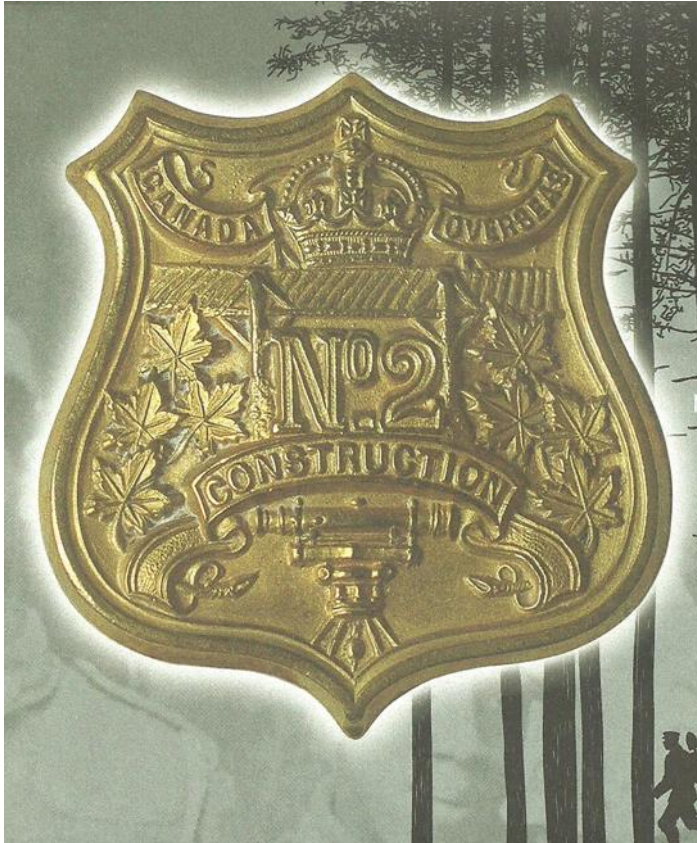


NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION
(aka the Black battalion):
A SHORT HISTORY & an Apology



Col John Boileau (Ret'd)

NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

OUTLINE

THE FIRST WORLD WAR & BLACK CANADIANS

NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION FORMATION

NO. 2 OVERSEAS IN BRITAIN & FRANCE

WAR'S END

REMEMBRANCE/CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION

ROLE OF NO. 2: THE "BIG" PICTURE

APOLOGY

QUESTIONS

"STREET CRED"

MILITARY SERVICE: 37/10=47

AUTHOR/PRESENTER: 15/625/80/∞

NO. 2 CONNECTIONS:

-COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP: NO. 2 CENTENNIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE 2015-2016, NO. 2 APOLOGY NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE + COMMUNICATIONS & HISTORY SUB-COMMITTEES (2021-22)

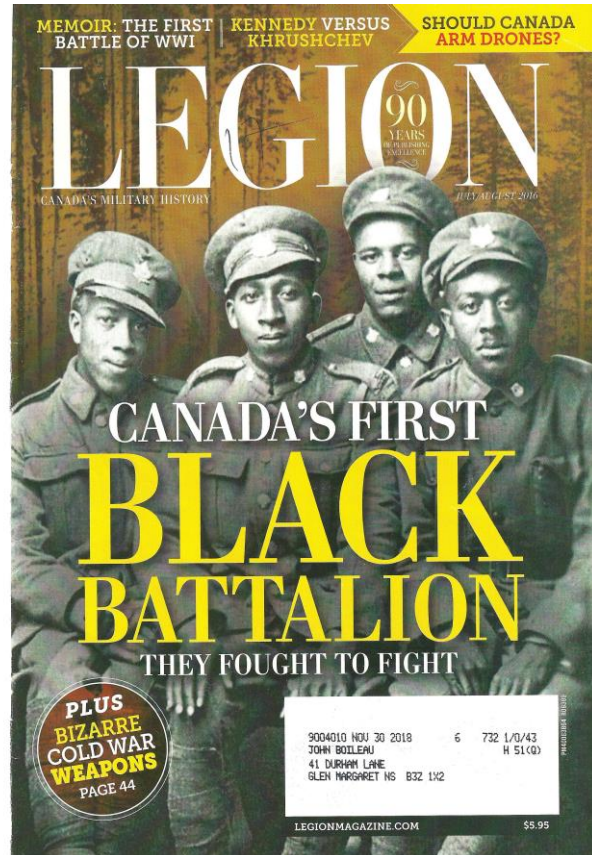
-ARTICLES: HALIFAX CHRONICLE HERALD (15 FEB 2004 & 4 JULY 2016), HALIFAX DAILY NEWS (14 FEB 2007), ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE INTERNATIONAL TATTOO PROGRAMME (JULY 2016), LEGION MAGAZINE COVER STORY (JULY/AUG 2016), INTRODUCTORY ESSAY CENTENNIAL CEREMONY PROGRAMME (9 JULY 2016) (PICTOU), ANAVETS MAGAZINE (SEP 2016), CANADIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY REV WM ANDREW WHITE (12 JUNE 2019), CHAPTER ON NO. 2 BOY SOLDIER IN AMAZING ATLANTIC CANADIAN KIDS (AUG 2019), NAAC MEDIA ADVISORIES (2021-22)

-PRESENTATIONS: HALIFAX NORTH MEMORIAL LIBRARY (13 FEB 2016), ARMY MUSEUM (PAINTING UNVEILING 5 JUL 2016), RYERSON UNIVERSITY WEBINAR PRESENTATION AND PANEL DISCUSSION (26 MAR 2019), HALIFAX FWW STUDY GROUP (21 APR 2021), CAPE BRETON UNIVERSITY RESEARCH MONTH (4 MAR 2022)

-EVENTS: AFRICAN HERITAGE MONTH POSTER UNVEILING (PH 27 JAN 2016), STAMP/FDC UNVEILING (BCC 2 FEB 2016), PAINTING UNVEILING (AMHC 5 JUL 2016), CENTENNIAL CEREMONY (PICTOU 9 JUL 2016), MONTHLY NAC & SUB-COMMITTEE MEETINGS

-LIAISON: BETWEEN CAF CHIEF MILITARY ENGINEER & BCC FOR PERPETUATION OF NO. 2

NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION



The Black Battalion

By John Boileau

"I have been fortunate to have secured a very fine class of recruits, and I did not think it fair to these men that they should have to mingle with Negroes."

Lieut.-Col. George Fowler, commanding the 104th Battalion, wrote these words to 6th Division Headquarters in Halifax, in an attempt to have 20 new "coloured" soldiers removed from his unit. In spite of official Canadian government policy to the contrary—which clearly stated black volunteers could be accepted—many blacks suffered rejection at recruiting stations.



After two years of perseverance and tireless lobbying by black leaders, assisted by supportive whites, the government finally authorized a black unit, allowing patriotic blacks an opportunity to serve King and Country. The black population of Canada at the time probably numbered about 20,000, the majority of them in Nova Scotia (7,000) and Ontario (5,000), with lesser numbers in New Brunswick (1,000) and the western provinces. Because of its large black populace, the army chose Nova Scotia as the location of the new unit, and on July 5, 1916, it announced the formation of No. 2 Construction

Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), with headquarters initially at Pictou. Canada formed three construction battalions during the First World War, a type of unit no longer in use today, but very much in demand then to carry out essential tasks. Construction units built and repaired trenches, roads, bridges and railways, among other tasks.

No. 2 Construction Battalion became the first and only black unit ever established in Canada after Confederation. Although made up of blacks, the officers were all white, with one notable exception. The unit chaplain, the Rev. Dr. William White, became one of a

handful of black officers in the British Empire during the First World War. The son of a slave, White originally came from Virginia, moved to Nova Scotia in 1900, studied theology at Acadia University (becoming its first black graduate) and settled in Truro where he ministered to the flock of the Zion Baptist Church.

He was also the father of famed contralto Portia White, a classical concert singer of the 1940s and 50s with a voice described by the New York Times as "wonderfully rich." Capt. White kept a diary throughout the war, and afterwards became pastor of the Cornwallis Street Baptist Church in Halifax.

BLACK CANADIANS & THE FIRST WORLD WAR

- Government regulations allowed blacks to enlist
- But—“Catch 22”—most unit COs/recruiters would not permit
- Also several attempts to form black units/sub-units—all unsuccessful



BLACK CANADIANS & THE FIRST WORLD WAR

"I have been very fortunate to have secured a very fine class of recruits, and I did not think it fair to these men that they should have to mingle with Negroes."

Lt-Col George Fowler
Commanding
104TH (New Brunswick) Battalion
Canadian Expeditionary Force

"In the last extremity we might organize a company or two. But would Canadian Negroes make good fighting men? I do not think so.

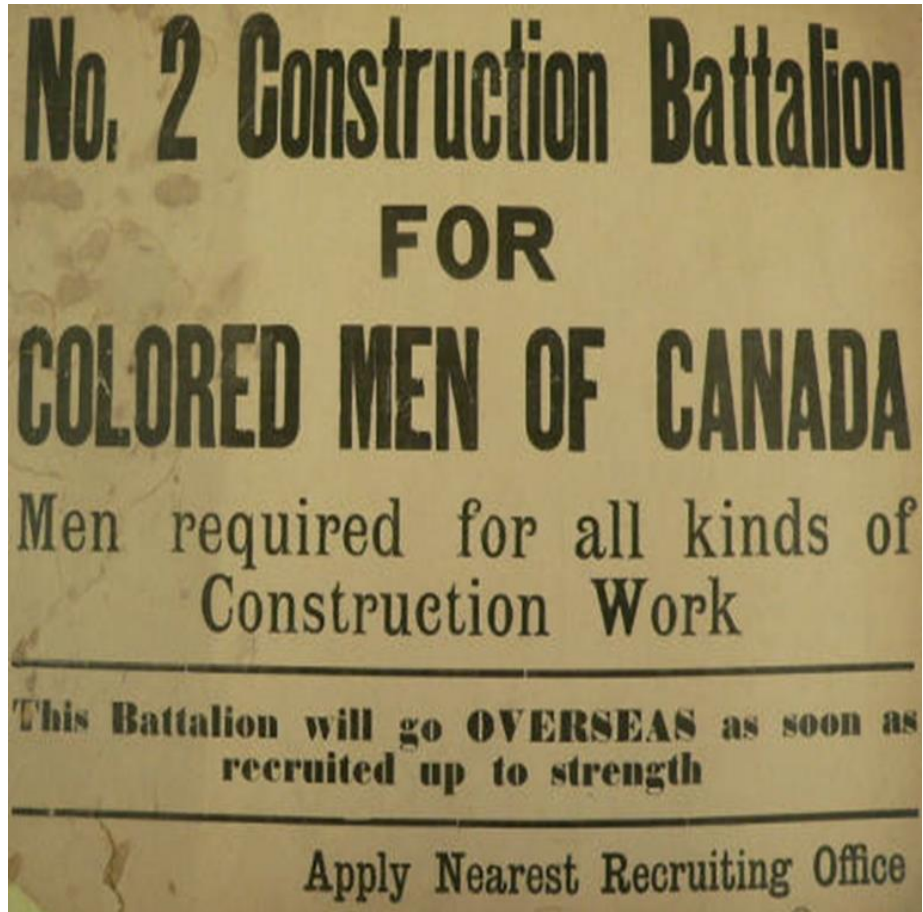
Maj-Gen Willoughby Gwatkin
Chief of the General Staff

BLACK CANADIANS & THE FIRST WORLD WAR

- Government clarification in Dec 1915, but left to COs
- About 1,060-1,260 blacks managed to enroll in CEF (higher?)
- 110 served at front; 10 bravery awards
- Black population: Canada (20,000), including NS (7,000), Ont (5,000), NB (1,000), West & Que (7,000)



NO 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION-FORMATION



- After 2 years of lobbying, black unit finally approved
- Authorized July 5, 1916
- HQ at Market Wharf, Pictou, NS
- Officers were white (ex Chaplain)
- RSM, RQMS white
- Moved to Truro, NS, Sep 9, 1916

NO. 8 COY, CFC

5 WHITE OFFICERS

11 WHITE NCOs

169 BLACK SOLDIERS:

-NO.2: 7

-VOLUNTEERS: 41

-CONSCRIPTS: 120

-UNKNOWN: 1

JULY 1918-MARCH 1919



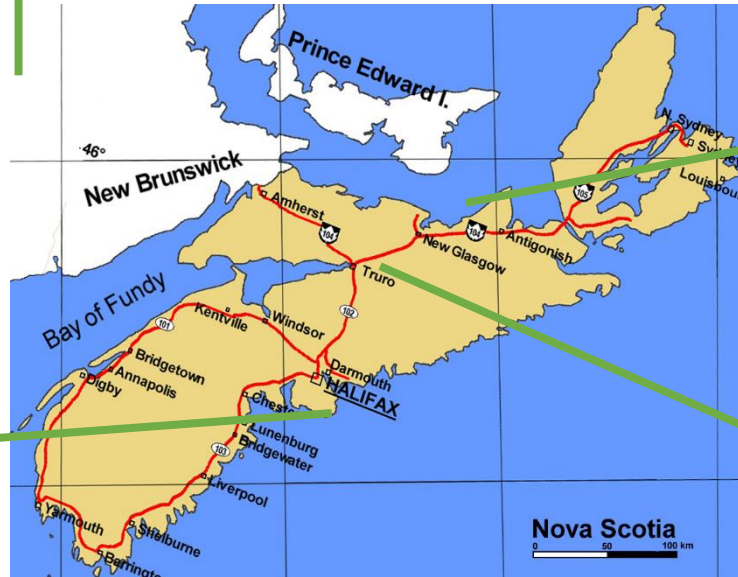
LOCATIONS before departure overseas

4. Detachment
NB
Jan-Mar 1917

← 3. Company
Toronto &
Windsor, ON

→ 1. Original Location
Pictou

← 5. Sailed from:
Halifax
March 25, 1917



→ 2. New location
Truro

WHY NOT A BLACK INFANTRY BATTALION?

Several complaints were reportedly made at the time that the black unit authorized was not a combat battalion. For example:

“The army let us join, but wouldn’t let us fight.”

“They gave us shovels, not rifles.”

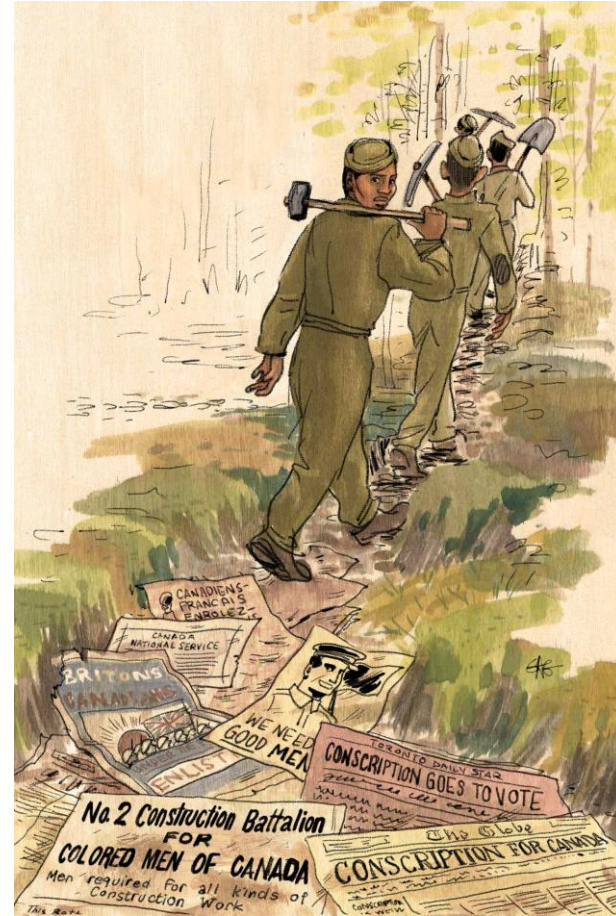
Such criticisms continue to this day.

But...

It was impossible to form a black infantry battalion in Nova Scotia...

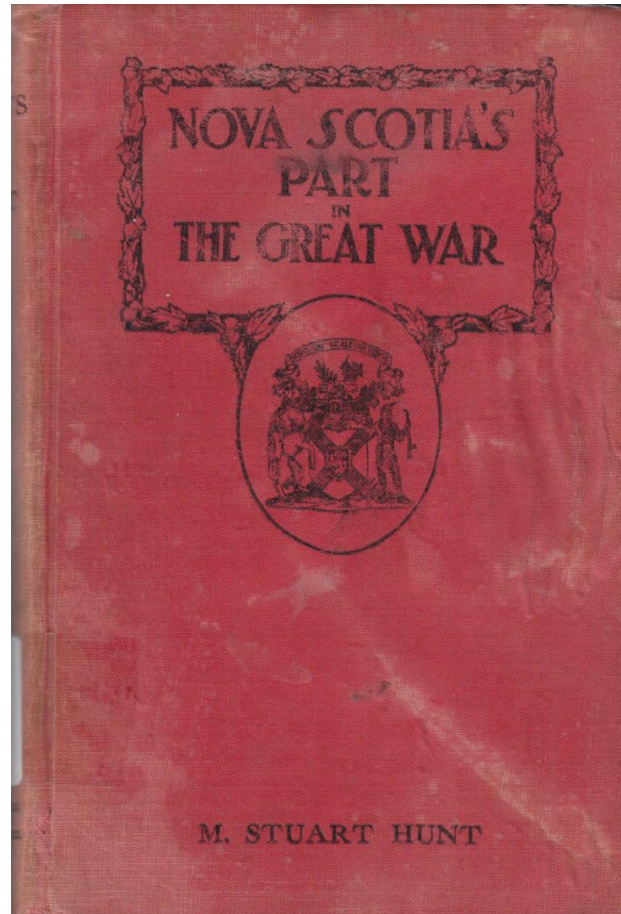
or even in Canada at the time.

IT ALL COMES DOWN TO NUMBERS



Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War (1920)

Chapter XXI – No. 2 Construction Battalion



“An infantry battalion was not deemed advisable as the population was not sufficient to send the necessary reinforcements.” (p. 148)

Potential NS black males all ages: 1,305 (37.3% x 3500)

Less essential workers & medically unfit: 300 (?)

Available males all ages: 1,005

Infantry battalion strength: 1,049

Est reinforcements needed: 2,736 (85th Bn Apr 1917)

Total required: 3,785

(Potential Canada black males all ages: 4,030 (40.3% x 10,000))

(Reduced by 923 (?) essential workers, medically unfit & previous enrollments to 3,107)

No. 2 construction battalion band



NATIONAL RECRUITING

243 NS

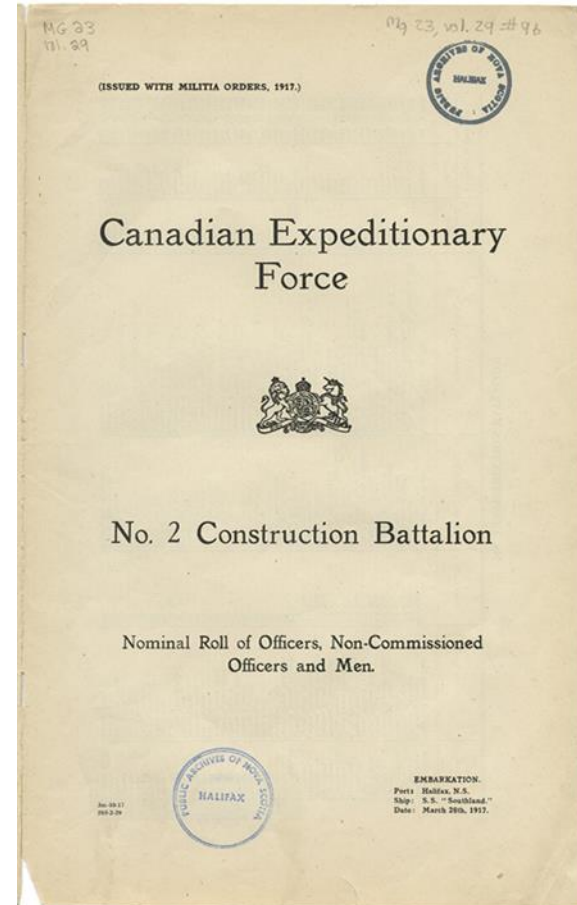
171 US (born, 106 in Canada)

88 ON

71 BWI (born)

51 ROC

624 Total (1,049)

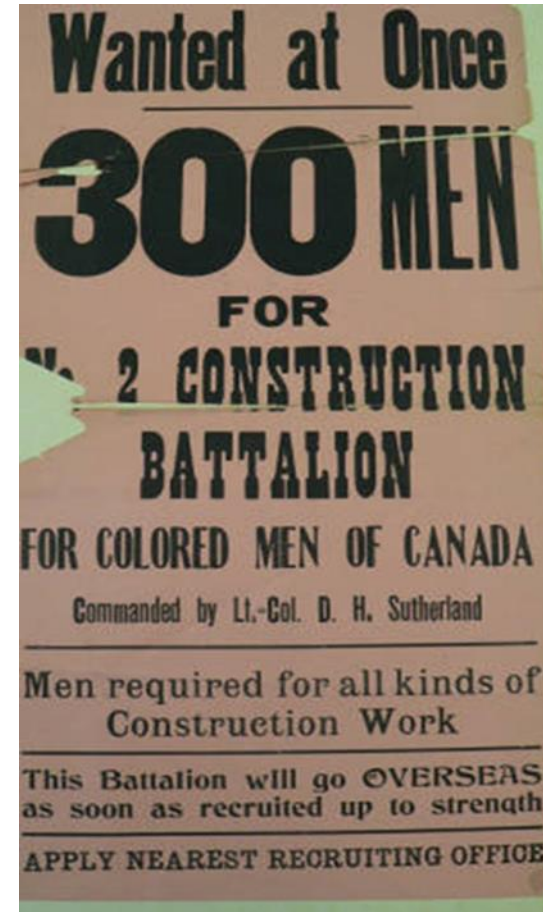


Why???

- Segregated
 - Non-combatant
 - Previous rejection
- BUT...

As of late 1917, conscription came into force and blacks now legally bound to join if conscripted & if refused faced:

- Forcible induction
- Severe penalties



NO 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

**CO – LCol Daniel Sutherland
(1878-1977)**



**Chaplain – HCapt Rev Wm Andrew White
(1874-1936)**



NO 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

New Brunswick



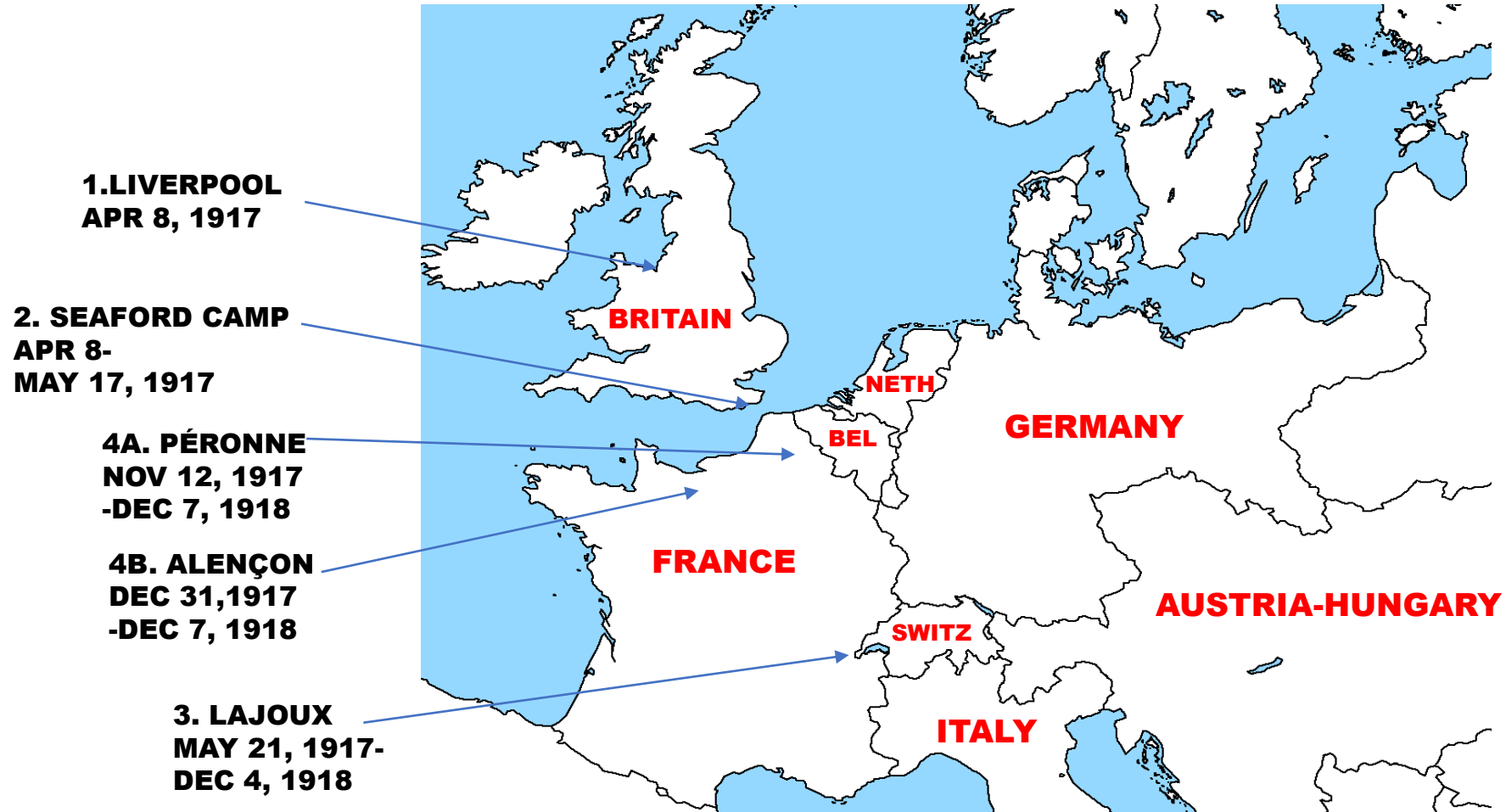
No. 2 at Truro



HMT *SOUTHLAND*



LOCATIONS IN EUROPE



CAMP SEAFORD



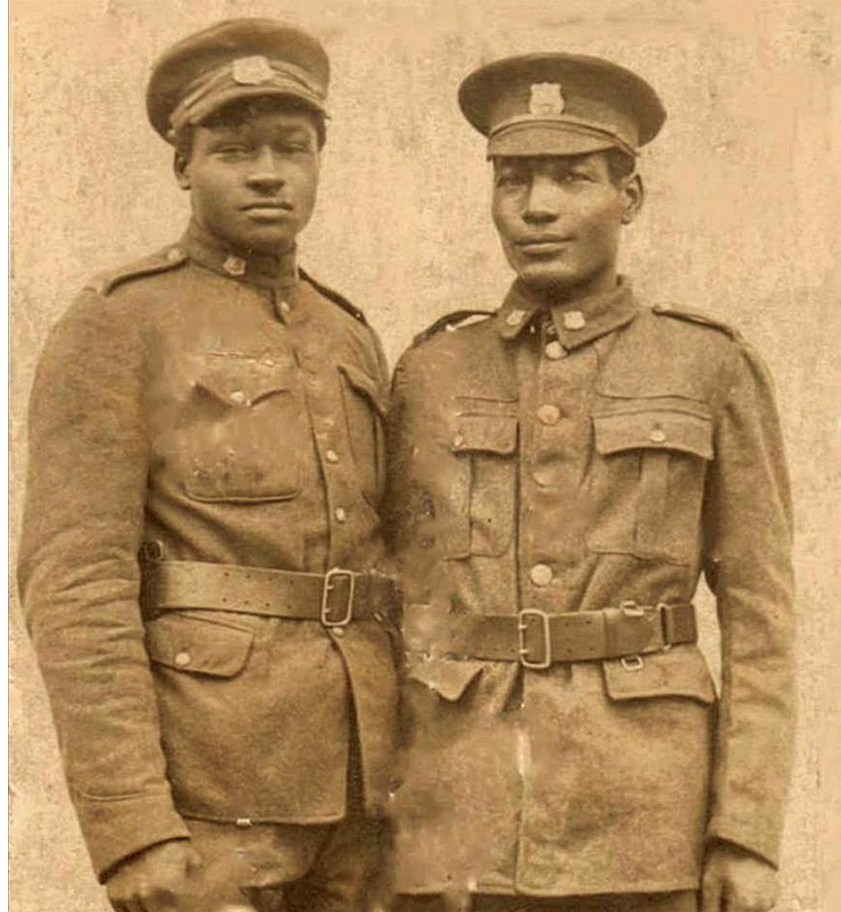
Kitchener's Camp. - Seaford. No 32.

Wynker
Seaford.

NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BN - SEAFORD



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION COMPANY - SOLDIERS



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION COMPANY - OFFICERS



No. 2 construction coy - lajoux





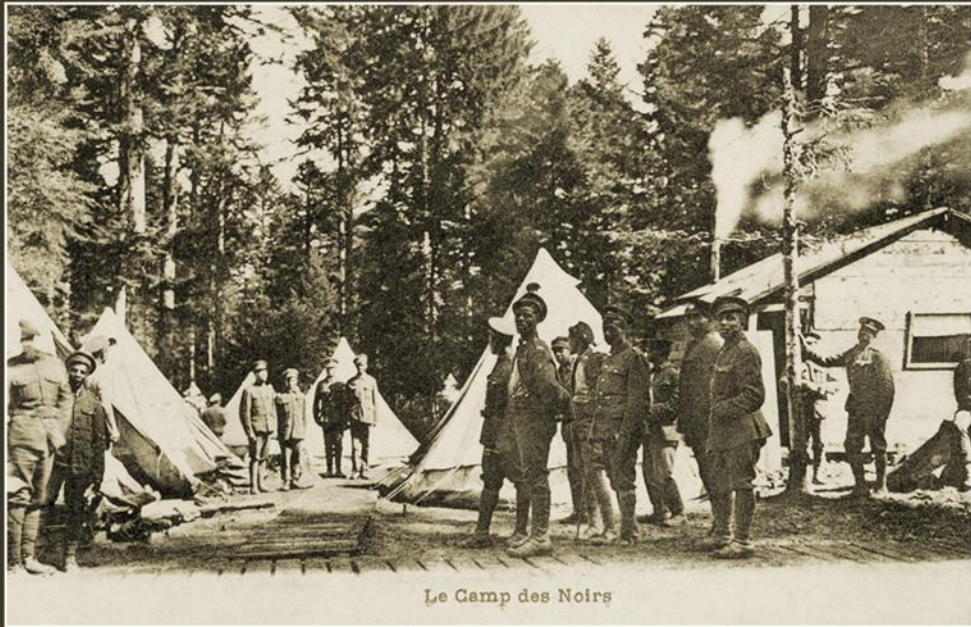
BUSHMEN AND SAWMILL HANDS WANTED

**JOIN THE
224TH CANADIAN FORESTRY
BATTALION**

**ALEXANDER M^CDOUGALL
LT. COL.**

**HEADQUARTERS
43 BANK ST. OTTAWA**

NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION COY - ACCOMMODATION



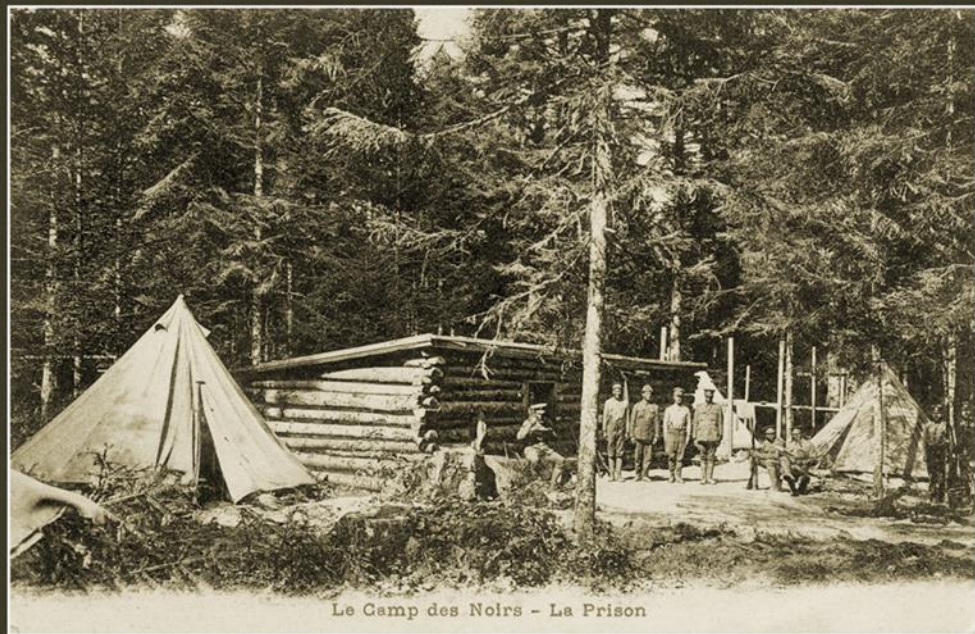
NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION COY - HOSPITAL



No. 2 employment
No. 5 district, Canadian forestry corps
logging-milling-shipping lumber



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION COY - jail



HON CAPT REV WM ANDREW WHITE



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION COMPANY - OFFICERS' MESS



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION COY - DETS ALENÇON & PÉRONNE



GERMAN SPRING 1918 OFFENSIVE



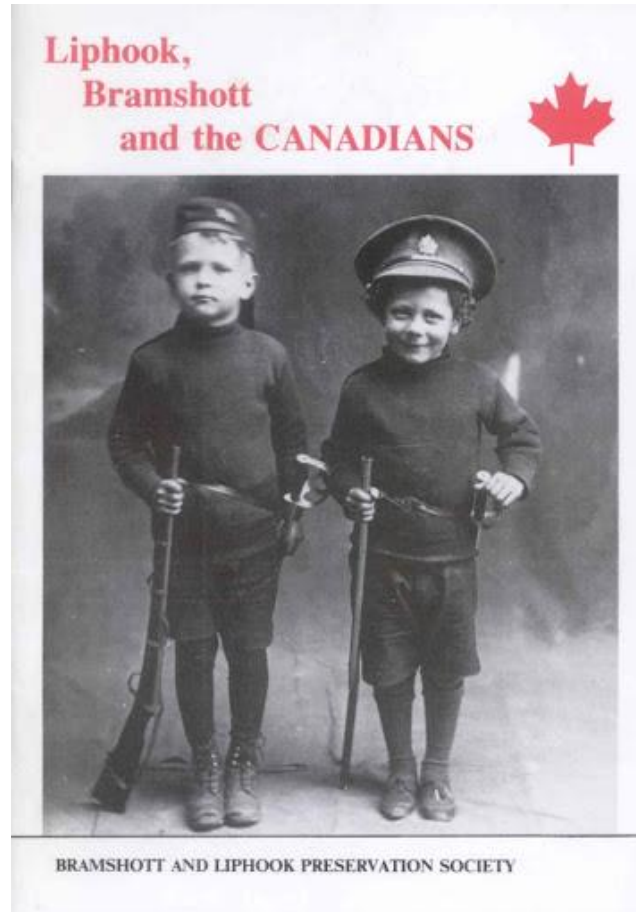
NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION COY - GERMAN SPRING OFFENSIVE



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION COY - SPORTS DAY



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION COY - BRAMSHOTT CAMP



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION COY - LUMBER OPERATIONS



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

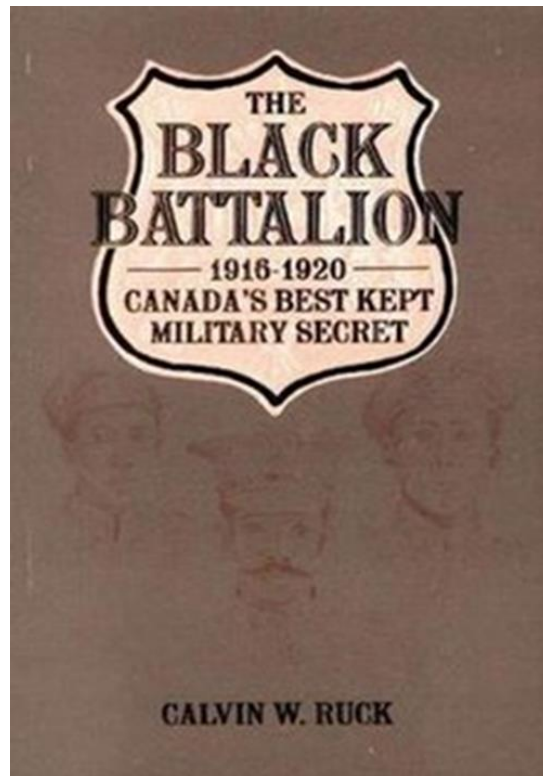
REMEMBRANCE & COMMEMORATION

NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION - REMEMBRANCE

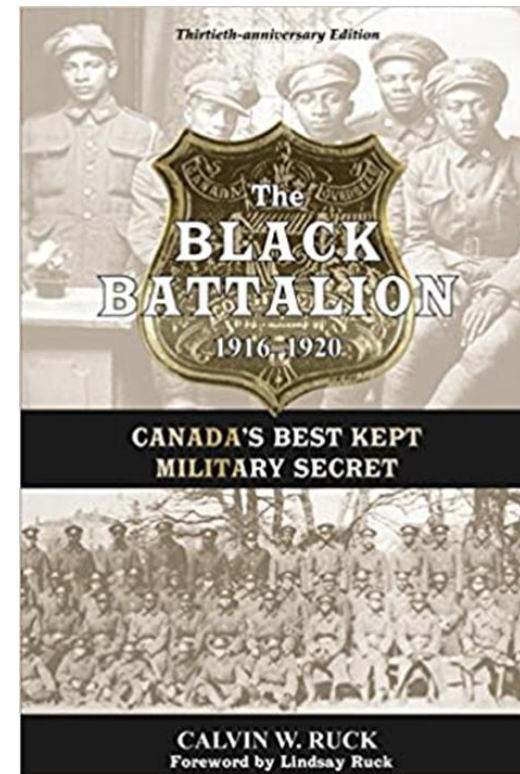


NO 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION REMEMBRANCE - original study

1986/7



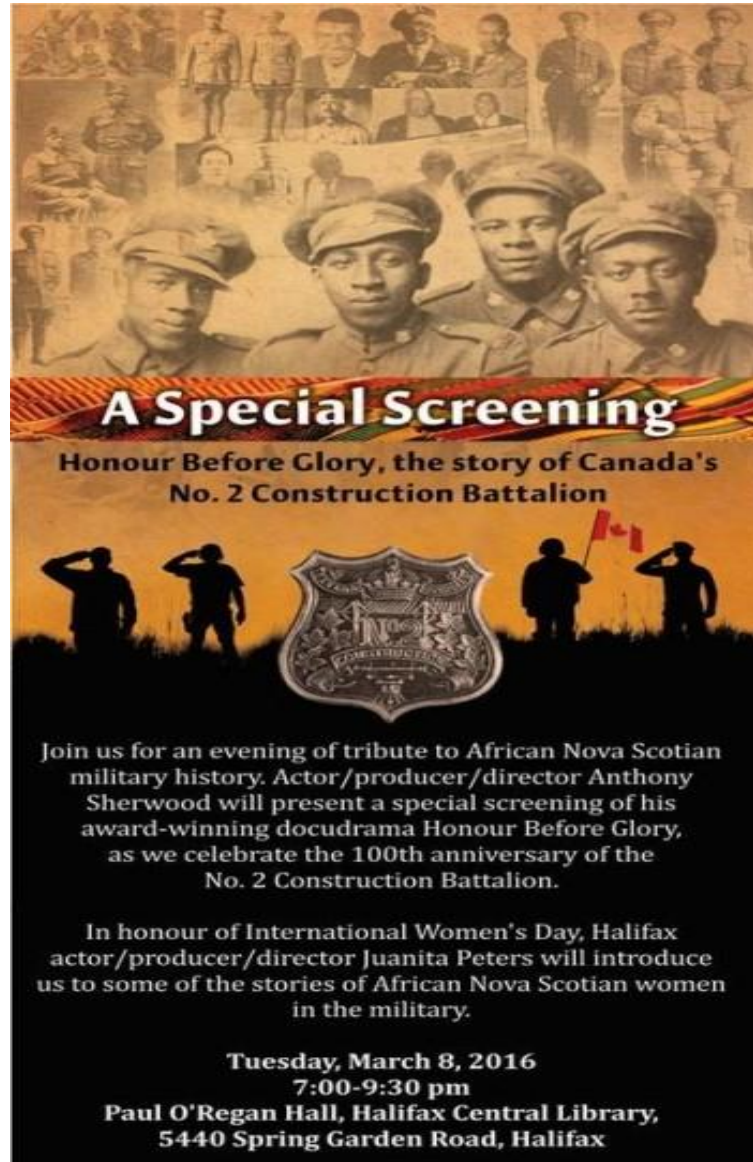
2017 (reprint+)



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION REMEMBRANCE - BLACK CULTURAL CENTRE



NO 2. CONSTRUCTION BATTALION
REMEMBRANCE - "HONOUR BEFORE GLORY"



A Special Screening

**Honour Before Glory, the story of Canada's
No. 2 Construction Battalion**

Join us for an evening of tribute to African Nova Scotian military history. Actor/producer/director Anthony Sherwood will present a special screening of his award-winning docudrama *Honour Before Glory*, as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the No. 2 Construction Battalion.

In honour of International Women's Day, Halifax actor/producer/director Juanita Peters will introduce us to some of the stories of African Nova Scotian women in the military.

**Tuesday, March 8, 2016
7:00-9:30 pm
Paul O'Regan Hall, Halifax Central Library,
5440 Spring Garden Road, Halifax**

NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION REMEMBRANCE - PICTOU MEMORIAL



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION REMEMBRANCE - HOMETOWN HEROES

GEORGE A. DOWNEY 1892-1969

HOMETOWN HERO

George Alexander Downey was born in Preston, Nova Scotia. Along with cousin James Downey, he enlisted with the No. 2 Construction Battalion and served with distinction in the Great War.

For his service in the "Black Battalion," Private Downey was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Despite racial discrimination in the forces, he re-enlisted for the Second World War and served with the Veterans Guard of Canada, earning the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and the War Medal.

After the war he became a businessman and community leader. Downey's fighting spirit was an inspiration to his family, with a number of sons and grandsons having successful careers in boxing, the military, government and politics. He died in 1969 and is laid to rest at a family cemetery in Fall River.

HÉRO DE CHEZ NOUS

George Alexander Downey est né à Preston, en Nouvelle-Écosse. Avec son cousin James Downey, il s'enrôle dans le 2^e Bataillon de construction et sert avec distinction dans la Grande Guerre.

Pour son service dans le « Bataillon de Noirs », le soldat Downey se voit décerner la Médaille de guerre britannique et la Médaille de la victoire. Malgré la discrimination raciale dans l'armée, il s'enrôle à nouveau durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale et sert dans la Garde territoriale des anciens combattants, ce qui lui vaut la Médaille canadienne du volontaire et la Médaille de guerre.

Après la guerre, Downey devient un homme d'affaires et un leader dans sa communauté. Son esprit combatif est une source d'inspiration pour sa famille, bon nombre de ses fils et petits-fils connaissant des carrières fructueuses dans le milieu de la boxe, de l'armée, du gouvernement et de la politique. Il meurt en 1969 et est enterré dans un cimetière familial à Fall River.



JOSEPH A. PARRIS 1899-1972

HOMETOWN HERO

Born in Guysborough County, Joseph "Joe" Parris (centre) served in the No. 2 Construction Battalion alongside several family members, including brother William and cousin Seldon (second from left).

Only 17 when he enlisted at New Glasgow, Parris served his country with great enthusiasm despite the prejudices of the day. Departing from England in 1917, the "Black Battalion" was attached to the Canadian Forestry Corps in France. Its forestry work, road and railway construction, and helping the wounded were essential to the Allied victory in the First World War.

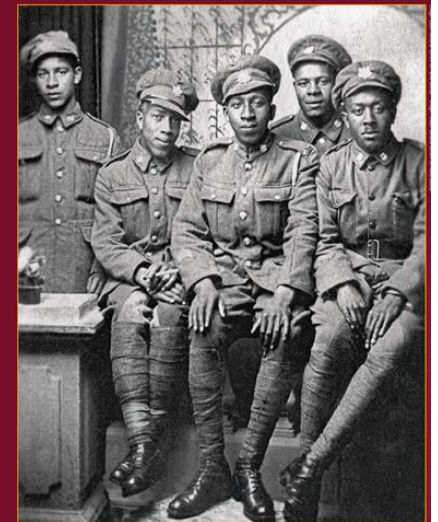
After the war Parris returned to Mulgrave, Nova Scotia, where he joined the local branch of the Canadian Legion. He passed away in 1972 and is laid to rest in St. Lawrence Catholic Cemetery in Mulgrave.

HÉRO DE CHEZ NOUS

Né dans le comté de Guysborough, Joseph « Joe » Parris (centre) sert dans le 2^e Bataillon de construction aux côtés de plusieurs membres de sa famille, dont son frère William et son cousin Seldon (deuxième à partir de la gauche).

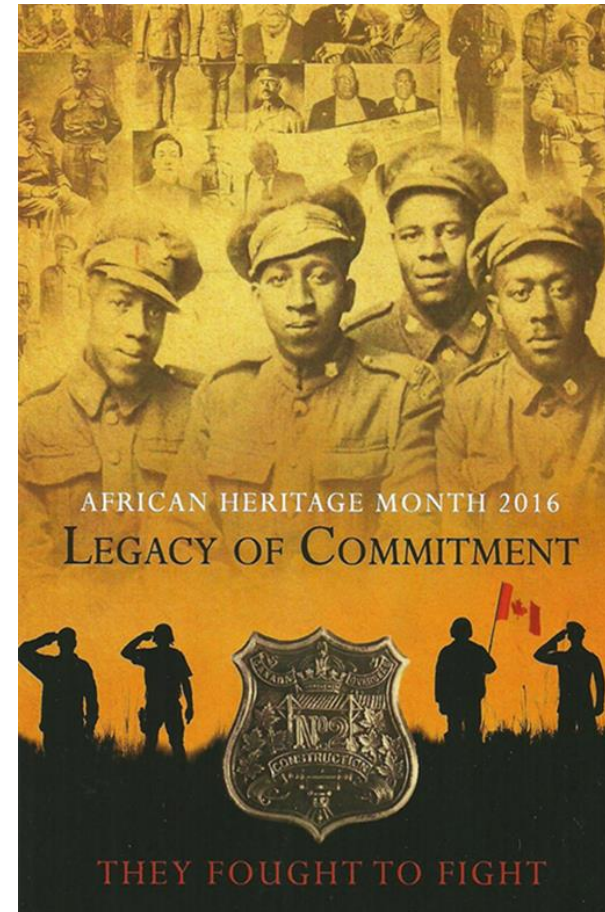
Âgé de seulement 17 ans lorsqu'il s'enrôle à New Glasgow, Parris sert son pays avec beaucoup d'enthousiasme malgré les préjugés de l'époque. Parti de l'Angleterre en 1917, le « Bataillon de Noirs » est rattaché au Corps forestier canadien en France. Ses travaux forestiers de construction de route et de chemins de fer ainsi que son assistance aux blessés s'avèrent essentiels pour la victoire des Alliés durant la Première Guerre mondiale.

Après la guerre, Parris retourne à Mulgrave, en Nouvelle-Écosse, où il s'enrôle dans la filiale locale de la Légion royale canadienne (autrefois la Canadian Legion). Il s'éteint en 1972 et est enterré au cimetière catholique St. Lawrence, à Mulgrave.





NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION COMMEMORATION - AFRICAN HERITAGE MONTH POSTER



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION COMMEMORATION - FDC/STAMP



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION COMMEMORATION - STAMP



SYLVIA PARRIS & HER DADDY



NO 2. CONSTRUCTION BATTALION commemoration - "THE COLOUR OF COURAGE"

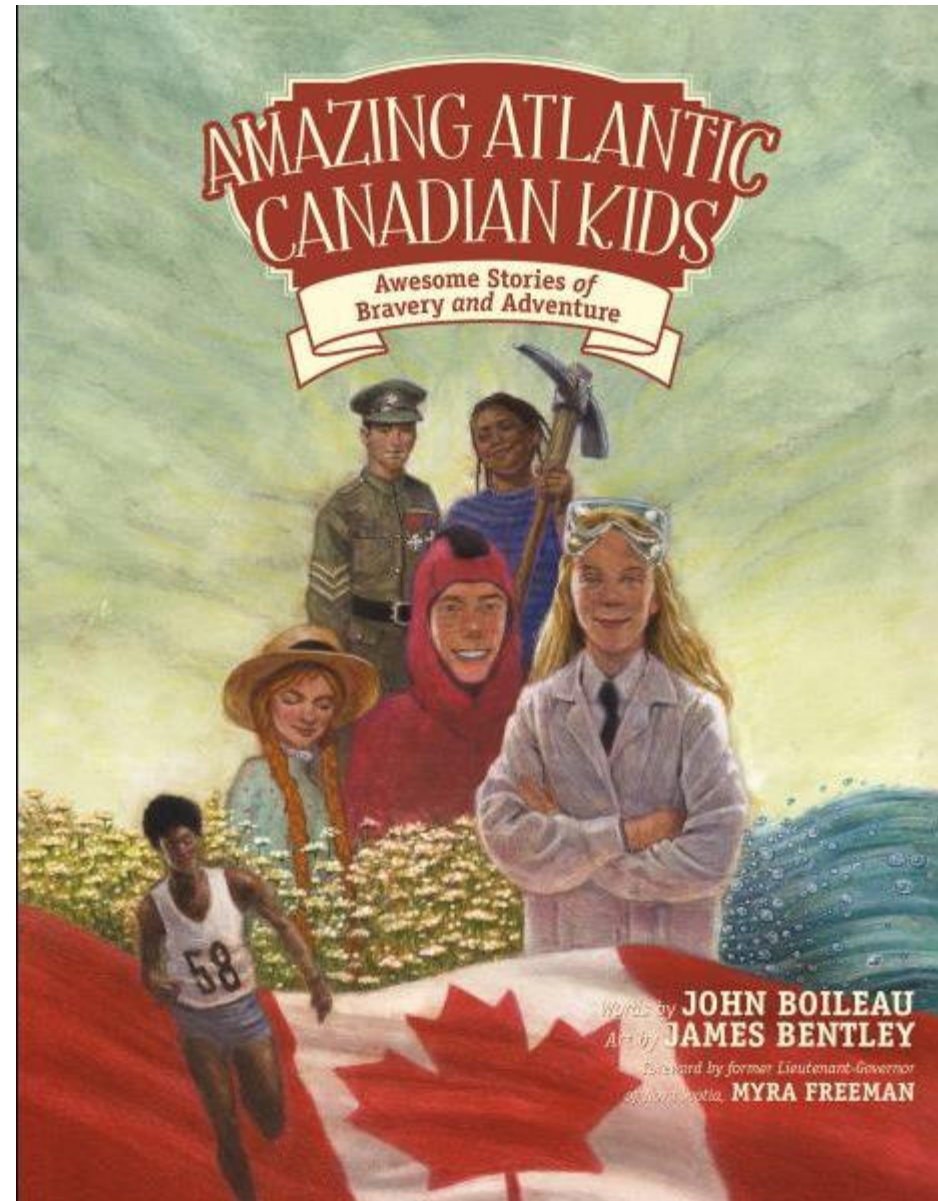


Freedom Halifax 1814



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION COMMEMORATION - PAINTING





Words by **JOHN BOILEAU**
Art by **JAMES BENTLEY**
Foreword by former Lieutenant-Governor
of Nova Scotia, **MYRA FREEMAN**

No. 2 construction battalion commemoration - centennial ceremony



No. 2 Construction Battalion
Canada's First & Only Black Battalion

Save The Date

100th Anniversary Commemoration Ceremony

Saturday, July 9, 2016 - 10:30 am
Pictou Waterfront, Pictou, Nova Scotia

Join us in Pictou, Nova Scotia as we pay tribute to Canada's first and only all Black regiment in WWI. The event will take place on Saturday, July 9, 2016 starting at 10:30am with a honour parade and formal ceremony at 11am. More details to be released in the coming weeks.



BCC
BLACK CANADIAN COMMUNITY CENTRE
AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN MUSEUM

No. 2 construction battalion commemoration - centennial ceremony



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION COMMEMORATION - DEPARTURE CENTENNIAL

100th anniversary of the departure of the No. 2 Construction Battalion

The Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in partnership with the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia is pleased to invite you to join us for a special commemoration. March 25, 2017 marks the 100th Anniversary of the departure of the No. 2 Construction Battalion, Canada's first and only all black battalion, as they departed the shores of Halifax, NS towards the battle fields in France aboard the *SS Southland*.

The commemoration ceremony will take place March 25th, 2017 at 6:30 pm at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 and will feature the recently launched "Community Presents" exhibit on the No. 2 Construction Battalion on display in the Hall of Tribute.

The evening will feature musical performances and a keynote address by Douglas Ruck, QC, son of the late Senator Calvin W. Ruck the author of the publication "Canada's Best Kept Military Secret - The No. 2 Construction Battalion C.E.F." and champion of bringing the history of the Battalion forward.



Le 100^e anniversaire du départ du 2^e Bataillon de construction

Le Musée canadien de l'immigration du Quai 21, en partenariat avec le Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, est heureux de vous inviter à nous rejoindre pour participer à une commémoration spéciale. Le 25 mars 2017 marque le 100^e anniversaire du départ du 2^e Bataillon de construction, jour où le premier et seul bataillon canadien composé de soldats noirs a quitté les rives d'Halifax, en Nouvelle-Écosse, à bord du *SS Southland*, pour se diriger vers les champs de bataille de la France.

La cérémonie de commémoration aura lieu le 25 mars 2017 à 18 h 30 au Musée canadien de l'immigration du Quai 21 et mettra en vedette l'exposition récemment lancée par « La communauté présente » sur le 2^e Bataillon. L'exposition est présentée dans la salle d'hommage.

Des prestations musicales feront aussi partie de la soirée, en plus d'un discours liminaire de Douglas Ruck, c.à. fils du regretté sénateur Calvin W. Ruck, qui est l'auteur de l'ouvrage « Canada's Best Kept Military Secret - The No. 2 Construction Battalion C.E.F. », qui a travaillé sans relâche pour révéler l'histoire du Bataillon.

Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21
Musée canadien de l'immigration du Quai 21

BCC
Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia

Canada

RSVP to publicprograms@pier21.ca RSVP à programmationpublique@quai21.ca

No. 2 construction battalion commemoration - France



A GENERATIONAL COINCIDENCE -
50 YEARS LATER

No. 2 Construction Battalion

Capt Dan Murray
(MO)

1916

HCapt Wm Andrew White
(Chap)

Dr James Murray

CBC Singalong Jubilee

Anne Murray

1966

Lorne White

WHAT'S IN AN OLD TRUNK?



No. 2 - perpetuation

“Perpetuation” means the inheritance and preservation of the identity, traditions and honours of disbanded units.

Proposal to DHH for 4 ESR to perpetuate No. 2; staffed by CAF Chief Military Engineer; approved by CDS.



No. 2 construction coy - war work

Contrary to some claims, the soldiers of No. 2 did NOT:

- Dig frontline trenches
- Defuse land mines ahead of advancing troops
- Lay barbed wire on the battlefield
- Evacuate wounded from the battlefield
- Engage in combat

To say that they did is wishful thinking not backed up by historical facts.

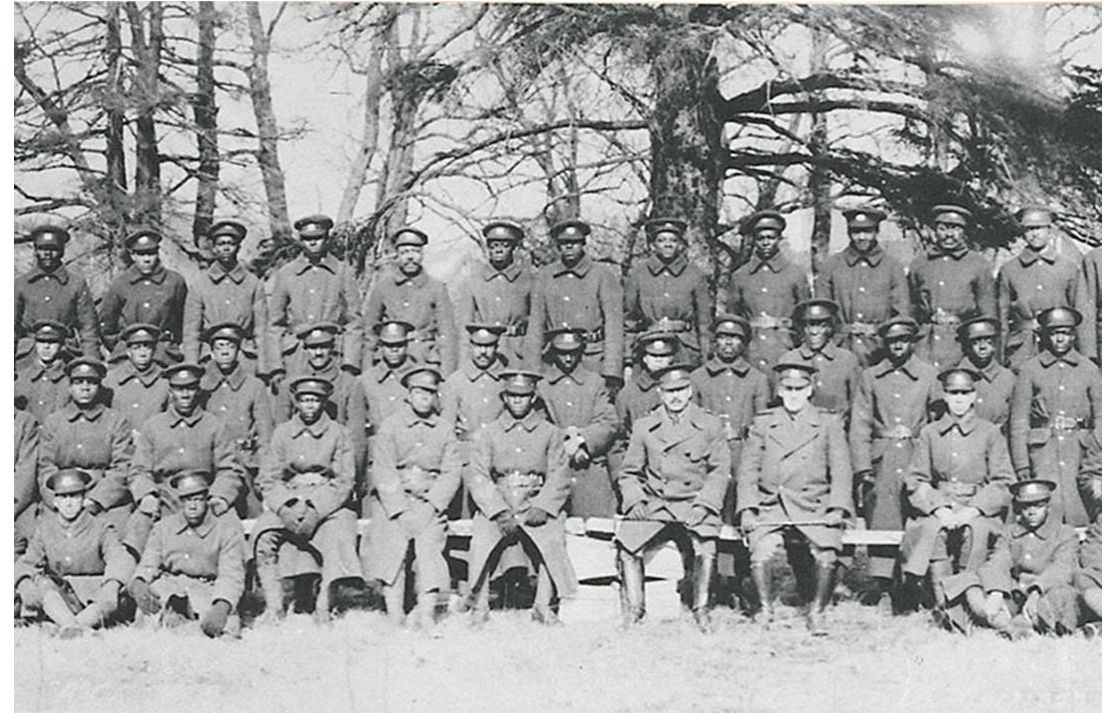


TOOTH-TO-TAIL RATIO

- The number of military personnel it takes to supply & support (the “Tail”) each combat soldier (the “Tooth”).
- Each combat unit of the Canadian Corps had a built-in support element. The further back from the front, the more units became devoted to purely support functions.
- At the CEF level, units were largely support only.
- Support units included engineers, signals, supply, transport, medical, workshops, pay, postal, military police, veterinarians & others.
- Some largely support units were:
 - 3 construction units
 - 4 labour battalions
 - 5 pioneer battalions
 - 13 railway construction battalions
 - 101 forestry companies

WHO “WON” THE WAR?

- Whether combat or support, all units played their full part in winning the war.
- No unit has to take a back seat to any other unit on the basis of their role.
- There is no need to embellish what the men of No. 2 accomplished, especially in view of the prejudice they faced.



GOVERNMENT OF CANADA APOLOGY TO DESCENDANTS OF NO. 2

On Sunday, 28 March 2021, the Minister of National Defence, Harjit S. Sajjan, and other federal officials outlined the Government of Canada's intent to apologize for the treatment of the members of No. 2 Construction Battalion during the First World War.

On Monday, 28 March 2022, the new Minister of National Defence, Anita Anand, confirmed this decision.

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA APOLOGIES

- 1988: Internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War.
- 1990: Detention of Italian-Canadians during the Second World War.
- 2001: Executions of 23 Canadian soldiers during the First World War.
- 2003: Acadian deportation of 1755 (Royal Proclamation)
- 2006: Chinese immigrant head tax between 1885 and 1923.
- 2008: Internment of Ukrainian-Canadians during the First World War (\$10M education grant, no apology).
 - Canada's residential schools system, involving more than 150,000 children from 1840s to 1996.
 - Komagata Maru incident, in which shipload of Indian migrants turned away from Vancouver in 1914.
- 2016: Komagata Maru incident.
- 2017: Abuse and cultural losses at Innu residential schools in Newfoundland and Labrador.
 - LGBT individuals harmed by the "gay purge" of the 1950s-1990s.
- 2018: Arrest, trial and hanging of six Tsilhqot'in chiefs in 1864.
 - Rejection of asylum request from more than 900 German Jews in 1939 (254 later died in Holocaust).
- 2019: Inuit treatment for tuberculosis in mid-20th century.
 - Unjust conviction for treason of Chief Poundmaker in 1885.
- 2021: All current and former defence team members and veterans who were affected by sexual assault, sexual harassment and discrimination.

APOLOGY ACTIONS

- NO 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION NATIONAL APOLOGY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (NAAC) FORMED UNDER CA/BCCNS
- REPRESENTATIVES: BCC, CA, DESCENDANTS, HISTORIANS, ACTIVISTS
- SUB-COMMITTEES: HISTORY, COMMS, LOGISTICS
- APOLOGY EVENTS: WEEK OF 4-9 JULY 2022
- MAIN EVENT: TRURO 9 JULY 2022



THE END - THANK YOU - questions?



