CHAPTER FOUR

THE WAR BEGINS

"Your King and Country Need You. We Don't."

_message from Canadian Pacific Railway Company,

put in the pay envelopes of single male employees

in Ottawa, 1915.\(^1\)

WORLD WAR CAME TO CANADA on a soft summer day in August 1914. Amid euphoria, men rushed to enlist. Within two weeks, more than 100,000 Canadians volunteered to go to Europe and fight the Germans. With little training, armed with the infamous Ross rifle that repeatedly jammed in battle, and a first issue of boots that fell apart in the rain, they sailed off to Britain. Everyone thought it would all be over by Christmas. Or soon, anyway.\(^2\)

Among the early Canadian volunteers was Robert Rushford of Cumberland, a coal miner and friend of Ginger Goodwin. Rushford was a reservist in the Black Watch of Scotland before he emigrated to Canada. He was given a hearty send-off on 21 August 1914, with the Cumberland News trusting that he would "return to Cumberland victorious." Back in Scotland he joined the 1st Battalion, The Black Watch (Royal Highlanders). He left behind his wife, Jessie, and two children, Nava and Jimmy. Not long after Rushford left, a daughter was born. Patriotically, she was named Ypres after the first battle in Belgium in the fall of 1914. The First Battle of Ypres had hardly begun when Rushford became a casualty, shot through the lung on 11 November 1914. Less fortunate were his two closest friends, Private Charles McIntosh and Corporal Ernest Salt. They were killed before the end of 1914.\(^3\)

\(^1\)Cumberland News, 4 August 1915.

\(^2\)For references to Canada and the World War I see, for example: G.W. Larkin and J.P. Matresky, Canada in the Twentieth Century: World War I (Markham, 1987); John Swettenham, Canada and the First World War (Toronto, 1969); Patricia Giesler, Valour Remembered: Canada and the First World War (Ottawa, 1982); Daphne Read ed., The Great War and Canadian Society: An Oral History (Toronto, 1978).

\(^3\)Cumberland News, 12, 26 August, 9 December 1914; 24 February 1915.
Lance Corporal Rushford recuperated in hospital in Aldershot, England, and was invalided home to Cumberland where he received a hero's welcome on 4 May 1915. Schoolchildren were given the day off. The arriving train was decked in the Union Jack. The West Cumberland Band played. There was a procession. Mayor Charles Parnham read an exuberant address of welcome: "Cumberland is proud of you; proud of your association with a gallant corps — the Black Watch; proud of your cheerful response to the call of duty; proud of your gallant conduct in the face of the enemy; proud of the blood you have shed in fighting your country's foes, and proud of the honourable scars you carry, and we feel it is a great honour to be permitted to welcome home one who has so valiantly upheld those principles for which the whole of the British Empire, and her gallant Allies, are now contending. While we deplore the desperate nature of your wounds and your incapacity for further active service, we trust that you have still many years of health, strength and usefulness before you. In a relentless struggle, such as is now raging in Europe, the 'Last Post' has sounded for many gallant men and you will no doubt render sincere thanks to The Almighty Father for your wonderful preservation and the joy of once again being reunited with your family. Your recollections of the enthusiastic loyalty of Canada, the throbbing patriotism of the British Isles, the stirring scenes of France, the Battle of the Aisne, the desolation and spoliation of Flanders, may, in years to come, grow dim and fade from your memory, but the screech of shells, the shock of arms and the smoke and din of battle-wrecked Ypres, will never be forgotten, and this Flemish town — of immortal fame — has fittingly given a name to the little girl who came into this world while her father was bravely striving for King and Country."

The joyous hero's welcome for Rushford clashed with the grim news that Fletcher and George Elliott, sons of Rev. and Mrs. William Elliott, minister of Grace Methodist Church in Cumberland, had been killed in the second Battle of Ypres. Rushford was among those attending an overflow congregation of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches for a memorial to the two dead men. A few days later, the Elliotts received a cablegram: There had been a mistake. Fletcher was, after all, alive and well, though George was indeed dead.  

Sadly, little Ypres died a month after her father returned, after a two-day illness. Because of his war wounds, Rushford was unable to work for a year and the Comox District Patriotic War Fund helped the family out financially. Then he became the provincial government’s game warden in Cum-

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4 Cumberland News, 5 May 1915.
5 Cumberland News, 5, 12 May, 2, 9 June 1915.
Robert Rushford, volunteer soldier injured early in World War I and later a reluctant BC Provincial Police constable in the search for draft dodgers including Goodwin, poses in 1915 with his wife, and children, Nava and Jimmy, on the porch outside their Cumberland home. *Cumberland Museum and Archives, C192-048.*
berland. In 1918, he was appointed Cumberland’s constable in the Provincial Police. Not surprisingly, he was less-than-enthusiastic when his duties required him to search for Goodwin and other draft dodgers. He knew first-hand what war was about.

In the coalfields of Vancouver Island, destitution in the wake of the Big Strike was severe and lasted well into 1915. There was not enough work for both former strikebreakers and former strikers because of the depression. Coal production from Canadian Collieries at its Cumberland and Extension mines dropped from the all-time high of 898,908 long tons in 1910, when Dunsmuir sold the mines, to 741,569 tons in 1912, when the strike started, and to 523,947 tons in 1914 when the strike ended. In 1915, production fell further to 427,812 tons. The work force of 1,516 men above and below ground was 1,003 less than in 1910. General manager Walter Coulson’s pitch to investors of producing 2,000,000 tons a year was a disastrous pipe dream. But the company’s expenditure of $3,500,000 on modernization on top of the purchase price of $11,000,000 produced a debt load that proved impossible to sustain. This resulted in 1920 in a massive corporate reorganization and write-down of assets that a later royal commission judged was insufficient even at the time. After 1915, the depth of the depression, production did pick up, reaching in 1919 the second-highest annual total of 863,418 long tons before falling again.

Strikers who were active in the union, especially, were not recalled to work. Joe Naylor, the leader of the Cumberland miners, did not get work again until the early 1920s. Many former strikers moved away. The British government paid the fare home for miners needed there and a large number took up the offer. The union claimed there was a blacklist and that companies were bringing in new miners in preference to hundreds of former strikers. There was no public social safety net, no unemployment insurance, and no welfare. The distress moved even the provincial government to action because people were left, literally, without resources. The government began supplying food to those who applied for it. The Provincial Police in Cumberland investigated 40 destitute families in October-November 1914 but there were many more. Work-for-welfare on roads was instigated.

When relief work for single men was withdrawn in the summer of 1915, Goodwin appeared before Cumberland council and asked it to use its influence with the provincial government to secure work for the men. He said he knew of men who had eaten only one meal in two days. He did not know what they might resort to, and he was one of them, working for relief on the roads. It was a disgrace to humanity to see strong healthy men go idle, he

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\(^6\)Cumberland News, 26 May, 2 June 1915; Cumberland Islander 15 June 1915; 20 May 1916.
said. "No one can predict what men will do in case they go hungry. No one would like to see anyone do anything that was against the law," he said.

Mayor Charles Parnham was not sympathetic although council voted to forward a letter from Goodwin and others to the provincial government. Parnham, who worked throughout the strike as a foreman, said council could do nothing. It was overdrawn at the bank, he said. He asked why rate-payers should support a lot of single men.

Even less sympathetic was the Cumberland Islander that had been antagonistic to the strikers from the start. It commented editorially that the miners had no one to blame but themselves for starting the strike in the first place, then being cast adrift by the UMWA. The Islander had its own solution, in the second year of World War I: "The call to 'Halt, Fall In!' has been sounded and recruits are wanted at the front. The men who have tried and failed in the medical examination have done their best. But what about those who have never tried at all — those white feather men conspicuous with the red flag when the district was prosperous."

The white feather was, of course, the tag of cowardice. Women pinned white feathers on fit-looking men they thought should be fighting at the front. The object was to publicly humiliate men and to shame them into military action. A serious mistake occurred in Toronto after one such episode. The young victim rolled up his trousers to show an artificial leg. He had lost his real leg in battle. He was sixteen years old. Patriotism became jingoism, even vigilantism.

Propaganda posters urged eligible young men who were slow to volunteer to step forward. "Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?" asked one. The quick reply: "JOIN NOW." Recruiters pressed men in the street to volunteer. Lists of volunteers were published in newspapers. Soon other lists appeared — of the dead and the wounded. Then the wounded began arriving home. The euphoria that marked the start of the war began evaporating. So did the optimism that the war would soon be over.

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7 UMWA District 28 Papers, Washington, DC; BC Archives, Cumberland, Provincial Police Reports, GR 445, Box 15, File 4; Cumberland Islander, 17, 24 July 1915; W.L. Coulson report, 31 March 1910, Exhibit 817, (BC), Royal Commission on Coal and Petroleum Products, GR 686, Box 11, File 3; and Canadian Collieries Prospectus 5 May 1910, Buckham Collection, AddMss 436, Volume 32, File 8,; (BC), Royal Commission on Coal and Petroleum Products, Volume 2 (1937) and Volume 3 (1938); Annual Reports, Minister of Mines, 1910 onwards.

8 Cumberland News, 30 September 1914; Read, The Great War and Canadian Society; Robin MacDonald, "White Feather Feminism: The Recalcitrant Progeny of Radical Suffragist and Conservative Pro-War Britain," Ampersand 1.1 (Fall 1997).

9 Read, The Great War and Canadian Society.
The huge lead, zinc and copper smelter in Trail, BC, belches its sulphurous smoke that killed vegetation on surrounding hillsides and created a “leading” health problem for workers. The photographs are approximately contemporaneous with Goodwin’s time in Trail from early 1916 to early 1918. *Trail City Archives.*
Meanwhile, still unemployed one year after the Big Strike ended, and having depended on work for welfare, Goodwin left Cumberland for a coal-mining job in Merritt in the Nicola Valley on the BC mainland. After a short time, he moved again, signing on with his old employer, Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company, this time as a driver at No. 1 East mine in Coal Creek near Fernie. No. 1 was the biggest of the company's seven operating mines in Coal Creek with 1,051 workers, 740 of them underground. Goodwin agreed to go to work on 18 December 1915 for $3.03 for an eight-hour day. But, early the next year, he ended sixteen years in the coal mines and moved to Trail in the West Kootenay where he began his meteoric trade union career — and his fatal collision with conscription.

Goodwin started in Trail as a smelterman for the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company Limited (CM&S), then owned by Canadian Pacific Railway, and known since 1966 as Cominco Limited until 2001 when it merged with Teck Corporation to become TeckCominco Limited. Work in the smelter was grim and the environmental damage it caused in both the Trail area and southwards into the United States was serious. F. Augustus Heinz started the smelter in 1896 to process copper and gold from the booming mines at Red Mountain in nearby Rossland. The CPR bought the smelter in 1898 and soon lead and zinc were added to the ores being processed. Copper and zinc were essential ingredients for shell casings in World War 1. In 1916, the smelter was becoming the largest metallurgical works in the world. It belched an average of 4,700 tons of sulphides, mainly sulphur dioxide, into the air every month, killing trees and other vegetation on the surrounding hills. The landscape was scorched by acid rain.

Workers were critical of conditions inside the Trail smelter. Production workers put in an eight-hour day but mechanics and day labourers worked nine hours. The BC Labour Department reported a work week of 56 hours, meaning workers did not have regular days off. Lead is a powerful poison and there were 89 temporary total disability awards for this reason out of 208 for all reasons by the Workmen's Compensation Board in 1918. In earlier years, there was no compensation for an industrial disease like lead poisoning. Large doses of lead produce sickness and death and smaller doses affect various parts of the body including blood, the nervous system, kidneys, and the reproductive systems of men and women. Early symptoms may include a drop in physical fitness, fatigue, sleep disturbance, headache, aching bones and muscles, stomach pains, decreased appetite, and extreme and persistent constipation. The main hazards in lead smelting are dust produced during crushing and grinding operations and fumes and oxides.

encountered in sintering, blast-furnace reduction, and refining. Dust control and hand washing are important deterrents to what was called "leading."

The Trail Mill and Smeltermen's Union, Local 105, told the Royal Commission on Labour in 1913 about lead poisoning problems. With a sense more of resignation rather than outrage, union president Fred Perrin said: "It's an industry a man can't expect to work at without getting sick." The union asked that the Compensation Act be amended to include smelters and refineries and that industrial diseases be put on the same footing as accidents. The union also sought the eight-hour day for all smelter workers.

"The average man goes to work at the lead furnace and three months is about the average of what he can stand," said union secretary Colin Campbell. "Three months is about the limit that most of them will stay there without getting leaded." This applied to 140 men out of the workforce of about 600. "When they get leaded they lay off all the way from three to six weeks and after they come back to work they last about another six weeks generally," he said. It was "very seldom" that a leaded worker could stand another three months employment.

Local doctor William Coghlin said he treated fifteen to twenty men a month for leading, "some just recovering and others just coming in."

Campbell appeared fatalistic when asked what could be done to prevent lead poisoning. "The management here does the best they can. Still it's very bad," he said. Management representatives said the company was installing new dust-collecting machinery to reduce leading and planned a wash-up facility in the middle of the day before eating.

Management was unenthusiastic about the union proposal to change the law to treat industrial diseases on the same basis as accidents. "It puts the man in a position to say he's leaded any old time he feels like it," said smelter superintendent James Buchanan. But Dr. Coghlin dismissed this concern, saying: "There isn't very much trouble in diagnosing lead poisoning."

Buchanan said he had known men to work for a year without being affected by lead but "other fellows can't go near it at all. They may be leaded in one day." But working for one year without being leaded, he conceded, would be an exception.

"As a general rule, when a man is badly leaded, we try to put him somewhere else until he gets over it," Buchanan said. But Campbell put it differently. He said, "It's a case of necessity for them to work on that job, or they have no job at all. You can't get another place for all of them."

General manager Robert Stewart said that while some smeltermen booked off on Sundays, they could work 30 days without a break. The company made no provision for "laying off" meaning no days off or vacations.
An incredulous member of the royal commission asked: “Don’t you take into consideration the relieving of these men once in a while?” Replied Stewart: “No, we haven’t any special arrangement for it.”

The BC legislature did pass the Workmen’s Compensation Act on 31 May 1916 that came into effect on 1 January 1917. Suits for damages in court, where the injured worker or his estate had to prove blame, were replaced by no-fault employer-funded compensation. It also included lead poisoning in a schedule of compensable industrial diseases. Parker Williams, the former Ladysmith coal miner, union organizer, and Socialist member of the legislature, was one of the three compensation board commissioners.11