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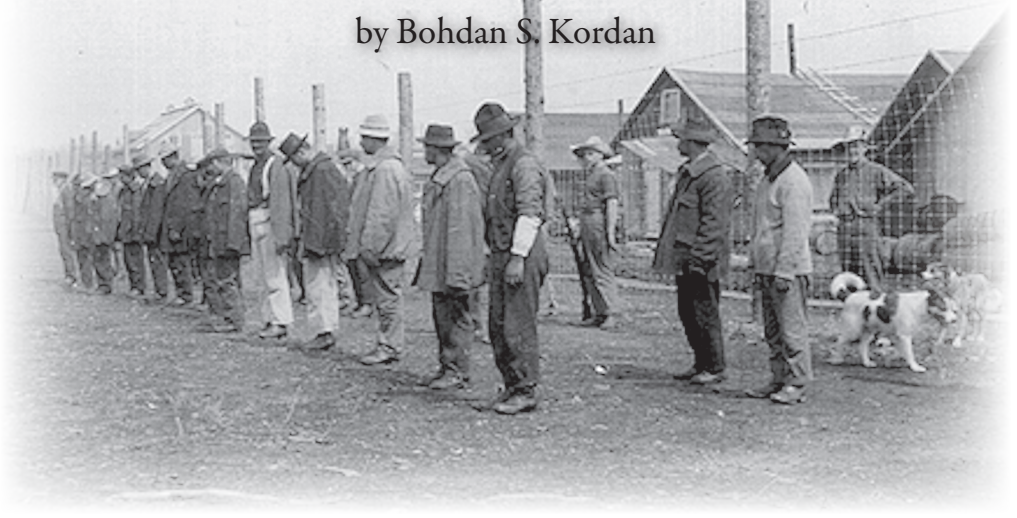
Résumé de l'article

Environ 1400 étrangers démunis d'origine ennemie se sont retrouvés à Kapuskasing en tant qu'ouvriers et prisonniers de guerre pendant la Première Guerre mondiale, créant une colonie agricole expérimentale dans le nord de l'Ontario. Leur internement, cependant, soulignait la contradiction de leur statut de prisonniers de guerre – c'étaient des civils, après tout. Cette contradiction a contribué à créer des conditions qui les ont exposés à des comportements démesurés. Ainsi rendus vulnérables, les internés de Kapuskasing étaient contraints au travail. D'autres, cependant, jugés « indésirables », ont été détenus jusqu'à leur expulsion à la fin de la guerre. Exploités, mal accueillis et maltraités, leur situation reflétait les circonstances générales de l'internement, ainsi que le rôle unique joué par Kapuskasing dans les premières opérations nationales d'internement au Canada.

Enemy Alien Internment in Ontario's Northland

by Bohdan S. Kordan



Watson Kirkconnell was scheduled to depart for Europe in 1916 as a fledgling captain with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Prevented from going overseas at the last minute because of a medical condition, he chose nevertheless to remain in the military, serving with the justice department's internment directorate as paymaster at Kapuskasing, an internment camp in Canada's hinterland. Mustered out at war's end and foreshadowing his later career as a literary scholar, Kirkconnell penned two articles about the experience.[1] Spending years in the wilderness on an operation that garnered little at-

[1] Watson Kirkconnell, "Kapuskasing: An Historical Sketch," *Bulletin of the Departments of History and Political and Economic Science in Queen's University* (Kingston, ON) 38 (January 1921); and Capt. F. W. Kirkconnell, "When We First Locked Up Fritz: The First Authentic Story of Our Internment Camps," *Maclean's*, 1 September 1920, <https://archive.macleans.ca/article/1920/9/1/when-we-locked-up-fritz> (accessed 17 October 2019). Descriptions, in passing, of internment at Kapuskasing include: Desmond Morton, "Sir William Otter and Internment Operations in Canada during the First World War," *Canadian Historical Review* 55:1 (1974), 32–58; Desmond Morton, *The Canadian General: Sir William Otter* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1974); and Dieter Buse and Graeme Mount, *Untold: Northeastern Ontario's Military Past, Volume 1, 1662–World War I* (Sudbury, ON: Latitude 46 Publishing, 2018). More recently, the correspondence of Adolph Hundt and the memoir of John Boychuk, internees held at Kapuskasing, have been retold in different formats. See: Dominique Villeneuve, *Heritage By Default, 1914–1920*, trans. Melanie Lalonde (Kapuskasing, ON: n.p., 2014); and Kassandra Luciuk, *Enemy Alien: A True Story of Life Behind Barbed Wire*, ill. Nicole Marie Burton (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2020).

Abstract

Some 1,400 destitute aliens of enemy origin were put to work as prisoners of war (POWs) at Kapuskasing during the Great War, carving out of Ontario's northland an experimental farm colony. Internment, which made this possible, however, highlighted the contradiction in their status as POWs. They were civilians after all. This contradiction helped create the conditions that exposed them to intemperate behaviour. Thus made vulnerable, the internees at Kapuskasing were compelled to work. Still others, considered "undesirable," were held until deported at war's end. Used and abused, unwelcomed and unwanted, their predicament reflected the general circumstances of internment, but also the unique role that Kapuskasing would play in Canada's first national internment operations.

Résumé: *Environ 1400 étrangers démunis d'origine ennemie se sont retrouvés à Kapuskasing en tant qu'ouvriers et prisonniers de guerre pendant la Première Guerre mondiale, créant une colonie agricole expérimentale dans le nord de l'Ontario. Leur internement, cependant, soulignait la contradiction de leur statut de prisonniers de guerre – c'étaient des civils, après tout. Cette contradiction a contribué à créer des conditions qui les ont exposés à des comportements démesurés. Ainsi rendus vulnérables, les internés de Kapuskasing étaient contraints au travail. D'autres, cependant, jugés « indésirables », ont été détenus jusqu'à leur expulsion à la fin de la guerre. Exploités, mal accueillis et maltraités, leur situation reflétait les circonstances générales de l'internement, ainsi que le rôle unique joué par Kapuskasing dans les premières opérations nationales d'internement au Canada.*

tention or respect, it was an opportunity for him to share his story. The writing was cathartic, but he also believed it was a tale worth telling.

As Kirkconnell narrated, in the vast boreal forest of Ontario's north—situated at the intersection of the newly built Transcontinental Railway and the Kapuskasing River, hundreds of miles from civilization in any direction—a collection of prisoners of war (POWs) were put to work carving out of the wilds a place of future settlement. It was a scheme born of an audacious idea. The region's flat topography, high water table, and rich clay soil was thought to hold agricultural promise. If properly prepared, this fertile land could lure future colonists to the area. The scheme spoke to imagination, ambition, and grit. Kirkconnell sought to convey all of this—but he also communicated the difficulties associated with the project, such as the resistance of the prisoners to their work. Indeed, he described at length the antagonism and resentments built up by the years spent behind Canadian barbed wire. For Kirkconnell, this was war and they were POWs and a battle of wills unavoidable.

It was a perspective, however, that prevented the young captain from delivering a more ingenuous account of the experience. Aware that the internees were non-combatants, he failed to ask how it was that these civilians became POWs in the first place. Moreover, like so many others, he was indifferent to their protests that, though immigrants

originating from countries now at war with the British Empire, they were not enemies of Canada. Nor did he appear to make much of the fact that a significant number of them would be collected at Kapuskasing and deported at war's end. An officer of junior rank, he was naturally dissuaded from inquiring. However, because Kirkconnell ignored these and other matters, an incomplete if not skewed interpretation of the events at Kapuskasing would result.

How then should Kapuskasing be understood? At a certain level, the experience mirrored the objectives of a government bent on a policy of internment. But what was behind the policy rationale that would see immigrants turned into POWs, and what did it mean for civilians to be sent to work as war prisoners in Canada's hinterland? What were the motivations of those who would use their labour? And what effect did this have on the mindset of those charged with guarding civilian immigrants sent to a remote wilderness area, far away from inquiring eyes? These were considerations that defined the Kapuskasing internment experience, paralleling developments found elsewhere as part of the operation on the frontier. But Kapuskasing was also unique in that the camp continued to operate until 1920, when the Treaty of Paris was signed, well after other internment sites were shuttered. In the latter stages of the war, Kapuskasing served as a place of consolidation, where prisoners were held prior to being removed from the country. What was the intent behind this, and why were some prisoners released and others detained indefinitely? How did these practices distinguish this camp from the rest of Canada's first national internment operation? And what did it reveal about the evolving role of internment and the overall policy?

The story of Kapuskasing is about the general and the particular: how the policy of internment shaped the experience at the camp and how specific considerations dictated developments that differentiated Kapuskasing from other facilities. It also represents an unbroken narrative wherein the disparate parts of the experience constituted a singular whole. But more directly, Kapuskasing is a story that runs far beyond the account authored by Captain Kirkconnell, who described it simply as a place where nature and the will of the enemy were tamed. As its story reveals, Kapuskasing was a place where newcomers were held and forced to labour because of who they were said to be and what they represented—enemies to whom nothing was owed and with whom even less was shared. That they had been invited into Canada meant nothing in the context of war. That they were civilians mattered less. They were the enemy and would be treated as such. In this sense, the Kapuskasing story is one in which the cruel logic of internment in Canada during the First World War is laid bare.

Eleven days after Canada's entry into the First World War, a proclamation was issued on 15 August 1914 giving notice that no alien of enemy origin would be interfered with if they obeyed the laws

of the land. Failing to do so, they would be interned. On the face of it, the proclamation spoke to security issues: detaining and preventing reservists from returning to their homelands where they might take up arms. Security, in this sense, was a legitimate concern and internment an appropriate response. However, through negative inference—insinuating that the natural inclination of the alien of enemy origin was to act on allegiances that lay elsewhere and, more especially, with a power at war with the British Empire—the declaration impugned their loyalty.[2] As a result, in the public mind, the decree cast the alien in the role of an actual enemy, elevating suspicion and fuelling rumours of disloyalty. Predictably, with war anxiety on the rise and the economy in flux, thousands of enemy aliens were dismissed from their places of work. With so many unemployed and destitute, an initially apprehensive Ottawa became increasingly worried as winter approached.

With public speculation about internment widespread, Order-in-Council P.C. No. 2721 was issued on 28 October 1914 under emergency powers granted the government by the War Measures Act. Directing enemy aliens to register with local authorities, the ordinance was meant to monitor this class of individual and have them report on whether or not they had sufficient means to remain in the country. More importantly, the order stipulated that should these individuals not possess sufficient resources to carry them through the hardship, in the judgment of local officials, they were to be interned as POWs. Targeting enemy aliens, however, ignored the ubiquity of unemployment among the general population, highlighting the impulse to contain the problem by localizing it, thus creating further, palatable security measures aimed at this group. But this was only possible if aliens of enemy origin could be interned as POWs; inevitably, it would lead to Order-in-Council P.C. No. 2721 and the POW designation.

Thousands of enemy aliens—unemployed, homeless, and poor—were soon arrested and processed for internment as POWs. Municipal jails and military prisons, such as Fort Henry in Kingston and the Citadel in Halifax, proved insufficient. The swell in numbers made alternative sites a priority, convincing the new internment director, Brigadier-General (later Major-General) William Otter, to search for partners in a quest to reduce the mounting costs associated with internment. The federal department of agriculture had for some time expressed interest in exploring the growing potential of the clay belt in northern Ontario and concluded that an experimental farm could be created to attract settlers to the area. The idea was also of longstanding interest to the Ontario premier, William Hearst, who, serving as the minister responsible for immigration and coloniza-

[2] An important aspect of the presumed loyalties of the enemy aliens lay in their legal and political status as subjects of foreign sovereigns. For a full discussion of this point, see: J. Farney and B. Kordan, "The Predicament of Belonging: The Status of Enemy Aliens in Canada, 1914," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 39:1 (Winter 2005), 74–89.

tion, was a strong advocate for developing the north. But it was a project the province could not undertake unilaterally—certainly not under the austerity conditions brought on by war. POW labour, on the other hand, presented an opportunity and the premier recognized it as such.[3]

The plan was for the federal department of agriculture to offer expertise as well as cover the cost of POW labour to clear the forest for farming. The military, under the authority of the internment directorate, would guard and maintain the prisoners. For its part, the province would provide land and assume responsibility for overseeing the cutting of tress and millwork. As for the profit from the sale of lumber, this would be shared between the province and federal agriculture department. A potential windfall, Premier Hearst boasted that the model farm could be established without cost to the province other than providing a land concession of some 1,000 acres.

Hearst would not be denied the benefits from this pool of labour, which in his view "would only be limited practically by the ability to provide work and accommodation."[4] That the agriculture department similarly approached the government of Quebec served as a further impetus. In this regard, the premier insisted that Ontario simply "wanted its full share of Austrian and German prisoners of war for this work."[5] Underlining the premier's indifference to their plight, the prisoners were regarded as a spoil of war. The only condition set was that the project be located at a distance from the Quebec camp, to minimize future competition for homesteaders. A grant of 1,282 acres was offered, and with that negotiations were concluded regarding the construction of an internment station at Kapuskasing.

On 10 January 1915, the first contingent of fifty-six POWs arrived from Fort Henry. They were immediately put to work erecting bunkhouses. Shortly thereafter, the commanding officer, Major Fredrick Clarke, advised divisional headquarters that a hundred prisoners could be received weekly, with sleeping quarters available for 400. By March, a total of 438 POWs were at Kapuskasing, easing Fort Henry of its surplus. The majority were Austro-Hungarian subjects, consisting of minorities from the periphery of the empire—part of the great wave of turn-of-the-century immigration to Canada. To this number were added prisoners of German and Ottoman origin. In the main, all were labourers, unemployed,

[3] "Prisoners Have To Earn Maintenance," *Manitoba Free Press*, 10 December 1914. See also: "War Prisoners Will Open Up New Ontario," *Toronto Daily Star*, 10 December 1914; "Experimental Farm In North Arranged by Premier Hearst," *Sault Star*, 11 December 1914; and "Alien Prisoners To Work On The Farm," *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 December 1914.

[4] Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO), RG 14-157, reel MS 5542, "Kapuskasing Detention Camp Re: Clearing Land," Hon. W. H. Hearst to J.F. Whitson, 11 December 1914.

[5] United Sates National Archives (hereafter USNA), Department of State Records, file 763.72115.345, Felix Johnson, US Consul, to the Secretary of State, Washington, 11 December 1914.

Prisoners disembarking at Kapuskasing Internment Camp. Courtesy Ron Morel Memorial Museum.

and indigent. Now under armed guard, they were expected to work.

Results were soon realized. Officials in the agriculture department were apprised in April that seventy-five acres of dense forest had been cut down. Mills in the vicinity were notified that 400 cords of pulpwood and 3,000 logs were available for purchase, with the promise of more to come. Work was also undertaken on constructing military barracks, work sheds, and more bunkhouses for new prisoners, who arrived daily. Upon inspection, commissioner J.F. Whitson, of the Ontario government's northern development branch, described the site as "a thriving village" and praised the work as first-rate, enthusing that "the beauty of the place" was slowly being revealed with the removal of the trees.[6] Premier Hearst, however, was more sagacious in his assessment of Kapuskasing. With a captive labour force, costs were minimal. Sensing an even greater opportunity, he proposed that with the arrival of more prisoners, a number be employed on clearing other land adjacent to the Transcontinental Railway. Two satellite camps were soon established at a distance from the main station.

The scale of the Kapuskasing operation was impressive. By August 1915, Toronto's *Empire and Mail* estimated that 1,400 prisoners were clearing land at a per-prisoner cost of just 25¢ a day—the allotted military wage for supplementary non-military work. In the newspaper's judgment, this was a good investment, especially since the prisoners were compliant.[7] The satisfaction, however, was short-lived, the *Empire* soon reporting several escapes from the camp. Given

[6] AO, RG 14-157, reel MS 5542, "Kapuskasing Detention Camp Re: Saw Mill," Commissioner J.F. Whitson, Northern Development Branch, to G.H. Grisdale, Director of Experimental Farms, Ottawa, 25 March 1915.

[7] *Empire and Mail* (Toronto), 6 August 1915; and "1,400 Now Interned at Kapuskasing Camp," *Empire and Mail*, 10 August 1915.

the risks involved, flight signalled desperation, underscoring the reality that, for some, the conditions were simply too much to bear. The pace of felling and milling trees was, in fact, relentless, with no prospect of let-up. From 1 May to 20 July, some 8,818 logs were cut and prepared. Another 4,810 logs followed between 20 July and 1 September, resulting in 1,567,605 board feet of lumber. To the job of clearing land for farm use, road construction was added. By January 1916, in the nearby townships of O'Brien, Fauquier, Owens, and Williamson, 124 acres of dense black spruce were cut and thirty-five miles grubbed and graded in preparation for a future motorway. Twelve culverts and one bridge were also constructed as part of the project.

Almost from the outset, Germany registered protests with the British Foreign Office after receiving reports from neutral American consular officials tasked with monitoring conditions faced by German internees in camps across Canada. The reports contained information that prisoners at Kapuskasing and elsewhere were compelled to work. German authorities complained that with respect to POWs this was contrary to the 1907 Hague Convention. When Canada replied that the work was voluntary and the prisoners properly compensated, Germany rejected the claim. According to international convention, states could authorize the use of traditional POWs for public service as long as the work was not excessive and unconnected to the war effort. But prisoners could not be compelled to do so. Rather, the work was to be voluntary, and if voluntary the rate of pay equivalent to free labour was to apply. In this instance, however, the pay scale, according to Berlin, was "disgracefully low"—certainly well below German standards—and the prisoners were forced to work. But more fundamentally, these were civilians.[8] Implied was the idea that interned enemy aliens merited greater consideration than that extended to captured combatants.

As a legal principle, the allegations highlighted the conundrum faced by civilian internees. Were they POWs? If not, then what treatment was to be accorded them? The public view of the internees at Kapuskasing was that they were simply war prisoners and deserved to be treated as such.[9] International law, however, was more circumspect. Only enemy alien civilians who actually had taken up arms or engaged in hostile activity could be considered POWs. Little consideration was given to the prospect of massively interning enemy alien civilians with no involvement in the conflict. Consequently, and in the absence of international juridical guidance, rationalizations were offered.

Officials in Canada's justice department, for instance, claimed that since "the country of their allegiance" made no provision for their maintenance, the

[8] Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG 25 G1, vol. 1156, file: 48-1, "Note Verbale" to the Embassy of the United States of America, 23 June 1915.

[9] See, for example: "Interned Aliens Will Clear Two Big Experimental Farms in The North," *Ottawa Journal*, 11 December 1914.

status of POW would apply. Further, while no international ruling prohibited the destitute from being put to work, domestic vagrancy laws did authorize the labour of the poor to offset the cost of their relief. And finally, it was noted: "That they should be accorded treatment [as] prisoners of war obviously works to the advantage to these distressed people rather than as a hardship."[10] The *Montreal Gazette* seconded this line of thought: "It is likely that most of them will have a far better time of it as prisoners than they would have had around Montreal as alien enemies out of money and work."[11]

Characterizing the denial of liberty as of benefit, however, was self-serving. It was also deceptive in that it failed to acknowledge that the difficult circumstances confronting enemy aliens originated with the government (as it had prevented them from returning to their countries of origin) and that the emergency powers being exercised inevitably led to the selective targeting of this group within the wider, unemployed population. Moreover, there was nothing to suggest that this was condoned practice, let alone a salutary measure; rather, being used as a captive labour force, the effect of internment was pernicious and debilitating.[12] Indeed, once interned, they were compelled to work, and work they did because of where they had come from, who they were said to be, and what was expected of them.

At Kapuskasing, quotas were set as provincial overseers looked to ensure that funds were properly used. Efficiency became a priority after agriculture officials gave notice the department would no longer cover the prisoner allowance, since the lands necessary for the federal experimental farm had been cleared. This prompted the Ontario government—anxious not to lose access to the labour—to pay for the continued use of the internees for roadwork and other projects, but only at the assigned POW rate. To be clear, Premier Hearst stipulated that, "we will only take labour when we want it, and that we will not be compelled to retain any labourers on the work that are not satisfactory for us."[13] Hearst was adamant: "We could not afford to pay .25¢ per day in the winter time, nor would we want to pay for any class of men they may want to send to us." The availability of cheap POW labour was an opportunity. But in the premier's judgment, the numbers also had to add up. The role of internment was now delineated by economic considerations, making policy reassessment unlikely.

In view of these added priorities, quarrels over the quantity and quality of work

[10] The Deputy Minister of Justice, E. Newcombe, first articulated this position, which would be submitted in a report to the Committee of the Privy Council. See LAC, RG 6 H1, vol. 819, file 2616, R. Boudreau, clerk of the Privy Council, 28 August 1915.

[11] "Alien Prisoners In Northern Wilds," *Montreal Gazette*, 15 January 1915.

[12] The use of internees as forced labour was understood to be contrary to law, which accounted for why it was treated for the most part as a "secret." See: "Visit to Detention Camp In The North," *Toronto Daily News*, 20 July 1915.

[13] AO, RG 14-157, reel MS 5542, "Kapsukasing Detention Camp, Re: a/c for Board," J.F. Whitson, Commissioner, Northern Development Branch, to J. A. Stewart, Inspector, 14 March 1916.

were frequent. Provincial overseers insisted the pace of work be maintained. To ensure that there would be no slackening and to minimize cost overruns, the military guard at Kapuskasing were encouraged to exercise strict discipline in managing the internees. This, however, demanded that guards and officers were suited to the job. All along, the camp's commandant, Major Clarke, insisted that the calibre of recruits assigned to Kapuskasing be adequate to coping with the physically and psychologically demanding conditions. The difficulty, for Clarke, was that while on leave, the camp's most capable personnel were often pilfered for overseas duty. In an effort to put the camp on a more rational basis, Clarke insisted either this practice be stopped or alternative, similarly competent replacements provided.

Quality of personnel was a particularly sensitive issue with Clarke, since recruits of questionable value were being sent to Kapuskasing.[14] Some failed their medical examinations; others, having returned traumatized from the European front, behaved erratically. A few of the enlistments were even of "enemy" birth, albeit naturalized. Meanwhile, the senior ranks were populated with men of dubious character or ability, including the camp's medical officer, who, it was felt, might still be of use, despite his demotion to the rank of private for his propensity to drink. And then there were those individuals who simply did not want to be in a place that had no apparent connection to the war. They had enlisted to fight and took exception to the job of guarding civilians, even those of enemy origin. In the end, the quality and mindset of both guards and officers reflected the standing of the operation: internment was of little military importance and those sent to Kapuskasing were under no illusion that this was the case.

All of this fed into an atmosphere of resentment, which resulted in bitterness, abuses, and irregularities at Kapuskasing. Punishment diets—bread and water—as well as solitary confinement were administered liberally for any infraction, large or small, while the lack of discipline among the guards resulted in alarming displays of intimidation and brutality. Allegations of abuse were brought to the attention of the internment director, Major-General Otter, who sought to put a stop to the more egregious violations, but admitted that this was an all-too-common occurrence at many of the camps. For Otter, nothing was to be gained by the wanton physical mistreatment of POWs, which he condemned as a failure of moral character: "The object of their present duties are rendered valueless, and the good name of Canada

[14] Numerous reports and correspondence detailed the quality of the recruits and the problems encountered. See, for example: LAC, RG 24, vol. 4279, file 34-1-3 (10), "Recruits A.M.C. at Kapuskasing," 28 November 1915; *ibid*., file 34-13 (11), "10th Royal Grenadier Detachment doing Duty at Kapuskasing," 9 December 1915; and *ibid*., Officer Commanding Kapuskasing Internment Camp to the A.A.G., 2nd Military Division, 10 December 1915.

[15] LAC, RG 24, vol. 4695, file 448-14-20, Maj. General Wm. Otter, Officer Commanding Internment Operations, to Brigadier General E. Cruickshank, Officer Commanding Military District No.13, 16 December 1915.

Prisoners assembling, Kapuskasing Internment Camp. Courtesy Ron Morel Memorial Museum.

brought to the level of the Hun," he declared.[15] But the director also understood that in the wilderness, there was little he could do if immediate and proper supervision was lacking.

In November 1915, an American consular representative reported that the mood at the frontier internment camps was tense and the prisoners surly. The offenses being committed, from the petty to the serious, added to the misery and sullenness of the stations, including Kapuskasing. It was not surprising, then, that attempted escapes at the northern Ontario facility were on the rise, or that personnel anxious to quit the hard-luck camp pleaded for discharges. When the appeals of the latter were refused, once on leave they simply disappeared. Others, however, patiently looked to be reassigned. Among them was the commanding officer of Kapuskasing—Major Clarke—whose repeated requests for a transfer would eventually be approved.

Clarke's replacement was Lieutenant-Colonel George Royce, who, it was felt, having served some twenty-five years as an officer with the Queen's Own Rifles, had the necessary administrative experience. But Royce also possessed an anxious disposition, exacerbated by the challenges he faced. When he assumed command—in January 1916—Royce immediately expressed his uneasiness about the camp, which at this time numbered some 1,200 prisoners. Like his predecessor, he complained to district headquarters about the quality of the guards. Many had no experience or knowledge of what guarding entailed, while others simply were without any military training at all. Royce explained that at Kapuskasing,

each single guard had in his charge a large number of prisoners, a duty requiring men of experience.[16] For the lieutenant-colonel, this was no small matter. He understood that there were expectations and the failure to meet these would reflect badly on his command.

Indeed, it was anticipated the prisoners would work steadily and deliver value. To this end, the progress of the work and expenditures were closely scrutinized.[17] Invariably, discrepancies in the accounts would occur. For the month of February 1916, the value of internment labour at Kapuskasing amounted to $2,253.50. The northern development branch officials, however, estimated the cost of the work at $1,536.25. This inconsistency, which translated into a shortfall of some 2,869 man-days of labour, was attributed to religious holidays, which internment authorities were obliged to respect, and sickness (real and feigned). Since in these cases the prisoners were idle, provincial authorities insisted they would not be paid. They were expected to work, and if not, then the internment directorate was responsible for any deficit that might result. In the context of an operation experiencing rising costs, Royce was under pressure to ensure that the prisoners were being used to maximum effect. There could be no delays, stoppages, or interruptions.

To offset criticism and give credence to the idea that there was still merit to the operation, Royce emphasized the camp's accomplishments. Beyond the 600 acres that had been stumped and slashed for agricultural use, he reported in March 1916 that no less than 500 men were working daily on logging and clearing bush, resulting in an additional eighteen miles of roads being cleared and graded under his command. Some 8,000 feet of marketable lumber was also being produced daily at the sawmill. In correspondence with his superiors, Royce communicated, "this camp [was] worth seeing and it would surprise you, the magnitude of the operations."[18] But more importantly, Royce gave assurance that the original plan for Kapuskasing—that the prisoners, released at the end of the war, would purchase lots for sale and occupy the land as future colonists—would yet come to fruition. He and others were convinced that once the internees recognized and appreciated the value of what they had accomplished, they would willingly take up settlement.[19] The idea that the internees could be both enemy prisoners and future colonists did not appear to strike the commander as odd or incongruous. What mattered was that the work be undertaken and the plan completed.

[16] LAC, RG 24, vol. 4360, file 34-6-11 (1), Lieut. Colonel G. Royce, Officer Commanding Kapuskasing Internment Camp, to the A.A.G., 2nd Military Division, Exhibition Camp, Toronto, 7 February 1916.

[17] For examples of monthly accounts, see: AO, RG 14-157, reel MS 5542, "Kapuskasing Detention Camp, Re: a/c for Board," March–June 1916.

[18] LAC, RG 24, vol. 4360, file 34-6-11 (1), Lieut. Colonel G. Royce, Officer Commanding Kapuskasing Internment Camp, to the A.A.G., 2nd Military Division, Exhibition Camp, Toronto, 20 March 1916.

[19] "Interned Austrians May Make Framers," *Globe* (Toronto), 19 February 1916.

Despite Royce's enthusiasm for the project, however, there was no hiding the fact that Kapuskasing was beset with problems. Maintaining discipline was a constant worry given the pressures of the camp. Conflict—between guards and prisoners, between military administrators and provincial overseers, and among the internees themselves—was endemic. Being in close confinement, it was a toxic environment. "We have fights among prisoners occasionally, as they are not all lambs," the commandant commented, "and if they can not fight with anyone else, they fight amongst themselves."[20] With tensions rising, Royce, believing that all personnel were needed, declined applications for overseas duty and refused any furloughs. Sensing trouble, he insisted the camp be supplied with more ammunition, writing to his superiors: "While disturbances, so far, have been of a minor nature, it is liable to be serious at any time."[21]

There was good reason for Royce to feel unnerved. The winter of 1916 proved to be unduly harsh, with daily temperatures between -40°F and -50°F. Prisoners complained of the bitter cold. Frostbite was commonplace. Frozen timber could not be easily hewn, making the work dangerous. Infirmary records revealed a plethora of cold-related mishaps, including hacked hands and feet.[22] Among the guards, the ability to stand watch in this inhospitable climate for long stretches at a time tested even the most able. And then there was the simple risk of guarding prisoners in close quarters who were in possession of a range of tools—axes, picks, pikes, shovels, and hammers. The stress among the guards reinforced the antipathy directed toward their charges. To address the strain, Royce requested more men. His application, however, was rejected, pending a policy reassessment regarding the release of prisoners to industry.

Royce's fears were soon realized when 200 of the most troublesome prisoners at Petawawa were transferred for safekeeping to Kapuskasing. A decision had been made early in May 1916 to close Petawawa, with the majority of prisoners being paroled to industry. The remainder, carrying their grievances with them, arrived at Kapuskasing in a state of agitation. Not unexpectedly, the internees refused to follow instructions as to work assignments and protested the compulsory nature of the work. Sixty were singled out for solitary confinement. A crowd of prisoners blocked the escort. As the troops assembled, more prisoners joined in. Despite warning shots and pistol whippings, the prisoners did not disperse and gave no sign of retreating. The soldiers at the command charged the crowd of 300 with bayonets drawn, and the prisoners were eventu-

[20] LAC, RG 24, vol. 4360, file 34-6-11 (1), Lieut. Colonel G. Royce, Officer Commanding Kapuskasing Internment Camp, to the A.A.G., 2nd Military Division, 20 March 1916.

[21] *Ibid*., Royce to the A.A.G., 2nd Military Division, 16 March 1916.

[22] Prof. D. Morton makes reference to the list of injuries and infirmary records at Kapuskasing. See: Morton, "Sir William Otter," 47.

Guarding the perimeter, Kapuskasing Internment Camp. Courtesy Ron Morel Memorial Museum.

ally driven back to their bunkhouses. In the confusion, reports indicated a number of prisoners were shot and killed. In the end, twelve were seriously injured.[23]

As Royce reported, the trouble could have been much worse if the majority of prisoners had not been turned out for work earlier that day. He expected further disturbances and requested a machine-gun squadron be attached to the guard: "It might never be required, but it would certainly have a moral effect on the prisoners."[24] Royce conveyed that the internees' chief complaint concerned compulsory labour and the apparent discrepancy around the issue: some were compelled to work while others were given special dispensation as "first-class prisoners." Unless the policy was amended, the resentment among the prisoners could not be easily contained and even the most basic of tasks, Royce felt,

[23] The prisoner riot was extensively covered in several dailies, including the *Globe* (Toronto), 16 and 17 May 1916. On official reports, see: LAC, RG 24, vol. 4360, file 34-6-11 (1), Maj. General Otter, Officer Commanding Internment Operations, to Brigadier General W. Logie, District Officer Commanding 2nd Military Division, 13 May 1916; *ibid*., Brigadier General W. Logie to the Hon. Sam Hughes, Militia Headquarters, 13 May 1916; and USNA, Department of State Records, file 763.72115.2127, "Report of Riot of Prisoners of War, Friday May 12th, 1916."

[24] LAC, RG 24, vol. 4360, file 34-6-11 (1), Lieut. Colonel G. Royce, Officer Commanding Kapuskasing Internment Camp, to Brigadier General W. Logie, Officer Commanding 2nd Military Division, 19 May 1916.

would not be carried out without the use of force. This, he was convinced, would only lead to further violent clashes.

Royce's concerns were shared. The district officer commanding, Brigadier-General Logie, wrote to the internment director observing that the policy of compulsory labour was problematic in the way it was being implemented. In his opinion, it was unfair that the commandant was not provided with more definitive instructions as to whether the prisoners were required to work. But as Major-General Otter observed:

> The question is one that it has not been advisable to promulgate any definite order upon, as there is no regulation compelling them to do so, while on the other hand it is better both for themselves and the public that they should. Therefore the matter has been left to the tact and judgment of Commandants and until now no trouble has ever been experienced.[25]

It was, of course, a less than satisfactory response—but one that Otter felt compelled to give, despite his reservations. Indeed, fearing that Canada might be acting illegally, he asked for clarification from the justice department, only to be told that having been apprehended for "military reasons," civilian enemy aliens would be treated as POWs.[26] As for Royce, in the absence of clear instructions, he pleaded, once again, for more men. He requested that forty-one more be added to the existing 219.

While preliminary authority was given to increase the guard, the recruiting depot in Toronto conveyed that, given the rate of remuneration, it was impossible to find individuals willing to go north. Kapuskasing was a hardship post with little to recommend it. In an effort to mollify the commander, Royce was informed that the more efficient Mark II version of the aging Ross rifle would be issued to guards at the camp. However, despite the difficulties he faced, when told no additional soldiers would be sent his way, Royce indicated he would resign if not reassigned. Royce's transfer was granted. He relinquished command on 17 July 1916, the same day that forest fires threatened the nearby settlements of Cochrane, Kelso, and Iroquois Falls. In his last act as commander, Royce sent prisoners and guards to help extinguish the inferno. Together, they fought the flames and gave assistance, but not before the great Matheson Fire claimed the lives of 223 local inhabitants.

Lieutenant Colonel W.H. Rodden was chosen to replace Royce. Rodden's appointment followed a posting that had him oversee the sizeable Spirit Lake camp near Abitibi, Quebec. It was also the result of a plan to consolidate the two northern stations in central Canada, with

[25] *Ibid*., Major General Wm. Otter, General Officer Commanding Internment Operations, to Brigadier General W. A. Logie, Officer Commanding 2nd Military District, 25 May 1916.

[26] LAC, RG 13 A2, vol. 1929, file 1633-1916, Maj. General Wm. Otter to the Minister of Justice, Hon. C.J. Doherty, 3 November 1916. Personally dismayed by the arrest and internment of 800 unemployed enemy aliens at the Lakehead (viewed as a way for municipal authorities to download their responsibility), Otter felt that military necessity was not at issue and the explanation could only have come as a disappointment.

Spirit Lake to close permanently. Across the country, camps were being shuttered due to the growing number of internees being paroled in response to economic demand. Since April 1916, appeals for labourers were fielded by industry and agriculture, hurriedly looking to secure replacements for native-born workers who had enlisted. POW labour at the Kapuskasing and Spirit Lake camps was seen as a potential resource. Applications from a range of companies necessarily followed, including the CPR, which on 2 June 1916 asked for no less than a thousand interned aliens from Kapuskasing to work on the Lake Superior Division line.

The government was disposed to release the POWs to satisfy demand. But it was also mindful of the potential repercussions of doing so. After all, the government had introduced the category of "enemy alien," thereby laying the foundation for the public's perception that they were in fact enemies. Yet, for Ottawa, the internment of these enemy aliens originally centred on indigence, linking the issue of security to their employment status. And so, to the degree that their status would change with a job offer, release could now be envisaged. However, this would occur only under certain conditions. The prisoners had to demonstrate their eligibility for parole, which meant that only those who were amenable to working where placed would be discharged. They would also be paid free labour wages so as not to undermine the existing labour market. And finally, like the wider enemy alien population, they would have to register and report regularly to local officials.

Public resentment and suspicion, of course, was difficult to overcome. The thought of working alongside released enemies was inconceivable, resulting in calls for the government to abandon its plans of shuttering the camps and for all enemy aliens in the country to be interned. In Ontario, native-born workers mobilized "to drive out of town interned aliens who had been brought in to address the labour shortage."[27] Unbeknownst to the public, however, the policy of internment was proving untenable. Germany had long protested the compulsory use of civilian prisoners on work projects in Canada, and even threatened retaliation against British POWs in German camps. This made it difficult for the government to continue with the policy as originally conceived, especially with pressure emanating from London, which had for some time feared repercussions.[28] From the outset, internment had been conducted with local needs in mind. However, the reality of a world at war made it part of a global undertaking: internment in Canada was connected to an imperial network that imposed responsi-

[27] See: "Bracebridge Workmen Hostile to Austrians," *Globe*, 15 April 1916; and "Won't Let Austrians Work," *Sault Star*, 15 April 1916.

[28] LAC, RG 25 G1, vol. 1156, file 48-1, Bonar Law, UK Colonial Secretary, to the Governor General, 5 and 12 July 1915.

[29] See the discussion in Stefan Manz and Panikos Panayi, *Enemies in the Empire: Civilian Internment in the British Empire during the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

bilities on those employing the practice.[29] In the context of the Great War, these local and global dimensions were not easily separated, refuting the idea that internment in Canada was purely a domestic affair. Thus, in addition to changing economic conditions, pressures upon Canada to align its practice with imperial policy necessitated that Canadian internment be modified. As a result, Kapuskasing, as well as other camps, would slowly be emptied of their prisoners. By late August 1916, only seventy-five internees remained at Kapuskasing.

Camps across the country were quickly being closed. Yet, within each there remained those who would not be reconciled with their fate, and who, continuing to be defiant, made their resentments known. At Kapuskasing the remaining prisoners, still compelled to work, drove railway spikes into the logs, damaging the mill's saw. These and other acts of defiance were seen as signs of sedition on the part of the enemy alien, the handiwork of those who could not be easily accommodated or integrated. Although their fate was still to be determined, removal to a secure site was a foregone conclusion. Kapuskasing's isolation, capacity to intern large numbers, and proximity to transport made it a preferred location.[30] Kapuskasing would thus serve as a destination for those prisoners who either resisted or were considered suspect. Given the perceived danger they posed, instructions were issued to reinforce the existing wire compound at Kapuskasing with two additional tall fences, set six feet apart, around the pe-

Prisoner roll call, Kapuskasing Internment Camp. Courtesy Ron Morel Memorial Museum.

[30] "Canada's New Detention Camp," *Pembroke Standard*, 20 May 1917.

rimeter. Completed in May 1917, the system of fences was described as a "band of steel." Shortly thereafter, 250 internees were transferred from Spirit Lake upon its closure, while another 400 prisoners arrived from Fort Henry in Kingston.

Within days of their arrival at Kapuskasing, two inmates escaped. Given the recent security improvements, the news of the escapes convinced Major-General Otter that there were underlying problems with the camp. Investigations revealed irregularities on the part of the new commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Rodden, leading Otter to focus attention on other possible indiscretions by the latter. During a surprise visit to the Spirit Lake camp just prior to its closure, Otter found 1,100 cords of stowed wood at the nearby railway siding. The large stack was unaccounted for in either the work or pay schedules. The source of the wood, it was eventually discovered, were trees cut on property adjacent to the camp owned by Rodden—the commandant of Spirit Lake at the time. Vehemently denying wrongdoing, Rodden asserted that the prisoners had strayed onto his property. The impropriety, however, could not be overlooked. Only recently reassigned to Kapuskasing, Rodden was quietly relieved of his new command, a position he held through the justice department.[31]

A disappointment to Otter, the transgression was not an uncommon one. Similar incidents took place at other camps—the result of officers of debatable quality and character being foisted on the directorate through connections and influence. But it was also a function of the uncertain status of the internees and the camp's isolation. These were enemies and their treatment apparently of little consequence, a notion reinforced by the camp's remoteness. Why, otherwise, would they have been sent to such a place, neglected and forlorn? It was a question that provided motive to those who saw the opportunity for private and personal gain.

Internment at Fort Henry ended with the removal of the prisoners to Kapuskasing, enabling the Fort Henry commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel W. E. Date, to replace the disgraced Rodden in May 1917. Date was an officious man. But as a disciplinarian, Major-General Otter also saw in him the traits needed to finally bring the camp to order.[32] Otter would not be disappointed. Upon taking command, Date immediately put the troops on notice that regulations would be strictly observed and lax performance of duty met with consequences. Among the internees, a program of stringent inspections and curfews was introduced, as were new austerity measures. When Canada's food comptroller urged Cana-

[31] LAC, RG 13 A2, vol. 1929, file 1633-1916, Maj. General Wm. Otter to the Minister of Justice, Hon. C.J. Doherty, 24 February and 1 March 1917. The episode is also described in Morton, "Sir William Otter," 50.

[32] LAC, RG 6, vol. 765, file 5251, Major General Wm. Otter, General Officer Commanding Internment Operations, to Capt. W.R. Creighton, Assistant Private Secretary, Minister of the Militia, 26 September 1917.

dians to decrease food consumption, and as British officials had advised that internees in Canadian camps were liberally fed relative to British POWs in German camps, a policy of reduced rations was strictly enforced at Kapuskasing.

Not only was Date domineering and inflexible, he was also suspicious. In the main, he considered his charges treacherous; an attitude that laid bare his unwholesome prejudices and fears. But it also spoke to circumstances. The government's original description of immigrants from Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey as presumed enemies helped frame his hardened stance toward them. No quarter was to be given the enemy, and Date, resolute in his duty, was unapologetic in treating them as such.[33] There were, however, parameters—especially as Germany, ever watchful, was attentive to the welfare of its co-nationals abroad. These two realities, potentially at odds, portended conflict.

Germany, in its diplomatic engagement with Britain, had long held that civilian POWs would be treated with a greater degree of consideration than captured combatants. Berlin insisted that prisoners could not be forced to work, though it did accept the principle of voluntary work if the rate of pay approximated that earned by free labour. Thus, as of 15 June 1917, those paroled to the railways but still required to report were paid 20¢ per hour. However, for British officials and, by extension, Canadian authorities, it was expected that those who remained behind barbed wire would perform extended duties at the POW rate of 25¢ per day, including cutting wood. A matter of diplomatic dispute, Berlin was adamant that work which took them outside the camp was in violation of the convention. Meanwhile, the internees, implacable in their attitude toward camp authority, took their cue from the political quarrel, claiming they would not work at the direction of the camp administration under any circumstances.

For Lieutenant-Colonel Date, the refusal of the prisoners to work was interpreted as a challenge to his personal authority.[34] More immediately, however, his frustration centred on the problem that their refusal posed. How to prepare

[33] "I decided to call their bluff right there and then. I called for about twelve men, posted armed sentries over the other bunkhouses, in case their inmates attempted a mix-up, went into No. 1 [bunkhouse] with Capts. Gibson and Kirkconnell and ordered the prisoners up for roll call. A few hesitated, but an automatic six-shooter poked in their faces made them step lively. They stood up like sheep and answered their names. Afterwards, I had them counted, then told [Prisoner] Baffin to roll his blankets and come out, which he did most obediently. Furthermore, I told [Prisoner] No. 2232 Policardo to follow suit, seeing he was so mouthy just previously. He came like a child. After we left there was not a sound in No. 1, and the whole thing was done so quietly, and they cowed down so completely." LAC, RG 6, vol. 765, file 5330, Officer Commanding Kapuskasing Internment Camp, Lieut. Colonel W. E. Date, to Major General Wm. Otter, 1 October 1917.

[34] "These men have absolutely refused to saw any wood to keep themselves warm. There is a big stove in the building, wood at the door, saw and saw horse, but they say 'they will freeze in hell before cutting wood.' If they want to freeze, it's their outlook. Troops will not be allowed to cut their wood." LAC, RG 6 H1, vol. 765, file 5330, Lieut. Colonel W.E. Date to Maj. General Wm. Otter, 5 October 1917.

the camp before the onset of winter? Firewood had to be obtained from the bush and cut for the camp. Being as it was for the welfare of the camp and the prisoners' own health, Date felt that this type of work was the responsibility of the prisoners under the Hague Convention. The difficulty, however, lay in interpretation. Did fatigue duties outside the camp constitute compulsory labour and therefore violate the understanding under the Hague regulations regarding POWs?[35]

The result was an impasse that led to a build-up in tensions, especially as relief funds provided by the German government incentivized prisoners not to comply with the commandant's orders. In response, Date proposed withholding the allowance from those who refused to work, "inasmuch as a prisoner could earn almost as much by idleness as by industry."[36] The reduced rations were cut even more. The militants reciprocated by severely beating prisoners who chose to work, thereby putting a halt to all labour at Kapuskasing. This in turn prompted the commanding officer to confront the instigators, forcing them into isolation cells at the point of a revolver while placing troops at the ready to address the threat of an uprising. Date was convinced that only strong measures would prevail. He personally felt that the recent shooting of a prisoner who resisted—"mak[ing] them realize what they are up against"—would have the desired effect on the strikers.[37] Instead, the prisoners remained defiant and declared that they would not capitulate, even in the face of cold weather, starvation, and the continued use of threats and violence.

On the face of it, the conflict was a test of wills. But more profoundly, the stalemate derived from a fundamental difference on the issue of rights. For the internees, nothing less than adherence to civilized norms would suffice, for only in this way could they secure for themselves a sense of dignity and self-worth. They insisted that the dictates of natural justice and the rule of law be followed.[38] For Date, on the other hand, by disregarding camp regulations, the prisoners proved themselves to be no more than rabble and malcontents undeserving of the protections afforded under the laws of war. He dismissed any and all representations by the internees as being the

[35] See: LAC, RG 6 H1, vol. 765, file 5330, B.R. Iseli, Consul General of Switzerland, to Swiss Legation, London, England, 22 September 1917; B.R. Iseli to Maj. General Wm. Otter, Director Internment Operations, 24 September 1917; B.R. Iseli to Lieut. Colonel W.E. Date, Officer Commanding Kapuskasing Internment Camp, 10 October 1917; and Date to Iseli, 19 October 1917.

[36] LAC, RG 6 H1, vol. 764, file 5330, Lieut. Colonel W.E. Date to Maj. General Wm. Otter, 21 August 1917.

[37] LAC, RG 6 H1, vol. 765, file 5175, Lieut. Colonel W.E. Date to Staff Officer, Internment Operations, 4 November 1917.

[38] "Though the letter of International Agreement relating to the treatment of prisoners might be adhered to verbally, the interpretation is such of a spirit of malevolence and petty annoyance which makes life almost unbearable." See: LAC, RG 6 H1, vol. 760, file 4178, "Officers Interned at Kapuskasing" to B.R. Iseli, Consul General of Switzerland, 11 October 1917.

Prisoners on parade, Kapuskasing Internment Camp. Courtesy Ron Morel Memorial Museum

work "of troublemakers, obstructionists, agitators, who are always talking 'Hague Rules,' etc."[39]

The political and psychological chasm between Date and the prisoners made it unlikely the situation would end well. It was only through the direct and nimble intervention of the Swiss diplomatic representative that disaster was avoided. German officials conceded that fatigue duties outside as well as inside the camp would not be considered compulsory labour, while Ottawa acknowledged that all internees who undertook fatigue duties would be paid more than double the standard daily rate—a full 50¢. With these concessions, the majority returned to basic duties. But the essential dispute remained: they were civilian prisoners with rights that could not be ignored.[40]

The disturbances in the late fall of 1917 profoundly affected relations between the command and the troops. Guards were criticized for insubordination and the camp commander reproached for high-handedness and ineffectiveness, being unable to keep the rebelliousness of the prisoners in check.

[39] LAC, RG 6 H1, vol. 764, file 5330, Lieut. Colonel W.E. Date to Staff Officer, Internment Operations, 16 November 1917.

[40] *Ibid*., Lieut. Colonel W.E. Date to Maj. General Wm. Otter, 4 November 1917. For a first-hand account of the strike, see: Kirkconnell, "When We First Locked Up Fritz."

In view of these accusations and failings, the internment director was inclined to relieve Date of his command. Instead, an inquiry was held that eventually led to the exoneration of the commandant.[41] Nevertheless, a shake-up occurred, with several officers critical of Date's command being dismissed while others resigned, having received no satisfaction regarding their grievances. The lingering resentments ensured that administering Kapuskasing in 1918 would remain a challenge. Several issues compounded the difficulties. Work was gradually being scaled back, leading to a reduction in the POW allowance. Used to purchase canteen items (tobacco and sugar), it was a cutback that only added to the internees' frustrations. In addition, prisoners working near the railway encountered recently paroled internees, underscoring the unfairness of their continuing incarceration. Then there was the increased cost of covering basic fatigue duties, which unexpectedly added to the camp's expenses. All of this raised questions about Kapuskasing. Internment would have to be adjusted if it was to continue to be viable.

Since the finances of Kapuskasing were a pressing issue, a provisional solution was to release some of the prisoners, thereby reducing the costs. In this regard, a precedent had already been set. Aliens of enemy origin, interned because they were unemployed, had been paroled to industry once the economy improved. But on what grounds could this be contemplated now? They were suspect. Moreover, public opinion was hostile, especially among returned veterans, who were solidly against any concessions to enemy aliens let alone war prisoners. Such attitudes culminated in a push to have all enemy aliens interned as POWs and used as compulsory labour.

The justice department rejected this idea insofar as "it would be impossible to find justification in the Hague Convention or in general international usage for [the] industrial conscription of such aliens."[42] In their assessment, however, officials concluded that some could prudently be released if they were properly screened for attitude and if continued monitoring of their behaviour were in place. As for the prisoners considered "undesirable"—demonstrating a visceral dislike of authority and, as such, evidence of their enemy sympathies—it was felt they should remain behind barbed wire until a decision was made regarding their future.[43] Diplomatic negotiations regarding the fate of different categories of POWs were ongoing, and the

[41] A senior officer of the General Staff, 2nd Military Division (Toronto), conducted the investigation. For a copy of the report, see: LAC, RG 24, vol. 4360, file 34-6-11 (3), "Report on Kapuskasing – Saturday February 9th, 1918." The complaints and allegations lodged against Lieut. Colonel W.E. Date are found in LAC, RG 6 H1, vol. 765, file 5251.

[42] LAC, Robert Borden Papers, MG 26 H1, vol. 100, reel C-4331, untitled document, n.d., 54130–1. See also: *ibid*., "Alien Labour, 16 February 1918," 53424–4326.

[43] See: LAC RG 6 H1, vol. 770, file 6712 (2), E. Newcombe, Deputy Minister of Justice, to Maj. General Otter, Director, Internment Operations, 14 May 1919.

[44] As an ancillary aspect of internment, the role that deportation would play – ridding the country

idea of deporting this residual group was clearly on the minds of the authorities.[44] Thus, a distinction between the acceptable and undesirable was formally introduced. Major-General Otter instructed Date and other commanders at the remaining camps to compile lists under Order-in-Council P.C. No. 158 (23 January 1918), identifying those who were suitable for possible release and those who would remain.[45] Soon thereafter and throughout 1918, on the basis of this difference, small groups from Kapuskasing were paroled locally to railway companies. Others were sent to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, where they worked on the railways. Those who proved unsatisfactory, either in terms of performance or outlook, were sent back to Kapuskasing, where, under the watchful guise of Lieutenant-Colonel Date, they would await their fate.

With the armistice, the disposition of POWs in Canada became a matter of growing public debate. Within a broader discussion about immigration and the future of aliens of enemy origin in the country, the public clamoured for the removal of the 2,222 prisoners remaining in the camps. But it was also a sentiment motivated, in part, by the fear of political and labour unrest in the country, which enemy aliens were accused of fomenting. Indeed, public sentiment became more pronounced regarding the fate of the internees, especially with the arrest and internment of enemy alien participants and others in the May–June 1919 Winnipeg General Strike.[46] Amid a charged atmosphere of labour unrest, calls for deportation served as a trigger.

In reply to inquires about the presence of radicals at Kapuskasing, Lieutenant-Colonel Date reported that of the 1,007 prisoners there, forty were either labour activists or political militants, while another ninety-five had proved troublesome during internment. An additional 195 prisoners relocated from Amherst, Nova Scotia, wore red ribbons when they entered the camp at the time of their transfer. Sensing there was an appetite for their removal, Date proffered that "being a loafing, good for nothing lot, the sooner the country [was] rid of them the better."[47] By order of the justice

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of those deemed "undesirable" – is explored in Barbara Roberts, *Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada, 1900–1935* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988), chs. 2 and 3.

[45] LAC, RG 13 A1, vol. 237, file 1490-150, "Repatriation of Prisoners of War," Maj. General Wm. Otter to the Minister of Justice, 23 August 1919.

[46] At the height of the troubles, one hundred labour activists were identified for deportation – thirty-six of them from Winnipeg. To this number were added other radicals. See: Donald Avery, *"Dangerous Foreigners": European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896–1932* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983), 85; and Donald Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896–1994* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1994), 79. The arrests in Alberta are described in Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983), 55.

[47] LAC, RG 6 H1, vol. 770, file: 6712 (2), Lieut. Colonel W.E. Date to Maj. General Wm. Otter, 12 May 1919. The deportation of militants was reported by Date, who noted: "More Reds are still to go." "Canada Deports 1,000 Reds," *Empire and Mail*, 20 January 1920.

department, the first batch of 872 prisoners from the three remaining camps—Amherst, Kapuskasing, and Vernon, British Columbia—was assembled at Quebec City and, on 25 July 1919, mustered onto a ship bound for Rotterdam. Among them were 105 internees from Kapuskasing. Having suffered psychological breakdown in the course of their internment, another twenty-two prisoners deemed insane (out of fifty-four being held at various asylums) were also included for deportation—part of the general effort to purge any and all "undesirables" from the country.

The prospect of further deportations prompted a spate of last-minute personal and legal appeals. Solicitors acting on behalf of some internees, who had been involved in the Winnipeg General Strike and then sent to Kapuskasing, appealed for due process but to no avail. Others requested clemency with a promise to be law-abiding or, more simply, pleaded for justice, citing that their only offence "consisted solely in being of [enemy alien] nationality, regardless of what he had once meant to Canada."[48] Then there were those who did not care whether they were allowed to stay or be deported. They simply wanted out.

Canadian authorities would oblige by organizing for transport a majority of the remaining prisoners—886 in total—including the last of the "insane." On 4 September and 27 October 1919, they would board ships bound for Europe with a young Captain Kirkconnell in charge of one of the transports. The escorts for each ship were issued 1,000 rounds of ammunition in case of trouble. It was unnecessary. Released on the docks of Rotterdam, prisoners were described as "blithe and carefree," wishing their captors a bon voyage—but not before a few shared with them the prediction that they would return to Canada one day to spread the creed of socialism.[49]

Kapuskasing officially closed on 24 February 1920 after the last few prisoners were paroled. The camp buildings, in the meantime, had been sold to the federal department of agriculture. As to the future of the experimental farm, it was unclear. The first set of colonists—returned soldiers—did not take to the new settlement, having overwintered at the site in 1918–19. An early frost had destroyed the crops and the cold weather was severe. By all accounts, the experimental colony was a disaster. Nonetheless, it was seen as an important step in promoting the potential of Ontario's northland. A template and infrastructure were in place; all that was needed, according to the plan's supporters, was the right type of settler.

Without detracting from what had been accomplished—and it was significant—the real importance of Kapuskasing would lay in its deeper meaning. Ka-

[48] LAC, RG 6 H1, vol. 770, file 6712 (3), Letter of "First Class POWs" to Sir Wm. Otter, Director, Internment Operations, 11 August 1919.

[49] *Ibid*., file 6712 (4), Capt. F. W. Kirkconnell, Officer Commanding Pretorian Party, to the Staff Officer, Internment Operations, "Prisoners Repatriated per SS Pretorian," 21 September 1919.

Prisoners at work, Kapuskasing Internment Camp. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada.

puskasing was a place where, designated as POWs, civilians were forced to work under armed guard, and, isolated and forgotten, endured primitive, harsh conditions. It was also a place where, once deemed unwanted, they would be held until deported. More to the point, Kapuskasing was a place of moral, physical, and psychological danger, where indifference, suspicion, and malice came together to shape the experiences of those interned as well as those tasked with overseeing their internment. Underlying much of this was the predicament of immigrants originating from distant lands now at war with Canada. There was a tangible sense they did not belong. In the context of war, in which birthright became paramount, they were designated and treated as enemies. This was no small matter, affecting their everyday lives.

It would have been inconceivable to them at the outset, of course, that this would be their fate.[50] As immigrants, they had made Canada their home. The affairs of the old country were of less importance than getting on with their lives in the new. What they failed to understand, however, was that their presence in the country was conditional. They were invited to till the soil and fill the ranks of industry; but when the economy soured and global conflict erupted, the issue of what to do with the resulting mass of destitute enemy aliens thrust onto the unemployment rolls became paramount. War measures allowed for a radical but useful solution. Arrested, unemployed enemy aliens would be classified as POWs and, once sent to internment camps, put to work as was expected of them. But they were also civilians, which complicated

[50] LAC, Robert Borden Papers, MG 26 H1, vol. 99, reel C-4331, "Resolution to the Executive Council of Canada," n.d., 53439–44.

matters. International understanding on the matter was unclear. As civilians, of course, they should have been given greater consideration than that extended to captive combatants—something the internees implicitly understood and articulated.[51] Nevertheless, in the initial stages of the conflict, the ambiguity in their status was seized upon in order to justify the practice of compulsory labour.

Kapuskasing, unsurprisingly, reproduced the problems associated with the vagueness of their status as civilian prisoners. Without explicit rights, they would be used, and abused, by guards who had enlisted to fight the enemy but were instead dispatched to Ontario's hinterland to oversee interned civilians who happened to be of enemy origin. The internees were resented and despised as the source of their troubles. But more to the point, being on the frontier and out of sight made it possible for the frustrations, disappointments, and prejudices of troops and officers alike to be visited upon those who were largely without protection. The majority of the internees accepted their fate. Some resisted.

An emergency measure, internment was ostensibly to be used for security purposes. In actual fact, however, it was applied to address a relatively innocuous problem—unemployment among a certain category of individual. Consequently, large numbers of enemy alien internees, formerly unemployed, were released when the economic fortunes of the country improved. In this sense, the idea that internment was security-driven was unmasked. But as an expression of the war powers granted the government, it also revealed the wide latitude with which these would be exercised, with all of its unfortunate consequences. The emergency measures made it possible for the plans of provincial governments and the appetites of the unscrupulous to be satisfied while absolving officials, for the most part, of any responsibility. Perhaps more telling was the fact that internment was not disavowed; so deeply and widely accepted was the notion that these were enemies who did not belong that, once rejected, they were used as seen fit. It underscored the prevalence of the idea that the measures taken were both appropriate and legitimate.

The labour phase of the Kapuskasing camp ended with the upturn in the economy. The camp's internment story, however, did not. Having proved useful for dealing with unemployed enemy aliens, this earlier experience underlined the utility of the practice. Internment could be of use again and, indeed, there was much to recommend it. Obstreperous prisoners who could not be released had to be dealt with somehow. Then there were the labour activists and political agitators—seen as no less disruptive—whom the government sought fit to expel. Internment at Kapuskasing, from mid-summer of 1917 on, would provide for their detention and deportation, de-

[51] LAC, RG 6 H1, vol. 770, file 6712 (3), Letter of "First Class POWs" to Sir Wm. Otter, Director, Internment Operations, 11 August 1919.

spite their protests. Some with a passive demeanour and favourable record would be set free. But for the hardened, embittered, and suspect, they would be held until deported—the logical and inevitable consequence of a process that first started with the premise that they were all enemies.

In Ontario's northland, a settlement was built around the promise of agriculture. Kapuskasing ended with mixed results. Captain Kirkconnell, a participant in and witness to the experience, expressed his disappointment that returned soldier-settlers were unable to take advantage of the opportunity presented. Yet, he still believed that others—a hardier, more determined, and resilient group—would succeed where they had failed.[52] What he did not appreciate was that he had already witnessed such individuals—those initially brought to Kapuskasing as POWs. By returning to their families, friends, and communities, and carrying on with their lives in Canada after their internment experience, they had demonstrated their mettle. In their ordinariness, they prevailed over the extraordinary. In the process, they proved that they belonged.

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[52] Kirkconnell, *Kapuskasing*, 13–15.