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ARMED WITH CAMERAS:
THE CANADIAN ARMY FILM UNIT DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

By
Sarah Beth Klotz

Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the M.A. degree in History.

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ABSTRACT

ARMED WITH CAMERAS:

THE CANADIAN ARMY FILM UNIT DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Sarah B. Klotz
University of Ottawa, 2004

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Professor Jeff Keshen

This thesis focuses on a previously undocumented part of Canadian military history: the Canadian Army Film Unit (CAFU). Like the official historians, war artists and photographers, the CAFU was to create an official record of Canada's Army in the Second World War. Although the National Film Board (NFB) was established in 1939, receiving complete control over the federal production of film in Canada, the CAFU was created in 1941 by the Department of National Defence outside of the mandate of the *National Film Board Act*. This caused a significant amount of conflict between the NFB and the Department of National Defence over which department would control the documentation of Canada's Army in the Second World War.

Reconstructing the history of the Canadian Army Film Unit from 1941 to 1945, this thesis analyses a number of issues that the Film Unit encountered in the production of its motion pictures. This chronological study explores the nature of filming during combat, censorship, distribution, and the soldier-cameramen's ongoing struggle with the NFB for control over the documentation of the war on film.

The CAFU expanded substantially throughout the war, increasing the scope and breadth of its productions. While there were private British and Canadian film

companies creating a visual record of the war, the Film Unit was different from the civilian war correspondents and commercial newsreel cameramen. These combat cameramen were attached to military units and shot real-time footage of the Canadians in battle. These motion pictures were used to create productions, including theatrical and training movies, and the *Canadian Army Newsreel*. Footage was also sent to commercial newsreel companies, including the NFB. The Unit left a legacy of Second World War film that continues to be employed by the television journalists and documentary filmmakers illustrating the Canadian Army in the Second World War. Although many of the Unit's films still exist in these contemporary documentaries and form a substantial corpus of evidence at the Library and Archives Canada, the Unit and the men who formed it have long been forgotten.

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INTRODUCTION

EARLY CANADIAN FILM, 1914-39

I doubt whether cinema films will have more than a rather limited value in the future as historical material in the narrow sense.¹ *C.P. Stacey*

Colonel Charles P. Stacey, Army Historical Officer in the Second World War and Official Historian after the war, did not rely on any film sources to write his multi-volume official history series. For him, in the “narrow sense,” motion pictures were of little value as reliable archival documentation. He is not alone, however. Trained to study and interpret textual records, some historians have neglected film as a source for documenting war and the past in general. Nonetheless, film, although difficult to find, use and interpret, offers unique information and is a valuable tool in helping historians re-create a narrative of the past.

Early cinematographers believed that film would be an integral component in the study of history due to its faithful rendering of events and life.² Like photographs, film was believed to capture an event - moments of truth. Furthermore, more “truth” could be imparted to the historian through the moving image of the film rather than the static photographic image.³ However, the ability to fake footage, to edit and merge film seamlessly, to recreate events for the camera, the use of film for propaganda purposes, and the rise and promotion of feature film, brought this faithful rendering into question.

¹ Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), Appendix A of Historical Officers Report No. 20, 31 March 1941.

² Anthony Aldgate, *Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Scholar Press, 1979) 2.

³ For a useful analysis of photographs and how they, like film, are manipulated constructions, rather than mirrors, of reality, see Joan M. Schwartz, “Records of Simple Truth and Precision: Photography, Archives and the Illusion of Control,” *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000) 32.

This does not negate the value of film as a historical source, but the historian must use the moving image with caution, being aware of its value in providing a glimpse into the past, while also rigorously analysing the context surrounding this source. This thesis will provide a case study of the context surrounding film – in effect, a history of records creation – to demonstrate both the richness of the resulting record, and the imperative of “reading” or viewing archival film as a product of its context.

The Department of National Defence established the Canadian Army Film Unit (CAFU) in October 1941.⁴ The combat cameramen were responsible for creating the audio-visual record of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. These raw motion pictures were used to create theatrical and training movies, and the *Canadian Army Newsreel*. Footage was also sent to commercial newsreel companies in Canada, throughout the British Empire and the United States. It was anticipated that in the Second World War, motion pictures would develop into one of the “most important media for the dissemination of information and for propaganda.” Moving images were being used for training and entertainment, and were seen as “the best means of recording events of historical interest for posterity.”⁵ Yet, although many of the Unit’s films still exist in these commercial newsreels and have been used in contemporary documentaries to illustrate the war and by subsequent film-makers, official film (and those responsible for its production) remain relatively neglected in historical scholarship.

⁴ It should be noted that the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force would also establish their own film units but this is outside the scope of this study.

⁵ Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Records of Boards, Offices, and Commissions, Wartime Information Board, RG36-31, volume 16, File 9-A6, Memorandum on the Organizing of a Special Film and Photographic Unit for the Canadian Expeditionary Force by Frank Badgely, n.d.

Film had been used before the Second World War to document Canadian military experiences. Efforts were made in the second half of the Great War to film the Canadians. Prior to 1916, however, there was no organized approach to create film and photographic records of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF).⁶ Few motion and still pictures exist of the arrival of the first contingent in England and of the early engagements, like the Battle of Second Ypres, in which the Canadians were involved. The majority of the photographs and films from this period are group photos and reviews of troops, and very little actually speaks to the achievements and losses of the CEF. By the summer of 1916, Sir Max Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook, undertook to change this by creating official photographs and film both to document the CEF and to publicize the deeds of Canadians.⁷ He did so independently of the federal government. At the same time, the War Office Cinematographic Committee was also responsible for documenting British and Canadian soldiers. After Beaverbrook's cameramen successfully filmed the Somme, he was asked to head this committee.⁸

The footage shot by these First World War cameramen, for the most part, was weak and exemplified the ongoing problem of recording war. It was difficult to get good battle shots: the lighting was not ideal as the majority of the attacks or trench raids occurred in the early morning or at night; the physical conditions such as the mud at

⁶ On numerous occasions special permission was given to individuals to take photographs or motion pictures of the CEF by the Minister of Militia. However this was done in an unsystematic manner and there was no real plan to create a complete record of the activities of the CEF. As a result there are very few photographs or film of the CEF prior to the battle of the Somme in 1916.

⁷ Tim Travers, "Canadian Film and the First World War," *The First World War and Popular Cinema, 1914 to the Present*, ed. Michael Paris. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000) 96-114.

⁸ Charles Backhouse, *Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, 1917-1941*, (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1974).

Passchendaele severely limited the cameramen's abilities; and the sheer danger of filming above a trench was enough to intimidate a cameraman.⁹ There were few motion pictures documenting actual battle. The First World War footage was not shown until 1934 when the official war film, *Lest We Forget*, was distributed across the country.¹⁰

It is generally acknowledged that the production of film by the federal government was an essential tool for promoting the war effort and shaping public opinion. The majority of these filming activities were sponsored by the Department of Trade and Commerce and the Department of the Interior. Although a number of Canadian newsreels emerged during the First World War, after it ended, the majority of the domestic newsreel companies folded and the industry was largely foreign controlled.¹¹

Government involvement in filmmaking did not end with the war. In September 1918, the Department of Trade and Commerce formed a departmental film agency responsible for publicizing Canada and Canadian products. Known as the Canadian Motion Picture Bureau (CMPB), it gave the Canadian film industry new opportunities to develop in Canada.¹² The Bureau was responsible for the creation of all publicity films and photographs for the federal government. However, the CMPB did not receive

⁹ Travers, 98-101.

¹⁰ Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997).

¹¹ The newsreels from the First World War included *Strand Star Weekly*, *Canadian Topical Review*, *All Canada Weekly* and *Canadian National Pictorial*. In 1919 British and American newsreels like the *British Canadian Pathé News*, *Fox Canadian News* and *Canadian Kinograms*, were established to feed the demand for international stories. For more information see Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978) 61.

¹² The bureau was initially named Exhibits and Publicity Bureau and in 1923 the name of the Bureau changed to the Canadian Motion Picture Bureau.

complete autonomy over all government films; other departments did not relinquish lightly their own filmmaking capabilities, and did not take kindly to being forced to employ the newly formed Bureau.¹³ The CMPB's greatest achievement was its production of the travelogue-style film used to publicize the beauty of Canada in order to attract tourists.¹⁴ However by 1927, when Captain Frank Badgely, previously a member of Lord Beaverbrook's Canadian War Records Office, became the Director of the Bureau, the travelogue had become a tired format and four years later the CMPB lost its reputation for producing innovative and quality films.¹⁵ Lack of sales and interest led to the ruin of the CMPB in the mid-1930s, but this cinematographic vacuum gave other companies, like the Associated Screen News, the opportunity to flourish.

The Associated Screen News (ASN), developed from the Canadian Pacific Railway, was established in July 1920.¹⁶ The ASN was the major supplier of Canadian content to the American newsreels, producing travelogues and documentaries. Through

¹³ The Department of Agriculture was accustomed to hiring commercial companies to create its films and after some discussion it received an exemption from having the CMPB produce its motion pictures. The productions by these departments were considered to be outside of the mandate of the CMPB because these movies were not intended for general consumption but for record purposes only. This lack of centralization plagued the Bureau in the following years, since other departments produced their own films, many of which were of poor quality. When these movies were distributed outside of Canada, along with those produced by the CMPB, external agencies assumed that the Bureau was responsible for all productions, good and bad. This resulted in negative publicity for the CMPB. For more information see Backhouse, 7, 16-17, and Morris, 169.

¹⁴ Raymond Peck, who ran the Bureau from 1920 to 1927, was responsible for the *Seeing Canada* series, which publicized Canada's national attractions like the Canadian Rockies and Niagara Falls. It was the most important production created by the CMPB.

¹⁵ By 1931, the central complaint against CMPB productions was that the style of the films was outdated since all it seemed to produce were travelogues and montages. As well, the films mainly focused on tourism and there were few movies related to Canadian industry or commerce. Forced to work with very outdated equipment, the CMPB was unable to produce sound films because it did not have the extra manpower to run the equipment or to create the more fully developed story lines, sound effects and musical scores required of sound films. Without these technical innovations, it was difficult for the CMPB movies to get showings in theatres. Although the Bureau acquired sound equipment in 1934, it had already lost its place in the international market. For more information see Morris, 167.

¹⁶ Morris, 223

the *Canadian Cameo* series in the 1930s, the ASN became a more significant force in Canadian filmmaking.¹⁷ Its were the first Canadian colour and sound films, and the ASN remained an important production company throughout the Second World War.

Frank Badgely, Director of the Canadian Motion Picture Bureau, recommended that a Film and Photo Unit be established to function as part of the Canadian Army in 1939. However, approximately two years passed before Badgely's recommendations were implemented, and much of the Army's early Second World War history went unrecorded. As during the Great War, there are few records of the Army's arrival in England, demonstrating that it is difficult for a historian to reconstruct a cohesive or complete history through film, since it is a representation of selected events. A film historian should not rely solely on moving images in his or hers research but examine other media – namely the textual records that were created throughout the course of the film's production – to rebuild the context surrounding the motion pictures and infusing them with interpretive potential.

Through such related archival textual records, the motion pictures themselves and oral testimonies, this thesis will reconstruct the history of the Film Unit from 1941 to 1945, and the place of film in documenting the Canadian Army in the Second World War. The history of the Canadian Army Film Unit can be separated into four main groupings marked by important events or turning points. Following a discussion of the methodological approaches of using film as a historical source and the context leading up

¹⁷ Gregory Lawrence Eamon, "Associated Screen News of Canada: an Illustration of Corporate and Governmental Influence on Canadian Motion Picture Production," (M.A., Carleton University, 1991).

to the CAFU in the first chapter, the second chapter, covering 1941 to the winter of 1943, will examine the establishment of the Film Unit and its early productions. The third chapter follows the Film Unit from its first entry into battle in Sicily in the summer of 1943 until the preparations for D-Day in early 1944, and will discuss the Film Unit's work in recording combat footage and the trials of distributing this material. The fourth chapter begins with the successes of D-Day, outlines the work of the Film Unit in Northwest Europe, and will conclude with an examination of the historical legacy of the soldier-cameramen.

The audio-visual memory of Canada's Second World War overseas was captured by the soldiers of the Canadian Army Film Unit. Most of what the Canadian public saw during the war in newsreels and what it now sees on television about Canada's participation in the Second World War is from archival footage shot by these soldier-cameramen. Typically in later years, original film footage was re-purposed into documentaries and de-contextualized from its original source. Yet by examining the audio-visual and textual records created by and related to the Unit, the context surrounding the creation and development of the CAFU and its films will be better understood. In so doing, the nearly forgotten Film Unit will receive the credit that it deserves and will find its place in the history of Canada's overseas participation in the Second World War.

CHAPTER 1

DOCUMENTING THE WAR:
FILM IN WAR AND HISTORY

The exploits and adventures of these tripod toters, both in and out of actual combat, will no doubt enliven the pages of more than one book which will be written some day about World War II.¹

Jon Farrell, Canadian Geographic Journal, June 1945

Contrary to Jon Farrell's postulation, very little has been written about the Canadian Army Film Unit since the Second World War. There have been short articles in newspapers across the country related to the Film Unit and the D-Day footage that made it famous, but there has been no scholarly study.² In 1945, two short popular articles were published and while they provide anecdotal evidence related to the combat cameramen's activities from 1943 to 1945, and served as a vehicle for promotion, the articles do not offer anything approaching a detailed or scholarly analysis into the Film Unit, or the context surrounding the production of its films.

Like the official historians, war artists and photographers, the purpose of the Canadian Army Film Unit was to create an official record of Canada's role during the Second World War. Although there were difficulties in its early days, the Unit expanded substantially throughout the war, increasing the scope and breadth of its productions.

¹ Jon Farrell, "History in the Taking: Some Notes About the Canadian Army Film & Photo Unit," *Canadian Geographic Journal* (June 1945), 277-287.

² Articles appeared in the 1960s following the NFB series *Canada at War*: "Canadians Led the World with Invasion Pictures," *Winnipeg Free Press* (March 31, 1962); "Canadian Cameramen Led the Way," *Canadian Press* (March 30 1962); "Canada's Camera Commandos Scored World Scoop on D-Day," *The Ottawa Journal* (April 4, 1962); "In the Courtyard of Hell" *Time Magazine* (May 25 1962); "Canada at War Series to be Shown on TV by CBC" *The Legionary* (March 1962). More recent articles include Brian

While there were others creating a visual record of the war, the men of the CAFU were different from the war correspondents and commercial newsreel cameramen as they were not civilians. They were attached to military units and shot real-time footage of the Canadians in battle. This footage was then used to create the CAFU films and was also sent to commercial newsreel companies, as well as the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), for use in its productions.

Through an examination of the existing scholarship surrounding Canadian film and the Second World War, one only finds works devoted to the NFB and John Grierson, the father of the documentary and first film commissioner of the Film Board. However, the CAFU played essential roles in the history of Canadian film: producer of films related to the Canadian Army and provider of stock footage used in the commercial newsreels and the productions of the NFB. Much of what this generation sees and knows about D-Day comes from footage shot by the Unit. Proper recognition was not given to the CAFU in the production of these films during the war nor has suitable credit been given to the soldier-cameramen in Canadian military historiography over the last sixty years. Since there is so little scholarship relating to the CAFU, this is a story that must be pieced together using primary sources. It is only by examining the textual and audio-visual records created by and related to the Film Unit that one may provide an appropriate place for the soldier-cameramen within the historiography.

O'Regan "Canadian Cameras First on Beaches," *The Ottawa Citizen* (June 2, 1984) and Randy Boswell, "How 20 Seconds of History Show Canada's Coming of Age," *The Ottawa Citizen* (June 6, 2003).

Most of the archival textual records related to the Canadian Army Film Unit are part of the records of the Department of National Defence.³ There are only a few dozen files that cover the period 1941 to 1946 but they provide a wide variety of material. The records consist of memos and correspondence between Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ), the Public Relations Office of the Department of National Defence, the Film Unit and the NFB; CAFU war diaries; and detailed production sheets, reports on distribution, storylines and equipment lists. The records were created by or sent to the Unit as part of its regular functions. The war diaries of the CAFU are of particular interest, as they do not resemble those of other active units. It is possible to track individual experiences because the Film Unit was so small at only 200 men. In fact, these war diaries appear, at times, like personal diaries. The purpose of the war diary was to document the activities of the Unit to keep superiors abreast of its actions and also as a basis for writing scripts. The editing team used the war diaries to build stories from the footage they were receiving from the front(s). The war diary, therefore, was essential not only for the Film Unit's general operations and the production of its motion pictures, but has also recorded for posterity its activities.

In addition to the operational and administrative records of the CAFU, there are also relevant records created by those outside of the Unit. There are important references found in the Historical Officer Reports written by Major (later Colonel) C.P. Stacey, Historical Officer during the Second World War. Three reports (No. 2, 3 and 20) focused

³ The official records of the Canadian Army Film Unit are part of the Library and Archives Canada, RG24, Department of National Defence fonds.

on film in the Army and were written prior to the establishment of the Film Unit.⁴ The Historical Officer's reports were written for the Director of the Historical Section, National Defence Headquarters, and provided a description of the public relations work, and what little film was shot – mostly unofficially – prior to the establishment of the CAFU. Colonel Stacey describes an improvised unit that had been filming Canada's wartime activities since 1940 and, after General Andrew McNaughton asked him for his advice on the usefulness of film, the Historical Officer supported the proposal of establishing a formal film unit in the office of Public Relations. Although Stacey did not see the value of film in historical scholarship, he recognized its importance in documenting the war for the general public, and future generations. These reports provide an important overview of the types and quality of films produced prior to the establishment of the Canadian Army Film Unit, and assists in setting the historical context for its establishment.

Through an examination of the Film Unit archival records, it is clear that there was a conflict between the CAFU and the NFB. However, the difficulty with using the CAFU records as a source is that they only present one perspective. The correspondence between the NFB and the soldier-cameramen present a very negative picture of the NFB. This perspective can be balanced by examining the plentiful secondary sources related to the Film Board.⁵ The historiography suggests that the National Film Board was, for all

⁴ These reports are available online at the Directorate of History and Heritage Web site (www.dnd.ca/hr/dhh/engraph/home_e.asp).

⁵ Forsyth Hardy, *John Grierson: A Documentary Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979); Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda*; DB Jones, "Assessing the National Film Board, Crediting Grierson," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, Television* 9, no. 3 (1989) 301-8; DB Jones, *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of the National Film Board of Canada*. (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute and Deneau, 1981); Jack C. Ellis, *John Grierson: Life, Contributions,*

practical purposes, the only film institution in Canada. However, much of its film footage came from the cameras of the CAFU – footage that was shot in harm's way. This ongoing conflict between the NFB and the CAFU provides insight into both organisations and presents a fuller picture of film in Canada.

In addition to these government records are valuable oral accounts, including interviews with seven members of the CAFU and a sound recording documenting the Film Unit's reunion in 1986.⁶ Portions of the reunion were televised in the news story, *Celluloid Soldiers*, on the CBC's news magazine *The Journal* and in the documentary entitled *The Best Years*.⁷ Although the oral histories and the reunion video provide first-person accounts, these were recorded forty years after the events took place and cannot be relied on as being completely accurate. It is also impossible to verify many of the stories. These recordings were taken at a reunion commemorating the Unit and the very nature of the event no doubt affected the focus of the stories being told and remembered. Overwhelmingly, the recollections were positive and centred on the high points of the CAFU. Nonetheless, these oral accounts offer valuable personal insight into the soldier-cameramen, and are useful to augment the existing archival textual records.

Influence (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000); Joyce Nelson, *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988; Peter Morris, "Backwards to the Future: John Grierson's Film Policy for Canada." *Flashback: People and Institutions in Canadian Film History - Canadian Film Studies* 2, ed. Gene Walz, (Montreal: Mediatexte Publications, 1986) 17-35; "Rethinking Grierson: The Ideology of John Grierson." *Dialogue: Canadian and Quebec Cinema - Canadian Film Studies* 3, ed. Pierre Verronneau, Michael Dorland, and Seth Feldman (Montreal: Mediatexte Publications and La Cinematheque Quebecoise, 1987) 21-56; and Nicholas Pronay, "John Grierson and Documentary – 60 Years On", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 9, no. 3 (1989) 227-246.

⁶ The sound recordings are part of the Dan Conlin fonds held by the Library and Archives Canada.

⁷ Both news stories were seen across Canada and are conserved at Library and Archives Canada.

To fully understand the work of the Film Unit it is essential that this study not only include the textual records and first-person memories, but also the movies it produced during the Second World War. The moving images created by the Film Unit are an equally valuable record, just like the textual documents and first-person accounts, in deconstructing the actions of the CAFU. However, the historian using audio-visual records encounters a different set of methodological issues. Most historians have been trained to understand textual material and may not be familiar with the pitfalls associated with film research.

Film footage, by its very nature, represents selection. The first choice occurred before footage was even shot and related to the selection of an event, a scene or a subject to be recorded, as well as certain technological limitations of the equipment of the 1940s.⁸ The scenes recorded by the Canadian Army Film Unit and distributed to the public were affected by a number of factors: the purpose of the Film Unit, the activities of the Canadian Army, the limitations of filming during battle, and the needs and requests of the NFB and commercial newsreel companies. The soldier-cameramen recorded subject matter they believed significant and were, in essence, selecting the visual record.⁹ Once a film was recorded, it was then reviewed, culled, and edited into the final production piece that would, in some cases, be disseminated to the public.¹⁰ Due to the amount of manipulation that occurred prior to and during the recording process of these

⁸ Anthony Aldgate, *Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Scolar Press, 1979) 2.

⁹ As well, the angle and placement of the camera played an important role in which scenes of an event or which perspective was recorded. For a further discussion see Karsten Fledelius, "Audio-Visual History – The Development of a New Field of Research," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Volume 9, No 2 (1989) 156.

final products, film historians have felt it necessary to authenticate film by mapping its degrees of separation from the basic record.¹¹ The basic record or original unedited film is considered to be the most authentic source of information, as it is the closest available reproduction of the actual event. For historians to use film as a testimony of the events depicted, they are best to use this uncut footage. The more a film historian relies on a “polished” film, the more they are depending on footage that has been edited and tampered with. But of course, it was this final polished product that was used for propaganda purposes and that was viewed by the public, and thus influenced popular perceptions of Canada’s war effort. Thus both versions have their historical significance.

The Film Unit recorded thousands of feet of footage of the Canadian Army and from this footage produced approximately 2,000 stories, ranging from one minute to twenty minutes.¹² The films were all non-fiction and the CAFU productions included theatrical films, most closely associated with the documentary, training films and newsreels for the Canadian Army. The newsreel, as its name suggests, is an audio-visual version of a newspaper.¹³ It presented day-to-day events in a seemingly factual fashion; however, like newspapers, the information was subject to editorial biases. The newsreel, like all edited film, underwent some form of alteration, be it the trimming of longer footage, censorship or the addition of a musical score. The edited film is less authentic in

¹⁰ Richard Meran Barsam, *Nonfiction Film: a Critical History* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973) 3-15.

¹¹ This concept of versions or intermediaries is also discussed by Thomas Cripps, “Film: the Historians’ Dangerous Friend,” *Film and History*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (December 1975) 6, and Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 13.

¹² It is difficult to verify the number of films produced by the CAFU as a complete copy of its films no longer exists. The number of productions equals approximately twelve theatrical pieces, twenty training movies and 106 newsreels. Library and Archives Canada, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17/3, Letter from Major Gordon Sparling to Editor, Maple Leaf, 6 October 1945.

representing an event as the original unedited footage. Even the simple act of shortening the length of a movie can significantly change content and meaning. The theatrical and training productions of the CAFU are even further removed from the uncut original film. These movies are differentiated from the newsreel because they were scripted prior to the footage being selected or shot. They could also be composed of both clips from actuality films and staged footage.

One of the main difficulties of using moving images as a source for historical study is the availability of audio-visual material. Film was not always considered to be archival and therefore it was not properly appraised, selected or preserved.¹⁴ The films that have survived are not necessarily due to systematic archival appraisal but largely due to the Darwinist archival approach of the survival of historically significant material. There are also preservation issues associated with film, since the bulk of early moving images were composed of cellulose nitrate that easily ignited leading to its destruction. Furthermore, film is a machine-readable record and it is necessary to convert it to new formats so that it can be viewed and preserved over time. If a textual record is fragile or in a fragmented condition, it is still possible to read and obtain information related to the content of the record. However, film in a fragile state may be unreadable since it may disintegrate, tear, crack and ignite in the attempt to view it or transfer it to a more stable format.

¹³ Barsam, 6.

¹⁴ Paul Rutherford, "Researching Television," *Archivaria* 20 (Summer 1989) 86.

The majority of the films produced by the Canadian Army Film Unit were destroyed by fire and as a result, we are left with an incomplete audio-visual record of the productions of the CAFU.¹⁵ This study must focus on the surviving edited films produced by the Film Unit and so one cannot authenticate the accuracy of these films by mapping their degrees of separation from the unedited record since these no longer exist.¹⁶ Still, attempts will be made to reconstruct the original unedited films through an examination of the textual records, oral histories and commercially produced newsreels that included the CAFU footage.

The analysis of the films can be best understood through the theories of semiotics. The content of the motion pictures, which presents a visual record of the Canadian Army and its activities during the Second World War, as well as the message the government wished conveyed, will be deconstructed. The language and images determine how the films have been assembled in terms of its scenes and sound and the manner in which these have been combined together produce the messages of the movies. A film should be viewed contextually in the same manner as a textual record is read. The parts of a motion picture can be compared to the parts of a book: the shot is equivalent to a

¹⁵ The story of the fire was recorded in a number of Canadian newspapers: "A Million Feet Lost: Vintage Canadian Film Destroyed by Blaze," *Globe and Mail*, (July 26, 1967); "Irreplaceable Film Destroyed by Fire," *Hamilton Spectator*, (July 26, 1967), "Film Loss Blamed on Government," *The Ottawa Citizen*, (July 26, 1967).

¹⁶ The films that were chosen for this study were selected to provide a cross-section of the CAFU's productions. It includes theatrical, training and newsreel stories from the various points in its production history. The selection was limited by what was available but commercial newsreels were selected in attempt to reconstruct the raw battle footage of the CAFU. See bibliography for a full list of films consulted.

sentence, the scene is a paragraph, the sequence is a chapter, and the film, in its entirety, to the whole book.¹⁷

Although there is no scholarly work directly devoted to the CAFU, a number of topics associated with the Film Unit help to offer insight: official records creation in the First World War; the movie industry prior to and during the Second World War; and censorship, broadcasting, official photographers, artists and historians during the Second World War.

The documenting practices of the First World War set the stage for the policies of the Second World War. Lord Beaverbrook set up the Canadian War Records Office to officially document the First World War.¹⁸ The official historians, photographers, war artists, cinematographers, and media correspondents all created a legacy of literature, film, art and photographs that served to shape the popular memory of the First World War.¹⁹ Peter Morris briefly mentions Beaverbrook and more recent scholarship provides

¹⁷ John E. O'Connor, *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film and Television* (Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., Inc., 1990) 305; Raymond Fielding, "Newsfilm as a Scholarly Resource: Opportunities and Hazards," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Volume 7, no. 1 (1987) 48-49.

¹⁸ Beaverbrook and the War Records Office is discussed in A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972); and Tim Cook, "Immortalizing the Canadian Soldier: Lord Beaverbrook and the Canadian War Records Office in the First World War," *Canada and the Great War*. ed. Briton Busch. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003) 46-65.

¹⁹ For films, see Nicholas Reeves, *Official British Film Propaganda During The First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Tim Travers, "Canadian Film and the First World War," *The First World War and Popular Cinema, 1914 to the Present*. ed. Michael Paris. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000) 96-114; and Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978) 58-61. War journalists have been discussed in Martin Farrar, *News From the Front: War Correspondents on the Western Front 1914-18* (Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1998) and Philip Knightley, *The First Casualty, from the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth maker* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976). The literature which proliferated during the First World War was examined by Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda, 1914-1918 and After* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1989). For

greater detail on his important role.²⁰ Despite this far-sighted work of creating a war legacy on behalf of Canadians, most of the film, photographs and art remained locked away in institutions, unseen by the public, for much of the 20th century.

Similar to the films of the First World War, much of Canada's early film history and archival moving images have been forgotten or lost. It is understandable, then, that there are very few sources that investigate the film industry in Canada prior to the Second World War. The majority of studies focus on the National Film Board. As Peter Morris ironically remarked, it appears that, given the paucity of material with which to work, no film industry existed in Canada prior to the establishment of the National Film Board.²¹ Morris provides a history of film in Canada prior to 1939 and presents the much-needed context for the establishment of a Film Unit within the Department of National Defence. There were many box-office successes in the early history of film in Canada; however, the main reason for its inability to develop a large feature film industry was due to the decentralization of film production. Morris describes the many provincial and federal initiatives that created and distributed movies in Canada. An obvious high and low point in the history of Canadian film was the Canadian Motion Picture Bureau (CMPB). Historians studying the documentary films of Canada did not look upon the CMPB, the

photography, see Peter Robertson, "Canadian Photojournalism during the First World War," *Photographic Canadiana*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (January-February 1989) 1-7 and Vol. 14, No. 5 (March-April 1989) 7-15; W. Rider, "With A Camera At The Front," *Canada In Khaki: A Tribute to the Officers and Men now serving in the Canadian Expeditionary Force*, No. 3 (CWRO, 1917) 106-108. For war artists see Maria Tippet, *Art at the Service of War: Canada, Art and the Great War* (University of Toronto Press, 1984); and Laura Brandon, "The Canadian War Museum's Art Collections as a Site of Meaning, Memory, and Identity in the Twentieth Century" (Ph.D, Carleton University, 2002); and "Shattered Landscape: The Great War and the Art of the Group of Seven," *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Winter 2001) 58-66.

²⁰ This is discussed in Jeff Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship During Canada's Great War* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996); Cook, "Immortalizing the Canadian Soldier: Lord Beaverbrook and the

forerunner to the NFB, kindly, as the work of the CMPB was considered to be uninspired.²² The official history of the Bureau, not surprisingly, paints a more compassionate picture.²³ In an attempt to create a more centralized approach to production and distribution, the NFB gained control of the CMPB in 1941. However, as there was a culture of decentralization in the Canadian film industry, it is understandable how the Army was able to establish its own unit.

The conflict between the NFB and Canadian Motion Picture Bureau parallels the later conflict that developed between the Film Unit and the NFB. It is apparent in the archival records that there was a rocky and tumultuous relationship between the two. Although this “turf war” was lost by the NFB, it won the battle in the historiography. In the existing scholarship, it appears that in Canada, the NFB held the sole responsibility for capturing and producing films for the Canadian public.²⁴ The CAFU has been written out of Canadian film history. Grierson was successful in gaining control over the CMPB but never achieved the same power over the CAFU. This may explain why the Canadian Motion Picture Bureau is present in the histories of the NFB whereas there are only passing references to the soldier-cameramen.

Canadian War Records Office in the First World War”; Travers, “Canadian Film and the First World War;” and Tippet, *Art at the Service of War: Canada, Art and the Great War*.

²¹ Morris, preface.

²² Morris, 160-65 and Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) 76-77.

²³ Charles F. Backhouse, *Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau 1917-1941* (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1974).

²⁴ The other major player in the production of newsreels in Canada was the Associated Screen News. For the history of the ASN see Morris and Gregory Lawrence Eamon, *Associated Screen News of Canada: an Illustration of Corporate and Governmental Influence on Canadian Motion Picture Production* (Ottawa: Carleton University Dissertation, 1991).

There is no shortage of scholarship surrounding the NFB, and particularly John Grierson. It is possible to split the historiography into two opposing camps: those in favour of the lasting legacy of Grierson, as the saviour and progenitor of the Canadian documentary tradition, and those debunking that legacy as a myth. The first camp of scholarship, and the majority, present the NFB and Grierson in a positive light.²⁵ D.B. Jones, Gary Evans and Jack Ellis all provide sympathetic accounts of Grierson and the National Film Board. They describe the dissolution of the CMPB in 1941 and the development of the NFB as fulfilling the potential of film production in Canada. Despite the well-rounded scholarship, few if any studies have analysed where the NFB received its raw footage. The source of this footage was, for the most part during the Second World War, the CAFU. Jones mentions that the NFB used a mixture of original footage and stock-shot library footage, but does not specifically refer to the work of the Canadian Army Film Unit in providing footage to the NFB. The sparse references in Evans's work to the CAFU leaves the impression that the soldier-cameramen played only a very minor role in the production and supply of film.²⁶ Evans at least denotes that there was some sort of relationship between the CAFU and the NFB, but even he presents the inaccurate impression that the Film Unit was somehow under the control of the NFB. Ellis acknowledges that the National Film Board had to rely on "newsreel footage shot by

²⁵ Forsyth Hardy, *John Grierson: A Documentary Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979); Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda*; DB Jones, "Assessing the National Film Board, Crediting Grierson." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, Television* 9, no. 3 (1989) 301-8; DB Jones, *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of the National Film Board of Canada*. (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute and Deneau, 1981). The most recent study of Grierson was conducted by Jack C. Ellis, *John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

²⁶ The first mention of a film unit takes place in 1939 (Evans, 70), when Grierson's suggestion of establishing an overseas film unit associated with the Expeditionary Force was turned down by Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King. The next mention (Evans, 82) refers to the establishment of the Film Unit in the Department of National Defence by Grierson in August 1941.

anonymous cameramen scattered around the globe,” and this callous disregard of the CAFU is not unique among the NFB and Grierson historians.²⁷ As there are few links made between the footage shot by the Film Unit and the footage used in the NFB productions, this begs the question if the authors were simply unaware of the relationship between the two or considered this relationship to be irrelevant to the films produced by the NFB.

The scholarship of Joyce Nelson, Peter Morris and Nicholas Pronay is in contrast to these positive, sometimes hagiographic, accounts of Grierson and the NFB.²⁸ In these works, the NFB is presented more negatively, as an organisation of film editors who shot very little of their own footage. Grierson was portrayed as anxious to win the war of men’s minds and the documentary ideology that he pushed forward was elitist and authoritarian.²⁹ These studies focus on the powerful reputation of Grierson and do not emphasize the battle over film that Grierson and the NFB lost. Perhaps because historians are still fighting over Grierson’s legacy, they have not yet turned to less “glamorous” aspects of the history of Canadian film-making in wartime.

²⁷ Ellis, 153.

²⁸ Joyce Nelson, *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988; Peter Morris, “Backwards to the Future: John Grierson’s Film Policy for Canada.” *Flashback: People and Institutions in Canadian Film History - Canadian Film Studies* 2, ed. Gene Walz, (Montreal: Mediatexte Publications, 1986) 17-35; “Re-thinking Grierson: The Ideology of John Grierson.” *Dialogue: Canadian and Quebec Cinema - Canadian Film Studies* 3, ed. Pierre Verronneau, Michael Dorland, and Seth Feldman (Montreal: Mediatexte Publications and La Cinematheque Quebecoise, 1987) 21-56; and Nicholas Pronay, “John Grierson and Documentary – 60 Years On”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 9, no. 3 (1989).

²⁹ Grierson changed the nature of Canadian filmmaking from parochial travelogues and local interest stories to movies that promoted the international brotherhood. For a further discussion see Nelson, 64-76.

Michael Spencer, one of the founding members of the Film Unit, has recently published an account of the Canadian motion picture industry from 1945 to the present.³⁰ Although his days with the Canadian Army Film Unit are mentioned briefly in his introduction, little new information about the Unit and its relationship with Grierson is offered.

There are only a handful of studies that look at censorship or broadcasting during the Second World War. Public broadcasting is discussed by Frank Peers, Alain Canuel, Florent Lefebvre and R.B. Oglesby while Claude Beauregard, Roger Button and W.R. Young have explored propaganda and censorship.³¹ Like the Canadian Army's establishment of the Film Unit, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) formed its own news department that made use of direct reports from the CBC overseas unit. These stories and voices became an essential link from those at home to the soldier overseas. According to the 1944 Radio Committee Report, radio bridged the gap between overseas and home and brought the Canadian public more closely in touch to the soldiers. Similar to the CAFU, "regardless of risk to both correspondents and engineers the units of CBC in the field have by voice given Canadians at home a graphic picture of the heroic part

³⁰ Michael Spencer with Suzan Ayscough, *Hollywood North: Creating the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*, (Montreal: Cantos International Publishing, 2003).

³¹ Peers, Frank W., *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting 1920-1951* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1969); Alain Canuel, "The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Radio Canada International as Instrument for the Promotion of National Unity and the War Effort during the Second World War" (Paper given at British World Conference, Calgary 2003); Florent Lefebvre, *The French-Canadian Press and the War* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1940); R. B. Oglesby, "L'opinion publique canadienne sur l'emploi de l'Armée canadienne, 1939-1945" *La presse canadienne et la deuxième guerre mondiale* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1997) 95-189; Claude Beauregard, *Guerre et Censure au Canada, 1939-1945*. (Quebec: Diffusion Dimedia, 1998); Roger W. Button, *Wartime Information Board and the Development of Canadian Government Information Policy During World War Two* (M.A. Carleton University, 1972); and W.R.Young, *Making the Truth Graphic: the Canadian Government's Home Front Information Structure and Programmes during World War II* (Ph.D. University of British Columbia, 1978).

played by our men on the fighting front.”³² This is important because CBC radio was doing something very similar to the soldier-cameramen, documenting the Canadian Army and publicizing the war from at least the audio half of the audio-visual perspective.

A variety of memoirs were written about the experience of reporting the war. Peter Stursberg wrote of life as a CBC radio correspondent and Jack Donoghue presented the very relevant perspective of a Public Relations Officer during the war.³³ Although Stursberg’s account presents another view of the difficult conditions under which the CAFU shot its footage, at the same time, the radio war correspondents were not part of the Department of National Defence structure and thus had different constraints than the men of the Canadian Army Film Unit. The reporters were civilians and did not take part in battles as soldiers. Donoghue’s memoir provides details of the workings of the Public Relations Department and is useful for setting the military framework in which the CAFU functioned. Dick Malone and J. Douglas MacFarlane were editors of the *Maple Leaf*, the overseas newspaper distributed to the Canadian Army during the Second World War.³⁴ Like the *Canadian Army Newsreel* produced by the Film Unit, the *Maple Leaf* was established to communicate information to the soldier in the front lines or in England and its purpose was to provide information about the activities of the Canadian Army and to boost morale. Like the Film Unit, the team working on the *Maple Leaf*, although functioning like a civilian newspaper, was part of the military and thus was governed in

³² Peers, 345.

³³ Peter Stursberg, *The Sound of War: Memoirs of a CBC Correspondent* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Jack Donoghue, *The Edge of War* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1988).

³⁴ Richard MacFarlane, *Canada’s Newspaper Legend: The Story of J. Douglas MacFarlane* (Toronto: ECW Press), 2000; Richard S. Malone, *A Portrait of War, 1939-1943* (Toronto: Collins, 1983); Richard S. Malone, *Missing from the Record* (Toronto: Collins, 1946).

the same fashion as the Film Unit. Parallels can therefore be drawn between the experience of the editors of the *Maple Leaf* and the film editors in London who put together the *Newsreel*.

The similarities between the Film Unit, reporters, war correspondents and public relations officers were also shared with those responsible with officially documenting the war. The Film Unit's main purpose was to chronicle the activities and accomplishments, and to create an audio-visual record, of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. The artists, photographers, and historians also shared a similar mandate. The history of the creators of documentary war art, textual records and photographs, as well as the history of the sources themselves, have all been studied. War art has been explored by Laura Brandon.³⁵ C.P. Stacey wrote his memoirs and a number of important articles examine the writing of the Official History. Tim Cook has provided a recent evaluation of the preparation of the Official History emphasizing the records creation and records collection perspectives.³⁶ Peter Robertson has studied war photography in an illustrated book, which provides only limited information on the CAFU.³⁷ Official war film alone remains almost completely ignored in the history of the various recorded documentary legacies of Canada's Second World War.

³⁵ Laura Brandon "The Canadian War Museum's Art Collections as a Site of Meaning, Memory, and Identity in the Twentieth Century" (Ph.D Carleton University, 2002); "Genesis of a Painting: Alex Colville's War Drawings" *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 1995), 100-104; and "D-Day and After in Canadian Art" *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 1994), 26-32.

³⁶ For Stacey's involvement in the writing of the official histories see C.P. Stacey, *A Date With History: Memoirs of a Canadian Historian* (Ottawa: Deneau, 1983); "The Life and Hard Times of an Official Historian," *Canadian Historical Review* LI, 1 (March 1970); C.P. Stacey, "The Historical Program of the Canadian Army Overseas," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3 (September 1945), 229-238 and Tim Cook "Clio's Soldiers: Charles Stacey and the Army Historical Officers in the Second World War," *Canadian Historical Review* 83.1 (March 2002) 29-57.

Movies, as a medium of entertainment in the Army, have similarly been ignored. The Army used film like the *Canadian Army Newsreel* to entertain and support the morale of soldiers. Other entertainment and leisure activities have been studied, with C.P. Stacey and Barbara Wilson documenting the training camps and spare time of soldiers in England and Laurel Halladay examined entertainment and comedy troupes behind the front lines.³⁸ Film on the home front is explored by Jeff Keshen in his book *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War*.³⁹ His study is an essential guide to the home front during the Second World War and he describes the use and wide appeal of movies for the Canadian public. These studies are useful in setting the broader context for the viewing of films produced by the Canadian Army Film Unit and exploring the importance of the films as a source of entertainment and information for soldiers and those at home.

Jon Farrell's 1945 comment on the inclusion of stories of the Film Unit in the histories of the Second World War seemed at the time to be certain of fulfilment. However, it is evident through an examination of the discourse of the Second World War, and particularly film in the Second World War, that the Canadian Army Film Unit has only received the briefest of mention. The moving images captured by the men of the Film Unit have persisted in the post-war construction of memory through the re-use of

³⁷ Peter Robertson, *Relentless Verity: Canadian Military Photographers since 1885* (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1973).

³⁸ C.P. Stacey and Barbara Wilson, *The Half-Million: The Canadians in Britain, 1939-1946*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Laurel Halladay, "It Made Them Forget About the War For a Minute:

this footage in modern documentaries. But for the men who risked their lives to document the war for Canadians and how they actually did this dangerous work, there are but few and fleeting references in military history and film study historiography. This is all the more surprising since the CAFU left such a strong visual and textual record of its experiences. This thesis thus fills and bridges two gaps, in both military and film studies, and attempts to give proper recognition to the men of the CAFU who documented the Canadian Army's role in the Second World War.

Canadian Army, Navy and Air Force Entertainment Units in the Second World War" *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Autumn 2002) 20-36.

³⁹ Jeff Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004.

CHAPTER 2

READYING FOR BATTLE:
THE FILM UNIT FINDS ITS PLACE, 1941-43

To Britain's shores, across 3000 miles of sea come troops from Canada, ready to serve anywhere in the world.

[Ship arrives from Canada]

Among them are men from all varied armed services: infantry, tanks, gunners [and] engineers. But there is another lot, a group of hard weather beaten men: lumberjacks from the woods of Canada.

[Men disembark]

[Close-ups of groups of soldiers]

The Canadian Forestry Corps come to fight an important battle where skill and science, axe and saw are the weapons that count.

[Men march and follow parade formations]

For in wartime lumber is needed as never before.¹

Wood for War, 1941-1942

It is fitting that the first film of the Canadian Army Film Unit (CAFU) focused on a non-combat unit of the Canadian Army. *Wood for War* was seen, through contemporary eyes, as an attempt to legitimize the support units to which the Film Unit itself also belonged. This chapter looks at the CAFU from its establishment in 1941 until its first foray into battle in July 1943, when it spent the majority of its time filming non-battle activities and preparing for this first assault landing. The only conflict that the CAFU soldier-cameramen experienced during this time was with the National Film Board. Although the NFB was established in 1939, receiving complete control over the federal production of film in Canada, the Canadian Army Film Unit was created by the Department of National Defence outside of the mandate of the *National Film Board Act*.

¹ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. Library and Archives Canada (LAC), National Film Board of Canada fonds, *Wood for War*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1941/1942), 10 mins 20 secs, no. V1 9109-0001.

This caused conflict between the NFB and the Department of National Defence over which department would control the documentation of Canada's Army in the Second World War. This battle peaked after the raid on Dieppe in August 1942, as the NFB was not pleased with the quality of film produced by the Canadian Army Film Unit.

However, the soldier-cameramen were limited in their productions as their purpose was to document the activities of the Canadian Army. In doing so they produced a number of different types of motion pictures with this footage including training films, theatrical pieces and the *Canadian Army Newsreel*. Like the men of the Canadian Forestry Corp, the men of the Canadian Army Film Unit did not wield the standard weapons of war. They fought the Second World War using motion pictures. Their footage brought the war to North America and juxtaposed the jarring stories and startling images of battle with the relative peace of the home front.

Although there were recommendations to establish a Film Unit since the beginning of the Second World War, the CAFU was not formed until two years later. Because of his experience during the Great War and in the 1930s, Frank Badgely drafted a memorandum in the early days of the Second World War on the establishment of a film and photographic unit for the Canadian Army. This group would be responsible for recording motion and still pictures, creating an audio-visual record of the Army's activities but also producing informational material that could be viewed by the Canadian public. He asserted that these films and photographs would maintain public morale and assist with recruiting and that the material shot by the unit would be incorporated in newsreels "for propaganda purposes that will serve to keep Canada's war efforts vividly

before not only our own people but the rest of the world.”² To further sell the idea, Badgely asserted that the proposed unit would also produce instructional films for military training and be responsible for showing movies to the troops for recreational purposes.

Badgely believed that for the film unit to function effectively it had to be part of the military. The military authorities would be able to assert control over its work and personnel and there would be closer contacts with the operational units with which it would be working. There would also be fewer restrictions with military censors; unlike civilian filmmakers, the soldier-cameramen would be able to engage in secret work and have closer access to events and soldiers. Although it is not clear from the records why this group of soldier-cameramen was not established when Badgely first made his recommendation, it was likely due to a number of factors: apathy of the Canadian Army, the reputation of Badgely, and the fear of conflict with the National Film Board.

While this film unit was still being considered, the Public Relations Office was formed in January 1940 within Canadian Military Headquarters, the overseas administrative body of the Canadian Army, to centralize the activities of the media and provide fuller coverage of the Canadian war effort. Captain W.G. Abel was the commanding officer of the Public Relations Office, and he suggested that it be an agency to supervise both “news service and historical records.” He got half of what he wanted. The role of the Public Relations Office was to liaise with news agencies and disseminate

² LAC, Records of Boards, Offices, and Commissions, Wartime Information Board, RG36-31, volume 16, file 9-A6, Memorandum from Frank Badgely to W.S. Thompson, 3 January 1940.

wartime information to the public. "His office is a sort of clearing-house and rendezvous for Canadian newspaper men," wrote Major C.P. Stacey, who would soon be responsible for the Army's historical records.³ The Public Relations Office supported all news organisations including print, still images, motion picture and radio broadcasting companies and ensured that these mediums were used to their utmost potential for publicity purposes. This close management meant that the promotional and news material was not created in isolation, but connected through this centralized body and coordinated in its dissemination. Thus, even early in the war, the Army realized the importance of publicity to control and manage public support for the war.

Although the Public Relations Office largely took on a managerial role, part of its job was also to secure still images of the Canadian Army. Including Abel, there were three individuals who assumed the role of photographer. Their photographs were largely for publicity purposes but they also took shots of equipment such as tanks and artillery for record-keeping. There was no similar requirement for securing moving images, but the Public Relations Office obtained or assisted in the recording of several films relating to the Canadian Army's activities in the first year of the war. These movies were shot by commercial companies that sold their footage back to the Public Relations Office, an improvised film unit made up of soldiers from the Photographic Section of the Canadian Corps (later Army) Headquarters that had been filming since 1940, and the NFB that hired British commercial companies to film on its behalf.⁴ These groups worked on an

³ Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), Historical Officers Report No. 2, 7 January 1941.

⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Copy of Cable Received from Canadian Government Film Officer to Canadian Exhibitions and Publicity, 18 January 1940; DHH, Historical Report No. 2, 7 January 1941.

ad hoc basis, and so there were enormous gaps in the coverage, and no central organizing authority. The motion pictures they produced are not a comprehensive visual historical record, as the purpose of these filmmakers was not to provide a record of all events and activities relevant to the Canadian Army, but only to offer entertainment and publicity. Nonetheless, it was the NFB, with its accomplished history of production that was in the strongest position to document the war on film.

In 1938, John Grierson, who had previously established film units in the British Empire Marketing Board and the General Post Office, was invited to conduct an analysis of film-making capacity in Canada. What he found was not surprising: the Canadian film industry lacked focus, maturity and quality. Grierson's report mainly focused on the deficiencies of the existing Canadian Motion Picture Bureau, which he felt lacked imagination and a centralized approach for the creation of film for the Canadian government. Grierson recommended the creation of a film board that would monitor and advise the CMPB. The NFB was established in 1939 with Grierson appointed as its Commissioner. Cementing his influence, Grierson also drafted the Act that would govern the work of the Board.⁵ Although the CMPB under Badgely continued to create new Canadian productions, Grierson vied for complete power over government film production. When this first take-over failed, Grierson tendered his resignation. It was not accepted, and in June 1941, the Canadian Motion Picture Bureau was officially absorbed by the NFB.⁶

⁵ Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), 234.

⁶ DB Jones, *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretative History of the National Film Board of Canada*, (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1981).

As early as December 1939, Grierson approached Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King with the proposal of organizing a group of film-makers to go overseas. Unlike Badgely's recommendation, these cameramen would be civilians, but King dismissed this as being too expensive.⁷ A year later, Grierson put together another proposal asserting the NFB's interest in footage of Canadian troops overseas. This time, with Canada's increased military presence in England, his proposal was accepted. The movies would be presented in theatres all across Canada and would show the human side of war. To meet the needs of the NFB, Grierson required "film showing individuals from all districts of Canada...what they do in London; what girls they go out with, etc."⁸ There was little interest in their activities as soldiers, like training, exercising and parades. The cameramen were ordered to "above all get much amusement, comedy and personal human life into it." Grierson ordered that "we want to break down the distance across Atlantic."⁹

The Public Relations Office shared the NFB's perspective. For example, when it went through the outline for one of its early movies, the Public Relations Office felt that more social scenes should be shot to emphasize the theme of Canadian and British friendships. It appears that like the NFB, the Public Relations Office saw little value in documenting "military" aspects of war since there was no mention of any military scenes at all, apart from the fact that the subject of the film was soldiers.

⁷ LAC, William Lyon Mackenzie King fonds, MG 26-J13, Diary excerpt from 8 December 1939.

⁸ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Copy of cable from Canadian Government Film Officer to Canadian Exhibitions and Publicity, 18 January 1940.

⁹ Ibid, Copy of telegram from Grierson to Golightly, Film Centre, n.d. [ca. January 1940].

The movies, produced through the NFB, commercial companies and the improvised film unit in the Canadian Corps, had little success in being included in commercial newsreels. Accordingly, in January 1941, General Andrew McNaughton, who commanded the Canadian Corps in the United Kingdom, asked C.P. Stacey to report on the value of creating an embedded film unit. Stacey recommended the organisation of a formal group of soldier-cameramen within Public Relations, which would eliminate the reliance on commercial companies and ensure that the activities of the Canadian Army were properly documented in “an admirable collection of historical films dealing with Canadian military activity in this country.”¹⁰ Stacey also thought that a unit within the military composed of professionals, using quality equipment, would have much greater success at having their product included in the newsreels.¹¹ Shortly thereafter, Stacey was asked by McNaughton to screen films taken by the improvised film unit at the Canadian Corps Headquarters to provide advice on their historical value, captioning and the arrangement of an exhibition. He screened ten films on 25 March 1941, and determined that they were of very high quality, but could be improved through more thorough editing and captioning.¹² Stacey suggested that to maintain the historical integrity of these films, that the context (date, place, unit, etc.) be recorded. He also recommended that a film library be created to register each film. For Stacey, the motion pictures would act as an historical record of the war, and he was far sighted enough to see their usefulness “both for immediate and for historical purposes” even if they would not

¹⁰ DHH, Historical Report No. 2, 7 January 1941.

¹¹ DHH, Historical Report No. 20, 4 April 1941.

¹² DHH, Appendix A of Historical Officers Report No. 20, 31 March 1941.

assist him in the writing of narratives for the eventual Official History.¹³ While the NFB and the Public Relations Office were more interested in using film for publicity and entertainment, not surprisingly Stacey, a historian, thought the value of moving images was rooted in their use as a record of history. The focus of Stacey's anticipated film unit seemed to be closer to Badgely's original proposal. With his experience in the War Records Office in the First World War, Badgely's model saw film both as a medium for promotional purposes and for creating an official record. The Canadian Army opted for this more balanced approach.

John Grierson, anticipating his role in the establishment of a film unit, travelled to the United Kingdom in August 1941. The ship was also transporting Canadian Army troops, and when Grierson noticed his former employee at the NFB, Michael Spencer, aboard, he handed him a camera and asked him to begin shooting film. Grierson was also quoted in various newspapers as saying that he was going to run a film unit for the Canadian Army.¹⁴ Either Grierson was presumptuous or misinformed. While the *National Film Board Act* specified that no government department could produce films without the authority of the National Film Board this was not adhered to by the Department of National Defence.¹⁵ Grierson argued with Major-General Montague at Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ) in London that the Canadian Army could not set up a film unit without approval of the NFB that only he, as Film Commissioner, could

¹³ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Note from C.P. Stacey to Brigadier General Staff, CMH, 31 March 1941.

¹⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Memorandum from Major WG Abel to Senior Officer, Canadian Army Film Unit, n.d.

¹⁵ Grierson did not believe that the CAFU had the right to film without his permission, since section 11 of the *National Film Board Act* stated that no government department could shoot film without the NFB's permission.

provide that approval. As one might imagine, Montague did not take to the idea of a civilian interfering with the Army, and Grierson was ignored.¹⁶

In the desire to ensure “accurate presentation of Canada’s war effort” the Canadian Army Film Unit was officially formed in October 1941.¹⁷ At first, the Unit comprised just two officers and two other ranks, and operated under the Public Relations Office at CMHQ.¹⁸ A disappointed Grierson returned to Canada, later acknowledging the authority of the Army over film in a letter to Abel.¹⁹ However, Grierson did have a powerful reputation, and some of his suggestions for personnel were accepted. George Noble, a British cameraman with whom Grierson was familiar and Michael Spencer, previously a cameraman for the NFB, were recommended, becoming two of the founding members of the Canadian Army Film Unit.²⁰

The Canadian Army Film Unit was to record subjects suitable for theatrical release in Canada, produce training films, and record the activities of the Canadian Army.²¹ The structure of the CAFU was modeled after the British Army Film Unit, although American, Russian and German units were also studied by the Canadian

¹⁶ LAC, Dan Conlin fonds, interview with Michael Spencer by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986, 1hr, no. A4 9909-0029(1) and LAC, Dan Conlin fonds, Reunion of the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit, 19-21 September 1986, 2 hrs 30 mins, nos. A4 9909-0020(1), A4 9909-0021(1) and A4 9909-0022(1).

¹⁷ DHH, Historical Report No. 2, 7 January 1941; for McNaughton’s nationalist beliefs, see J.L. Granatstein, *The Generals: The Canadian Army’s Senior Commanders in the Second World War*, (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., 1995).

¹⁸ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Administrative order No.152 by Major-General PJ Montague, 13 Oct 1941.

¹⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Memorandum from Major W.G. Abel to Senior Officer, Canadian Army Film Unit, n.d.

²⁰ LAC, interview with Michael Spencer by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986.

²¹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memorandum from Lieutenant Jack McDougall to Major Abel, 21 October 1941; Ibid., Canadian Army Film Unit, General Outline of Policy, n.d.

military. Commanded by Lieutenant Jack McDougall, a former cameraman and director for the Associated Screen News, the majority of personnel were transferred from other areas of the Army and were often selected because of their previous cinematographic experience.²² Completing this group that already included Grierson's picks (George Noble and Michael Spencer) was Al Grayston, also a former Associated Screen News employee.²³

The men of the Unit were to undergo training in refresher cinematography courses through British film schools, but they were also instructed in regular infantry battle drill.²⁴ At the course provided at Pinewood Studios, each graduating member was taught such things as loading film and selecting scenes, focusing on moving shots, using an exposure metre and carrying out minor repairs to their equipment, as well as developing strips of films.²⁵ Although the formal training received at Pinewood was useful, nothing could supplement the actual practical shooting experience that they received in the field. These soldiers would likely be their own directors and editors while in battle. Before this trial by fire, however, the CAFU practiced its art by covering parades, training and manoeuvres.²⁶

²² LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17/3, Letter from Major Gordon Sparling to Editor, Maple Leaf, 6 October 1945.

²³ LAC, interview with Michael Spencer by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986.

²⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Memorandum from Major WG Abel, Public Relations Office, CMHQ to BGS 28 February 1942.

²⁵ LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17, Letter from Colonel WG Abel to DCGS, CMHQ, 15 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/10/3, Letter from Colonel E.L. Gibbs, DDPR CMH to Colonel Grace, Director of Education, CMHQ, 4 June 1945.

²⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17, Letter from Captain JER McDougall to Mr. J.E. Burn, Corps of Canadian Fire Fighters, 11 May 1943.

The soldier-cameramen produced films almost immediately, and within a month of its establishment the CAFU had fulfilled a number of small requests for footage from the NFB, and had developed a plan of potential future projects.²⁷ Since the CAFU's mandate was to provide a visual record of Canadian troops overseas, most of the subject matter that it filmed was dependent upon the activities of the Army. The overseas forces, with the exception of the units sent to Hong Kong in 1941 and a few other garrison units, were training in England and defending the United Kingdom against possible German invasion. The only topics available to the CAFU were training, other non-combat roles and social activities.

The addition of a third cameraman in March 1942 was of limited value since the CAFU was also short of cameras. The Film Unit was equipped with 35mm cameras, but most of these were second-hand and of poor quality as shortages in England made it difficult to secure new ones. Although problems with equipment continued to plague the CAFU, it was still able to produce a number of movies.

Training films were produced by the CAFU starting in 1942. The Unit developed its script based upon the content required by the Army Training School or unit, and was responsible for securing the required shots. The Training School was in charge of supplying technical advisors and for the final verification and validation of the films.²⁸ By enlisting the CAFU to produce these movies, instead of a civilian company, the Army

²⁷ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Letter from JER McDougall to John Grierson, 21 November 1941.

²⁸ LAC, RG24, Volume 12331, File 4/Film/3/2, Letter from Lieutenant-General K Stuart, Chief of Staff, Canadian Military Headquarters, 18 May 1944.

was able to secure footage that was top secret.²⁹ For instance in *Ronson Flame Thrower*, animated diagrams were used to describe the physics behind the flame thrower and how it was built. There were also close-ups of different parts of the equipment and live action shots of soldiers using the flame thrower demonstrating its use in combat. The narration stated that “training will give Canadians the skill and power to put flame to good use when the day comes,” echoing the messages seen in the theatrical films and in the later newsreels produced by the Film Unit, while highlighting Canadian ingenuity and innovation.³⁰ Although the use of fire in war was not new, the Canadian Army was presented as resourceful in its re-engineering of fire into a weapon of significant destructive power. Ending the film on such a note emphasized the unique and powerful nature of Canadian equipment and the skill of the Canadian soldiers. The film presented training as an equally essential part to winning the war, though, due to the secret nature of the subject matter, it would have been out of bounds for a civilian organisation to produce, or for civilians to view, the results.

The Army believed the most effective way to teach was through the replication of battle situations. The CAFU was to set up and shoot mock-battles, but later in the war, some scenes in the training films were taken from footage of actual battle sequences.³¹ Although the main purpose of these motion pictures was to teach, there was some variation: some films served to reinforce or refresh specific skills, while others were more

²⁹ Jon Farrell, “History in the Taking: Some Notes About the Canadian Army Film & Photo Unit,” *Canadian Geographic Journal* (June 1945), 277-287.

³⁰ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Ronson Flame Thrower*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1942/1943), 18 mins, no. V1 8502-0086.

³¹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4/2, Response to a questionnaire by the Canadian Army Film Unit, n.d. [ca. 1944]; Ibid., Memorandum from Brigadier WHS Macklin, Deputy Chief of the General Staff to Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 13 January 1945.

didactic in explicitly teaching a new technique. The film *Smoke of Battle*, produced in 1944, was intended to show troops, who had received previous training in smoke screens, how to use smoke in battle.³² Film would allow the Army to ensure that troops, no matter if in Canada or overseas in England, or later in other parts of Europe, all received the same form of education, thus ensuring more consistent and reliable effort in the field.

Theatrical films of the CAFU also had great value for the Canadian Army. Through the production of these motion pictures, the Public Relations Office was able to propagate a positive view of the Army to both military and civilian audiences in Canada and abroad. The films were scripted and sometimes comprised staged footage, paralleling closely the modern-day documentary.³³ They received a warm reception internationally. *Wood for War* was the first production and first theatrical short by the Canadian Army Film Unit. The movie told the story of the Canadian Forestry Corps stationed in Scotland and seemed to be based on a Canadian stereotype, the rugged lumberjack. The film was largely composed of shots of the Forestry Corps at work: using saws and axes to cut down trees and following the logs until they reached the mill. The United Kingdom needed Canada's expertise, skill and toughness to "battle" the forests of Scotland and the film suggested overtly that no one in the world could do the job more efficiently than Canadians. These men were also presented as effective fighters, growing up in the harsh Canadian environment, and being crack shots as they were "brought up

³² Ibid., Memorandum from Brigadier WHS Macklin, Deputy Chief of the General Staff to Canadian Film and Photo Unit, CMH, 13 January 1945; Ibid., The *Smoke of Battle* Production sheet, n.d. [ca. 1944].

³³ The documentary is differentiated from the newsreel because it can be composed of both actuality footage and staged footage. Typically the documentary film pulls together film clips from a variety of different sources without a clear indication of the original provenance.

with the gun in their hand.”³⁴ This film built on the reputation of the Canadian Army from the First World War as an elite but tough and rugged fighting force.³⁵ The film also showed pleasant interaction between Canadians and the Scots, including Canadians bringing their customs to Scotland. To promote the culture of the New World, the narration introduced three more stereotypes: the romance of the full-blooded Indian; the charming, vivacious French Canadian; and the friendly Westerner. *Wood for War* was distributed in the British Ministry of Information weekly series and was later dubbed into several foreign languages.

The success of *Wood for War* was followed by the theatrical short, *Motorcycle Training*, which covered motorcycle instructors at one of the Canadian Training Schools in the United Kingdom. The main message of this film was that the Canadians had fairly advanced mechanization and adapted modern techniques more effectively than other Allied armies and so were quick to recognize the value of motorcycles.³⁶ The movie demonstrated the value of the motorcycle and of a well-trained soldier through a story of a dispatch rider. Presented as a dramatic sequence, the dispatch rider raced against the clock to inform an isolated platoon that they were advancing into a trap. The only way to have reached the platoon was by motorcycle because the platoon did not have a wireless and a runner would not have made it in time. The music in the film raised the suspense, as did shots of the dispatch rider driving while being shelled. This film was also

³⁴ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, *Wood for War*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1941/1942).

³⁵ For examples of the Canadian Corps' reputation see Tim Cook, "Documenting War & Forging Reputations: Sir Max Aitken and the Canadian War Records Office in the First World War," *War In History* 10/ 3 (2003), 265-295.

³⁶ LAC, National Film Board of Canada fonds, *Motorcycle Training*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1942/1943), 7 mins 37 secs, no. V1 9109-0001.

distributed in the British Ministry of Information weekly series, and likewise was dubbed into several foreign languages.³⁷

However, international dissemination did not ensure distribution in Canada. In fact, *Wood for War* and *Motorcycle Training* were never shown to Canadian audiences. Although the films were quality productions, the NFB, which was responsible for the distribution of the CAFU films in Canada, did not think that the subjects had a broad enough appeal for Canadians. It seems odd that a film shot by Canadians about Canadians would be considered to have no interest to Canadians. One can only surmise that the NFB was refusing to distribute the films of the CAFU due to the “turf war” that had existed since the establishment of the Unit. The films even included many of the types of shots and scenes seen in previous requests for footage to CAFU from the NFB, for instance, the scene of the Forestry Corps men hanging out with the locals and sharing their customs.

It was possible that these CAFU films did not fit with the mandate of the NFB.³⁸ Although *Wood for War* was commended by the Film Board, it claimed it was unable to distribute this film as it did not fit with its “own plan of theatrical distribution.”³⁹ According to the NFB, the themes selected by the CAFU were too limited to be distributed in Canada. This was just the beginning of the difficulties with the Film Board and set the stage for the “war of wills” that was to play out.

³⁷ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Report on Canadian Army Film Unit Activities, [ca. October 1942].

³⁸ LAC, Interview with Michael Spencer by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986.

³⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, 4/Film/1, Letter from Ross McLean, Assistant Film Commissioner, NFB to Major W.G. Abel, n.d.

Although the NFB and the soldier-cameramen were intended to work cooperatively, the first correspondence received from the NFB did not arrive until May 1942 – seven months after the Film Unit was formed. The relationship between the NFB and the CAFU had been very distant since Grierson's first attempt to gain control over the Unit in August 1941. One interpretation of this silence between the NFB and the CAFU was that Grierson, since he was not able to control the Film Unit, simply chose to ignore its work.⁴⁰ This would explain why there were such gaps in the correspondence and why the CAFU had such difficulty in distributing its films through the NFB. If John Grierson ignored the CAFU, then this attitude could have trickled down and affected the distribution of the Army films. Colonel Abel of the Public Relations Office was concerned about a split between the two organisations, especially since the CAFU relied on the NFB to distribute its films. "Lieutenant McDougall is, of course, familiar with the stuff that you have required in the past," Abel wrote to John Grierson in May 1942. "It appears that he is shooting with that in mind, but precisely the same information led him to produce 'Wood for War'. It would be a great pity if the material that has been going forward has not been suitable, and that through lack of advice corrections were not made."⁴¹ This conflict persisted throughout the war and was the impetus for the CAFU gaining more independence. The Film Unit would eventually utilize its own in-house expertise and develop, coordinate and distribute its own films to the commercial newsreel companies. The NFB's obstinance merely pushed the soldier-cameramen towards greater autonomy.

⁴⁰ LAC, Interview with Michael Spencer by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986.

⁴¹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12339, File 4/Film/1, Letter from Major WG Abel, Public Relations Office, CMHQ to Ross McLean, Assistant Film Commissioner, NFB, 27 May 1942.

In the spring of 1942, the Canadian Army began training for a raid on Dieppe, France. Although members of the CAFU were initially requested to film the engagement, they were later denied the opportunity just days before the operation. Instead, three British Film Unit cameramen accompanied the Dieppe expedition and, consequently, there is no Canadian film footage of the Dieppe raid. It was very upsetting to the soldier-cameramen that they were not allowed to film the raid as this would have been their first time filming actual combat. After the battle, requests were made to the CAFU from the NFB to receive all of its footage of the event. But having not been present, the CAFU was placed, as McDougall recounted in a memo, "in the humiliating position of having to ask the War Office for copies of the film shot by their cameramen of Canadian troops going into action for the first time."⁴²

The CAFU was angered that it had been denied the opportunity to film the Canadians in battle.⁴³ "Where the fault lies I have no way of knowing, but the fact remains that we had a definite job to do, we were trained, prepared and equipped to do it, and when the time came to do it we were deliberately ignored," wrote McDougall.⁴⁴ He asked CMHQ to examine this issue and develop a policy for operational film coverage. McDougall also issued an ultimatum: if CMHQ was not satisfied with the current quality of work then McDougall would ask to be replaced and transferred back to combat duties.

⁴² LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memorandum from JER McDougall to Public Relations Office, 20 August 1942.

⁴³ A still photographer, Lieutenant Frank Royal, was the only official Canadian cameraman allowed to accompany the troops at the invasion.

⁴⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memorandum from JER McDougall to Public Relations Office, 20 August 1942.

McDougall's threat was successful and he received full support and backing from both the Public Relations Office and H.A. Young, Brigadier General Staff, in late August 1942.⁴⁵ A policy for operational coverage was soon established.

The Dieppe debacle set off another power struggle between the NFB and the Canadian military for control over the Film Unit. Grierson had not relinquished his desire to control the Unit, and had been suggesting since the beginning of August 1941 that the creative direction of the Film Unit should be given to the NFB. The footage of the Dieppe raid, in Grierson's opinion, "was especially poor, lacking not only in the imaginative approach but also in quality." Grierson went on to say that the NFB and the Canadian public were accustomed to films of a certain standard and "it must, above all, be newsworthy and of a quality which will enable our various needs in recruiting, public relations and morale to be adequately served."⁴⁶ Grierson's argument is ironic given that the film footage of the raid was not shot by the CAFU and his own earlier emphasis on social rather than military documentation. The NFB's complaint about the inferiority of the moving images from Dieppe was shared throughout the Allied countries. The majority of the footage seen in the United Kingdom, Canada and United States was of long-distance shots of the shoreline from ships far from the battle. One cinema magazine stated that "if any motion picture cameras landed, nothing has been heard from or seen of them."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., Memorandum from Major Abel to Brigadier General Staff, 21 Aug 1942.

⁴⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Letter from John Grierson to Mr. JWG Clark, Director of Public Relations, Department of National Defence, 25 September 1942.

⁴⁷ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, 4/Film/2, Excerpt from Motion Picture Herald, New York, 19 September 1942.

It is difficult to precisely reconstruct the footage that the NFB would have viewed of the raid on Dieppe, but it is clear that no cameramen hit the beach and so all shots would have been from ships miles away, thus failing to convey the immediacy of the experience of combat. Footage from the British cameramen was available in the Gaumont-British News film entitled, *Combined Operations, Dieppe*, and in various unedited films shot by the British Army Film Unit.⁴⁸ There were scenes of the air battle, but the majority of these were taken from a distance, although some of these were shots from planes looking down at the battlefield. This was the only Allied footage of the events in France. When the CAFU produced its retrospectives on the Dieppe raid, the majority of the footage was German.⁴⁹

Partly based on Dieppe breakdown of Canadian filming Grierson again argued in September 1942 that the Department of National Defence should only be responsible for the policy of the Film Unit, and that "the National Film Board, should be given the

⁴⁸ Analysis of the available footage at the LAC and the Imperial War Museum supports this statement. See unedited footage at the Imperial War Museum, *The Dieppe Raid, Return From The Road, The Dieppe Raid*, (Army Film Unit, 1942), no. MGH 36; [*Unedited Dieppe footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1942), no. AYY 248-01; and LAC, White collection, *Combined Operations, Dieppe*, (Gaumont-British News, 1942), no. V1 9910-0001.

⁴⁹ After the Dieppe raid, the Film Unit produced a number of stories related to the invasion for their *Newsreel*: LAC, National Film Board of Canada fonds, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 1*, (Story 6) - *Dieppe Heroes are Honoured*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1942), no. V1 8607-0030; LAC, A.G.L McNaughton collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 15* (Story 2) - *The King Presents Colours to Dieppe Veterans*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1942), no. V1 8607-0031; LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 20* (Story 3) - *Farewell and Hail!* (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1943), no. V1 8607-0031; LAC, A.G.L McNaughton collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 21* (Story 5) - *Canadians Awarded Croix de Guerre*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1943), no. V1 8607-0031; LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 42* (Story 6) - *Dieppe* (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1944), no. V1 8607-0033; LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 85* (Story 5) - *Dieppe Anniversary*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1945, no. V1 8607-0037. *Newsreel No. 42* and *No. 85* made use of graphic German footage of dead, injured and captured Allied soldiers. If there had been an attempt to suppress these types of images, they would certainly not have been included in these *Newsreels*.

opportunity to exercise [its] proper responsibility as its executors.”⁵⁰ This was the same argument used by Grierson the year before when he discussed control of the CAFU with Montague. Grierson felt that the NFB was better equipped than the military to produce training films, and that it was easier for the NFB to create productions if it was responsible for the filming. After running the Unit for a year, however, the military officers were not about to hand the job of documenting the Army over to a civilian. Countering Grierson’s suggestion that the NFB should control the film production of the service units, Abel stated that Grierson’s proposal had already been considered and refused when the Unit was established in 1941. It was understood that regardless of which institution was in control, the NFB and the CAFU should work in close cooperation with each other. As mentioned previously, thousands of feet of material were sent to Canada with letters from the soldier-cameramen requesting comments or criticism from the NFB, but by ignoring these letters, the Film Board had not shown itself to be a strong manager or genuine partner in creating the documentary heritage of the Second World War.⁵¹ The NFB’s request for control was denied and more personnel were attached to the Film Unit. This enabled the CAFU to produce the *Canadian Army Newsreel*, its most popular and widely viewed film product.

The production of a newsreel was first suggested in October 1941. Released once a month, the *Canadian Army Newsreel* contained between five and ten stories and was

⁵⁰ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Memorandum from John Grierson to MR. JWG Clark, Director of Public Relations, Department of National Defence, 25 September 1942; Ibid., Memorandum from Joseph W.G. Clark, Director of Public Relations to the Minister of Department of National Defence, 25 September 1942.

⁵¹ Ibid., Memorandum from Major WG Abel regarding Grierson’s memo, n.d. [ca. September 1942].

composed of footage shot by the CAFU. The films were ten minutes in length with sound and narration, featuring stories on sporting events, inspections, parades, commemoration, training and non-combat duties.⁵² Once the Canadian Army was involved in active battle, the *Canadian Army Newsreel* also included footage from the front(s).

The movies were distributed through the Auxiliary Services as part of the regular recreational film program, and shown to Canadian troops in England as well as those in active theatres of battle. Initially, it was only possible to distribute the *Newsreel* to soldiers stationed in Britain. But the Auxiliary Services soon became more active and the *Canadian Army Newsreel* was available wherever the Canadian Army was stationed.⁵³ The *Newsreel* was also available to Canadian soldiers in Canada through the Public Relations Office. "Each issue has been very warmly greeted by the troops," noted McDougall, they "seem to want as much of this sort of thing as we can give them."⁵⁴ The first *Canadian Army Newsreel* was released on 16 November 1942, with all subsequent *Newsreels* available on the fifteenth of every month.

The *Canadian Army Newsreel* provided a detailed visual representation of the history of the Canadian military in the Second World War. By examining a sampling of the *Newsreel* in its first year (November 1942 to November 1943), one can ascertain

⁵² LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memorandum from Lieutenant McDougall to Major Abel, 19 December 1941.

⁵³ LAC, Dan Conlin fonds, Interview with Lew Weekes by Dan Conlin, 25 September 1986, 2hrs, 20 mins, nos. A4 9909-0030(1) and A4 9909-0031(1).

⁵⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Letter from JER McDougall to Herbert Sallans, Dept of Public Relations, 10 February 1943.

some of the activities of the Army for that period.⁵⁵ For instance, of the six stories in *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 1*, half involved an inspection, visits and cameos of military or political dignitaries, and parade-like activities.⁵⁶ The other half of the stories, *Canadian Signallers Prove Skills at Arms*, *When Non Combatants Fight* and *Dieppe Heroes Honoured* focused, respectively, on sports, training and commemoration.⁵⁷

Canadian Army Newsreel No. 6 had a similar breakdown of subjects. Released in April 1943, fifty percent of the stories focused on parades, inspections and political or military dignitaries.⁵⁸ The other half of the stories, *Pigeon Post*, *Bringing in the Sheaves*, *Turn on the Heat* and *Canadians meet Norwegians in Soccer Playdowns*, focused on the non-combat work of the Canadian Army and sports.⁵⁹ The stories in *Canadian Army*

⁵⁵ Three *Newsreels* have been selected for this discussion, though the subject matter of all the *Canadian Army Newsreels* has been analyzed. *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 1*, represents the earliest *Canadian Army Newsreel*; *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 6*, produced in the spring of 1943, is an example of the *Newsreel* mid-way through its first year; and *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 12*, represents the last *Newsreel* before the Canadians entered into battle.

⁵⁶ LAC, *Canadian Army Newsreel No.1*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1942). The first story entitled *Defence Minister Visits Troops* documented Canadian military dignitaries arriving in England being greeted by Vincent Massey, then High Commissioner to London. The film showed Colonel Ralston, Minister of National Defence, visiting with soldiers and inspecting various troops. The fourth story, *Army Hands Over New Airport*, celebrated the opening of a new airport built by the Royal Canadian Engineers and includes General McNaughton, commander of the First Canadian Army, reviewing the troops. The fifth story, *Here Comes the Guards*, fêted the arrival of the Governor General's Foot Guards at Aldershot and included a parade out of the station.

⁵⁷ LAC, *Canadian Army Newsreel No.1*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1942). *Canadian Signallers Prove Skills at Arms*, documented a competition between the Canadians and British to see who were the best signallers. This story was the token sports film but also promoted the identity and skill of the Canadian soldier. *When Non Combatants Fight* focused on the training of the 3rd Division and *Dieppe Heroes Honoured* related to the commemoration and memorization of the Dieppe raid. The story recorded Dieppe Veterans receiving awards at Buckingham Palace.

⁵⁸ LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No.6*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1943), 10 mins, no. V1 8607-0030. The first story entitled *Lady Patricia Ramsay Inspects PPCLI*, depicted Ramsay inspecting her regiment. The fifth story, *British Mayors Visit Canadian Troops*, documented English mayors touring around Canadian training grounds, and story six, *Little Girls & Big Guns*, juxtaposed schoolgirls against the work of the Canadian Army as the girls toured around a battery in London. The last story, *Massed Bands Open 'Wings for Victory' Week*, focused on the inauguration of the war bond campaign and featured a cameo of Vincent Massey.

⁵⁹ LAC, *Canadian Army Newsreel No.6*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1943). *Pigeon Post* showed Canadian soldiers releasing pigeons with messages tied to their legs and *Bringing in the Sheaves* depicted Canadian soldiers helping the British with their harvest. The seventh story, *Turn on the Heat*, related to the training the Canadian Women's Army Corps received to fight fires. All three stories centred on some of the work

Newsreel No. 12, released in September 1943 featured a slightly different combination of subjects.⁶⁰ Although this *Newsreel* included stories on dignitaries, parades, non-combative duties and sports, it also contained two stories related to the conduct of military operations. Before this, from the audio-visual record alone, it did not appear that the Canadian Army was actually involved in an active war. The two stories, *Mediterranean Interlude*, which featured the Royal Canadian Air Force dropping bombs on Sicily, and *Canadians Embark for Sicily*, marked the first stories in the *Canadian Army Newsreel* to present the actual fighting on the film screen. Soldiers back in Canada and those left behind in the United Kingdom would have had the opportunity to vicariously experience what their fellow soldiers went through *en route* to Sicily.

Once the CAFU was established in 1941, the soldier-cameramen quickly began documenting wartime experiences of the Canadian Army. Producing theatrical pieces for the general public, training films for use within the military and the *Canadian Army Newsreel* as an information source for the soldiers, the CAFU fulfilled its mandate to produce films for and about the Canadian Army. Although initially the CAFU was not seen as a valued part of the military, after the Dieppe debacle, the Army's opinion of the soldier-cameramen changed. The Army saw that its actions and activities would not be adequately covered by the British Army Film Unit and that for the military to be accurately and consistently represented in the audio-visual record and commercial

of the Canadian Army in London. The fourth story fulfilled the sports requirement: *Canadians meet Norwegians in Soccer Playdowns* documented the second round of the inter-allied services soccer cup.

⁶⁰ LAC, A.G.L. McNaughton collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 12*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1943), 10 mins, no. V1 8607-0031.

newsreels, the Army would have to employ its own film unit. The successful work of the CAFU also supported the contention that, for the Canadian Army, it would have been difficult for a civilian organisation, such as the National Film Board, to take on the same role as a military film unit. The Canadian Army Film Unit was performing a vital job for the military and, with the invasion of Sicily approaching, the importance of the work of the Film Unit would become even more evident. The Canadian Army was going into battle and, unlike at Dieppe, this time the soldier-cameramen would follow it.

CHAPTER 3

SHOOTING THE WAR:
SICILY AND ITALY, 1943-44

Through the quiet seas another troop convoy sailed into the Mediterranean.

[Distant view of sea]

But this was no ordinary convoy; it was destined to form part of the greatest invasion armada in history.

[Close-up of ship and flag]

And the troops it carried were men of the 1st Canadian Division.

[Pan of troops aboard ship]

For at long last Canadian troops were to go into action and it had fallen to the lot of the 1st Division to lead the way – to lead after waiting for three years.

[Soldiers bathe, play cards, checkers and look at an Italian travel book and map]

[...]

This was the day for which the Canadians had worked and had trained and their training showed to good advantage.

[Men disembark and move towards the beach]

On the beaches of Pachino they began a new chapter in Canadian history.¹

Sicily, 1943

The Canadian Army had been waiting for close to a year after Dieppe to be involved in an Allied assault. The Canadian Army Film Unit (CAFU) had been waiting even longer to capture Allied operations on film, and the Sicily invasion marked its first entry into battle. From July 1943 until the spring of 1944, the CAFU was involved in extensive battles in the Mediterranean, where many of its theoretical procedures were put into action. While in Sicily and Italy, the soldier-cameramen endured the trials of combat and learned the best methods for distributing their footage to audiences in North America

¹ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. Library and Archives Canada (LAC), J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 13 – Sicily*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1943), no. V1 8607-0031.

and the United Kingdom. Although this battlefield footage was well received by commercial newsreel companies, there was an expectation of more dramatic films being produced even when the Canadians were not involved in any action. The Film Unit refused to re-create battle scenes for any of its footage and relied solely on the ability of its men to be at the right place at the right time with their cameras running. By the beginning of 1944, after experiencing hazardous filming during the battle of Ortona in December 1943, the soldiers of the Canadian Army Film Unit had become seasoned cameramen, dispatch riders and film editors. Armed with weapons and cameras, the men of the CAFU would document the Canadian Army's campaigns, publicizing its deeds throughout North America and the British Empire, and leaving a historical documentary legacy for future generations.

In early 1943, a special War Establishment was approved to increase the number of cameramen in order to more fully cover the Canadian Army's future operations.² This expansion only created a small editing team and a field unit, but by 1944 the Film Unit had grown to close to 200 personnel, the largest of all departments in the Public Relations Office. The No. 1 Film Unit (field) was composed of three cameramen, one officer and two other ranks.³ It was attached to one of the forward Divisional Headquarters, where it would travel between brigades or battalions.

² LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Proposed War Establishment (Appendix A) for the Army Film Unit, 26 January 1943.

³ Although the official name of the field Unit was the No. 1 Film Unit, the descriptor "field" has been added to distinguish it from the Film Unit editing in London. The No. 1 field Film Unit included Lieutenant Al Fraser, Sergeants Al Grayston, James Campbell and Jack Stollery.

The officer of the field Film Unit was the main point of contact for the Brigade and it was essential for him to be kept abreast of any action. "They should not be regarded as interfering 'press' representatives, but as front line soldiers, performing a very necessary military duty," opined one optimistic report.⁴ The cameramen were attached to various operational units to document their actions and usually attended briefing sessions for the upcoming engagements. The men of the CAFU then took their position a few miles away from the front and waited for the battle to begin, well within range of artillery and mortar fire.⁵ The cameramen spent most of their time preparing for the battle, realizing that they would have very little time to capture the actual chaos of war on film.⁶

Each soldier-cameraman was supplied with a portable camera, usually the Bell and Howell Eyemo, a lightweight metal tripod, and 900 to 3000 feet of film (thirty to ninety minutes) that was carried in pouches on the front and back much like soldiers carrying ammunition.⁷ They were also equipped with a pistol and a knife, but also with identification letters, since cameramen were sometimes viewed as spies. The letter stated that the personnel were not responsible for the subjects photographed nor for any necessary censorship and that, for this scheme to be successful, the fullest assistance and cooperation must be given to the cameramen.

⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Memorandum from Major WG Abel, Public Relations Office, CMH, to BGS, 28 February 1942.

⁵ Procedure based on LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11/2, War diary for month of May 1944.

⁶ LAC, Dan Conlin fonds, interview with George Game by Dan Conlin, 19 September 1986, 2hrs 10 mins, nos. A4 9909-0025(1) and A4 9909-0026(1).

⁷ LAC, RG24, Volume 12230, File 4/Film/2, Letter from WG Abel to Public Relations Service, First Canadian Army, 26 November 1942.

It was not always easy for the Film Officer and his men. "Attacking troops are usually not anxious to have cameramen along with them," recounted McDougall. "In a closely-knit operation each man has a specific job to do. The presence of an extraneous body is usually an additional hazard."⁸ However, members of the Film Unit considered themselves as part of the fighting force and at any opportunity would assist the operational unit in battle, including putting down cameras and picking up rifles.

Attached to different operational units to ensure the fullest coverage, the cameramen were very isolated from one another, and had a tremendous amount of freedom to decide what to capture on film.⁹ Still, there was always a question of self-censorship. No formal policy existed on filming sensitive subjects, such as showing dead Canadian soldiers, but according to oral testimonies of the CAFU cameramen, very few of them recorded these grim events.¹⁰ It was a general feeling among the men that nothing could be gained from filming the Canadian dead. As far as they were concerned, everyone knew that this was happening and the filmed results, should they clear later

⁸ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/3/2, Letter from Major JER McDougall to DDP, CMHQ, 28 March 1944.

⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Lieutenant JA Fraser to Captain JER McDougall, 14 August 1943 and LAC, interview with George Game by Dan Conlin, 19 September 1986.

¹⁰ It is difficult, using the audio-visual record alone, to confirm if the Canadian cameramen filmed dead and wounded soldiers; the original unedited footage, which may have included such scenes, is no longer available. A study of a sample of unedited films shot by the British Army Film Unit at Dieppe, in the Mediterranean and at D-Day, shows that very few images of Allied casualties were ever recorded on film. This suggests that self-censorship may have been prominent among the Allied cameramen. See unedited footage at Imperial War Museum, *The Dieppe Raid, Return From The Road, The Dieppe Raid*, (Army Film Unit, 1942), no. MGH 36; [*Unedited Dieppe footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1942), no. AYY 248-01; [*Unedited Mediterranean footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1943), no. ADM 572; [*Unedited Mediterranean footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1943), no. AYY 248-02; [*Unedited Mediterranean footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1943), no. AYY 497-1; [*Unedited Mediterranean footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1943), no. AYY 497-02; [*Unedited Mediterranean footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1943), no. AYY 499; [*Unedited Mediterranean footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1943) no. AYY 500-01; [*Unedited Mediterranean footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1943) no. AYY 500-03; [*Unedited Mediterranean footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1943), no. AYY 500-07; [*Unedited D-Day footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1944), no. A70 29-30; [*Unedited D-Day footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1944), no. A70 31-32; and [*Unedited D-Day footage*], (Army Film Unit, 1944), no. A70 36.

levels of censorship, would be demoralizing among troops or at home. The same was not felt about German dead, although they were not often included in the final productions. For instance, Al Calder remembered filming a German soldier, whose face was moving because it was filled with maggots. This footage never made it into the productions of the Film Unit or the commercial newsreels.¹¹ Similarly, there was little desire to photograph the wounded. The cameramen were also involved in the same battle as these less fortunate soldiers and had a natural aversion to filming the wounded and dead.¹² Dead and maimed Canadians would have signalled a defeat or setback and was not fitting content for other soldiers or those on the home front. However, as the cameramen were creating the official record, they claimed to shoot the dead if they were part of the scene or if such a shot was necessary for an audience to understand the events unfolding on a movie screen.¹³ In certain areas of the battles, there were so many dead that it would be difficult to avoid filming them. Nevertheless, few Canadian casualties appeared in the *Canadian Army Newsreels* or in the theatrical productions of the Film Unit. It is difficult to confirm now whether this was due to the self-censorship of cameramen, the cutting by later film editors and producers or the activities of formal government censors.¹⁴

¹¹ LAC, Dan Conlin fonds, Interview with Al Calder by Dan Conlin, 23 September 1986, 1hr, no. A4 9909-0027(1).

¹² LAC, Dan Conlin fonds, Interview with Leonard Thompson by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986, 30 mins, no. A4 9909-0046.

¹³ As few casualties can be seen in CAFU productions, it does not seem that this occurred very often. LAC, Dan Conlin fonds, Interview with Lew Weekes by Dan Conlin, 25 September 1986, 2hrs 20 mins, nos. A4 9909-0030(1) and A4 9909-0031(1).

¹⁴ Graphic images of allied dead, wounded and captured was included in *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 42* (Story 5) - *Dieppe*. This story was a retrospective on the Dieppe raid produced in 1944. The CAFU employed both British and German footage to compile its story and unlike the other films related to the raid, included shots of dead bodies and abandoned tanks covering the beach. Although it is impossible to know the effect such images would have had on soldiers, these may have made them eager to taking revenge on the Germans. Since these scenes were included in this film it can be assumed that had similar shots been available for all battles, the *Canadian Army Newsreel* may have included more graphic footage. However, without any unedited footage it is impossible to confirm this.

The cameramen could not record everything; only a selection of events were filmed. This choice of what to record was left in the hands of the men of the CAFU. It was their perspective, then, that has been left in the documented moving images. Their selection dictated the scope and breadth and completeness of the historical record they were in the process of creating. Since they opted to limit the footage of Canadian casualties, it became impossible for this kind of footage to make its way into the productions of the CAFU, or ultimately provide a comprehensive view of Canadians' roles in the Second World War for posterity. In making this decision, it seems that the historical record has lost out. Yet the very omission of the obvious is itself a record of the attitudes and values of the film-makers themselves.

The German surrender in Tunisia in May 1943 ended the North African campaign and presented the Allies with the opportunity to launch an assault on Sicily. The No. 1 Film Unit (field) joined the 1st Canadian Infantry Division in Scotland, awaiting its dispatch into action.¹⁵ It was ordered to film the landing and fighting, which meant that the cameramen would have to be near the front lines.

The CAFU landed with the first assault wave at Sicily.¹⁶ The landings were lightly contested, and the cameramen were able to get some good shots of the Canadian soldiers on their way towards the beach. Sergeant Al Grayston filmed the early morning activities, getting some of the best footage, including shots of Canadians charging up the

¹⁵ A second field Unit was shortly sent out with the reinforcements. These included Lieutenant C.C. McDougall, Sergeants Cooper, Andersen, Towers and DeGuire.

¹⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17/3, Letter from Major Gordon Sparling to Editor, Maple Leaf, 6 October 1945.

beaches with fixed bayonets and breaking down wire barricades. Lieutenant Al Fraser also filmed the landing, focusing on the “knocked out guns” and moved on to the airfield to record captured prisoners.¹⁷ The 1st Canadian Infantry Division, with the Canadian Army Film Unit following, pushed the enemy back in what became a hot, dusty and nasty campaign.

The Unit did not create any theatrical films from the footage shot in Sicily. However, special editions of the *Canadian Army Newsreel* covered these stories, and *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 13* was comprised of a single story, entitled *Sicily*.¹⁸ The film began with shots of the convoy carrying the Canadian forces sailing towards the Mediterranean, while the narrator proclaimed: “at long last Canadian troops were to go into action.”

The Unit was identified in this film as the source of the footage. The narration stated that “aboard one [ship], was Sergeant Alan Grayston, a Canadian Army cameraman, who on that day shot some of the great pictures of the war.” Grayston’s footage of the Canadians landing at the beaches of Pachino, showing them disembarking and unloading their equipment, was included, as were shots of thousands of Italian prisoners and Sicilian civilians reappearing from their mountain caves in which they were hiding, “wondering just what kind of life a conquering democracy would bring.” The idea of a “conquering democracy” was an important message and it was deemed essential

¹⁷ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Al Fraser to Jack McDougall, 8 July 1943.

¹⁸ The following quotations are from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 13 – Sicily*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1943).

by the CAFU to distinguish between the destruction occasioned by the Allied armies and that caused by the enemy.

The film also attempted to improve the morale of soldiers by emphasizing the difficulty of their work. The narration included a statement from Montgomery in which he said that “they have travelled farther and fought harder” than anyone in the 8th Army. The narration also thanked the 1st Canadian Infantry Division for all its efforts. This message, as the narration claimed, was “from the rest of the Canadian Army” and stated that they “were all damn proud of you.” The movie also boosted the morale of the CAFU: “we here are pretty proud of the stuff, and I think you’ll agree with me, that the Film Unit as a whole can be ever so proud of the finished job.”¹⁹

Canadian Army Newsreel No. 14 also included a story, entitled *Sicily*, focusing on the Canadians’ battle for Leonforte and Agira. Blocked by fierce opposition, the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment advanced on Leonforte at night by climbing up Castle Hill, surprising the German defenders.²⁰ The footage showed heavy combat with tanks advancing and the Canadians countering the German mortar fire. However, “before the town was taken, there was hand-to-hand fighting in the streets.”²¹ It seems that the cameramen were unable to record this clash; there were no shots of this fierce combat but only scenes of the city, destroyed after the battle. The film then moved on to document the fight for Agira. This battle involved more grim combat, and resulted in 438 Canadian

¹⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from JA Fraser to JER McDougall, 6 October 1943.

²⁰ Bercuson, 160.

²¹ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, A.G.L. McNaughton collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 14* (Story 2) – *Sicily*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1943), no. V1 8607-0031.

casualties.²² The filmed footage of Agira was spectacular. The combat began before daybreak, so the light was not ideal for a well-exposed shot. As the shells were fired, the muzzle flash from the artillery guns lit the surrounding area. For each of those split seconds, the artillery guns as well as the soldiers loading them were visible, yet as the flash faded, so did the guns and men. It created an ominous effect. A similar technique was used to capture the long shots of explosions and close-ups on Canadian machine guns. This film demonstrated that, stylistically, the quality of the footage coming from the soldier-cameramen was improving. Although they were working in less than ideal lighting conditions, to say nothing of the difficulty of filming while being fired upon, the men were resourceful and made use of whatever facilities they had to film. They, of course, could not bring portable lights to the battlefield and so ingeniously relied on the artillery fire to improve their exposure. This film also confirmed that the cameramen could not record everything. Since there was no footage of the street fighting in Leonforte, the editing team also showed creativity by using other available footage, like the shots of the city after the battle, to create the story for this *Newsreel*.

The Sicilian campaign was very successful for the Unit. The Allied advance was well documented, and the action shots taken at Leonforte and Agira in July 1943 were some of the best. The material was highly praised, not only because it provided very complete coverage, but because it scooped all other filming units.²³ The footage was the first to be released and thus received worldwide distribution. McDougall congratulated

²² Nicholson, G.W.L. *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War: The Canadians in Italy 1943-1945*, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1957) 134.

²³ Jon Farrell, "History in the Taking: Some Notes About the Canadian Army Film & Photo Unit," *Canadian Geographic Journal* (June 1945), 277-287; and LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/12, Letter from JER McDougall to Colin McDougall, 23 July 1943.

the work of the soldier-cameramen and specifically Grayston in a letter to the commanding officer of the field Film Unit: "Give the little corp [Grayston] a pat on the back from me; his landing stuff was really lovely and he is getting a big play in all the newsreels. I gather from his dope sheets that he was having the time of his life that day."²⁴ Grayston was not the only one to receive compliments. Since it was up to each individual cameraman to select what they would shoot, the CAFU footage reflected different perspectives, and some, like Al Fraser, shot a lot of footage of civilian activities that was different from the other non-CAFU cameramen in Sicily. His unique footage also went over well with the commercial newsreels.²⁵

Canadian Paramount News utilized the footage shot by the CFPU in its film *Sicily Invasion*.²⁶ It began with text screens stating that audiences were about to see the first pictures of the Sicily invasion and that this footage was "official Canadian Army Films flown by bomber across the Atlantic and pre-released throughout Canada." Thus the footage was presented to Canadian audiences at home as a true scoop with an authentic provenance. The message of the film was the great success of the Canadians in Sicily. The Canadians, who had spent the last "two and a half years of battle training in England, two and a half years of playing soldier, two and a half years of waiting for the right moment," had successfully captured "more than half of Sicily in ten days." The Army appeared to have led this attack. However, this was not the Canadians' first action in two and half years. The narration seemed to forget the Canadians' fateful involvement at

²⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from JER McDougall to Lieutenant JA Fraser, 23 July 1943.

²⁵ Ibid., Letter from JER McDougall to Lieutenant JA Fraser, 2 August 1943.

²⁶ All quotations in this paragraph are from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, Norman Gunn collection, *Sicily Invasion*, (Canadian Paramount News, 1943), no. V1 8702-0010.

Dieppe and Hong Kong. The movie employed shots of men embarking on the landing crafts and pre-battle preparation. The narration supported these images by switching the voice of the account so that the audience became the first person, thus becoming the soldier. "The day had come, and then from a port somewhere in England, you are loaded into transports." The only scene reflecting indirectly the reality of Canadian casualties was one of nurses embarking on the ships. This shot was coupled with the rather sanitized statement that "you can't have war without casualties." While there were no slain or wounded Canadians presented in this film, a dead Italian who, it was macabrely noted, "can no longer salute to the Duce," was included. This scene was probably not shot by the CAFU, as it was not included in the *Canadian Army Newsreel*.²⁷

The use of its footage by commercial newsreels encouraged the Film Unit. This news was shared with the senior officers of the operational units featured in the footage and helped to ensure that the cameramen's participation would be welcomed in future operations. "We were all ever so pleased to get your recent Signal telling us of the good uses to which the Leonforte [and] Agira material is being put," wrote Fraser of the No.1 field Film Unit. "It certainly peeps us up an awful lot, and at this stage of the game when it is vital for us to sell ourselves as Film and Photo Sections compared to the general press setup. Such news is a wonderful sales argument."²⁸

²⁷ The United States also had combat-cameramen and since this portion of the film related more to their involvement in Sicily, it can be assumed that the provenance of the shot was American.

²⁸ LAC, RG 24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Lieutenant JA Fraser to Captain JER McDougall, 14 August 1943.

The Germans and Italians withdrew to Messina where they crossed the straits into Italy with much of their equipment. Although Sicily had been taken, another larger campaign was about to commence.

While the Canadians were undertaking their first sustained ground combat of the war and capturing unique footage, the ongoing battle continued between the NFB and the Canadian Army Film Unit. Although Grierson's last attempt in 1942 to gain control of the Film Unit was unsuccessful, his complaints continued, as did his lack of cooperation in the distribution of the CAFU material. The NFB charged that the Film Unit was full of amateurs. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. The majority of the personnel in the CAFU were transferred from other units in the Army and had previous cinematographic experience, be it with the NFB, Associated Screen News (ASN) or other broadcasting agencies. This coupled with their military training made them a good fit for a unit that required its personnel to negotiate film techniques, artistic construction and subject matter with the NFB and commercial newsreels, as well as be accepted as equals by the troops whom they were to accompany and even support in battle.

The CAFU worked well within the military. Since Grierson was a civilian who did not possess extensive knowledge of the inner workings of the Army, it seems unlikely that the Film Unit would have flourished under a civilian regime. Despite the success of the NFB productions, it would not have been able to replicate the footage captured by the soldier-cameramen during battle. The men operated very much alone and so it was very

important that they understood their position in the Army, and were accepted by the soldiers they relied on. The same would not have occurred for civilians.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between the “cinematic art” of the NFB and the soldiers’ perspective of the CAFU, the Public Relations Office suggested that Gordon Sparling be attached to the Unit to head up its production activities in London.²⁹ Sparling was a veteran film-maker of the ASN and it was thought that an individual possessing his experience would, in the eyes of Grierson and the NFB, place the CAFU on par with the Film Board’s intellectual and artistic endeavours. Interestingly, Grierson attempted to block Sparling’s attachment to the Unit, stating that the ASN could not afford to lose a man of such experience. Since Grierson did not encourage Sparling’s move to the CAFU as a way to influence and assist in documenting the Canadian Army at war, it seemed apparent that he was trying to starve the CAFU of good people. Sparling noted that “when I took leave of my employer at Associated Screen, he [the employer] was most skeptical that ‘the army unit was anything more than two men and a boy’. This was, I found, typical of the general impression in Canada.”³⁰

Grierson’s conflict with the Film Unit may have also reflected its composition mainly of men from a commercial motion picture company. Grierson was convinced that the best way to organize film in Canada was through the centralized force of the NFB. However, the ASN, a commercial company, did not follow this model. Since the CAFU was largely made up of men from this competing organisation, there was some immediate

²⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Message from Gibson to CGS, 2 June 1943.

³⁰ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memo from Gordon Sparling to Commanding Officer, CAFU, 23 September 1943.

distance between the two.³¹ The CAFU was less connected to wartime Canada as its members did not see many Canadian films or know exactly what was happening at home. Similarly, the NFB was not directly connected to the war overseas. And so the CAFU-NFB tension continued as a backdrop and somewhat of a hindrance to the Film Unit's work.

John McDougall, now with the rank of Captain, headed the Unit in the field while Sparling took charge of the London headquarters. McDougall and three men set out for Italy in September 1943.³² The field Film Unit faced difficulties prior to landing in Italy as a U-boat sank the ship on which they were travelling. Luckily though, no one from the CAFU was hurt, but the precious film equipment was almost lost. McDougall saved the one camera that was aboard; its destruction would have resulted in a serious loss or delay in documenting the Canadians in battle.

Upon the soldier-cameramen's arrival in Italy, they recorded footage of the first-wave landing at Reggio di Calabria, which the Canadians took with little opposition.³³ There was not a lot of action in this battle and so the editing team in London used footage of the Canadian troops loading and leaving Sicily to supplement the movie. Al Fraser recounted that "there isn't a heck of a lot in the way of pictures to be taken just now, so don't be too disappointed if the pictures don't stack up to the stuff on the Island [Sicily]

³¹ LAC, Dan Conlin fonds, interview with Michael Spencer by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986, 1hr, no. A4 9909-0029(1).

³² These men would join Colin McDougall, Sergeant DeGuire, Sergeant Anderson and Sergeant Towers. LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Al Fraser to Jack McDougall, 8 September 1943.

³³ Douglas and Greenhous, 130-131.

as it is now, things remind me of a scheme in England, and the only difference is that here we can't find the enemy, theoretical or real."³⁴

And Now Italy, a story from *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 16*, which depicted the crossing to Italy, demonstrated this lack of action. There was little pressure on the Canadian troops at the landing and the trip was compared to a "pleasant ferry crossing."³⁵ As well, the musical score contrasted with the soundtrack used in the other movies related to the battles in Sicily. The music had a jaunty tone and was more reminiscent of the types of scores used in the *Canadian Army Newsreel* stories that focused on training or parades. In comparison to the later films on Italy, this production made war look like a bloodless outing.

The Film Unit was in Italy for four months and while there it was amalgamated with the Photo Unit. Their first project, as the combined Canadian Film and Photo Unit (CFPU), was the battle of Ortona in December 1943.³⁶ Although many lessons were learned in Sicily and the early part of the Italian campaign, Ortona proved the most difficult battle to film. The Germans had demolished buildings and blocked streets to force the Allies into the large open squares from which they could be picked off.³⁷ The streets and buildings of Ortona had been booby-trapped, creating deathtraps for the

³⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Al Fraser to Jack McDougall, 8 September 1943.

³⁵ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, A.G.L. McNaughton collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 16* (Story 5) – *And Now Italy*, (Canadian Army Film Unit, 1943), no. V1 8607-0031.

³⁶ When Abel and Clark visited they decided to amalgamate the film and photo units. For more information see LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/13, Letter from Captain JER McDougall to Captain Gordon Sparling, 22 December 1943.

³⁷ Nicholson, 325-328.

soldiers and cameramen. Since the urban fighting was restricted to streets, alleys and buildings, it was difficult to document anything on film. The Canadian soldiers even pioneered “mouse-holing” tactics – attacking from building to building by blowing holes in adjoining walls and always staying inside to escape the snipers.³⁸ It kept the Canadians safer, but made it difficult to film combat. The cameramen were thus forced to make choices, not based on importance but more on proximity, ability, and safety, and sometimes courageous opportunity. For example, Sergeant Jack Stollery was with the tanks of the Three Rivers Regiment as they made their way through the battle-ravaged streets of Ortona. The tanks came under German fire and their advance was halted. “Stollery was unable to cover the action from where he was so he pushed ahead for another hundred yards with camera and tripod, and calmly photographed the little battle which developed,” recounted one battle report. His actions “so surprised the commander of the leading tank that he opened up the hatch of his tank and took a picture himself with his own camera.”³⁹ Stollery was awarded the Military Medal and his citation read, in part: “His appearance with the forward troops in moments of great danger ... was in no small way responsible for bolstering their morale.”⁴⁰ The battle of Ortona was well documented as the CFPU was able to record some very high-calibre footage. “Yesterday Canadians entered Ortona. I should say, the Canadian Film and Photo Unit took Ortona,” bragged McDougall, “We had six movie and three still men in the town while very fierce street fighting was going on.”⁴¹

³⁸ Douglas and Greehous, 135.

³⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/1/2, Notes on the History of the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit, n.d. [ca. post 1945].

⁴⁰ LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17/3, Message from CanMilitary to Defensor, 21 September 1945.

⁴¹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/13, Letter from Captain JER McDougall to Captain Gordon Sparling, 22 December 1943.

This footage is available in *Battle of Ortona*, which was part of *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 24*.⁴² This story included the first images of dead soldiers in the *Canadian Army Newsreel*, as the Canadians sorted out the German dead and dug their graves, giving them “a decent burial.” The film then moved on to show the rows and rows of German dead lying on the ground and then cut to a shot of Canadians marching towards Ortona, “passing German equipment left littering the highway.” Although the German dead were not directly compared to litter, the connection between these two scenes was evident. There was also a close up of a dead German soldier with a gruesome head wound, and the narration identified the body as “one of Hitler’s soldiers ... with a picture of his Fuhrer beside him.” Not evident in this production are the hundreds of dead and wounded Canadians.⁴³

Notwithstanding the evident and earlier difficulties of capturing combat on film, the CFPU coverage of the battle for Ortona resulted in superb battle footage. The moving images depicted the soldiers working through the “town where death lurks in every doorway, every window,” to get the snipers. *Battle of Ortona* also included the first image of a Canadian soldier wounded in action, though his injury was not severe. Although it appeared that the Germans were destroyed in this battle, there was no

⁴² The following quotations are from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 24*, (Story 2) - *Battle of Ortona*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1943), V1 8607-0032.

⁴³ Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990) 55; J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 240.

denying – or hiding – the fierce nature and intensity of combat and the difficult battlefield. The soldiers continued working their way through the town and, since the footage followed their movements very closely, it was clear that the cameramen were very close to the battle. There was even a shot of a German sniper high above on one of the buildings. Although the shot is blurred, it was unique. The footage of Ortona was different from any other shot by the CFPU. Not only was the battle more vicious, but the footage recording it also seemed to reflect a much more brutal and real war.

The Ortona material was very well received by the commercial newsreels. An excerpt from a cable read as follows: “Canadian Army Film Unit Ortona fighting superb. Now appearing in all Canadian and big majority United States newsreels. Unit deserves highest praise.”⁴⁴ The men of the Film Unit heard back from their families at home who had seen the films. Evidently the intense nature of the battle had been captured on film, as their parents worried about their safety at the forward edge of battle.⁴⁵

From their experiences in Sicily, the soldiers of the CFPU knew that camera work was very different when one was in the midst of battle. McDougall recounted that “one of the miracles of the last six months is the fact that we haven’t had a casualty yet. Our lads have been right up with the most forward troops day after day,” and that “everyone

⁴⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Captain Gordon Sparling to Al Fraser, 8 February 1944.

⁴⁵ LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17, Letter from Lieutenant JA Fraser to Captain Gordon Sparling, 22 February 1944.

has his own collection of near misses.”⁴⁶ The dangers of battle were ever-present and McDougall described that “the stuff flying about has been completely appalling – especially to me, green as I am to the terrors of battle. At first I was rather worried because I was practically scared to death every time I was up at the front.” But as McDougall discovered, “everyone else feels the same way, only some of them pretend they don’t.”⁴⁷ The CFPU did not stay this lucky, as the Unit suffered its first casualties at Anzio, Italy in January 1944. A still photographer was killed and two cameramen were seriously wounded.

The men of the CFPU were also successful at integrating into the combat units, as the cameramen considered themselves to be soldiers as well as cinematographers.⁴⁸ Sergeant Jimmie Campbell had a reputation for knowing everyone in the 1st Division and when not filming he helped the medical corps treat casualties.⁴⁹ When Sergeant Al Grayston was caught in a barrage while moving out of Agira, he performed first aid on a couple of wounded officers until they were brought under care at a dressing station. This helped to build the reputation of the Unit. These actions gave them leverage to ask the Army, or particular divisions and brigades, for help with getting footage.⁵⁰ Fraser praised the work of Grayston and Campbell: “These lads [...] don extra jobs such as helping with casualties and generally being helpful where they can,” and that “this is to be expected of

⁴⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/13, Letter from Captain JER McDougall to Captain Gordon Sparling, 22 December 1943.

⁴⁷ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/13, Letter from Captain JER McDougall to Captain Gordon Sparling, 22 December 1943.

⁴⁸ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Form letter from WG Abel identifying bearer of the letter as an official photographer of the Public Relations Service, 3 March 1943.

⁴⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Lieutenant JA Fraser to JER McDougall, 27 July 1943.

⁵⁰ Ibid., War Diary from September 15 to 29 September 1943 and LAC, interview with George Game by Dan Conlin, 19 September 1986.

one in the army, but just the same it is making a good impression on the units and the people with whom we have to work.”⁵¹ It was important that the field Film Units develop a close relationship with the operational units with which they were attached. “Whenever we enter 1 or 2 CIB HQ [Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters] they greet us with ‘How’s the picture business,’ or ‘What did you get today?’” reported Fraser. “This genuine interest is most encouraging and we certainly have had grand cooperation from people on these two staffs.”⁵² As well, the soldiers and staff officers of the operational units could greatly facilitate the work of the cameramen by informing them of upcoming movements and letting the cameramen accompany their unit.

Still, logistical problems plagued the Film Unit in Sicily and Italy. It lost two jeeps and 12,000 feet of film *en route* to the island when a U-boat attacked the convoy and, since it was difficult to replace vehicles, the Film Unit had to operate without its own personal transportation.⁵³ It was then incumbent on the cameramen to catch rides from their fellow soldiers. The difficulties with transport also made it hard for the CFPU to distribute the cameramen across all relevant areas of operations.⁵⁴ There was great concern that the footage shot by the Unit was inadequate. McDougall remarked on gaps in the coverage, “when one has to go from Div. (rear) to Adv. Div. get the dope on things then try to catch up, and ‘catch as catch can,’ you may see just how difficult it is to

⁵¹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Fraser to Captain JER McDougall, 4 August 1943.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Due to this loss en route to Sicily, the operational troops were also without transport. See LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter [Al Fraser] from the beach in Sicily to Lieutenant Colonel Abel, 10 July 1943; Ibid., Letter from Jack McDougall to Al Fraser, 8 September 1943.

⁵⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/12, Letter from Colin McDougall to Captain J. McDougall, 22 September 1943.

get around.”⁵⁵ Despite these transportation problems, the Film Unit endeavoured to capture well-rounded footage of the troops.

Yet even if the footage was complete, if it was unsteady, it was unusable. Tripods, although an essential tool of the trade when filming in London and during the training of the cameramen, became obstacles in combat.⁵⁶ The tripods were too lightweight and thus did not hold up well while campaigning in the Mediterranean. Even slight vibrations caused the tripods to fall apart. Yet the editing team in London felt that much of the field Film Unit's footage was rendered useless when a tripod was not used. One could easily tell when the camera had been hand-held, as the shakiness of the shot became quite evident when this footage was projected to screen. The film appeared amateurish, making it difficult to be picked up by the NFB and the commercial newsreels. Since the full tripod was difficult to use in battle, some of the men altered the tripod into a single-legged unipod so that they would have more mobility in shooting with at least some stability for their cameras. However, even the use of tripods or the unipods did not ensure a stable shot. If a Sherman tank was going by or artillery was exploding, the ground would rumble.⁵⁷ For example, while filming footage referred to as “Blown Bridge,” the cameraman, while in view of the Germans, travelled up a road that had not yet been cleared of mines. Sergeant Campbell had to shoot as quickly as possible and did not have time to use a tripod. This “is an example of how deceptive these things can be,” remarked Fraser, “and the public do not realize under just what conditions films are often

⁵⁵ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Al Fraser to Jack McDougall, August 19 1943.

⁵⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Al Fraser to Jack McDougall, 30 September 1943.

⁵⁷ LAC, Interview with Leonard Thompson by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986.

taken. It is a bit discouraging on our parts, to shoot the stuff under tough conditions and not have these conditions understood by the public.”⁵⁸ It was obviously difficult to use a tripod under such battle conditions. With McDougall’s arrival in the field, however, the men seemed to be using tripods more frequently and, as a result, the footage remarkably improved.⁵⁹

It was hard for those in the field to really understand why using a tripod was so important, as they rarely had the opportunity to see their own raw footage. It was also difficult for them to know which types of shots were first rate and which ones should not be attempted again. As a result, frequent communication between the front and rear was very important, with the editing team in London sending reports back to the cameramen in the field explaining what footage was used and how their camerawork could be improved.⁶⁰

Once the footage was recorded, the cameramen were responsible for providing the appropriate context of the film. It was standard practice in the commercial film industry to create what was called a dope sheet, a list indicating every scene or shot for each reel of film produced. Its purpose was to explain the footage, how it fit together and why it was important. Dope sheets were essential for those in London, the NFB and the

⁵⁸ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Al Fraser to Captain JER McDougall, 26 October 1943.

⁵⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/13, Letter from Captain Gordon Sparling to Captain JER McDougall, 21 December 1943.

⁶⁰ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Al Fraser to Jack McDougall, 8 July 1943 and LAC, interview with Michael Spencer by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986.

commercial newsreel companies to identify and understand the CFPU footage from the field.

Although the CFPU endeavoured to provide complete dope sheets, this was not always the case.⁶¹ The dope sheets for the films of the Sicily campaign outlined the Canadians advancing through four or five Sicilian towns, but it did not include any general information about the towns, their importance, the length of the battles and how the towns were captured. All of this information would have assisted those compiling the newsreels in selecting the footage and explaining to the cinematic audience exactly what was happening in these battles. Although the dope sheet was very important to the men of the field Film Unit, they were rushed to get their footage sent out as quickly as possible and did not always have the time to write up these lists, or to do so very thoroughly. Moreover, they knew that the key to the use of their footage was in how quickly it could be sent back to London, and later the United States and Canada, and so they did not want “procedures” to interfere with the films’ timeliness.

Upon the completion of the dope sheet, the reel(s) of film were usually handed over to a driver who transported it to the closest airport. All exposed film was treated as a secret document since it could have had some value to the enemy.⁶² The work of the dispatch rider was not only to transport but also to protect the footage, and this became

⁶¹ The typical CFPU dope sheet was less than two pages long and provided only a half page summary of the preparation for the battle. The shot list provided very basic information, such as, “Trucks move off, Men embark, Nurses embark.” Unfortunately only a few CFPU dope sheets have been preserved. For an example of a CFPU dope sheet see LAC, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4, Letter from J.A. Field, NFB to J.W.G. Clark, Public Relations, 7 September 1943.

⁶² LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, 4/Film/2, Letter from WG Abel to Public Relations Service, First Canadian Army, 26 November 1942 and LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/1/2, Letter from Captain Gordon Sparling, Canadian Film and Photo Section, PR Services to DDPR, 20 May 1944.

increasingly difficult in Italy as the Allies advanced and the lines of communication lengthened.⁶³ When using Reggio Airfield as their main exit point in Italy, it took a dispatch rider a full day to get there. Although the CFPU changed airfields, this logistical problem remained a concern throughout the campaign. Because of the extended distances for drivers, the field Units were only able to have one dispatch run every three days.⁶⁴ This significantly affected the timeliness and the uniqueness of their footage.

The exposed negative film was then sent to the laboratory for processing where two black-and-white copies and one lavender preservation copy were created.⁶⁵ One of the black-and-white films was submitted to the military censors, along with a copy of the cameraman's dope sheet.⁶⁶ The British Ministry of Information initially censored the material, though once the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) was established in December 1943, all footage from Northwest Europe was censored by this organisation. Some material was shipped directly from the Mediterranean to Canada via Washington and thus these films did not follow this same process. Still, censorship took place in North America or in the field.⁶⁷ The censors ensured that there was

⁶³ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Al Fraser to Captain JER McDougall, 26 October 1943.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Letter from Al Fraser to Jack McDougall, 10 September 1943.

⁶⁵ The CFPU headquarters kept a log of all footage shot by the cameramen, and so once in their possession, a production number was assigned to the film and it was added to the logbook. All films in one shipment were under a single production number and were further separated by alphanumeric codes to identify the material shot by a particular cameramen. Each tin of film was then labelled with this information and the dope sheets were marked so that it corresponded with production and roll numbers. Once SHAEF requirements were in place, a second lavender was created to be sent to the US Pictorial Service. For more information see LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17, Note on Procedures for incoming film shipments by Captain WG Abel, 5 October 1943.

⁶⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Memorandum to BGS from Major WG Abel, Public Relations Office, CMH, 28 February 1942.

⁶⁷ Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), File 159.6013 (D3) A Description of the System used by the Canadian Film and Photo Unit for Identification and Classification of Motion Picture Material, n.d., and LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11/2, War diary for month of May 1944.

nothing recorded on film that would be of use to the enemy. There was a standard list of material that would be removed from all film footage: this included identification patches, equipment on the "secret" list, prisoners being searched, identifiable images and names of officers over the rank of lieutenant colonel, the number of men, official name or location of a unit and any mention of combined operations.⁶⁸ The censoring of films intended for the *Canadian Army Newsreel* went through less rigorous severing, since the intended audience was military personnel.⁶⁹ Units, names of commanding officers, weapons and equipment that were on the secret list were often left in these films, as this was common knowledge to the men, and they were already under orders not to divulge this information.⁷⁰ If the stories from the *Newsreel* were also offered to commercial newsreel companies for public distribution, these films were then further reviewed and often a selection of cuts were made before they were sent out.⁷¹

It was initially thought to be beneficial for the CFPU to avoid shooting certain material so that its footage would not be rendered unusable due to censorship. For instance, the CFPU took great care not to record the identification patches of the Canadian Army. Otherwise, as it soon discovered, good shots would be cut.⁷² On more than one occasion the material recorded by the CFPU was criticized for the lack of close-ups and a disjointed story, but this was often due to censorship, or, as just mentioned, the

⁶⁸ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Al Fraser to Jack McDougall, 30 September 1943; Volume 12331, File 4/Film/6, Memo from MOI censors, 3 March 1944.

⁶⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12331, File 4/Film/6, Letter from JER McDougall to RJ Sims, MOI, 4 November 1942; Ibid., Letter from Chief Military Advisor to the Press Censorship to McDougall, 5 November 1942.

⁷⁰ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Letter from JER McDougall to Herbert Sallans, Dept of Public Relations, 10 February 1943.

⁷¹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12331, File 4/Film/6, Letter from JER McDougall to Mr. Berthau, Film Censorship, 25 January 1943.

⁷² LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/10/2, Letter from Colonel WG Abel to OC, No 3 PR group, 26 April 1944.

avoidance of anticipated censorship.⁷³ Since the censors cut any shots of prisoners being frisked, likely because this information could be used for military intelligence or the censors did not want the Canadian public to see how prisoners were treated, it was suggested that the cameramen avoid such scenes. Instead, they could shoot footage of prisoners “being herded together, or chatting with our people, or just looking happy because they are prisoners, but nothing can be shown of them being searched.”⁷⁴

Although one would never have a complete audio-visual (or any other) record, since it would be impossible to document everything, an even more incomplete historical account would have resulted had the CFPU always avoided censored material. There would be no secret equipment and no identifiable images of locations or units. For instance, Al Grayston’s footage of mechanics and engineers repairing equipment at a Canadian Infantry Brigade workshop was not usable because the story featured the 17-pdr. anti-tank gun in almost every shot, which was banned for dissemination purposes.⁷⁵ Sparling therefore suggested that the men shoot scenes twice, once with the censored object and once without. “It seems a shame to miss a good subject for permanent record, merely because it is currently stopped,” he noted.⁷⁶ If the official film record contained no moving images of the censored 17-pdr., then this would not adequately reflect the nature of the firepower of the Canadian Army.

⁷³ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4, Letter from Lieutenant WG Abel to JWG Clark, LAC, RG24, 27 October 1943.

⁷⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from JER McDougall to Lieutenant JA Fraser, 23 July 1943.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Letter from Captain JER McDougall to Al Fraser, 20 August 1943.

⁷⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11/2, Letter from Major Gordon Sparling to Captain CE Nye, 6 September 1944.

All censorship cuts were stored separately from the films until the items were cleared. The dope sheets were also revised to reflect the cut material. The censored film and the lavender copy, as well as all cuts made by the censor, were catalogued and stored in the CFPU library so that it could be used in later productions. Once catalogued, the films were never to be physically cut apart and if particular scenes were required from a film, the cuts were made to duplicates only. Thus the lavender copy and the film became “part of the permanent film record of the Canadian Army Overseas.”⁷⁷ Sadly, as we shall see later, these historical records did not survive.

Once the material was censored, the CFPU would begin cutting the film into a story that would be used in the *Canadian Army Newsreel* or in longer theatrical productions. There was no real value in seeing the complete footage only to have, in some cases, the majority of the shots cut out. Therefore, the work of the CFPU editors and producers did not begin until the footage had been reviewed. The CFPU team then viewed material at London Merton Park Studios and tried to devise a story from the remaining footage. The editors pared down the raw footage, and with productions ranging from one minute to twenty minutes, some masterful editing work was required to create seamless and complete films. For instance, the *Canadian Army Newsreel* was a ten-minute production (1000 feet) and generally this was pared down from thirty minutes (3000 feet) of raw footage.

⁷⁷ DHH, File 159.6013 (D3), A Description of the System used by the Canadian Film and Photo Unit for Identification and Classification of Motion Picture Material, n.d.

Once the editing team had a story and all the scenes were spliced together, a script was written. The music and sound effects, from the library of sound clips that the CFPU had compiled throughout the war, were the last items added. They strove for authenticity: the sounds of tanks, rapid-firing small arms, and many other military weapons recorded in practice sessions or at battle school were utilized. Sound recording equipment of the time could not have been brought on a battlefield.⁷⁸ Although the CFPU worked as quickly as possible, the editing process for the *Canadian Army Newsreel* took several days.⁷⁹

The Film Unit, with assistance from the British Ministry of Information, was responsible for the distribution of its completed movies in the United Kingdom and free Europe, but the National Film Board was in charge in North America. The CFPU met with great success with the distribution of its films in the European market, but Sparling lamented “the same cannot be said for Canada – which should be one of the most important parts of our ‘sphere of influence.’”⁸⁰

The CFPU had very few problems distributing in Britain, but throughout the war, the Film Unit encountered difficulties in having its films shown in North America.⁸¹ The blame, Sparling believed, lay with the NFB, which “as a civilian organization cannot be expected to have the same interest in our work, nor even the same viewpoint toward some

⁷⁸ LAC, Interview with Ken Ewart by Dan Conlin, 20 September 1986, 1hr 30 mins, no. A4 9909-0028(1).

⁷⁹ LAC, Interview with Lew Weekes by Dan Conlin, 25 September 1986.

⁸⁰ LAC, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memo from Gordon Sparling to Commanding Officer, CAFU, 23 September 1943.

⁸¹ By March 1943, the Film Unit had taken over its own distribution in the United Kingdom and was working directly out of London through Paramount, Fox and other newsreel producers.

of our objectives. It has its own definite commitments and production patterns.”⁸² The NFB produced at least three newsreels related to the war effort in which the CFPU stories could have been included. However, the NFB had very rarely used a complete Film Unit production in its newsreels, but instead cut selected shots from the movies without credit to the CFPU’s soldier-cameramen.⁸³ As the primary focus of *Eyes Front, Canada Communiqué* and *Canada Carries On* was on global dimensions and not specifically Canada’s achievements in the war, the CFPU footage was generally of little interest to the NFB.⁸⁴ Since the purpose of the CFPU was to record the activities of the Canadian Army, it would have been very difficult for the CFPU to produce a film that would have fit with the NFB’s broader mandate.

Moreover, the NFB did not feel that the CFPU’s material met the quality that the Canadian public expected from its films. The NFB’s critique of the CFPU’s footage ranged from uninteresting subject matter to shoddy, jumbled shots. Inexperience led some newer cameramen to film material that was restricted and thus the films were

⁸² LAC, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memo from Gordon Sparling to Commanding Officer, CAFU, 23 September 1943.

⁸³ However, portions of footage shot by the CFPU were used by the NFB, including the material shot at Ortona. The full story produced by the CFPU was not used and thus the material was cut up and included in the NFB film with no credit attributed to the CFPU. For more information see LAC, interview with Michael Spencer by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986.

⁸⁴ According to Michael Spencer and correspondence from the NFB, the majority of CFPU films were deemed unsuitable. See LAC, interview with Michael Spencer by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2/2, Letter from Grierson to Colonel William Abel, 13 July 1944 and RG24, Volume 12339, File 4/Film/1, Letter from Major WG Abel, PRO, CMHQ to Ross McLean, Assistant Film Commissioner, NFB, 27 May 1942. Gary Evans provides a summary of productions in *Canada Carries On* and concludes that the series did not endeavour to boost Canadian patriotism; it featured international events. The films in *World in Action* centred on international brotherhood and presented stories from different parts of the world, such as the U.S.S.R., United States, Germany and Japan. For more information see Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) 128-146, 186-220. A similar discussion and conclusion is seen in Joyce Nelson, *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988), 64-76 and Jack Ellis, *John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) 151-156.

heavily censored. Some movies lost the core of their story and were no longer suitable for release.⁸⁵ Sparling agreed with some of the NFB's complaints and, by 1943, the Film Unit had gone to great lengths to solve this problem. "It seems too much to expect the average cameraman to keep up a continuous supply of first-rate material," explained Sparling. "It has long been my feeling that the average cameraman has been asked to do too much when he has to be contact man, director, caption writer, and in addition obtain pretty pictures."⁸⁶ To improve this situation, the men were instructed to work in pairs, splitting their duties. However, it seems that the problems with the NFB also reflected the long-standing "turf war" between it and the CFPU, in addition to the allegedly poor quality of the footage.

The NFB was also responsible for distributing the CFPU footage to Canadian and American commercial newsreel companies, which in the weekly Canadian versions of their productions included two stories of Canadian content. The films were selected based upon their individual quality and uniqueness.⁸⁷ Here, however, the Film Unit was in direct competition with the NFB and the ASN to have its stories included. It was a clear (if undeclared) conflict of interest for the NFB to have a mandate to promote the CFPU footage when its own films were competing for inclusion.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ LAC, RG24, Volume 12331, File 4/Film/6, Letter from Captain WJ Hynes, CAFU, to Sparling, CAFU, 23 March 1945.

⁸⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memorandum from Sparling to DDPR, CMHQ, 26 November 1943.

⁸⁷ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4/3, Letter from G.A. Wells NFB to Major Gordon Sparling, 23 February 1946; LAC, RG24, Volume 12331, File 4/Film/5/2, Letter from Colonel FX Jennings to Colonel WG Abel, Canadian Military Headquarters, 14 September 1944.

⁸⁸ LAC, interview with Michael Spencer by Dan Conlin, 21 September 1986.

The Public Relations Office attempted to do everything it could to get the military films distributed, "but admittedly there is no one on the staff [at Public Relations] who is familiar with film technique or methods. Thus they must rely on the NFB."⁸⁹ There was also a delay that sometimes occurred in the distribution of material in North America. The hold-up was not in the transfer of material from the front to England, which in itself was very difficult, but in the shipping of this material to Canada and then to the United States.⁹⁰ A film could sometimes take weeks to get to its destination; since stories were topical, it was essential that they be reviewed quickly. To resolve the delay in distribution, Sparling thought that the transfer to North America should be under Army control.

It was important for the Public Relations Office that Canadian footage be included in the international newsreels so that Canada and the world would know of the Canadian Army's role in Allied battles.⁹¹ In February 1944, the CFPU began shipping directly to the United States, in effect by-passing the NFB. By having the processing and censoring take place in the United States, it was able to speed up the procedure and increase distribution.⁹²

⁸⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memo from Gordon Sparling to Commanding Officer, the CAFU, 23 September 1943.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Memorandum from Sparling to DDPR, CMHQ, 26 November 1943.

⁹¹ It was also important that the Canadians were identified in the stories otherwise this would not assist in the promotion of the Canadian Army. For instance, World Wide Pictures used selections of CFPU footage of Canadian troops being served sandwiches. However, in the commentary of this film, it was not stated that the troops were Canadian. Throughout the war the CFPU and the Public Relations Office worked hard to impose on distributors and commercial newsreel companies the need to credit the Film Unit and Canadians. LAC, RG24, Volume 12331, File 4/Film/5/2, Letter from James Carr, World Wide Pictures (UK) to Captain Gordon Sparling, 4 September 1944.

⁹² LAC, RG24, Volume 12331, File 4/Film/6, Letter from Colonel WG Abel to Lieutenant Colonel Heap, 29 February 1944.

The CFPU received weekly reports of the usage of its films in the newsreels.⁹³ This helped them tailor their footage as they could see what stories were used and which ones were not. The Canadians had to continually prove themselves to the commercial newsreel companies, and the most significant complaint was the lack of combat footage.⁹⁴ The American Signal Corps, which was responsible for recording the American Army's activities overseas, made use of re-created shots and scenes and thus were able to give a dramatic sense of the battle, even if it was simulated. In response to the claim that CFPU footage lacked action and thus news value, Sparling said that one could not compare the Canadian footage with that of the Americans and British, as Canadians had less experience and fewer cameramen. Moreover, he claimed that "it must be remembered that quite a bit of the material our men shoot is not necessarily intended as news, but is for record purposes," and the soldier-cameramen were not willing to risk their reputation by faking footage.⁹⁵

It was always difficult for the men of the CFPU to represent on film the intense action that they and the soldiers experienced. When they did come out of front-line service with good footage, the shots may have looked like they could have been taken anywhere.⁹⁶ "No matter how close to the scene of battle, it is extremely difficult to

⁹³ For an average three month period in 1944 the percentage of Canadian service stories in the US produced newsreels was twenty-one percent. LAC, RG24, Volume 12331, File 4/Film/5/2, Noteworthy points of an analysis of newsreel content from April 1 1944 to June 30 1944, June 1944 and Letter from Colonel FX Jennings to Colonel WG Abel, 16 August 1944.

⁹⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4, Letter from Colonel WG Abel to Major George Stevens, US Army Pictorial Services, 10 March 1944.

⁹⁵ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memorandum from Sparling to DDPR, CMHQ, 26 November 1943. It should be noted that the Film Unit re-enacted scenes for its theatrical and training films but not for its actuality footage shot in the field.

⁹⁶ This difficulty was discussed by Al Fraser in a letter to Jack McDougall: "The only pictures we were able to get Jack, were ones of the lads as they went through the town in the well known formation, it really

capture pictorially the sense of tension and urgency. Even in the very excellent Ortona pictures there is little to indicate that the enemy was in many cases only a few yards distant," reported McDougall. He continued: "If films do not have this feeling of propinquity they lose their only advantage over training films made under ideal conditions."⁹⁷

Since the CFPU's main function was to document Canadian activities, "uncompromising truthfulness was decided upon. Re-enactment could easily become the thin edge of the wedge whereby the historical and record value would be completely sacrificed to propaganda, and cheap heroics."⁹⁸ After Ortona it was difficult to capture battles and engagements on film since they were few in number or carried out at night. Much of the footage recorded by the CFPU was not action oriented. Fraser of the No. 1 field Film Unit in Italy explained their difficulties to McDougall: "Lieutenant Schrag seems to think that we can manufacture an Ortona every day of the week, you know this isn't possible, and thank goodness is not possible, if the pix from here have not seemed very news-worthy, it is due to the plain fact that there just isn't any news at present."⁹⁹

If the operational unit to which they were attached was not going to be involved in any major battles, there would be nothing for the cameramen to shoot. Conversely,

didn't make any sort of a picture, and was the sort of thing that could be very easily posed, as you will see, BUT it was a great thrill Jack to be able to be as far forward as we were." LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Al Fraser to Jack McDougall, 28 July 1943.

⁹⁷ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/3/2, Letter from Major JER McDougall to DDP, CMHQ, 28 March 1944.

⁹⁸ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memorandum from Lieutenant Jack McDougall to Major Abel, 21 October 1941; Ibid., Canadian Army Film Unit, General Outline of Policy, n.d. [ca. 1941].

⁹⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from, Lieutenant JA Fraser to JER McDougall, 31 March 1944.

sometimes the battles the men were in were not conducive to recording footage; the CFPU at one time was caught in three days of shelling with the Royal 22nd Regiment, but due to the tough conditions it was unable to record much useful footage.

Some of the criticism of the Film Unit was unfair, as it was being evaluated as a production team and not appropriately as a newsreel organisation. McDougall explained that “since the Film Unit was formed everything has been directed towards preparing it to take its place in the field and provide first-class battle pictures,” and that “any production, either of theatrical or training films, has always been regarded as of secondary importance to our main function.”¹⁰⁰ Had its purpose been to replicate war for civilian audiences on film, and not to document the activities of the Canadian Army, the methods of the Film Unit may have differed. The cameraman would not have been solely responsible for selecting the subjects and a director and a scriptwriter would have also accompanied them. They would have assisted the cameramen to plot their movements and the storyline. There were no true directors in the CFPU and the formulation of a script took place afterwards in London, far removed from the battle.

The Film Unit was also forced to deal with civilian requests from the NFB. In February 1943, McDougall expressed concern over Grierson’s demand for a re-enactment of prisoners of war escaping from a prison camp.¹⁰¹ McDougall refused to film such a sequence, stating that this re-creation could be useful to the enemy and

¹⁰⁰ LAC, RG24, Volume 12329, File 4/Film/1, Memorandum from Captain JER McDougall to DDPR, 4 June 1943.

¹⁰¹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memo from Mr. John Grierson to Mr. IWG Clark, n.d. [ca. 1943]; Ibid., Letter from McDougall to Public Relations Office, 27 February 1943.

detrimental to any future escapes of allied soldiers from similar camps. McDougall also scoffed at Grierson's demand for scenes of Canadians playing in the snow – this would be difficult since they were stationed in England.

It is no wonder that the CFPU was frustrated with the NFB, as the majority of the stories requested by the latter would have required the cameramen to perform some directorial and production work and possibly have their soldier-subjects act out roles. The NFB also asked for more close-ups and more dramatic flair.¹⁰² However as noted by Fraser, “the war doesn’t take on the Hollywood touch all the time,” and “if they have requests for us, will you ask them to let us be the judges of what is and isn’t the best thing to take.”¹⁰³

The Film Unit was responsible for selecting stories and events. Although there were no formal instructions, the cameramen knew that their job was to create an audio-visual record of the Canadian Army. It would have been difficult to maintain this role if they only filmed shot-lists requested by the NFB or represented fabricated scenes as factual accounts. This would have undermined the work (and integrity) of the Film Unit. “By common agreement there is no faking. Sometimes that rule means sacrificing dramatic effects, but in the long run it pays to have the reputation of never letting the camera lie.”¹⁰⁴ If the Film Unit had opted to follow the suggestions of the commercial newsreels and the NFB to re-enact stories, this would have inferred that the Canadians

¹⁰² LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4, Memorandum from JA Field and Julien Roffman, NFB to Ross Mclean, 2 August 1943.

¹⁰³ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from JA Fraser to JER McDougall, 8 April 1944.

¹⁰⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/10/2, Script for “Eyes Front”, 10 August 1944

were not involved in any exciting or daring action and that any films that demonstrated this were faked. Although it would have been difficult for civilian audiences to know if footage was simulated, this would have been clearly evident to the soldiers of the Canadian Army who may have been asked to act in the re-enactment or who, having fought during the battle, knew that the CFPU had not filmed the actual event. The importance of the validity of the footage rested not only with the need to create the official and reliable record, but also with the negative effect faking would have had on the Canadian Army.

The CFPU's first opportunity to film the actions of the Canadians took place in Sicily and Italy. The Film Unit experienced first-hand the trials of filming during battle, and its choice of subjects to be recorded and distributed to the public was affected by the limitations of filming during battle, censorship, and the demands of the NFB and commercial newsreel companies. The Film Unit learned much from its experiences in Sicily, as the Italian footage was of high quality. The cameramen were not only better prepared to film the brutal street-fighting in Ortona, but also had the advantage of having an experienced cameraman and director, John McDougall, advising them in the field. With Gordon Sparling heading the editing team in London, the quality of the films produced also improved significantly. The propaganda in the stories of the *Canadian Army Newsreel* was ever present, as each story contained specific messages transferred to the audience through the narration and the images, sound effects and music, in the finished films.

The Film Unit continued its ongoing struggle with the NFB for control over the documentation of the war on film. But since the soldier-cameramen were so successful in the field, there was no support for Grierson's repeated takeover efforts. As a result, the Film Unit gained greater autonomy from the NFB as it distributed its own films in the United States and the United Kingdom. Much had changed for the Film Unit since Dieppe: having proven its worth in Sicily and Italy, it was now valued by the senior officers of the Canadian Army and allowed to participate in all major operations. However, the true test for the CFPU was yet to come. As important as the Mediterranean battles were to the development of the soldier-cameramen, the impending invasion of Northwest Europe would represent the most important chapter in the history of the Film Unit.

CHAPTER 4
HITTING ITS STRIDE:
D-DAY AND TOWARDS GERMANY, 1944-45

The advance guard of freedom make their touch down on the Normandy beaches just as the sun scatters the mist of early morning. The mighty naval bombardment has done well its job of paralysing the enemy battery.

[Men disembark from landing craft and advance to shore]

[Close-up of hollowed out buildings]

Although the landings achieved tactical surprise, strong north winds make the business of landing equipment extremely hazardous.

[Men unload equipment from landing crafts]

The much marvelled west wall crumpled before the whirlwind advance. As the bridgeheads are established supplies, armour and reinforcements fall from the landing craft.

[Men continue to disembark from landing craft and unload transports and more equipment]

Canadians meet considerable fire on the beaches as they work their way into defences. There is stiff hand-to-hand fighting in the middle coast towns. The citizen soldiers of yesterday are now a hardened mass of professional killers.¹

Crusade for Liberation, 1944

Amidst the harsh fighting of the D-Day landings, the reputation of the Film Unit was being made on the beaches of Normandy. During the months leading up to 6 June 1944 and on to the end of the war and the demobilization of Canadian soldiers in the months that followed, the Film Unit became more skilled in cinematography and consequently more experienced in battle conditions. Although the Film Unit had achieved much praise for its work in Sicily and Italy, it had still experienced conflict with the National Film Board of Canada (NFB). This animosity did not relax until after D-Day. The stellar reputation of the Canadian Film and Photo Unit (CFPU) was built on its

¹ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. Library and Archives Canada (LAC), J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 33* (Story 1) - *Crusade for Liberation*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1944), no. V1 8311-0016.

footage of the D-Day landings, which was widely shown in North America and free Europe. From then on, the CFPU encountered fewer difficulties with the NFB, supplying it and other companies with motion pictures of Canadian battles. The D-Day footage resulted in the creation of a number of theatrical pieces including *Left of the Line* and *Green Fields Beyond*. As well, the successes after D-Day inspired the soldier-cameramen to produce *You Can't Kill a City*, which, in contrast to most of their productions, focused on the impact of war on civilians, and *Antwerp Story*, one of the CFPU's last stories filmed during the war and released after VE Day. As the relationship between the NFB and the Film Unit improved, and as the end of the war neared, demobilization was on everyone's minds. Films that would assist the reintegration of soldiers on their return to Canada became a joint endeavour of the NFB, the Associated Screen News (ASN) and the CFPU. The NFB, now a willing partner, supplied stories to the CFPU-produced *Canadian Army Newsreel*. Although in *Crusade for Liberation*, the soldiers were compared to "professional killers," the later *Canadian Army Newsreels* focused on the expertise, experience, and broader perspective gained while the returning soldier was overseas. "The citizen soldiers of yesterday" could become the educated group of experienced men who would bring Canada to the forefront of the postwar world.

The relationship between the NFB and the Film Unit had been rocky throughout the war. As seen in earlier chapters, there were problems with the National Film Board's distribution of the CFPU films, as well as complaints that the NFB did not provide the "advice" it had promised. John Grierson also made one final attempt to gain control of

the Unit in March 1944. Grierson had always thought that the best way to organize film and propaganda in Canada was through the centralization of the film industry. Since Grierson was also the head of the Wartime Information Board, it seems likely that his goal of centralization was influenced as well by this posting. Grierson was anxious to improve the distribution of and the overall quality and direction of the CFPU films. Once again, he suggested that individuals from the NFB should be put in charge overseas and that the Film Unit would be directly responsible to these individuals. "Whenever Grierson invades this country there is always some advance notice of his coming," remarked Colonel WG Abel of the Public Relations Office. His aim was nothing short of "coordinating the motion picture operations of all the Forces."² Abel's response was not surprising:

A continuous check over a period of years indicates that we have had a lack of support which some of our very excellent films have not deserved, and it would seem strange to us now that having failed so far to obtain cooperation, the very organisation on whom we had relied, should be given direction and disposition of our future material.³

Although this lack of past support from the NFB would have been reason enough to decline the NFB's overture, control over Canadian military productions in Northwest Europe was not exclusive to the CFPU. The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) was now responsible for, among other things, the coordination of all Services in Europe, including film and photography.⁴ It would have been difficult to integrate a civilian body like the NFB into this multi-national military

² LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2/2, Letter from Colonel WG Abel, DDPR, CMH to JWG Clark, Public Relations Armed Forces, 10 March 1944.

³ Ibid.

⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/1/2, Letter from Captain Gordon Sparling, Canadian Film and Photo Section, PR Services to DDPR, 20 May 1944.

arrangement, especially with Canada as a relatively junior partner. The Public Relations Office felt that the new arrangement through SHAEF would only improve the distribution of the CFPU's military films. Abel concluded that "we will probably get into the Canadian theatre much more frequently than we ever did through the cooperation of the Film Board," and "we will get out films advertising Canada all over the world on a very much better basis."⁵

Grierson never made it to London but the intent of his visit was mentioned in *Maclean's* magazine. Grierson, it was reported, had planned the trip because of his dissatisfaction with the footage being shot by the CFPU: "lately the Army photographers have been sending back too few battle pictures, too many studies of Brass Hats."⁶ The Film Unit and the Public Relations Office had heard rumours that the NFB was trying to manoeuvre the control issue again, this time by denigrating the reputation of the CFPU. The soldier-cameramen were understandably furious. Sparling recounted after reading this article, "it makes surprising reading for the rest of the Army who are thus informed that CFPU personnel are only 'uniformed photographers' (similar to civilian war correspondents) rather than soldiers assigned to special duties."⁷ Despite this public assault, no further action was taken by the NFB to gain control of the Film Unit. Indeed, after D-Day, more positive articles were written about the CFPU to make amends for Grierson's unfair comments.⁸

⁵ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2/2, Letter from Colonel WG Abel, DDPR, CMH to JWG Clark, Public Relations Armed Forces, 10 March 1944.

⁶ "Backstage at Ottawa," *Maclean's*, (15 May 1944).

⁷ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2/2, Memo entitled Attack on CFPU by National Film Board from Gordon Sparling to DDPR, CMHQ, 15 June 1944.

⁸ Two articles were published, one in *Maclean's* and one in *Canadian Geographic*. See L.S.B. Shapiro, "Camera Commandos," *Maclean's*, (15 April 1945) 40-43 and Jon Farrell, "History in the Taking: Some

In February 1944, John McDougall, with the No. 1 field Film Unit in Italy, was called back to England to organize a new field Film Unit for the forthcoming operations in Northwest Europe.⁹ By D-Day there were over 200 people attached to the Unit, the majority of whom were responsible for the transfer, editing and creation of the films at the London headquarters.¹⁰ In the intense preparation for D-Day, the cameramen were seen as essential to document this historical event. The reputation of the Film Unit was built on 6 June 1944, as the CFPU was responsible for the first footage and stills of D-Day landings to reach the public anywhere in the Allied world.

It is surprising that the Canadians were able to record any footage at D-Day, as they had suffered a series of mishaps that could have easily changed the fate of the CFPU. Although the Canadians laid claim to having the first Allied cameraman on French soil with the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, like so many of the parachutists, Sergeant Dave Reynolds missed his landing point and had lost his camera, which was strapped to his chest, during his descent. Although Reynolds was unable to record any footage of his descent, he joined up with a unit of British paratroopers who were advancing on a group of German-defended houses. He was assigned by the British officer in charge to lead a section into a house, which he did, clearing the house, killing

Notes About the Canadian Army Film & Photo Unit," *Canadian Geographic Journal*, (June 1945) 277-287.

⁹ The new field Unit was named the No. 2 Film Unit and included Captain Jack McDougall, Lieutenant Colin McDougall, and Sergeants Grayston and Stollery. The No. 1 field Film Unit stayed in Italy under the lead of Colin McDougall.

¹⁰ LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17/3, Letter from Major Gordon Sparling to Editor, Maple Leaf, 6 October 1945.

three German soldiers.¹¹ This revealed again the dual role of cameramen who were responsible for shooting the war on film, but could also be called on to shoot Axis soldiers if necessary. Bud Roos, who went ashore on D-Day with the Regina Rifles, shared a similar fate. The landing craft upon which he was travelling suffered a direct hit. He managed to get to land and took cover, but his camera was damaged beyond repair, and so he worked as a stretcher-bearer.¹²

Sergeant Bill Grant came safely ashore with Frank Duberville, a still photographer. They filmed the activities on the beach, watchful for any landing craft that would be able to transport their motion pictures and stills. The movies were quickly sent back to London on a naval dispatch boat, and Grant's film of the landing was the first to arrive in London, beating all other footage by six hours. Of the 700 feet of film, 400 feet passed the censor and was sent off immediately to the commercial newsreels. Grant's footage was shot from the landing craft behind the soldiers and captured the men huddled together, waiting to disembark.¹³ The ramp of the craft fell away to reveal dark, abandoned houses on the French coast. The men then advanced into the water making their way to the beach while under heavy enemy fire. This experience of battle was captured on film and remains some of the most poignant footage of the war.

¹¹ Shapiro, 40.

¹² LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/1/2, Notes on the History of the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit, n.d. [ca. post-1945].

¹³ It is uncertain whether Grant filmed the footage himself or if the camera was attached to the landing craft and activated by one of the soldiers aboard the boat. Bud Roos stated in his oral testimony that Grant's camera was affixed to the landing craft. However, Ted Barris believes that Grant shot the footage himself and provides other anecdotal evidence in his recently published book, *Juno: Canadians at D-Day, June 6, 1944*, (Toronto: T. Allen Publishers, 2004) 150-154.

Grant's film of D-Day was featured in all the British Empire newsreels. It was also the first footage to reach North America, beating the others by a day, and as such, "Canadians at home will have an opportunity of seeing at the earliest opportunity what their lads are doing," crowed Gordon Sparling of the CFPU editing team in London.¹⁴ Grant's raw footage is no longer available, but a variety of edited films on the invasion can be seen in the CFPU films: *Crusade for Liberation* in *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 33*, *Left of the Line*, and *Green Fields Beyond*, as well as in some out-takes originally found in the CFPU library.¹⁵ The footage is also available in commercial newsreels, like the Canadian Paramount News film entitled *Battle in France* and the News Parade film entitled *Invasion of Fortress Europe*. These films present an interesting comparison of the D-Day footage, as the intended audience of the films and thus the production styles and release dates varied. The *Canadian Army Newsreel*, produced shortly after D-Day, was only to be released to the Canadian Army and thus could include material that would not be seen by the general public, while *Left of the Line* and *Green Fields Beyond* were produced for greater theatrical release and were developed months after the invasion.¹⁶ The commercial newsreels, in contrast, would have been created shortly after D-Day for the general public.

¹⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17, Letter from Captain Gordon Sparling to CC CFPU, 9 June 1944.

¹⁵ Two films given the titles of *D-Day* and *D-Day Beaches* were likely filmed by the Canadian Film and Photo Unit. No sound was dubbed into the films, thus indicating that this footage was not a formal production. The films were not composed of uncut raw footage as the shots did not follow a continuous flow. It is evident upon viewing the footage in the stock-shots of D-Day why this footage was not included in any films: the shots were shaky, blurred and in many cases the subjects were placed too far in the distance. However, this footage is interesting as it demonstrated that hundreds of feet of footage was shot during a battle, but that only a small proportion of that ended up being usable. To view the films consult: LAC, Peter McQuaid Collection, [*D-Day*], (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1944), 15 mins, no. V1 8306-0075; and [*D-Day Beaches*], (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1944), 4 mins, no. V1 8306-0075.

¹⁶ *Left of the Line* was a joint production of the British Army and Canadian Army. Approximately forty percent of the material was Canadian.

The films began with preparatory shots of the invasion and led up to the famous footage shot by Grant. The main messages of these films, although certainly related to the fighting efficiency and preparedness of the Canadian soldiers, had a slightly different spin. *Left of the Line*, *Invasion of Fortress Europe* and *Crusade for Liberation* centred on the growing professionalization of the soldiers in the years between Dieppe and D-Day. The narration of *Invasion of Fortress Europe* noted that “these are Canadians spoiling to avenge Dieppe.”¹⁷ According to *Crusade for Liberation*, the Canadians had been on these shores before, but that “the citizens of yesterday are now a hardened mass of professional killers - they have learned and improved upon the lessons of Dieppe.”¹⁸

The messages of *Green Fields Beyond* and *Battle in France* were somewhat different. They were “green in experience” as they “watched and fought with mixed feelings of alarm and curiosity the sight and sound of real war.”¹⁹ The Canadian Army had been bloodied at Dieppe, but D-Day was probably the first battle experience for most of these soldiers. The focus was then on the individual soldier and less on the Canadian Army as a whole. The narration personalized the landing for the audience and so described the scene as if the audience were on the boat. During Grant’s footage of the landing craft, the narration stated, “You are groggy, seasick all the way over – in seconds you will be in, the door will open and it’s on to the beach and may the bullets miss you.”²⁰ By individualizing the battle and the soldier, the film emphasized the human side

¹⁷ Excerpt from narration of film as transcribed by author. LAC, Mr. MacDonald fonds, *Invasion of Fortress Europe*, (Castle Films, 1944), no. V1 8708-0040.

¹⁸ Excerpt from narration of film as transcribed by author. LAC, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 33* (Story 1) – *Crusade for Liberation*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1944).

¹⁹ Excerpt from narration of film as transcribed by author. LAC, Department of National Defence fonds, *Green Fields Beyond*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1945), no. V1 8211-0030.

²⁰ Ibid.

of war. In a similar fashion *Battle in France* endeavoured to show the public at home exactly what was happening overseas. Even the printed titles at the beginning of the film, “the first pictures” and “filmed under fire,” attempted to entice the audience and emphasized that they would be viewing actual scenes that were shot during the battle.²¹ This may have helped the general public at home to understand the soldiers’ experience, and the 1,074 casualties incurred on D-Day.²²

The last few scenes of *Crusade for Liberation* included shots of the wounded being pulled off the ships. According to the narration, the only comment from the wounded was that they were “sorry to be off the fight.”²³ This message demonstrated that the *Canadian Army Newsreel* was not immune to propaganda. It presented war not as a horrific activity that men would want to avoid, but as something that soldiers would miss if they were away from it too long. This implied that the men were devoted to duty and that, despite injuries, they would have preferred to stay with their fellow soldiers in the fight. As well, although the wounded were mentioned, the injuries of those presented in this film did not appear to be life threatening. The casualties appeared to be smiling, lightly wounded soldiers, rather than men with agonizing injuries and mangled bodies. This footage certainly did not accurately reflect the more than 300 Canadians who were killed, washed up on the Normandy beaches or bobbing lifeless in the blood stained water.

²¹ LAC, Norman Gunn collection, V1 8309-0106, Canadian Paramount News, *Battle in France*, 1944.

²² Colonel C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War: The Victory Campaign, the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945* (Ottawa: The Queen’s Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1960): 119.

²³ Excerpt from narration of film as transcribed by author. LAC, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 33* (Story 1) – *Crusade for Liberation*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1944).

Conversely, the commercial newsreel stories, *Invasion of Fortress Europe* and *Battle in France*, included graphic images of casualties. These films did not shy away from death as there were many shots of fallen soldiers on the beaches and of bodies rolling in the ocean. A soldier shot down on the beach was caught in action as a “daring cameraman records the tragedy of battle.”²⁴ These films attempted to present a brutal yet realistic account of D-Day that was lacking in most CFPU productions. However, the purpose of the *Canadian Army Newsreel* may not have been to accurately represent the horrors of war. Had that been its goal, it would have included footage of corpses or soldiers dying in battle. The film downplayed the casualties of D-Day, as the handful of injured men shown on the film did not equate to the 1,000 casualties suffered by the Canadians. Since the film would only be viewed by service people who would have been well aware of the truth of the battle, it is surprising that they suppressed the brutal reality of war. Perhaps the CFPU in the creation of the film was cognizant that the soldiers would not need visual reminders of the losses that the Army had incurred and that the message of its film should relate to the overall success of the Allied invasion.

The Canadian D-Day film footage was highly praised not only because it was received first, but also because of its quality. Even after the American footage was sent to the newsreels, the CFPU was still considered to have shot the best battle scenes. The reception of this material in SHAEF Theatre A, a pre-screening theatre, was described by John McDougall:

²⁴ LAC, *Invasion of Fortress Europe*, (Castle Films, 1944).

The theatre was packed with a lot of Senior American officers, the censors and our own representatives. We sat through about three or four thousand feet of rather dull American stuff, having to do mainly with preparations and embarkation. Then came Grant's stuff. And it was good. It was bloody good. All through the theatre you could hear people whispering to each other and muttering as good shot followed good shot. When it was all over there was much excitement and planning on how to get it to Washington the quickest possible way.²⁵

The footage was included in all five newsreels released in London and a similar reception was received in Canada and the United States. This was especially significant as Canadian footage had not in the past been very well received by the American newsreel companies. Headlines such as "Invasion Pictures Scoop by Canucks" were prevalent.²⁶ The footage served as great publicity for the CFPU and the Canadian Army.

The need to promote and identify the Unit became of prime importance after D-Day. The men of the CFPU were looking for some outward recognition for the work they had been doing and wanted to be properly credited as the source of footage. The commercial newsreel companies and the National Film Board relied on military film units for footage, but the gulf of the Atlantic was large, and the CFPU was not always aware if commercial newsreels mentioned the source of the footage. There were examples of tag lines citing the combat cameramen as the source of the footage since Sicily, but more often there were no references. Although this lack of citation was frustrating to the men in the field, crediting individual units or organisations was not

²⁵ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Memo from Gordon Sparling to DDP, CMHQ, 15 June 1944.

²⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/10/2, Press Index No 4, 27 June 1944.

standard practice and thus, initially, was not built into the framework of the films. Many times, though, this kind of credit was not possible. In one example, a single frame was reproduced from a commercial newsreel and was printed in the *Montreal Gazette*. The image was of a Canadian soldier who had just recently been killed, and the headline read: "Parents see son in War Newsreel after getting word of his Death."²⁷ Since the screen shot was taken from the Empire Universal News Reel Film, this organisation was cited as the source. However, this image was actually shot by the CFPU and it should have been properly credited. In a radio broadcast, the soldier-cameramen made sure to promote their own work: "Whenever the people at home see a picture of Canadians in action, whether it is a still picture in the daily newspaper, or a movie scene at the local theatre, it is a product of front-line cameramen of the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit."²⁸ The CFPU took every opportunity to tell its story, but much of its work and sacrifice remained unacknowledged.

It was not until 1945 that a film for general public release, *Left of the Line*, carried the credit line of the CFPU.²⁹ Even the overseas Army newspaper, the *Maple Leaf*, featured a story on the National Film Board without even mentioning the Film Unit. Gordon Sparling, obviously annoyed, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Maple Leaf* stating that "reading your story of October 4th on the Civilian Government Body – the National Film Board – made the writer think that the members of the Canadian Army would like to know the story of their own film making organisation – the Canadian Army Film and

²⁷ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from JA Fraser to Captain Gordon Sparling, 13 April 1944.

²⁸ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/10/2, Script for "Eyes Front", 10 August 1944.

²⁹ The film was a joint production between the British Army Film Unit and the CFPU.

Photo Unit.”³⁰ This issue of accreditation was never resolved to the satisfaction of the Film Unit.

The next major film recorded and produced by the CFPU, a few weeks after D-Day, was *You Can't Kill a City* which was based on the liberation of Caen.³¹ John McDougall and the No. 2 field Film Unit arrived in Normandy at the beginning of July 1944. McDougall and Al Grayston began work on a documentary based on the destruction and reconstruction of the city the day after it fell. According to McDougall, this was the first scripted motion picture recorded on an active battlefield. As they shot the film, the Germans, who were just on the other side of the Orne river, were firing mortar shells into the city.³² The film presented the need of the Allies to bomb Caen, with the narration stating “in the battle to liberate Europe the Allied armies must maintain their pressure on the enemy – inevitably any[thing] blocking that pressure must be destroyed. Such an obstacle was the city of Caen, in Normandy.” This statement provided some justification for the Allies’ destruction of the city and for the killing of many of its civilians. The scenes at the beginning of the movie presented the city as little more than a pile of rubble. There were shots of elderly people, women and children living and sleeping in churches as many of their homes had been destroyed. The city was in ruins and, although it looked impossible for Caen to be reconstructed, “the city was not dead.” The film then switched to show Caen and its citizens coming back to life after the Germans retreated and the Allied forces (namely the Canadians) moved in. The mood of

³⁰ LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17/3, Letter from Major Gordon Sparling to Editor, Maple Leaf, 6 October 1945.

³¹ A news story was published in the *Evening Telegram* about this production. See “Front-Line Cameramen brings Canadians Story of European Heroism,” *Evening Telegram*, 31 January 1945.

³² Shapiro, 40.

the film changed as the music became more upbeat. Through the assistance of the Allied army, the French developed plans to rebuild the port and construct new roads, railways and bridges. Although it was the Allies who had originally destroyed the city, the people of Caen paid the same price as the Allied army. "Many died like soldiers and like soldiers they lie beneath white wooden crosses." The narration even stated that the "French should thank the groundwork laid by Allied Engineers."³³

The film was released internationally by the British Ministry of Information and was translated into many languages.³⁴ And after hearing little from the NFB for months, the CFPU learned that the NFB would be distributing *You Can't Kill a City*.³⁵ This was a positive step for the soldier-cameramen and would likely not have been possible had they not proven their worth through the quality of the footage shot on D-Day. After the invasion the relationship had improved between the CFPU and the NFB. Grierson even paid a visit to the Unit in the summer of 1944, later stating in a CBC radio show that the men of CFPU "are fine soldiers, and up there where any other man will go."³⁶ He further credited the Film Unit by saying that "no one should think as they see the newsreels of *Canada Carries On* or *World in Action*, or listen to CBC news reports, or read the stories of the Canadian war correspondents, that any of it is done without danger and without great determination."³⁷ The relationship between the two had indeed changed, although

³³ All quotations from this paragraph are from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, Ken Woodbridge collection, *You Can't Kill a City*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1944), 11 mins 12 secs, no. V1 8501-0084.

³⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/10/3, Note by [?], n.d.

³⁵ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11/2, Letter from Captain MD Spencer to Major Gordon Sparling, 20 December 1944.

³⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/10/2, Talk on a Visit to Normandy and Brittany: CBC Sunday, 20 August 1944, 8:45 pm by John Grierson, 20 August 1944.

³⁷ Ibid.

one could not find fault with Sparling and McDougall for not yet fully embracing the “new” Gierson.

The Canadian Army continued its advance in the summer of 1944 and the CFPU was there to capture it on film. The Army was to take Fleury-sur-Orne on 19 July 1944 and during the operation the members of the Film Unit – Jimmie Campbell, George Cooper, and Len Thompson – found that they had somehow got ahead of the lead units. The 5th Brigade of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division’s attack on Fleury-sur-Orne became disorganized when one of the advancing units, le Regiment de Maisonneuve, failed to coordinate its attack with the supporting barrage.³⁸ The CFPU got mixed into this confusion and arrived in Fleury-sur-Orne before the advancing troops. They were met by Germans who subsequently surrendered to them. However, as they were in front of the Canadian infantry, the artillery barrage soon hit their position and they all, captors and captives alike, ducked for cover. When the intense barrage was finished, the CFPU was left with three prisoners, the rest had escaped or been killed.³⁹ The men of CFPU had to be in the front lines to get these pictures of war. Having survived the attack at Fleury-sur-Orne, cameraman Jimmie Campbell was killed the next day, while recording the Canadians in action.⁴⁰ “There was no question of him missing a good shot just because the Jerry fire was heavy,” reported a radio broadcast. “In fact, the heavier the

³⁸ Stacey, 173.

³⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/1/2, Notes on the History of the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit, n.d. [post 1945].

⁴⁰ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/10/2, Press Index No. 10, 8 August 1944.

fire, greater the action, the nearer he'd crawl with his camera."⁴¹ The two reels of film he shot were sent to London, and when developed, they included fierce combat footage.⁴²

The CFPU continued to film the Army's advances throughout Europe. At the Scheldt Estuary in October 1944, Lloyd Millon set up cameras on an assault craft to obtain moving images of the action as the infantry went into battle. The CFPU were greatly improving its tactics but sadly, the craft was bombed and Millon was killed and his footage lost.⁴³ During the fierce fighting at the Leopold Canal, the Film Unit was unable to provide comprehensive coverage of the attack. While on board a headquarters' ship, George Cooper's camera was damaged, leaving him without any means of recording the attack. Even if he had had the camera, the flooded terrain and arduous nature of the campaign made it difficult to shoot, since it was almost impossible to move along the front. After filming on the beach at Westkapelle, Ken Dougan stored his equipment and footage in a landing craft overnight. The craft was sunk in the evening and his equipment and footage were lost. Such were the trials of filming the war.

The film that best reflected the work of the Canadian Army in Northwest Europe was *Antwerp Story*, which described the city's liberation. Due to heavy rainfall and the low-lying plain of the Scheldt, the Germans had blown open canal dykes and locks to flood particular areas. By doing so the Germans turned the battlefield into a quagmire, and the flooding forced the Canadians to keep to the roads, thereby making them easier

⁴¹ Ibid., Script for *Eyes Front*, 10 August 1944.

⁴² The appraisal of the footage was included in the script for *Eyes Front*. However, this footage, if still available, has not been identified. Ibid., Script for *Eyes Front*, 10 August 1944.

⁴³ Shapiro, 42.

targets when they advanced.⁴⁴ The film focused on the opening of the port, which was an essential part of the logistical support for the advancing Allied armies. “The moment that men had fought and died for” came when the port was finally opened.⁴⁵

The film was distributed by the Ministry of Information. Since *Antwerp Story* was released in January 1946, long after the war’s end, it was issued with never-before-seen footage.⁴⁶ Many of the shots in the film focused on the difficulty of the terrain due to the flooding and the ever-present mud. The battle footage in the Netherlands included scenes of armoured vehicles stuck in the mud, the use of flame throwers, amphibious vehicles, smoke screens and soldiers pushing across the canals with boats. There were distant shots of the canals giving the viewers a sense of the landscape; since much of the terrain and equipment would have been previously censored, this film presented a more accurate visual record of the Scheldt.

The First Canadian Army moved on through the Reichswald Forest with the Film Unit following in the last month of the war. The area was flooded, which made the shipping of film very difficult. Those at home never knew, though. As mentioned, the censors restricted all images of flooded areas so that the Germans would not know the extent of the military difficulties they had caused.

⁴⁴ David J. Bercuson, *Maple Leaf Against the Axis: Canada's Second World War*, (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1995) 243.

⁴⁵ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, National Film Board of Canada fonds, *Antwerp Story*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1945/1946), 21 mins 27 secs, no. V1 8705-0088.

⁴⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4/3, Letter from Lieutenant-General JC Murchie to Department of National Defence, 12 February 1946.

The No. 1 field Film Unit working in Italy was brought to Northwest Europe in early 1945 after a long and difficult tour of duty in that theatre. Upon this Unit's arrival in Britain, the two field Units were joined together and operated as one to provide better coverage of the two Canadian Corps now fighting in Northwest Europe.⁴⁷ The Film Unit followed the Canadian divisions that were operating in the northern Netherlands and western Germany. Although the Canadians met with some fierce opposition, the German armies surrendered on 7 May 1945, with the Film Unit documenting this final fighting.⁴⁸ Attesting to the danger of shooting the war from the front lines, the CFPU had approximately a ten percent casualty rate, with twenty-one casualties.⁴⁹ Only four of the original twelve sergeants were left in the Unit by the end of the war: three sergeant-cameramen had been killed and the rest were wounded. The CFPU had truly filmed the sharp end of war.

Back in London, the production of the *Canadian Army Newsreel* continued. The *Newsreel* gave the Canadian Army the opportunity to show its troops footage from battles in which they had been involved. The films served as a great boost to the soldier's spirits knowing as they did that their actions were being recorded for posterity.⁵⁰ For example, while the troops were still engaged in street fighting at Ortona, the Auxilliary Services set up a theatre a few miles from where the battle took place. The men were able to see the

⁴⁷ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/1/2, Notes on the History of the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit, n.d. [post 1945].

⁴⁸ Granatstein, J.L., *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 304-306.

⁴⁹ This figure represents the entire unit, many of whom never left London. For those in the field, the chance of being wounded or killed would have been much higher.

⁵⁰ LAC, Dan Conlin fonds, interview with Ken Ewart by Dan Conlin, 20 September 1986, 1hr 30 mins, no. A4 9909-0028(1).

action they were involved in just a few weeks previously.⁵¹ The men featured in the stories might also catch a glimpse of themselves, their unit or someone they knew. The *Canadian Army Newsreel* provided a few moments of fame for the Canadian soldier.⁵² As a result, there was a very strong relationship between the soldier and the cameramen of the CFPU: most wanted to be in the pictures and assisted the Film Unit as much as they could.

These short movies were a source of entertainment and information to the troops, and were intended to describe events as accurately as possible.⁵³ “The *Canadian Army Newsreel* has a good reputation with the troops for unbiased and ‘unpropagandized’ news,” testified one report.⁵⁴ At the time, the *Newsreel* was not considered to be propaganda. But since there were individuals responsible for editing and for creating a script, there would certainly be a bias – they were trying to win a war and would do whatever they needed to win, including building up the moral of the soldiers by carefully editing footage.⁵⁵

As the war progressed, there was a desire from the troops overseas to see how Canada had been affected by the war. “Men who have been away three or four years have

⁵¹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/10/2, Letter to The Editor, Daily Film Renter, [after March 1944].

⁵² LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Lieutenant JA Fraser to Captain JER McDougall, 14 August 1943.

⁵³ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2/2, Letter to Lieutenant FX Jennings, Director Public Relations to Colonel WG Abel, 5 July 1944.

⁵⁴ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4/2, Memo from Gordon Sparling to DDPR, CMHQ, 4 September 1944.

⁵⁵ This view is shared by past members of the CFPU. See LAC, interview with Ken Ewart by Dan Conlin, 20 September 1986.

no conception of what things are like at home,” wrote one commentator. “They long for movies which will show them.”⁵⁶ In addition, then, to showing civilians war footage from overseas, the CFPU also presented newsreel stories that brought the home front to soldiers.

Initially the Film Unit only planned to include Canadian stories in the *Newsreel* when there were delays in the production of its own stories.⁵⁷ However, Sparling requested content from the NFB and the ASN that could be included in the *Newsreel* that would satisfy the soldiers’ need to see a glimpse of daily life in Canada.⁵⁸ Neither travelogues nor highly propagandic films would be appropriate, as “neither scenes on *Beautiful Banff* nor Kodachrome compilations *Presenting Canada* nor high pressure discussions of *Canada at War* can satisfy that longing.”⁵⁹

The inclusion of occasional Canadian stories in the military newsreels simply whetted the soldier’s appetite and these domestic features soon became a regular component of the *Newsreel*. Sparling noted that “they are very much appreciated by the troops in the field, who apparently have an avid desire to know what Canada is like now and what goes on there.” These films should have “an obviously Canadian quality, [...]

⁵⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/3/2, Letter from Captain Gordon Sparling to Mr. John Grierson, 23 March 1944.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Memo from Gordon Sparling to Defensor, April 22 1944.

⁵⁸ The NFB was already responsible for two newsreels that were distributed to the Canadian Forces. The *Canada Communiqué* was seen monthly at home and abroad and the *Eyes Front* was seen once or twice monthly in Canada and was then distributed in England. It is uncertain if these films were as well distributed in the Canadian Army as the *Canadian Army Newsreel*.

⁵⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, 4/Film/3/2, Letter from Captain Gordon Sparling to Mr. John Grierson, 23 March 1944; LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from JA Fraser to Captain Gordon Sparling, 13 April 1944.

military flavour, and a timeliness without actually dating.”⁶⁰ In an interesting twist, it was now the CFPU that was requesting material from the NFB to augment its films.

To accommodate the inclusion of new stories from Canada, the *Newsreel* was shown to the troops every week starting in the summer of 1944. The first *Newsreel* to include such a story was *War Brides Arrive in Canada* in *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 29*.⁶¹ Although the NFB agreed to send the Film Unit stories about the home front, many of the stories were dated and thus were of little value to the Unit. “I think the people back home would be the first to want to guard against the troops feeling that old stuff was being fobbed off on them,” wrote a concerned Sparling.⁶² The *Canadian Army Newsreel* was perceived as an important link of communication between the soldiers overseas and the home front.⁶³ Between the end of 1944 and January 1946, aspects relating to the home front were in over 80 percent of the *Newsreels*. The stories generally concentrated on demobilization, sports, news and other important events, and while they varied in content, the underlying themes of the movies were the prosperity of Canada and the bright future awaiting veterans. The nation had prospered as a result of its war effort. Furthermore, it would embrace the returning veterans and ease their transition to civilian life. Although the CFPU attempted to distinguish its product from propaganda, the *Canadian Army Newsreel* became an essential tool for delivering and supporting the Army’s and government’s desired messages.

⁶⁰ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4/2, Letter from Captain Sparling to Lieutenant CJ Quick, 5 July 1944.

⁶¹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from Gordon Sparling to Lieutenant JA Fraser, 19 April 1944.

⁶² LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4/3, Letter from Major Sparling to G. Arthur Wells, NFB, 15 June 1945.

⁶³ Ibid., Letter from DP Wallace to Colonel FX Jennings, DPR, 24 May 1945.

Stories in *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 32, 38 and 79* focused on the commitment of those on the home front to those in uniform. *Universities at War* in *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 32* was one of the earliest films with a home front story. The main message of the film can be summarized in the first sentence of the narration: "In Canada, the institutes of higher learning have joined the rest of the nation in going to war 100 percent."⁶⁴ The intent was to instill some pride in the soldiers to see that young people were modelling themselves after the soldiering ideal; as well, the film made it clear that the government was shaping the educational system after military training. Moreover, there was an attempt in this film to personalize the war effort. The student-soldiers were training their minds and bodies to help out "big brother" overseas. This choice of language gave the impression that Canada was a family united together in the battle for freedom. This use of language also suggested that the young people idolized the soldiers as older siblings and one day hoped to emulate them. It is interesting that university students, who would surely be of military age, at home "playing" soldier, were seen as an effective way to boost morale for soldiers already active in real, live war.

Round Up in *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 38* and *Canadian Equipment for Russia* in *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 79* demonstrated Canada's support and assistance to the soldiers and civilians overseas in a different way. In *Round Up*, Canada was supplying beef, "the most vital of war foods to the soldiers and civilians of the United Nations," and in *Canadian Equipment for Russia*, Canada assisted Russia by creating and

⁶⁴ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 32 (Story 2)-Universities at War*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1944), no. V1 8607-0032.

building equipment to be shipped overseas to an important ally.⁶⁵ Similar to the servicemen who assisted in the liberation of Europe, this home front support, in any form, indicated that Canadian workers were also doing all they could to improve the situation of the allied countries, which were facing a worse fate than Canada. The manufacturing role on the home front was considered to be vital and, the film-makers hoped, buttressed the efforts of those at the front who were liberating Europe.

The prosperity of Canada was also demonstrated in *Round Up, Canadian Equipment for Russia* and *Boom Town Moves* in *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 105*. Canada had the reputation of producing high-quality beef, as stated by the narrator in *Round Up*, and the film attempted to appeal to the Canadian soldier by highlighting Canadian prosperity throughout the world. Even though there had been food rationing, the narrator claimed, Canadian beef products had far exceeded production targets. In *Canadian Equipment for Russia*, Canada, industrialized from its war effort, was helping its allied partner. The tone of the film was set by the first statement in the narration: "Factories in Canada are now turning out equipment for Russia to help replace that destroyed by German invaders."⁶⁶ The footage of destruction attempted to make clear that Russia was in need of assistance. This message was coupled with scenes of huge, awe-inspiring pieces of machinery, close-ups of electrical flashes from high technology circuits, and statements advertising "Canadian skill and ingenuity."⁶⁷ *Boom Town Moves* focused on the discovery of gold in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. The film began

⁶⁵ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 38 (Story 4) - Round Up*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1944), no. V1 9907-0005.

⁶⁶ Excerpt from narration of film as transcribed by author. LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 79 (Story 3)- Canadian Equipment for Russia*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1945), no. V1 8607-0036.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

with scenes of intermittent shacks and rough roads, which by the end of the film had been replaced with more fully developed streets, houses and businesses. This scene would have had great appeal to the soldier who would soon be demobilized. Furthermore, scenes of prosperity, even in Canada's frozen north, would have provided a great contrast to the reality overseas of burned-out cities and malnourished populations.

By 1945, stories began to focus on reintegrating the soldier back into civilian life. *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 74, 92 and 105* told a story of hope and prosperity that awaited the soldier back home. The *Canadian Army Newsreel* would have been a very effective way to disseminate information related to demobilization. The Education Services program, the Canadian Legion courses, Auxiliary Services and University short courses, were all included as themes in the *Newsreel*. These movies would revolve around the idea that the returning soldier was coming back to Canada better equipped for life than when he left, and also reassured him that there were many facilities in place for his own postwar retraining.

School for Servicemen in *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 74* related directly to the education and training opportunities available to veterans upon their discharge from the forces. It outlined how Canada would care for and reward its veterans. Returning men were to be instructed in trades such as carpentry, bricklaying, and electronics while women were to receive instruction in the domestic arts. This movie suggested that the domestic arts would be essential for women now unaccustomed to their natural motherly duties. One can only wonder what women who had served in important Army posts

thought of being relegated to motherly duties. “Regardless of disabilities,” claimed the film, “there is a course suitable for all.”⁶⁸ This message was reinforced by a scene with two men sitting at a table doing work. When one of the men pushed himself away from the table, it was apparent that he was missing his lower torso and confined to a wheelchair. With re-training, it was suggested that any soldier could re-establish himself, and that the government was attempting to do everything possible to ensure a place for him in postwar Canada.

Another technique used in the *Canadian Army Newsreel* to facilitate the repatriation of soldiers involved the use of military language to describe civilian topics. *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 92* included a story entitled *Gridiron Season Opens in Canada*, which carried the rugby/football season opening match between the Ottawa Trojans and the Toronto Indians. The game was won by the Toronto Indians and was referred to as “V-Day.”⁶⁹ This same technique was used in *Boom Town Moves*. The last line of the narration was very poignant as it drew a comparison between mining and war by describing the development of Yellowknife as a “war of movement fought for gold.”⁷⁰ By drawing these parallels between war and the home front, this may have helped to reach the overseas audience. These comparisons may have also improved the reintegration of soldiers into society by easing the harsh transition from war to peace.

⁶⁸ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 74* (Story 3) - *School for Servicemen*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1945), no. V1 8607-0036.

⁶⁹ All quotations in this paragraph are from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 92* (Story 7) - *Gridiron Season Opens*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1945), no. V1 8607-0038.

⁷⁰ Excerpt from the narration of the film as transcribed by the author. LAC, J.P. Rigby collection, *Canadian Army Newsreel No. 105* (Story 6) - *Boom Town Moves*, (Canadian Film and Photo Unit, 1945), no. V1 8607-0039.

For if soldiers were instructed to approach situations, upon their return, by using military theory and techniques, one would imagine that reintegration would have appeared easier and simpler for them.

The inclusion of stories related to the home front suggested that the Film Unit was providing operational support for the overseas army, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian government by attempting to smooth the transition of soldier into civilian. The soldier overseas was inundated with scenes and messages about the prosperity of Canada, and this, juxtaposed against the reality of what was happening in war-torn Germany, the Netherlands, and France, would have produced a powerful contrast. The returning soldier would believe that he was going home to a country that respected his sacrifice overseas and was well equipped to integrate him back into domestic life.

After the Italy campaign, the CFPU continued its ongoing struggle with the NFB over documenting the impending second front in Northwest Europe. The success at D-Day finally put to rest this power struggle with the NFB. Some of the men from Italy were also part of the D-Day Unit, but there were many new cameramen who had never experienced battle. Despite this inexperience, the CFPU recorded highly praised footage of the invasion. Due to the successes of D-Day, the Film Unit increased its output of footage to the commercial newsreel companies and increased its own production of the *Canadian Army Newsreel*. As the relationship between the NFB and the soldier-

cameramen became more amicable, the flow of communication improved between the two bodies, and more CFPU footage was shown in Canada. The NFB saw value in the work of the Film Unit, rather than viewing it as competition, and so took the opportunity to utilize the CFPU's close relationship with soldiers to screen some of its productions. These stories, although possessing news value, were mainly focused on the returning Canadian soldiers. It is impossible to gauge how effective these stories were in assisting with the reintegration of soldiers, but it seems certain that the NFB and the CFPU were more effective in propagating their messages than if they had been working separately. Through the *Newsreel*, the NFB presented its views of a new Canada to soldiers and facilitated their re-introduction to civilian society. The *Canadian Army Newsreel*, once a powerful tool for building the morale of the citizen-soldiers, was used to transform the "professional killers" back into repatriated civilians. Although the Second World War officially ended in May and August 1945, with VE and VJ days respectively, the war-work of the Film Unit did not end. The chief role of the CFPU was to document the activities of the Canadian Army and, as long as the Army remained overseas, as, for instance, part of the Occupation Forces in Germany, the soldier-cameramen continued to document their work for the official war record on film.

CONCLUSION

DOCUMENTARY LEGACY OF THE FILM UNIT

A German army of 120,000 surrendered in the western Netherlands in the first week of May 1945. A few days later the war in Europe was over, but Canada continued to contribute forces to occupy Germany. To document this, and the aftermath of the war, a reorganized field Film Unit, No. 4, worked in Germany until March 1946 when it was finally disbanded.¹

The *Canadian Army Newsreel* continued to be produced after the war and was shown in every camp, hospital and unit where Canadian service personnel were stationed. Although the fighting had stopped, it was still important "to let the troops know, in their own language, the latest Canadian Army News while they await repatriation."² These films were both educational and, for often bored soldiers, a form of entertainment. By January 1946, however, a large number of editorial staff had returned to Canada and the Canadian Film and Photo Unit (CFPU) was no longer able to produce and edit its own films overseas. This work was conducted in Canada.³ There was also not enough manpower to continue the production of the *Canadian Army Newsreel*, and, because of its importance, a replacement product was sought, but failed to materialize as experienced

¹ Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4/3, Letter from Major Sparling to Department of National Defence, 4 February 1946. Another new field Film Unit was created to work with the 6th Division in the Pacific, under the command of Colin McDougall. This Film Unit was sent to the Pacific Theatre, but only arrived at the time of the surrender of the Japanese.

² LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17/3, Letter from Major Gordon Sparling to Editor, Maple Leaf, 6 October 1945.

³ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4/3, Message from CanMilitary to Defensor, 5 January 1946.

film officers and editors were steadily demobilized.⁴ The last issue of the *Canadian Army Newsreel*, No. 106, was recorded on 29 January 1946. In summing up his feelings, Major McDougall wrote to Major Sparling:

I felt a pang of regret to hear that *Canadian Army Newsreel* was closing down after this long time. I have a dim idea of all the sweat and blood and tears which those issues must have cost you all in London. Your reward was in the enjoyment which thousands of troops derived from them in the splendid record which they form for future reference.⁵

Gordon Sparling agreed with the Department of National Defence's suggestion in February 1946 that the permanent Canadian Army should establish a film and photo unit. By doing so, the lessons learned during this war would not be lost.⁶ Massive postwar cutbacks scuttled its formation, but the role of film in documentation, public relations and training was evident, and a film and photographic unit was eventually re-established.⁷

The CFPU created over 2000 stories on the Canadian Army throughout the war.⁸ The films were each catalogued and individual scenes were cross-indexed to facilitate their use for future reference purposes. The CFPU's library also contained documents, pamphlets and books that were used during the production of its movies. The CFPU did more than generate film for contemporary wartime needs: it also built a documentary

⁴ Ibid., Letter from Lieutenant-General JC Murchie to Major CC McDougall, 10 January 1946; Ibid., Message from Defensor to CanMilitary, January 1946; RG 24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17/3, Letter from Major Gordon Sparling to Major CE Nye, 5 February 1946.

⁵ LAC, RG 24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/4/3, Letter from Major CC McDougall to Major Gordon Sparling, 10 January 1946.

⁶ Ibid., Letter from Major Sparling to Department of National Defence, 4 February 1946.

⁷ The Unit is now known as Canadian Forces Combat Camera Team.

⁸ LAC, RG24, Volume 12333, File 4/Film/17/3, Letter from Major Gordon Sparling to Editor, Maple Leaf, 6 October 1945.

archives for future generations.⁹ While cleaning up the film library, Sparling remarked that it is “now in pretty good shape and I think that any continuing organization should do all in its power to protect it. As it stands it is an invaluable film record of the Canadian share in the war. If carelessly handled or neglected it can easily become only a pile of old film.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, such careless handling is exactly what happened.

Shortly after the war, and with the disbandment of the CFPU, the films that were intended to be transferred to the Department of National Defence, were instead sent to the National Film Board of Canada (NFB).¹¹ Under the *National Film Board Act*, the NFB was responsible for the storage and preservation of all government film, including those of the Department of National Defence, and it already had in its possession films from the First World War and the Canadian Motion Picture Bureau.¹² As there were no suitable storage repositories the film was first kept at the Rockcliffe Air Station in Ottawa and later moved to an abandoned hanger in Pendleton, Ontario. The films were not formally processed by the NFB until it began working on its television series, *Canada at War*, in 1957. Many of the motion pictures were no longer identifiable as the production sheets that accompanied them from London had been misplaced or separated from the film cans, and many of the films themselves were badly damaged from the years of neglect and poor storage.¹³ Upon completion of the documentary series, the films were then transferred to the NFB’s storage repository in Kirkland, Quebec, where they met the most

⁹ LAC, RG24, Volume 12332, File 4/Film/11, Letter from CAFU, Public Relations Office, CMHQ to Lieutenant JA Fraser, 24 June 1943.

¹⁰ LAC, RG24, Volume 12230, File 4/Film/4/3, Letter from Major Sparling to Department of National Defence, 4 February 1946.

¹¹ Ibid., Letter from Major Sparling to The War Office, PR 2, 4 February 1946.

¹² Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), unprocessed central registry files, Box 26, File 6-0-14-1, p. 1, 21 October 1948.

¹³ “Canada’s Camera Commandos Scored World ‘Scoop’ on D-Day,” *The Ottawa Journal*, (4 April 1962).

unfortunate of disasters. A large number of early films, and most of the CFPU's film library, were destroyed by a fire in 1967 that raged through the NFB's storage facility.¹⁴ However, the blaze did not obliterate the entire legacy of the Film Unit, as some duplicate motion pictures of the CFPU were located at the Department of National Defence and in the holdings of private individuals. Although many of the Film Unit's theatrical and training productions were lost, as was most of its raw field-based footage, a complete collection of the *Canadian Army Newsreel* still exists, and those films have been transferred to Library and Archives Canada for proper storage and preservation. But an important part of Canada's Second World War legacy was lost when the films burned in 1967, and no photograph or written account can provide the same perspective or visual evidence of a particular event in the same way as the moving image.

The Canadian Army Film Unit was established with four men, "one old Newman-Sinclair camera and one Eyemo camera, one table, two chairs and an empty film tin used as an ashtray."¹⁵ It evolved into a professional unit of close to 200 men and women who were responsible for the popular *Canadian Army Newsreel*, internationally-distributed theatrical pieces and the best footage of the D-Day landing. Although there were power struggles due to the overall film quality and alleged non-professionalism of the Unit, the soldier-cameramen's main responsibility was to create an audio-visual record of the Army's activities in the Second World War. In this they succeeded, even if the filmed

¹⁴ "A Million Feet Lost: Vintage Canadian Film Destroyed by Blaze," *Globe and Mail*, (July 26, 1967); "Irreplaceable Film Destroyed by Fire," *Hamilton Spectator*, (July 26, 1967), "Film Loss Blamed on Government," *The Ottawa Citizen*, (July 26, 1967).

¹⁵ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/1/2, Notes on the History of the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit, n.d. [post 1945].

legacy was poorly preserved by archivists and their wartime role barely appreciated by historians.

While this thesis has attempted to rescue the Canadian Film and Photo Unit from obscurity, it also suggests additional areas for research. Analyses of the use of film to document Canada's war at sea and in the air are needed. Comparisons of the nature and impact of film with other non-print media documenting the war, such as photographs and radio broadcasts, would be useful. Analysing the use of film, and indeed record-creating practices more generally, in Allied and Axis countries, with comparisons to Canada, would offer insights.

Film provides a view into the past, in a manner that textual records cannot. C.P. Stacey, who headed the productions of the Army's official histories of the Second World War, did not think that film had any real use in writing his volumes. However, he did believe that films would be "important from the point of view of the possibilities they present for telling the Canadian people at large, including a great many who will never, by any stretch of imagination, open the Official History, something of what their countrymen did in this war."¹⁶ These films produced by the Canadian Army indeed have been employed in modern documentaries to impart visually to a whole new generation the story of the Canada's soldiers during the Second World War. Film is now accepted as an essential medium for understanding war. One has only to look at television to see the coverage of present-day wars, and the influence that the visual record has exerted on

¹⁶ LAC, RG24, Volume 12330, File 4/Film/2, Note from CP Stacey to Brigadier, General Staff, CMH, 31 March 1941.

public memory and public opinion. Just as television editors carefully select their footage for their productions, so, too, did the Canadian Film and Photo Unit. Modern historians increasingly recognize the need to use film (and other audio-visual records) as important archival sources for their research. Yet, in doing so, historians also need to recognize the archival concept that records have their own history, and that this broader context of creation and contemporary use very much shapes its content.¹⁷ The films of the Canadian Army in the Second World War represent the selected, available perspective crafted by the Canadian Film and Photo Unit under special conditions to serve targeted audiences. As this thesis illustrates, the legacy of war on film needs to be understood within the context in which the Film Unit operated. Notwithstanding Stacey's earlier assessment, Canadian Army film is part of the "official history," and its legacy remains our research opportunity.

¹⁷ Scholarship has flourished within the archival profession in recent years on the theory and concepts of archiving. On the archivist's role as "historian of the record" and researching contexts around records creation and contemporary use in order to enrich such core archival functions as appraisal or description, or to deal with digital records, see Tom Nesmith, "Introduction: Archival Studies in English-Speaking Canada and the North American Rediscovery of Provenance," in Tom Nesmith, *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, N.J., 1993) 1-28, and his "Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship," in Tom Nesmith, *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, N.J., 1993) 159-84; and Terry Cook, "From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85) 28-49, and his "'The Imperative of Challenging Absolutes' in Graduate Archival Education Programs: Issues for Educators and the Profession," *American Archivist* 63 (Fall/Winter 2000) 380-91. For an introduction to much recent writing situating archival studies within the critical theory of the late twentieth century, see the two double-length thematic issues on "Archives, Records, and Power," in *Archival Science: International Journal on Recorded Information* (2: 1/2 and 3/4, 2002) edited by Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook.

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