

“In the interest of the Indians” The Department of Indian Affairs, Charles Cooke and the recruitment of Native Men in Southern Ontario for the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1916

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Résumé de l'article

Quand, en décembre 1915, le Corps expéditionnaire canadien (CEC) commença à enrôler des Amérindiens pour servir outre-mer, le Département des Affaires indiennes (DAI) y vit l'occasion de développer une politique d'assimilation des Amérindiens à travers le service actif. Au début de 1916, Charles Cooke, un employé et traducteur iroquoien du DAI, fut détaché auprès du CEC, pour l'aider à maximiser le recrutement dans les réserves du sud-est de l'Ontario. Pendant sa tournée des réserves, de Rama à l'île Manitouline, Cooke put non seulement juger du potentiel et des habiletés des Amérindiens comme recrues, mais aussi évaluer la force des communautés amérindiennes en fonction de la politique d'assimilation que voulait poursuivre le DAI. De leur côté, de nombreuses communautés amérindiennes cherchèrent à prendre avantage des liens de Charles Cooke avec le DAI, en utilisant le besoin de soldats comme un atout dans les négociations qu'ils continuaient à mener avec le gouvernement.

“IN THE INTEREST OF THE INDIANS”

THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS, CHARLES COOKE AND THE RECRUITMENT OF NATIVE MEN IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO FOR THE CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE, 1916

by Katharine McGowan

Introduction

In late 1915, after initially excluding Native men from the ranks of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), Canadian recruiters began looking at reserves as under-exploited pools of manpower. Whereas the militia relied on local authority figures to help raise battalions in non-Native communities, recruitment officers looked to the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) for similar local knowledge and authority on reserves. In particular, the 114th Overseas Battalion sought the DIA's help recruiting among the Six Nations and used the services of Charles Cooke, an Iroquois clerk from the department's Ottawa headquarters.¹ In an attempt to maximize the number

of Native recruits, Cooke's itinerary was extended beyond the Six Nations to other southern Ontario reserves through the spring of 1916. From 7-10 March, Cooke held two recruitment meetings among the Chippewas of Rama that were “well attended and enthusiastic.”² He was convinced the residents of Rama were “exceptionally patriotic,” because of their seemingly universal support for enlistment in the battalion's all-Native companies. Sixteen men from Rama had already enlisted in the 157th and 177th (Simcoe) Battalions, and ten more promised to join the 114th. Cooke lamented that his busy recruitment schedule meant he could not stay longer in Rama, believing he could “have been able to sign up nearly all the eligible men on the reserve.”³

¹ Paul Maroney, “‘The Great Adventure’: The Context and Ideology of Recruiting in Ontario, 1914-17,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 77 (March 1996): 62-98; Evidence of the militia's belief can be found in the following correspondence of Major George Williams, Officer in Charge Divisional Recruitment Toronto to the Honourable Minister of Indian Affairs William James Roche, 27 January 1916, LAC RG 10 Volume 6766 File 452-13; P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Katharine McGowan, “Competing Loyalties in a Complex Community: Enlisting the Six Nations in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1917,” in *Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian Military: Historical Perspectives*, eds. P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Craig Leslie Mantle (Kingston: Canadian Defense Academy Press, 2007), 89-115.

² Charles Cooke to D.C. Scott, 4 April 1916, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

³ *Ibid.*

Abstract

When the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) began actively enlisting Native men for overseas service in December 1915, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) saw an opportunity to further their goal of assimilating Native peoples through active duty. To maximize the number of Native soldiers, the DIA lent Iroquois clerk and translator Charles Cooke to the CEF to help recruit on reserves in Southern Ontario in the winter and spring 1916. During the northern half of Cooke's tour from Rama to Manitoulin Island, many of the communities he visited took advantage of his connection with the DIA, using the current need for soldiers as a bargaining chip in pre-war disputes with the government. While they used Cooke to further their local concerns, he judged the Native men's potential abilities as soldiers, as well as the strength of their communities, according to the tenets of the DIA's goal of assimilating Native peoples.

Résumé: *Quand, en décembre 1915, le Corps expéditionnaire canadien (CEC) commença à enrôler des Amérindiens pour servir outre-mer, le Département des Affaires indiennes (DAI) y vit l'occasion de développer une politique d'assimilation des Amérindiens à travers le service actif. Au début de 1916, Charles Cooke, un employé et traducteur iroquois du DAI, fut détaché auprès du CEC, pour l'aider à maximiser le recrutement dans les réserves du sud-est de l'Ontario. Pendant sa tournée des réserves, de Rama à l'île Manitouline, Cooke put non seulement juger du potentiel et des habiletés des Amérindiens comme recrues, mais aussi évaluer la force des communautés amérindiennes en fonction de la politique d'assimilation que voulait poursuivre le DAI. De leur côté, de nombreuses communautés amérindiennes cherchèrent à prendre avantage des liens de Charles Cooke avec le DAI, en utilisant le besoin de soldats comme un atout dans les négociations qu'ils continuaient à mener avec le gouvernement.*

Regardless of whether such a result would have been good for Rama as a whole, Cooke's recruitment work in Southern Ontario in 1916 was a mixture of the militia's needs and the DIA's goals. Indian Affairs and its Deputy Superin-

tendent Duncan Campbell (D.C.) Scott believed they could use military participation to further their goal of assimilating Native people into Canadian society and the militia saw the benefit of Native recruits after the CEF's initial flood of enlistees ebbed. This article investigates how Cooke's recruitment work, ostensibly for the CEF, was informed by the DIA's assumptions about and goals for Native people and relied on its Indian Agents and allies in the Christian Churches, including missionaries on the reserves to argue the militia's case within the DIA's framework. Yet when Ottawa's goal was presented at reserve churches or band councils, Cooke found himself involved in local conflicts, ongoing negotiations with the DIA, and even outright rejection of his recruitment efforts. This article will contrast Ottawa's initial enthusiasm for enlisting Native men with the realities Cooke encountered while actually recruiting on reserves. His

recruitment efforts brought the values and assumptions of Indian Affairs into conflict with the realities of Native life in Southern Ontario in the early twentieth century.

The extant literature on Native peo-

ples and the First World War has focused on the impact of the war rather than on how war was brought to the Native communities. Whereas D.C. Scott believed that the war would aid in assimilating Native peoples, Native veterans tried to parlay their overseas experiences into meaningful change for their communities.⁴ This tension between the forces of cultural destruction and survival characterizes much of the literature on Native peoples during the war. For instance, Sarah Carter detailed the government's erosion of the Native land base through such policies as increasing wartime food production and the Soldier Settlement Act—policies that awarded confiscated reserve land to white veterans.⁵ Conversely, J.R. Miller argued participation in the war effort provided Native advocates with a bargaining chip as they attempted pan-Native organizing – their participation in recent history made

them meaningful actors.⁶

P. Whitney Lackenbauer and R. Scott Sheffield draw a trajectory from D.C. Scott's romanticized and ahistorical description of the warrior-cum-soldier to the later historical studies that appropriated and redefined this theme.⁷ The resultant forgotten soldier narrative emphasized the largely overlooked contribution of Natives to the CEF, such as the celebrated Ojibwa sniper Corporal Francis Pegahmagabow (Military Medal and two bars), who followed a warrior tradition that had survived on reserves despite the government's best efforts to inhibit cultural traits.⁸ While this warrior-cum-soldier narrative reflected the important and under-appreciated story of the men who came back to the recruiting office after the CEF had initially rejected them because of their ethnicity, it missed the important middle step from civilian to soldier.⁹

⁴ E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986); D.C. Scott, "The Canadian Indians and The Great World War," in *Canada in the Great War: Volume III, Guarding the Channel Ports* (Toronto: United Publishing of Canada, 1919): 327-328, 328, 327; James Dempsey, "Problems of Western Canadian Indian War Veterans After World War One," *Native Studies Review* 5 (1989): 1-18.

⁵ Sarah Carter, "Infamous Proposal: Prairie Indian Reserve Land and Soldier Settlement after World War I," *Manitoba History* 37 (1999): 9-21.

⁶ J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*, Revised Ed., (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1989), 214-18.

⁷ P. Whitney Lackenbauer & Scott Sheffield, "Moving Beyond 'Forgotten': The Historiography on Canadian Native Peoples and the World Wars," in *Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian Military: Historical Perspectives*, eds. P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Craig Leslie Mantle (Kingston: Canadian Defense Academy Press, 2007): 209-31, 210-211; Duncan Campbell Scott, *Dominion of Canada Annual Volume of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended March 1919* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1919), 13.

⁸ Such works include Janice Summerby's *Native Warriors, Foreign Battlefields* (Ottawa: Veterans Affairs Canada, 2005), a product of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples ten years prior, L. James Dempsey, *Warriors of the King: Prairie Indians in World War I*, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center & University of Regina, 1999); Fred Gaffen, *Forgotten Soldiers* (Penticton: Theytus Books, 1985).

⁹ James W. St. G. Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Canadian Historical Review* 70 (1989): 1-26.

An examination of Charles Cooke's recruitment campaign in 1916 reveals how Native people and communities attempted, sometimes successfully, to negotiate the character of their participation in the war effort. While many historians have considered the war's impact on Native peoples, few have considered the available avenues to enlistment, and how these different routes might have coloured their war experience. Susan Krouse, for example, discovered almost 3,000 survey responses from Native veterans collected by Native rights activist and photographer Joseph Dixon.¹⁰ While Krouse's work opened a window into Native men's understanding of the war, her evidence was often anecdotal, and she did not differentiate between how and where individuals joined the services (i.e. did they hail from a reserve, residential school or from a non-Native community?). In a community-based study of recruitment, Lackenbauer and McGowan discussed the attempts of Haldimand County's 114th Overseas Battalion to recruit among the political and sectarian divisions at Six Nations, including Charles Cooke's efforts.¹¹ While these local battles provide important nuance to the historiographical narrative, Cooke's recruitment trips outside of Six Nations provide a unique opportunity to study the conflict between DIA objectives and local realities, all under wartime

pressures.

Background to Charles Cooke

Charles Cooke was born Thawensere at Kanesatake, Quebec, on 22 March 1870. While still a child, Cooke's family sold their farm and moved to Ontario's Gibson Reserve, where his father Angus Cooke was a logger and a member of the Methodist Missionary Society; he preached the Indian Bible to the area's Native inhabitants. Charles learned English at a rudimentary school established in one of the handful of log cabins in his neighbourhood. Concerned about the quality of his son's education, Angus sent Charles to the Mount Elgin residential school in Muncey, Ontario. His transfer to a non-Native school at Gravenhurst, however, was not because of the "ancient tribal animosities" acted out in the schoolyard between himself and his Algonquin classmates, but because the elder Cooke disapproved of the Pidgin English of his son's classmates.¹²

Continuing his education, Charles was on his way to medical school at McGill University in the winter of 1893 when the Cookes stopped in Ottawa. Here Charles acted as his father's translator during a meeting with DIA representatives. This service earned Cooke a clerk position with the department, indexing paperwork and translating for Iroquois

¹⁰ Susan Applegate Krouse, *North American Indians in the Great War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007) 8, 13, 16.

¹¹ Lackenbauer and McGowan, "Competing Loyalties."

¹² Marius Barbeau, "Charles A. Cooke, Mohawk Scholar," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 96 (1952): 424-26.

visitors to the department.¹³ Cooke officially began as a ‘Writer’ for the Registry, with an annual salary of \$425, rising through the ranks of clerks and enjoying progressively higher salaries. When D.C. Scott sent him out to the Six Nations reserve in early 1916 in response to a request from Lieutenant-Colonel E.S. Baxter, Cooke was a high-ranking clerk in the Records Branch, making \$1,350 a year, the third highest clerk’s salary at the department’s Ottawa headquarters.¹⁴ At the outbreak of the First World War, Cooke had worked for the government for over two decades, steadily climbing the ladder of Indian Affairs as a competent, polyglot employee.

Cooke and Recruitment

The militia initially resisted enlisting Native men for active service, although this was not a coherent and established policy prior to the war—rather

it was a general response to an individual inquiry. Within days of the outbreak of the war, on 8 August 1914, the Officer Commanding (OC) No. 1 Military District in London, Ontario, telegraphed the Secretary of the Militia Council asking whether “Indians who are anxious to enlist for overseas service are to be taken on the contingent.”¹⁵ The militia authorities responded immediately that “while British troops would be proud to be associated with their Indian fellow subjects,” the militia believed the “Germans might refuse to extend to them the privileges of civilized warfare.” Rather, the militia asserted Native men “had better remain in Canada to share in the protection of the Dominion.”¹⁶ The CEF authorities in Ottawa rejected several queries from Indian Agents, missionaries, CEF officers and even Indian Affairs with this rationale.¹⁷

Ignoring the militia and acting without Indian Affairs’ knowledge in Decem-

¹³ *Ibid.*, 424.

¹⁴ “Of Officers and Employees of the Department of Indian Affairs on the 31 December, 1897,” *Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 30th June 1897*, 482; “Indian Affairs Department: Expenditure Sessional Paper No. 1,” *Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended June 30 1899*, Part G, 3; *Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended June 30, 1900*, Part J 3; “Of Officers and Employees of the Department of Indian Affairs on July 1, 1901,” *Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended June 30, 1901*; “Headquarters – Inside Service,” *Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended March 31, 1916*, 167.

¹⁵ O.C. 1st Military Division to Secretary of the CEF Council, 8 August 1914, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.

¹⁶ Adjutant-General of the CEF Council to the Officer Commanding 1st Division, 8 August 1914, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.

¹⁷ This same argument verbatim was offered to Major P.J. Scott of Southampton Ontario on 23 June 1915, J.E. Armstrong of Petrolia, Ontario, and J.C. Nethercott of Moravietown both on 18 October, 1915, and to the Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs, on 22 October 1915, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7; Letter to the Deputy Minister of the Department of Indian Affairs from Surgeon-General Eugene Fiset, 15 October 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 451-13; The Adjutant-General referred to the opinion as a telegraphed instruction in a letter to A.G. Chisholm, 26 November 1917, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ. 592-1-7.

ber 1914, six Indian Agents in Alberta canvassed their prairie reserves looking for those who were prepared to act as scouts for the CEF.¹⁸ As Indian Agents and missionaries wrote to Ottawa seeking to enlist Native men and boasting of both their inherited skills and the possibilities of pushing assimilation through military training, Indian Affairs sought to discover how many Native people had circumvented the militia's restrictions.¹⁹ In November 1915, DIA Assistant Deputy Superintendent and Secretary J.D. McLean contacted the department's agents to ascertain the exact number of Native men serving in the CEF from their respective reserves. This was part of an effort to produce a nation-wide record "of historical value" of the Native participation in the CEF.²⁰ In the process, the Department confirmed that some Native men had in fact successfully enlisted in various units across the country, while more were willing to fight and had been rejected.²¹ Agent A.J. Duncan of Cape

Croker, Ontario, caught McLean's attention with a story of local Chippewa men traveling to Owen Sound, London, Toronto, and Guelph in an effort to enlist.²² Duncan demanded to know why, when "the Country is asking for Recruits, and needing men to go to the front," the CEF dismissed these able-bodied and enthusiastic individuals.²³ McLean took the results of the national survey, along with Duncan's appeal, to the Militia Deputy Minister and Surgeon-General Eugene Fiset on 4 December 1915.²⁴

Between the beginning of the Department's survey and McLean's challenge to Fiset, the Six Nations on the Grand River were at the centre of the change in the CEF's approach to Native men. In early December 1915, Haldimand County MP F.L. Lalor and Lieutenant-Colonel E.S. Baxter successfully petitioned the Minister of Militia Sam Hughes for permission to recruit for the 114th Overseas Battalion on the Six Nations reserve.²⁵ Therefore, when Fiset re-

¹⁸ J.D. McLean to J.H. Gooderham, E.H. Yechans, F.J. Fleetham, H.A. Gunn, J.W. Waddy, W.J. Dilworth, 10 December 1914, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13. Indian Inspector Tyson asked Scott if he could establish a Native brass band, hoping it would also instill discipline in its members, A.M. Tyson to D.C. Scott, 25 November 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13.

¹⁹ Examples of these appeals include J.S. Donaldson to Minister of CEF Hughes, 26 November 1915, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7. Missionary W.C. McKay made a similar request of D.C. Scott, McKay to Scott, 11 November 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13; Scott to McKay, 9 November 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13; Other similar statements include J.D. McLean to Thomas Deasy, 3 December 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13; Scott to Brigadier-General W.A. Logie, 19 January 1916, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7; Thomas Deasy to Scott, 22 November 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766, File 452-13.

²⁰ J.D. McLean Memorandum to Indian Agents, 18 November 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13.

²¹ "Indians with the First Contingent," LAC RG 24 Volume 1842 GAQ 10-43.

²² A.J. Duncan to J.D. McLean, 9 November 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ J.D. McLean to Surgeon-General Eugene Fiset, 4 December 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13.

²⁵ Lackenbauer & McGowan, "Competing Loyalties," 89-115.

plied to McLean's letter five days later on 9 December 1915, the Surgeon-General offered a positive response. Although Fiset admitted it was "at first thought inadvisable that Indians should be allowed to join the C.E.F.," since the militia had authorized the 114th to enlist Native men, all other Military Districts were now free to open their recruiting stations to Natives.²⁶ The Militia Council circulated a notice of their new stance the day after Fiset's letter.²⁷ McLean contacted the Indian Agents who had already expressed a desire to enlist in their jurisdictions, and encouraged them to send prospective volunteers to the nearest recruiting office.²⁸

Although Scott sent Cooke to help recruiting for the 114th on the Six Nations and New Credit reserves, Major-General Hodgins of the militia headquarters in Ottawa told Brigadier-General Logie of

the No. 2 Military District in Toronto that Cooke was at the disposal of both No.1 (based out of London) and No.2 Districts to aid recruitment.²⁹ Colonel Shannon of No.1 District found Hodgins' proposition enticing, for although "the enlistment of Indians is proceeding satisfactorily" in his region, Shannon believed Cooke's help could only be of benefit.³⁰ To maximize Cooke's usefulness, militia authorities planned to transfer him to No. 1 District after he had "done his best" for the 114th in Haldimand County. Brigadier-General Logie of Toronto stopped Cooke's transfer from his district by granting him the temporary rank of Lieutenant in the battalion.³¹ Therefore, a week after promising Cooke's services to London, Ottawa conceded to Toronto and assured Logie that Cooke would work for No.2 District "until he has com-

²⁶ Surgeon-General Eugene Fiset to J.D. McLean, 9 December 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13.

²⁷ Brigadier-General Hodgins to the Officers Commanding Divisions and Districts, Inspectors General of Eastern Canada, Inspector General of Western Canada, 10 December 1915, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.

²⁸ J.D. McLean to T. Maxwell, Indian Agent, Sarnia, Ontario, 15 December 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13; J.D. McLean to T.A. Stout, Indian Agent, Chippewa Hill, Ont., 15 December 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13; J.D. McLean to A.J. Duncan, Indian Agent, Cape Croker Ont., 15 December 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13; J.D. McLean to A.M. Tyson, Inspector of Indian Agents, B.C., 17 December 1915, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6766 File 452-13.

²⁹ 1st and 2nd District are two of the nine original Military districts of Canada, meant for militia organization and mobilization, 1st District covering the south-western tip of Ontario and 2nd District covering a swath of territory from St. Catherines in the south, along Lake Huron to White River, east as North Bay and areas north. At the outbreak of war, Canada had grown significantly since these original nine areas had been drawn in 1868, and an additional four districts, three in the west and one for PEI. North Adjutant-General, Canadian CEF to Officer Commanding 2nd Division, 31 January 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.

³⁰ O.A. 1st Divisional Area, to Secretary, CEF Council, 12 February 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.

³¹ O.A. 1st Divisional Area, to Secretary, CEF Council, 12 February 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.; Adjutant-General, Canadian CEF to the Officer Commanding 1st Division, 22 February 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.; Adjutant-General, Canadian CEF to the Officer Commanding 2nd Division, 22 February 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.; General Officer Commanding 2nd Division to the Secretary, CEF Council, 22 February 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.

pleted the recruiting for the 114th O-C battalion,” not only on Six Nations but also among the Native populations on and around Manitoulin Island.³² Logie could now hold onto Cooke as long as he needed, to fill two Indian companies.

Cooke’s commission had two major impacts on his mission: first he believed his rank helped his work and, second, it allowed the 114th to begin recruiting Natives outside Haldimand County. The Militia Council in Ottawa recommended Cooke have “the appearance of an Officer” among those he was seeking to recruit to lend him the air of military authority.³³ The uniform itself, which Cooke received in March, cost \$100 and Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson of the 114th paid three-quarters of the bill, while Indian Affairs likely paid the remainder.³⁴ Cooke assured D.C. Scott that the uniform “had a wholesome influence with the Indians in winning them over to the cause of my mission.”³⁵ While he was still an employee of the DIA, Cooke looked like a soldier, and could be addressed as an officer.

Cooke’s recruitment for the 114th Battalion was strikingly different from the way other units in same district operated—the 114th had none of the geographical barriers that limited the

efforts of other units. Although the militia Council had initially hoped Cooke would recruit Natives throughout Ontario, Major Williams at No.2 District headquarters worried about the unit’s morale if its ranks combined members of several Native nations. Seeking out a learned opinion, Williams asked D.C. Scott if there would be “any incompatibility” if Native men from across the district, particularly the Iroquois of the Six Nations and the largely-Ojibwa nations along Lake Huron to which Cooke was headed, were to serve in the same unit.³⁶ Scott, the supposed expert on Native people, did not share Logie’s fears, and instead hoped that “a solid half” of the total men in the 114th would be Native, not just two companies of Iroquois, and “I trust that District No. 2 may be able to produce them.”³⁷ Military service was “in the interest of the Indians,” according to Scott, and maximizing the number of Native men in uniform was something “personally and officially I have been doing everything to bring about.”³⁸

Although the decision to recruit outside Haldimand County had come from the authorities in Toronto, Lieutenant-Colonel C.H.L. Jones of the 227th Overseas Battalion (Sault Ste. Marie) was frus-

³² Major-General Hodgins to Brigadier-General Logie, 18 February 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7; General Officer Commanding 2nd Division to the Secretary CEF Council, 29 February 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.

³³ Memorandum of the Department of the CEF and Defence, 2 March 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.

³⁴ Charles Cooke to D.C. Scott, 4 April 1916, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ George Williams to D.C. Scott, 2 February 1916, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

³⁷ D.C. Scott to Brigadier-General Logie, 31 May 1916, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

trated by the scope of 114th's recruitment drives. Jones was forbidden to recruit among the Native men on Manitoulin Island, from whom he had planned to raise "a certain number of 'good Indians.'"³⁹ Contrary to Scott's opinion, Jones believed that putting men from Six Nations and Manitoulin Island in the same unit was a mistake, as "it has been openly said that they do not like to do this but would rather come with their white friends from Manitoulin."⁴⁰ Both the 230th and the 119th Battalions, in the same region as the 227th Battalion, resisted transferring their Native recruits to the 114th—they would not give up their men to another unit, regardless of their ethnicity.⁴¹

From March to May 1916, Cooke traveled between the many Native communities on and around Georgian Bay, and his Native audiences treated him as both a recruiter and a representative of Indian Affairs. Different Native populations, including Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Ojibwa, settled in and around Manitoulin in the first half of the nineteenth century, many of whom were refugees to

Upper Canada from the United States. The reserves Cooke visited in his northern tour were established as early as 1836 (Manitoulin Island), 1838 (Rama), 1850 in the Robinson-Huron Treaty (Henvey Inlet, Parry Island) and as late as 1881 for Gibson (Watha Mohawk Territory).⁴² These treaties failed, however, to provide safe-havens from the increasing pressures of non-Native Canada. Indian Affairs and Christian churches cooperated in their mission to civilize Canada's Native people, and on Manitoulin Island, Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists, Moravians, and Roman Catholic missionaries preached to and lived within Native communities.⁴³ Although some of the Christian missions were successful in converting local band members, vision quests and giving newborns traditional Native names remained common practice.⁴⁴ By the time of the war, local economies varied from trapping and fishing, to logging for wages and family farms.⁴⁵ Non-Native settlements such as Parry Sound put the region's land and resources under increasing pressure, and tensions between Native and non-

³⁹ Lt.-Col. C.H.L. Jones to A.A.G. 2nd Division, Exhibition Camp Toronto, 12 April 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 4383 MD 2-34-7-109.

⁴⁰ Lt.-Col. C.H.L. Jones to A.A.G. 2nd Division, Exhibition Camp Toronto, 4 May 1916 LAC RG 24 Vol. 4383 MD 2-34-7-109.

⁴¹ W.R. Smith to Colonel Rowland, 2 May 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 4383 MD 2-34-7-109; O.C. 119th O.S. Battalion to Brig.-General Logie, 4 May 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 4383 MD 2-34-7-109.

⁴² Edward Rogers, "The Algonkin Farmers of Southern Ontario, 1830-1945," in *Aboriginal Ontario: Historical Perspectives on the First Nations*, Eds. Edward S. Rogers and Donald B. Smith, (Toronto: Ontario Historical Studies Series & Dundurn Press, 1994), 122-24, 127-28; Pierrette Désy and Frédéric Castel, "Plate 32: Native Reserves of Eastern Canada to 1900," in *Historical Atlas of Canada: Volume II The Land Transformed 1800-1891*, eds. R. Louis Gentilcore et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Robin Jarvis Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario, 1918-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-20.

⁴³ Rogers, "Algonkin Farmers," 125.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁵ Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye*, 10-20.

Native communities was well established by the outbreak of the First World War. These local animosities did not necessarily poison the attitudes about the war among the reserves along Lake Huron as a number of Native men from the area volunteered for service before Cooke's arrival, most notably Francis Pegahmagabow of Parry Island. To celebrate Francis' enlistment in 1914, the Parry Island band council donated money to Pegahmagabow's unit, the 23rd Regiment's Overseas Contingent Fund (Pegahmagabow would serve overseas with the 1st Battalion).⁴⁶ Pegahmagabow achieved fame on the battlefield as one of, if not the most, successful snipers on the Western Front, with 378 possible kills to his name and the Military Medal with two bars.⁴⁷

Pegahmagabow had long since left for Europe when Cooke arrived to recruit around Manitoulin and the north shore of Georgian Bay. Rather than lining up potential volunteers, Cooke found himself engaged in negotiations over the reserves' peacetime conflicts with their non-Native neighbours and the Canadian government. At the Gibson reserve between Georgian Bay and Lake Muskoka, some band members explained that their disinclination to enlist was based in their dis-

pleasure with "the treatment given them by the Government with reference to the tenure of their land."⁴⁸ The complainants weighed the request from the government to enlist against the community's previous dealings with Indian Affairs, and could not bring themselves to acquiesce to the broadly defined Canadian government who had acted in bad faith in the past. Cooke encountered a more specific set of grievances when he arrived on Parry Island. Despite their earlier celebration of Francis Pegahmagabow's enlistment, the community elders rejected Cooke's request for volunteers because the Government had "failed to fulfill its promises made to the Indians after the War of 1812, in the matter of pensions and presents."⁴⁹ Frustrated with this lack of cooperation, Cooke rejected the Islanders' claims, arguing they lacked "a single definite case in documentary form supporting their contention."⁵⁰ These Native men, who, in addition to their legal claims, were "hopelessly indifferent to the question of enlistment," earned Cooke's contempt. He deemed that the Native men of Parry Island "lack vim in everything and naturally the life of a soldier would be too strenuous and daring."⁵¹ Yet Cooke advised Scott against performing a planned survey of

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Council Meeting held at Parry Island, September 14, 1914, LAC RG 10 Vol. 1735 File 63-22 pt.2.

⁴⁷ Unlike most snipers who shot with a partner, Pegahmagabow shot alone, thereby making it difficult to confirm his kill numbers, although the stain of racist disregard for the Native sniper's achievements has not been wholly dismissed. Pegahmagabow Adrian Hayes, *Pegahmagabow: Legendary Warrior, Forgotten Hero* (Huntsville: Fox Meadow Creations, 2003), 8, 21.

⁴⁸ Charles Cooke to D.C. Scott 4 April 1916, 1-2, LAC RG 10 Vo. 6765 File 452-7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Charles Cooke to D.C. Scott, 4 April 1916, 2, LAC RG 10 Vo. 6765 File 452-7; Cooke to Scott, 29 May 1916, 1, LAC RG 10 Vo. 6765 File 452-7.

unceded land on Manitoulin Island, something he knew made local Native residents “very apprehensive,” as they feared such an action would “alienate them from their rights.”⁵² Cooke believed such a survey would turn all Native men on the Island against enlisting in the CEF. It is possible these communities took advantage of the presence of any DIA representative to air grievances. They used Cooke’s request for recruits as a bargaining tool underlines the overlap of the DIA’s and the militia’s authority and messages.

As he recruited, Cooke took the opportunity to collect information and settle disputes for the DIA. He disparaged those who chose the “ready money” of logging over the long-term self-sufficiency of farming, and believed logging kept Native families in a perpetual state of poverty.⁵³ Cooke met with the Indian Agents around Manitoulin Island to discuss how they could “encourage farming among the Indians,” rather than how best to recruit them.⁵⁴ Cooke’s direct correspondence with Scott made the recruiter a valuable ally for any Native community applying for money from the department. Cooke praised those living on Manitoulin’s unceded land as industrious “good farmers,” and he pressured the Indian Agent to ensure they had enough grain to replenish

the dwindling supplies.⁵⁵ Cooke recommended the DIS grant a request for \$1,500 to improve the roads at Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island; the previous winter and spring had left the unpaved routes in “bad condition,” which made traveling on them “next to an impossibility.”⁵⁶ Cooke often treated recruiting as a fact-finding mission that would “in future be of great value in my work in the Department.”⁵⁷ Despite his frequent criticisms of reserves, Cooke believed his experiences and observations could even help even those hostile to the war effort; they became targets of Indian Affairs which sought “to raise them to the level of the other Indians” who supported the war.⁵⁸

Despite his DIA activities, Cooke’s primary goal was still recruiting for the 114th Battalion, and in that capacity he faced opposition in some communities along the Northern Shore of Georgian Bay. When he arrived at Henvey Inlet, the young men in the village took “to the tall pines” to escape being forced to enlist. The local chief was surprised to see any CEF recruiter in his village; he explained to Cooke that his band had paid their hundred dollars to the Canadian Patriotic Fund “on the condition that no recruiting officer was to visit to take their young men away.”⁵⁹ Cooke was disgusted

⁵² Cooke to Scott, 4 April 1916, 4, LAC RG 10 Vo. 6765 File 452-7.

⁵³ Cooke to Scott, 23 April 1916, 2-3, LAC RG 10 Vo. 6765 File 452-7.

⁵⁴ Cooke to Scott, 4 April 1916, 7, LAC RG 10 Vo. 6765 File 452-7.

⁵⁵ Cooke to Scott, 23 April 1916, 6, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

⁵⁶ Cooke to Scott, 23 April 1916, 4-5, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7; Cooke to Scott, 5 May 1916, 2, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

⁵⁷ Cooke to Scott, 4 April 1916, 5, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

⁵⁸ Cooke to Scott, 25 May 1916, 3, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

⁵⁹ Cooke to Scott, 25 May 1916, 1, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

with this chief's "animal selfishness," as the recruiter interpreted the donation as self-motivated, disingenuous, and base. The men's flight at his arrival convinced Cooke they were little better than their leader and, therefore, "not desirable as soldiers."⁶⁰ In Pickerel River, an offshoot of the Henvey Inlet community, he found an even worse group of men in his estimation. They professed themselves afraid of soldiers and, once again, ran into the woods. Their failure to show enthusiasm and unreadiness to enlist demonstrated a lack of masculine fitness in Cooke's eyes—they were merely "so-called men," unable or unwilling to achieve the full status of male.⁶¹

Initially, the population of Manitoulin Island looked equally unpromising. When Cooke first arrived in mid-March, he sensed a "strong feeling against enlistment" in the west and south bays, where there had been "demonstrations against recruiting," and anti-enlistment Ojibwa-language pamphlets were distributed among the chiefs in the area.⁶² In this case, however, Cooke believed the anti-recruitment sentiment originated in a misunderstanding between the Native communities and the heavy-handed tactics of the local non-Native recruiters for the 119th Battalion based out of Parry Sound. He informed D.C. Scott that the Native communities on Parry Island and

Manitoulin Island were generally "not on good terms," with the non-Native town of Parry Sound, regardless of what Lt.-Col. C.H.L. Jones of the 227th had argued to his superiors in Toronto about local camaraderie.⁶³

Wikwemikong's chiefs and band members were not disloyal in Cooke's eyes, but they only thought of enlistment in the context of local antagonisms. When he explained the exclusive Native character of the companies for which he was recruiting, chiefs, missionaries, and "principle men and women" responded enthusiastically, assuring Cooke "there would be no difficulty raising a platoon" among their communities if the 114th were to set up a detail at Wikwemikong.⁶⁴ A local detail, a unit composed of local recruits (as part of the all-Native companies) who would train together and be billeted together before they were sent overseas with the rest of the battalion, gave the residents of Wikwemikong a sense of pride and allowed them to identify with the broader war effort. Major Williams of No. 2 District gave his approval to the detail and the CEF began transferring local Natives who had enlisted in the 119th to the 114th.⁶⁵ In a "demonstration of patriotism and public spiritness," the community embraced the Detail's establishment, passing a unanimous resolution at a band council meeting that committed

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶² Cooke to Scott, 4 April 1916, 3, LAC RG 10 Vo. 6765 File 452-7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Cooke to Scott, 4 April 1916, 3, LAC RG 10 Vo. 6765 File 452-7.

Wikwemikong's members to assure "everything will be done to make the Detachment...a success from the standpoint of the Indians."⁶⁶ When Cooke responded to local concerns, he was able to make inroads into the previously hostile community of Wikwemikong.

Within this politically complex and often disheartening trip, Cooke found an oasis in Cockburn Island, where the community welcomed him, and his cause, with open arms. When he arrived in early May, Chief Wagosh welcomed him into his home, where "nearly all the male members of the band" listened to the recruiter explain to them "the claims of the Empire."⁶⁷ Upon receiving promises to enlist from five of the reserve's young men, Cooke admitted to Scott, "It was a pleasant surprise to me to find the men so eager to listen to our story, when it is remembered that they are so disadvantageously isolated from the rest of the Canadian communities."⁶⁸ Cooke believed the community ought to be praised for their commitment to the war effort, especially when he compared it with his negative impression of some of the other communities on Manitoulin Island "situated in the midst of white settlement."⁶⁹

That the patriotism of non-Native Canadians might adversely influence nearby Native communities contrasts sharply with Cooke's admission that non-Native recruiters were to blame for the initial negative response he received at Wikwemikong.

Cooke's work in Ontario ended rather abruptly. After receiving the recruiter's report of Henvey Inlet and Pickerel River, Scott recalled Cooke to Ottawa in late May 1916, deeming that, at least for the moment "it would be just as well to make no further special effort in recruiting."⁷⁰ Scott had a far greater need for the former clerk—the department was moving out of the East Block of parliament to a building on the adjacent Wellington Street, and the extra set of hands was essential for this time consuming task.⁷¹ Scott's decision may have been related to the militia's belief that Cooke's effort was "not entirely successful," citing the failure of the 114th to meet its target number of Native enlistees.⁷² Adding to this negative assessment, Major-General Hodgins of the militia's Ottawa headquarters continued to express his doubts about the suitability of Native soldiers for trench warfare. However, Hodgins did not suggest reinstating

⁶⁶ Cooke to Scott, 5 May 1916, 1-2, LAC RG 10 Vo. 6765 File 452-7.

⁶⁷ Cooke to Scott, 15 May 1916, 2, LAC RG 10 Vo. 6765 File 452-7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Scott to Cooke, 27 May 1916, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

⁷⁰ Scott to Cooke, 27 May 1916, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7; Cooke would engage in recruiting again in 1917, this time for the 256th Overseas Railway Construction Battalion among the Iroquoian community of Kanesatake, his birthplace, as well as Akwesasne and Kahnawake, Charles Cooke to D.C. Scott, 28 February 1917, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² "Enlistment of Indians for service overseas," Major General W.E. Hodgins to Pte Sec (?) 20 December 1916, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.

the prohibition on Native enlistment, and even entertained the possibility of raising entirely Native battalions in the future, as “we need every man we can get.”⁷³

Cooke was not as desperate or as disparaging as Major-General Hodgins in his evaluation of potential Native soldiers. In an effort to launch a national enlistment campaign aimed specifically at Native men in December 1916, Cooke asserted that the low number of Natives currently in uniform was not a result of a general disinterest in the war among Natives, but was the result of the “racial prejudice” of well-meaning but misguided non-Native recruitment officers.⁷⁴ The DIA had real authority among Canada’s Native peoples; according to Cooke, “He [the average Native man] knows no other Department and distains other than that which administers his affairs,” and therefore Native men would heed a call to enlist only if it came from Indian Affairs.⁷⁵ Although the plan did not materialize, Cooke believed that the “cordial” welcome he received in most of the communities he visited was “all due no doubt to my nationality and connections with the Department.”⁷⁶ Cooke believed that as the only Native man working for Indian Affairs and able to speak Iroquoian and Algonquin dialects, “the languages of two of the leading Indian Nations in Canada,” Native men would

appreciate “to have one of their own in such an appointment [as recruitment officer].”⁷⁷ Furthermore, Cooke visits to these communities had “done much to reconvince [sic] the Indians that our Government is willing to recognize its wards by honouring them in having one in its service.”⁷⁸ As Lackenbauer and McGowan have pointed out however, the Reverend Edwin Lee of Six Nations believed that some Native men complied with Cooke’s request from a “fear of consequences...for some have a wholesome dread of the Department,” while others cooperated in the “hope of securing some special favors” from the all-powerful DIA.⁷⁹ Whether out of respect or fear, Cooke’s ties with Indian Affairs lent him an important degree of legitimacy and power in the communities he visited.

Conclusion

The localized nature and informal origin of Cooke’s work has minimized his role in the story of the First World War. Although his travels fell short of his national aspirations, this should not obscure the fact that the DIA had clear objectives in lending him to the Ministry of Militia and Defense to recruit for the CEF. While the militia relied on local authority figures in non-Native communities to aid in recruitment, on reserves

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Charles Cooke to the Minister of CEF, 15 December 1916, 1, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Charles Cooke to D.C. Scott, 4 April 1916, 5, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

⁷⁷ Charles Cooke to the Minister of CEF, 15 December 1916, 2, LAC RG 24 Vol. 1221 HQ 593-1-7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Lackenbauer and McGowan, “Competing Loyalties,” 106; Edwin Lee to D.C. Scott, 28 February 191, 1-2, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7.

the Indian Agent held “all meaningful authority over local Aboriginal affairs,” controlling band funds and band councils—they applied DIA policy, although individual agents involved themselves in the life of reserves to different degrees.⁸⁰ Agents and missionaries often spoke alongside Cooke at rallies and speeches, and these meetings were routinely held in churches and mission houses in the Manitoulin area communities of McGregor Station, West Bay, Sheshegwaning, and Parry Island, reflecting the external authority figures increasingly powerful on reserve communities.⁸¹ Indeed Cooke’s assertion that he was recognized as a valued DIA employee, bridging the gap between the reserve and their government administrators, suggests that Cooke saw himself as an example to his audiences of the proof of the benefits of cooperating with the Government.

While Cooke provided a linguistic bridge between English Canada and the Native communities he visited, the pre-war governmental policies, and not some cultural appreciation, influenced his evaluation of potential recruits. Only those Natives who were already living up to the DIA’s ideals could, according to Cooke, make good soldiers—farmers were better than loggers, Christians better than pagans. Conversely, those who rejected Cooke’s message were dimwitted or not

sufficiently masculine. Rather than the usual militia requirements of height, age, chest width, and eyesight, the key qualifications for Native recruits was how closely they matched the Government’s pre-war expectations of assimilation.

Local conflicts between Natives and non-Natives, or between factions within a community, helped determine how Cooke would be received. If he could respond to those tensions and offer a palatable alternative, such as the decision to train men from Wikwemikong in their home or offer to help with some of their demands. He met with reasonable success. Although Cooke’s description of the exclusively Native companies in the 114th appealed to many, his audiences consistently responded to his association with the DIA. That different communities recognized the DIA as an authority does not mean they responded uniformly, or even respected Cooke’s legitimacy. Cooke’s reports reflect a variety of concerns, from land claims to community conflicts, from co-operation to confrontation. Indeed this variety could be considered a microcosm of Native responses to the war generally—internal community politics, cultural expectations, relationships with surrounding non-Native communities, economic activity and proximity to large non-Native centres are just a few of the factors that influenced how Native com-

⁸⁰ Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye*, xii, 29.

⁸¹ Charles Cooke to D.C. Scott, 23 April 1916, 2-3, 7 LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7; Cooke to Scott, 29 May 1916, 1, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-7; Writ large, the majority of Churches in Canada supported the war effort, on and off reserve. Therefore the synergy of their assimilation mission and supporting the war is not surprising. For more discussion of the role of various churches in the non-Native war effort, see Brown & Cook, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974).

munities perceived and participated in the war, including enlistment. While Ottawa drove the effort to enlist Native men, reserve communities could determine, to a limited extent, the nature of their involvement; they could bargain with Cooke over the terms with which they would part with their able-bodied young men. Conversely, while Cooke disapproved of those men who ran from him, it was an entirely successful method of avoiding recruitment as Cooke did not follow them and usually left the community assuming they would not be good soldiers. The recruiter's value judgments should not obscure the effectiveness of these evasions as legitimate responses to his efforts. Native communities were not passive audiences to Cooke's demands, but active negotiators in how, and if, their men would join

the CEF.

Cooke's recruiting was inseparable from the larger DIA policy, but for those communities he visited, he was forever linked to their sons who had enlisted. In one sad instance in 1918, Chief Peter Strength of the Gibson Reserve, wrote to Cooke with the "dreadful news" that Samuel Commandant, whom Cooke had recruited, had died in Europe; "the whole band is sorrow-stricken over the awful news."⁸² The Chiefs' motives for informing Cooke of the young man's unfortunate death may have reflected a belief in the recruiter's responsibility for the community's loss or perhaps he believed Cooke would care about his enlistees. His actions nevertheless belied the linkage the community made between Cooke, the war, and their losses.

⁸² Chief Peter Strength to Charles Cooke, 23 September 1918, LAC RG 10 Vol. 6765 File 452-9.