fixtures were pulled down. The street outside was littered with wreckage. The safe was thrown downstairs into the basement, breaking the stairs.<sup>16</sup>

While the soldiers attacked the restaurant, a crowd of several thousand looked on. What



Glenbow Archives NA-1469-51



Glenbow Archives NA-1469-41

Pre-riot photos of the White Lunch Restaurant.

fragments of furniture remained were thrown onto the street and reduced to even smaller pieces by the crowd.

Once finished with the restaurant, the rioters smashed down the door leading upstairs to the dance academy on the second floor. The proprietor of the academy was teaching a number of soldiers how to dance at the time the crowd arrived at the building, and had even hung a Red Ensign outside of his window prior to the raid “to show the boys that they were British in the Dance Hall.” Nevertheless, the frenzied mob went to work. The windows were “burst out,” the furniture (including the piano) was broken and hurled onto the street, and the flags and decorations on the walls were reduced to ribbons. In a feat of particular daring, the flag outside the dance academy was pulled down, and the electric

sign that projected the restaurant’s name over the sidewalk crashed to the ground.<sup>17</sup>

The authorities seemed powerless to intervene. During the riot, Mr. Naegel from the White Lunch fled to the central fire station but was rebuffed by the fire department when he sought their assistance. As it turned out, the dense crowd kept the fire-fighting equipment from getting to the restaurant. Like the police, the firemen could only join the spectators.<sup>18</sup> Police chief Cuddy took did not order his men to use force against the mob as he “recognized at once that such action would only tend to antagonize the soldiers, and might possibly have resulted in murder.” Although a few drunken soldiers tried to assault the police, chief Cuddy doubted that “a military guard, much less a handful of policemen, would have saved the object of their

Post-riot photo of the White Lunch Restaurant.



attack."<sup>19</sup> With no police resolve to risk active intervention, the 8th Avenue site was utterly destroyed.

Concurrent to the attack on the 8th Avenue building, a "second division" of soldiers had converged on the other White Lunch location at 528 19th Avenue, some six blocks southwest of the first riot. Urged on by civilians and with no police to oppose them, the mob destroyed the restaurant in one rush. The waiters and cashiers fled immediately, and the soldiers went to work in earnest. Daring exploits were later recounted with pride: soldiers had hung from the chandeliers, pleasing the destructive crowd with acrobatic stunts. The *Calgary Albertan* noted that within a few minutes, the place "looked as though it were situated 'somewhere in Ypres,' and that a howitzer shell had exploded."<sup>20</sup>

With police unable to restore order, the military scrambled to control the situation. Brigadier Cruikshank heard of the riots just after 9:00 pm. The Chief Constable told him that he could not control the crowd, so Cruikshank proceeded to 8th Avenue to address the excited throng. The commanding officer ordered the soldiers to return to their quarters and they quickly complied. Unarmed picquets were established and there were no further signs of disorder.<sup>21</sup> By midnight all was quiet again, but the gaping fronts of the wrecked buildings and the littered debris of smashed furniture and fittings on the street bore witness to the night's destruction.

The local and national press immediately responded to these sensational events. The next day, the *Morning Albertan* highlighted the soldiers' disobedience to the will of police and superior officers, and the inability of the authorities to cope with the excited crowd. The *Calgary Herald* devoted most of its front page



Alfred Cuddy  
Calgary Chief of Police

Glenbow Archives NA-2861-6

to the story, treating readers to photos of the damage done to each of the restaurants, but also headlining with the reassurance that the police had names of the "riot ringleaders." The newspaper expressed little sympathy for the rioters, stressed that the attack should never have occurred, and called for both military and civilian inquiries into the "disgraceful proceedings." An editorial dismissed the alleged causes for the attack as "insufficient to have warranted such lawless" behaviour, and ruled that "such conduct as the men of the Calgary garrison indulged in last evening might suit Hun tastes, but it is entirely foreign to the British principle." It suggested that other Calgary institutions

were threatened, but emphasized that Calgarians could not afford to tolerate mob law under any circumstances.<sup>22</sup>

On 11 February, Brigadier Cruikshank addressed all of the units under his command at their various quarters, condemning the conduct of the perpetrators the night before and pointing to the penalties such outrages warranted. He also held a meeting of the various units' commanding officers, the Mayor, the City Solicitor and the Chief Constable of Calgary. The officers issued a unanimous opinion that there was no danger of further disorder, which seemed to satisfy the civic officials. As a precautionary measure, the commanding officers were ordered to double the strength of their picquets. In addition, several local businesses informed the GOC that they had received threats to their buildings if they did not discharge all enemy alien employees. Cruikshank made sure each of the unit commanders were aware of these potential flashpoints.<sup>23</sup>

The officers wildly missed the mark with their optimistic estimate that no more riots were forthcoming. The following evening, "trouble came like a bomb from the blue heavens, sudden, demoralizing, appalling."<sup>24</sup> Between 8 and 9 pm,



*The bar area of the Riverside Hotel following its destruction by the mob.*

Glenbow Archives NA-2365-16

a group of 500 soldiers and civilians proceeded across the Langevin Bridge to the Riverside Hotel in the predominantly German-speaking Riverside-Bridgeland area of the city. This time, rumour had it that the English owner of the Riverside Hotel was actually a German and had hosted a meeting of pro-German sympathizers to celebrate the burning of the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa. Whatever justification the crowd conjured up, hundreds of soldiers gathered in front of the Alberta Hotel and shouted and yelled to the interest of pedestrians as they marched eastward along 8th Avenue. The mob absorbed soldiers and civilians as it moved along, numbering at least a thousand by the time it reached the corner of 4th Street East. Brigadier Cruikshank had hastily arranged picquets and the commanding officers of the local battalions marched to the scene of the rioting as soon as word of the mob was received. Each officer tried to form a guard with men picked from the crowd, but it was too late. The mob, estimated later at over 1500, overwhelmed the meagre defences, moved into the building, and "for two hours a veritable reign of terror prevailed."<sup>25</sup> The soldiers' appetite for excitement, still whetted by the adrenaline rush from the night before, was not yet satisfied. The rioters first destroyed the bar, and with their spirits lifted by stolen alcohol they began to destroy the entire property. Alfred Henry Ebsworth, the owner of the Riverside, took stock of the damage afterwards:

...every room in the house had been visited and...the interior of the hotel was a complete wreck. The bar fixtures, counters, electric light fixtures and all other property was either smashed up and destroyed or removed... considerable damage was done to the building itself, the stairway was pulled down and demolished completely, the radiators in the rooms were twisted and torn from their bearings, the keystone over the arch of the main entrance was knocked out, permitting the building to settle and disclosing large cracks in the brickwork....Iron beds are broken, twisted and warped so that many of them would be absolutely beyond repairs, the mirrors, dressing cases, chairs and bureaus are all broken, many of them in cases pitched through the windows, the curtains are torn down and the carpets and rugs damaged completely through liquor, water and other refuse brought upon the premises.<sup>26</sup>

Little was left of the 48-room hotel when the mob had finished. Satisfied that its work was done at the hotel, the mob went back over the turn and moved uptown.<sup>27</sup>

Subsequent activity suggested that strong picquets were, in fact, reliable means of dissuading soldiers from riotous acts. Rumours abounded that Kolb's restaurant and Cronn's Rathskeller were targeted for the next attacks, but the mob (its ranks now swelled by civilian men and women "out for the sake of the sensation") was forestalled by "khaki-clad lines" barring their way. Some 700 soldiers on piquet duty simply lined up in front of these buildings

and there was no attempt to "rush" them. The Palliser Hotel, a brewery, and the office of the Canadian Bible Society (that had circulated German bibles) were also threatened but military guards discouraged any action. By midnight the cold, tired crowds, bored by the lack of action, dispersed. According to the owner of the Riverside Hotel, this "clearly demonstrat[ed] that a firm stand was all that was necessary to put a stop to the rioting at any stage."<sup>28</sup>

The riots continued to generate attention in weeks ahead. The military authorities were, of course, preoccupied with maintaining order. Brigadier Cruikshank sent off a hasty telegram to the Militia Council in Ottawa stating that the restaurants and hotel had been "wrecked by [a] band of soldiers and others" and that every effort was being made to keep order in the face of widespread "anti-German excitement." To prevent a reoccurrence, Cruikshank placed all of the hotel bars out of bounds, any soldier on the street without a pass was liable for arrest, and troops were held in readiness "to repress disorder." Each battalion was allotted a segment of the city and a roll call was held every hour to ensure that the soldiers were present and accounted for.<sup>29</sup> According to a local informant, other businesses continued to be "seriously menaced but no damage [was] done" on account of "strong armed pickets [sic]" that were established around the city.<sup>30</sup> Terrified local German-speaking residents, most of whom originated from Russia and were not German nationals, barricaded themselves into their homes.

The streets were quiet, but the rhetoric and pressure for government action continued to mount. While condemning the rioters for creating an incident that could be used to justify "gross cruelty to Canadian prisoners," the *Albertan* lobbied for the internment of all enemy aliens, "not merely because of the violent outbursts of some Calgary soldiers" but because it was the most "human and charitable" thing to do.<sup>31</sup>

City Council was caught in the hail of controversy over the riots and the apparent threat to social stability in Calgary. On the morning of Saturday, 12 February, Council held a special meeting attended by Brigadier Cruikshank. He assured the City that he would maintain control of the military in the City without imposing

martial law. Council passed a resolution expressing their confidence in the military authorities. Furthermore, Council authorized the Mayor "to do all acts necessary to effectively cooperate with the Military authorities to maintain order." If further trouble arose, and civilians interfered, Cruikshank said he would call on the magistrate to ask them to disperse. The mayor, for his part, appealed to Calgarians to stay off the street and asked Alberta's premier, A.L. Sifton, to close all the bars and liquor stores until further notice.

To quell the anti-German hysteria, Council immediately dismissed all civic employees of alien nationality and laid off all street railway company employees born in enemy countries. Finally, to curtail more lawless behaviour by soldiers, a rider was added to the motion stating that returned soldiers be employed where possible in the places of the discharged. Calgary's mayor also urged the federal government to intern all enemy aliens in Canada, whether naturalized or not.<sup>32</sup> These resolutions, coupled with media and public sentiment that condemned the unruly and destructive behaviour but upheld the explicit motivations of the rioters, meant that the soldiers had indeed achieved some of their substantial objectives.

Military authorities in Ottawa were troubled by the disruptions caused by soldiers acting without consent and against the orders of their officers. The Governor-General, His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught, was appalled by the "disgraceful behaviour of the troops at Calgary" as it showed "great lack of tact on the part of the officers and want of discipline on the part of the men." He wanted to know what the local military authorities were doing about it.<sup>33</sup> In the House of Commons on 14 February, opposition leader Sir Wilfrid Laurier questioned the prime minister about the Calgary disturbances and asked what steps the Government had done to control enlisted men "in places where liquor runs freely." Sir Robert Borden denied any indication that liquor was involved, but a telegram from Brigadier Cruikshank confirmed Laurier's information the following day:

Attacks on restaurants and hotel undoubtedly led by some soldiers mainly under influence of liquor. Civilians participated in second attack apparently inflamed by reports of meetings of



enemy aliens and that employees had been discharged to give place for aliens. These attacks now being investigated by court of enquiry. Several arrests have been made and these men handed over to civilian authorities.<sup>34</sup>

The prime minister reported back to Parliament that an inquiry was being made and that an official report would be received in due course. He was, nevertheless, "sure that the reports" received on the Calgary incidents had "been very greatly exaggerated."<sup>35</sup>

Only after the Riverside Hotel riot did Cruikshank finally put tangible measures in place to prevent another recurrence. Returning from City Hall on 12 February, Cruikshank informed the commanding officers that they would be responsible for "good order and discipline" within their units and around the city. For the next four days these instructions remained in force, and the local battalions were sent on long marches in the country to walk off "a whole lot of effervescent animal spirits."<sup>36</sup>

The GOC established a court of inquiry to investigate the attacks on the White Lunch restaurants on 11 February, the day after the initial riot. The court was assembled at district headquarters, along with concurrent but separate proceedings to inquire into the attack on the Riverside Hotel. The court met daily until 24 February. Seventy-three witnesses, including the Calgary Chief of Police, police detectives, several military officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), Mr. Naegel (proprietor of the White Lunch on 8th Avenue) and soldiers allegedly involved in the attack testified before the panel regarding the attacks on the restaurants. Another 43 witnesses appeared to offer testimony on the Riverside riot.<sup>37</sup>

The enlisted ranks and NCOs who gave testimony before the courts made it difficult to attribute specific blame for the riots. Members of the local battalions were generally unwilling to implicate their comrades,<sup>38</sup> and most of the soldiers in the raids had ripped off their regimental shoulder badges.<sup>39</sup> Rumours about the White Lunch and Riverside had apparently circulated before the nights' events, but the vast majority testified that the raids were spontaneous acts with no particular leaders.<sup>40</sup> Most pleaded that they only learned of the attacks once they had started. They testified that they were simply

told to "fall in" as trained and they did, often unaware of where they were heading – and that they were at the scenes only due to idle curiosity. When their memories failed them as to their whereabouts or alleged activities, several turned to drunkenness as an excuse.<sup>41</sup>

Both military and civilian officials were more pointed in their testimony, but they also tended to blame each other. Military officers who testified were not reluctant to name and incriminate soldiers they saw at the riots, but they also tended to stress the role of civilians in the raids. Civil authorities, however, blamed the soldiers almost universally. Numerous "ordinary soldiers" insisted that the attacks were actually started by civilians "of a lawless sort" who were then joined by some men in uniform.<sup>42</sup>

In the end, the court of inquiry yielded inconclusive evidence. In the post-inquiry report to the Militia Council on the Calgary disturbances, Cruikshank reflected that:

Every possible effort has been made by these Courts to procure evidence against all persons implicated in these disturbances. Their exertions in this respect have not been attended with as much success as was desired. All soldiers against whom there was any evidence of having participated in these attacks were then taken into custody and handed over to the Civil authorities for trial.

Thirteen soldiers were tried in civilian court and five convicted, with minimum charges and sentences laid. Another two were discharged from the military.<sup>43</sup> As for the cause of the riotous behaviour, Cruikshank did not believe that the military was responsible. The GOC was "very strongly of the opinion that these disturbances were largely due to inflammatory letters and articles which appeared in certain newspapers, and the injudicious remarks made by civilians."<sup>44</sup> As a result, the Adjutant-General did not feel that any further action was necessary on the part of the military authorities.

The Chief of Police was critical of the local military officials who, he felt, were guilty of inaction and were responsible for the damage to the Riverside Hotel, if not the White Lunch restaurants.<sup>45</sup> Commissioned officers belonging to the same battalions as the men destroying the local properties made no effort to stop them.



*Soldiers from the 50th Battalion marching through the streets of Calgary.*

Furthermore, it was "common talk amongst the citizens and the soldiers who took part in the rioting or were then in camp" that Cruikshank bore at least partial responsibility. Had the General taken ordinary preventative measures and "asserted his authority in a more vigorous manner," the attack on the Riverside would never have taken place. Chief Cuddy's sympathy was with the owner of the hotel, not the military authorities who had tried to maintain order. "Through no fault of his own and as a result of the failure of the military authorities to control the situation," the Chief reasoned, "Mr. Ebsworth [the owner of the Riverside Hotel] lost everything he owned." Since it was impossible to get any compensation from the men convicted by the Police Court, Cuddy pleaded that "purely as a matter of equity, it would seem only fair and reasonable that the [Federal] Government should make some compensation" to the owner who had lost "the entire fruits of almost twenty years effort in this country" due to matters completely beyond his control.<sup>46</sup>

What was "fair and reasonable" to the City was not palatable to the military. In the aftermath of the riots, various Calgary lawyers wrote to the Minister of the Militia and Defence to seek damages for the White Lunch Café and Riverside Hotel. Mr. Ebsworth claimed losses and damages totalling nearly \$9,000.00 as a result of the raid, and the lessee of the hotel claimed another \$6635.00 in damages.<sup>47</sup> The Judge Advocate

General, however, decided in April 1916 that given the results of the inquiry "into the alleged riot" the Department was not liable for damages. "The Government is in no way responsible for the wrong-doing of its soldiers" he concluded.<sup>48</sup>

When a law firm acting on behalf of White Lunch Limited requested compensation, a more substantive defence was issued:

The evidence shows that the destruction complained of was done by a mob composed for the greater part of men in military uniform, with some civilians. The men in uniform, however, were not there as soldiers, were not under orders or on duty as a military body, were not acting as servants or agents of the Crown, but proceeded merely as individual citizens subject to the Criminal Law of the land, and amenable to civil tribunals....It must then be plain to you, as it is to the Officials of this Department, that much as the outrage in question is to be deplored, much as your clients are entitled to sympathy, and much as the rioters are deserving of the severest punishment, yet the public as represented by the Government at Ottawa are not answerable for the depredations in question.<sup>49</sup>

The owners of the three establishments destroyed during the riots of February 1916 continued to press for compensation, but the defence department stuck to this position. The Crown had legal immunity, but its moral position was less certain. An American lawyer writing on behalf of the owners of the White Lunch made the case

that his claimants were obviously “innocent victims of popular excitement brought about by the great war and working through a force of soldiery only partially disciplined which got out of hand and with which the local police proved entirely unable to cope.” In the United States, even in cases where blame was much less transparent than this, the government had “repeatedly made compensation as a matter of grace irrespective of the question of legal liability.”<sup>50</sup>

The military never paid compensation for damages, although its justification is questionable in light of other cases. In October 1916, a few hundred civilians and soldiers attacked the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP) Barracks in Calgary to demand the release of five soldiers who had been arrested for violating the liquor act. A subsequent court of enquiry heard evidence similar to that offered during the February hearings. Several individual soldiers were charged, fined and discharged, and the Department of Militia and Defence paid for the damage done to the RNWMP barracks and for personal items that were damaged or stolen.<sup>51</sup> The Judge Advocate General never saw fit to comment on why this compensation should be paid, perhaps because the amount was significantly less than that demanded by the owners of the White Lunch and Riverside. Furthermore, compassionate grants were made in England following the riots of Canadian troops at Witley Camp in 1919 that seemed to resemble the Calgary claims.<sup>52</sup> However, the Department recognized that the compensation question extended beyond the Calgary incident. If compensation was paid to Mr. Ebsworth, the JAG argued, “it would open up a similar question in the numerous other cases where, riots having occurred, compensation from the Crown was requested and payment of the same has been refused. I refer particularly to the riots in Quebec in 1918.”<sup>53</sup> Mr. Ebsworth, who was ruined by the attack, continued to seek restitution well into the Second World War, but his effort was ultimately in vain.

The drudgery of life for the citizen-soldiers stationed in Calgary, and the swirling tempest of anti-alien prejudice in early 1916, set the context for the riots. The attacks were prompted by nativist ideas, but they were also products of poor

military discipline and misadministration on a local level. That very few soldiers were punished for the riots (a mere seven out of the more than 1,000 estimated to be involved) made the episode all the more disconcerting. Later courts of inquiry were rich in descriptions of what occurred, but barren in evidence that identified the mob leaders. The men who composed the mob may have been in khaki uniforms, but when engaged in rioting, the military refused to consider them soldiers.

By blaming civil society and anti-German rhetoric for the riotous behaviour, and refusing to take meaningful responsibility for what had transpired, military officials ignored their role and responsibility for the damage. Although recruited to serve the causes of peace and justice, over-zealous and misguided Canadian soldiers threatened the security of a community in the very country they had pledged their lives to defend. The real victims were not members of Calgary society threatened by the continued presence of “enemy aliens,” but individual citizens, the owners of the White Lunch Company, the Dance Academy, and the Riverside Hotel.

## Notes

Thanks to David Bercuson, Chris Madsen, Nik Gardner, Anne Irwin, and Jennifer Arthur for useful comments on earlier incarnations of this article.

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2. Dick Cunniffe, *Scarlet, Riflegreen and Khaki* (Calgary: Century Calgary Publications, 1975), pp.17-18.
3. Cunniffe, *Scarlet, Riflegreen and Khaki*, pp.18, 22; Haycock, *Hughes*, p.201; Ronald Haycock, “Of Times and People: The Early History of Camp Borden, 1905-1916,” *Ontario History* LXXXIII, p.4 (December 1991), p.261; Letter, CGS to Minister of Militia and Defence, 21 September 1914, National Archives of Canada (NAC), W.G. Gwatkin Papers, Manuscript Group [MG] 30 G13 F4.
4. Desmond Morton, *When Your Number’s Up* (Toronto: Random House, 1993), 13, 62; John F. Meek, *Over the Top! The Canadian Infantry in the First World War* (Orangeville, Ont.: privately published, 1971), pp.75, 85, 89; Hugh A. Dempsey, *Calgary: Spirit of the West*

- (Saskatoon, SK: Fifth House Limited, 1994), p.107. Demographics, however, meant that late 1915 would prove to be the pinnacle of voluntary enlistment during the war; it took the next six months for 34 battalions to raise the next 22,593 men from the West.
5. David McConnell, "E.A. Cruikshank: His Life and Work," (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Toronto, 1965), pp.32, 39-40, 49-50.
  6. Inspector General's Report on Camp of Instruction at Calgary (6 July 1911), NAC, RG 24, Vol. 357, File HQ pp.33-24-41.
  7. CGS Report on Calgary Camp (1912), NAC, RG 24, Vol. 2507, File: HGS 1308 Pt. 1.
  8. McConnell, "E.A. Cruikshank," 50.
  9. Fred Bagley & Dr. Harvey Daniel Duncan, *A Legacy of Courage: "Calgary's Own" 137th Overseas Battalion, C.E.F.* (Calgary: Plug Street Books, 1993), pp.80-81, 163-4; *Albertan*, 14 February 1916, p.8.
  10. Bagley and Duncan, *A Legacy of Courage*, 81.
  11. John Herd Thompson, *Harvests of War* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), pp.36-7.
  12. Canada, *Senate*, 18 January 1916, pp.14-15.
  13. Howard Palmer, "Responses to Foreign Immigration: Nativism and Ethnic Tolerance in Alberta, 1880-1920," M.A. thesis (University of Alberta, 1971), p.225.
  14. Undated, handwritten sign, NAC, RG 24, Vol. 1255, File HQ 593-1-86, vol. 1 (hereafter "NAC Calgary Riots").
  15. 1st, 23rd and 47th witnesses, Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry into the attack on the White Lunch Restaurants, NAC Calgary Riots (hereafter "White Lunch").
  16. "Soldiers Take Own Action at Calgary," *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 February 1916, p.4.
  17. 73rd witness, White Lunch; *Albertan*, 11 February 1916, p.8.
  18. 47th witness, White Lunch; *Albertan*, 11 February 1918, p.8. Naegel wisely returned to the back of his building and shut off the gas meter to prevent a fire. The assistant fire chief worried that there might be fire and ventured into the kitchen where the soldiers agreed not to set fire to anything. 29th witness, White Lunch.
  19. 1st witness, White Lunch; Letter, Chief Constable, Calgary Police, to Mayor and Commissioners, Calgary, 16 February 1916, Calgary City Archives (CCA), Board of Commissioners, Series I, Correspondence Files 1909-1921, Box 63, File: Commissioners' Correspondence with City Employees D-S, Jan.-March 1916.
  20. *Albertan*, 11 February 1916, p.8.
  21. Letter, GOC MD 13 to Secy, Militia Council, 13 March 1916, NAC Calgary Riots.
  22. *Herald*, 11 February 1916, 1,6,9; *Albertan*, 11 February, pp.1, 8. See also *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 February 1916, p.4.
  23. Memorandum, JAG to DM, DND, n.d., NAC Calgary Riots.
  24. *Albertan*, 12 February 1916, p.1.
  25. Palmer, "Responses to Foreign Immigration," pp.226-7; Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), p.48; *Albertan*, 12 February 1916, p.1; *Calgary Herald*, 12 February 1916, p.14.
  26. Statutory Declaration sent from lawyer representing Alfred Henry Ebsworth of Calgary, owner of Riverside, to Minister of Militia and Defence, 1 April 1916, NAC Calgary Riots.
  27. *Albertan*, 12 February 1916, p.1.
  28. "Riverside Hotel," n.d., NAC Calgary Riots, vol. 2; *Albertan*, 12 February 1916, p.10; .
  29. Telegram, "Cruikshanks" to Secy Militia Council, 12 Feb 1916; Telegram, Adjutant General to DOC, MD 13, 12 Feb 1916; Telegram, "Cruikshanks" (DOC MD 13), to Secy Militia Council, 12 Feb 1916 8:23 pm, NAC Calgary Riots.
  30. Telegram, E. Taylor, Calgary, to Hon. J.A. Lougheed, Ottawa, 12 February 1916, NAC Calgary Riots; *Albertan*, 14 February 1916, p.8.
  31. *Albertan*, 14 February 1916, p.3.
  32. Resolutions passed by the Council of the City of Calgary at their special meeting held at 10:30 a.m. February 12th, 1916, CCA, City Clerks' Council Minutes, Reel 2, May 1914-Dec 1916, Volume 1, Year 1916, Council Chamber, City Hall, 12 February 1916; Confidential War Bulletin, 14 Feb 1916, NAC; *Calgary Herald*, 12 February 1916, pp.1, 13, 14 February 1916, 1; *Albertan*, 14 February 1916, p.8. Several motions were introduced at the Council meeting calling for Sam Hughes' involvement in the situation but were defeated at the urging of the mayor and Cruikshank.
  33. Unnamed note to file re: telephone call from Colonel Stanton, 12/2/16, 12:45 pm, NAC Calgary Riots.
  34. House of Commons, *Debates*, 14 February 1916, p.756; Telegram, BGen Cruikshank to Adjt General, Ottawa, 15 Feb 1916, re Calgary disturbance, NAC Calgary Riots.
  35. House of Commons, *Debates*, 15 February 1916, p.803.
  36. Letter and Marginalia, GOC MD 13 to Secretary, Militia Council, 13 March 1916, NAC Calgary Riots; *Albertan*, 15 February 1916, p.3.
  37. For an interpretation of the riots and courts of inquiry using anthropological theory on the rites of passage, see P.W. Lackenbauer and Nikolas Gardner, "Soldiers as Liminalities," paper presented at the Canada and War Conference, Ottawa, May 2000.
  38. 19th and 26th witnesses, Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry into the attack on the Riverside Hotel, NAC Calgary Riots (hereafter "Riverside Hotel").
  39. 12th witness, Riverside Hotel; 28th and 73rd witnesses, White Lunch.
  40. 14th, 32nd; 36th; 37th, and 54th witnesses, White Lunch.
  41. For those that were undoubtedly at the scene of the crimes, drunkenness (and the associated amnesia) appeared to be an acceptable means of denying participation and evading responsibility. See, for example, 1st, 10th, 19th, 26th and 42nd witnesses, Riverside Hotel. Although drunken disorderliness was an offence, and could not absolve a soldier of all blame for his actions, alcohol was nevertheless a vice to which all soldiers were apparently apt to succumb.
  42. See, for example, 2nd, 23rd, and 25th witnesses, White Lunch; 14th, 18th and 20th witnesses, Riverside Hotel; "The Raids," *Calgary Herald*, 14 February 1916, 3. A Calgary magistrate later "lectured" officers for apparently approving "the action of the men" and not taking the matter seriously enough. *Calgary Herald*, 24 February 1916, p.7.
  43. Letter, J.C. Duguid, Police Court Clerk, to Chief Constable, Calgary, 7 March 1916, NAC Calgary Riots.
  44. Letter and Marginalia, GOC MD 13 to Secretary, Militia Council, 13 March 1916, NAC Calgary Riots.

45. At one point, Cuddy suggested to reporters that a broad conspiracy by pro-German agencies, deliberately plotting to "discredit troops, impair discipline, and hurt recruiting," may have provoked the riot, but he apparently still held the military authorities responsible for the behaviour of the troops. *Albertan*, 14 February 1916, 1. Another conspiratorial view tried to draw connections between unions (the Western Federation of Labor and I.W.W.) and the rioting. *Albertan*, 16 February 1916, p.1; 24 February 1916, p.8.
46. Letter, Chief Cuddy to Messrs. Lent, Jones, Mackay & Mann, Barristers, etc., Calgary, Alberta, 8 May 1916, NAC Calgary Riots.
47. Statutory Declaration sent from lawyer representing Alfred Henry Ebsworth of Calgary, owner of Riverside, to MMD, 1 April 1916; Declaration, John Rioux, lessee of Riverside Hotel, 1 April 1916; Memorandum, JAG to Adjutant-General, 27 March 1916, NAC Calgary Riots.
48. Memorandum, JAG to Assistant-Adjutant-General, 10 April 1916, NAC Calgary Riots.
49. Letter, DM, MMD, to Messrs. Foster, Martin & Co., Advocates Etc., Royal Insurance Bldg., Montreal, re White Lunch Limited - Calgary, 14 April 1916, NAC Calgary Riots.
50. Memorandum, William C. Dennis, Washington, D.C., re: claim of Thomas and Neil M. Sorenson for damage to and destruction of their property and business in Calgary, Canada, [July 1916], NAC Calgary Riots. See also NAC, RG25, Series A-3-a, Volume 1190, File: 1916-5283, "Claim of Messrs. Thomas Sounson [sic] and N.M. Sounson [sic] for Loss Caused by Riots in Calgary."
51. See RG 24, Vol. 1257, File: HQ 593/1/108 Pt.1.
52. According to the JAG, what differentiated the claims in England (such as the riots of Canadian troops at Witley Camp) from the Elsworth claim was that, in all of the cases where compassionate grants were made, "the soldiers were on duty, under military control, or had in their rioting escaped from military control, a factor which does not seem to have existed in the Ebsworth claim. Where Canadian soldiers not under military control were alleged to be guilty of wrongdoing whereby damage was occasioned, any individual suffering thereby was left to his remedy under the ordinary law of the country." Letter, H. Guthrie, Minister of National Defence, to T.M. Tweedie, House of Commons, 21 May 1920, NAC Calgary Riots. On the Witley riots see Desmond Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp.184, 194-7.
53. Memorandum, JAG to DM, DND, n.d., NAC Calgary Riots.

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