

Disentangling Moral from Morale: Attempted Suicides in the Canadian Army, 1943–1944

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The following is the story of two men. Two men stationed at the same military training camp in Petawawa, Ontario. Two men who both held one of the lowest ranks in the Canadian Army as gunners during the Second World War. Two men who were both charged with attempted suicide. Two men who had similar cases but vastly different outcomes. The story of these two men, while small and perhaps seemingly inconsequential, illuminates the military structures that were guided by the efforts of the Army to maintain morale through strict discipline that reinforced the moral code that soldiers were expected to follow. Their stories teach us about masculinity, military life, military justice, family, and lastly, suicide and the way it has been defined and understood as a threat to the military establishment which identified suicide as a social contagion early in the development of military law. Those considered carriers of this social contagion, as we will see in the cases of John Lauzon and Albert Mulligan, were secluded, manipulated, silenced, punished, or stripped of legitimacy altogether.

A simple metaphor might fit best here. In the early months of the First World War, the French army suffered an alarming number of casualties. Among the 300,000 French soldiers wounded (some with only minor wounds), 20,000 soldiers had their limbs amputated. The issue was not the initial wound either, rather, it was the infection that spread following the injury. Bacteria, such as *Clostridium perfringens*, quickly spread, infecting the entire limb. In 1915, there was no effective treatment to kill the bacteria. Instead, the infected limb was cut off and removed from the body.

Consider too, a story in the Bible from the book of Matthew that portrays a similar sentiment:

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.¹

This idea, of cutting off the part of the body responsible for sinning, permeates throughout the centuries, especially surrounding the discussions on suicide. It is through this lens that this essay aims to show how the military establishment saw suicide.

¹ Matt. 5:29–30 (KJV).

It is perhaps superfluous to say that suicide has existed as a human phenomenon for time immemorial. The earliest mention of suicide in the written record dates to ancient Egypt where it was written that two brothers had killed themselves over two hundred years earlier during the era of Pharaoh Ramses II (1303–1213 BCE).² Although Western culture has never taken an apathetic approach to suicide, there has never been a consistent stance on the idea of voluntary death either. There was a certain level of tolerance for suicide, and at times, it was even desired. It was not uncommon for people to meet and discuss the least painful ways to die.³ Suicide has, however, typically been viewed in many cultures as a threat to the social order: a social contagion. Many cultures have sought a variety of methods to deter others from pursuing voluntary death.

The philosophical debates on suicide most prominently began in ancient Greece. Ancient Greek philosophers primarily posited that suicide was inherently incongruent with the inclination of the individual to survive. But although suicide was generally not seen as valid or morally correct, the act was not necessarily criminalized either. In cases where a justification for the suicide could be found, such as in the case of terminal illness, there was no punishment. But for those who were perceived as having committed an incomprehensible suicide, they would be punished. The incomprehensibility of suicide led to cultural traditions that did not adequately honour the dead. Those who had died by suicide were not given proper burials and this denial dates to at least the fourth century BCE.⁴ Tampering with the body after death became one of the most common forms to publicly display the attitudes and beliefs of suicide held at the time. In Athens, Greece, there are records where the hand considered guilty of the suicidal act would be denied burial with the rest of the body, and it would be cut off and buried separately.⁵

Plato (424–347 BCE) and Socrates (383–322 BCE) were both opposed to the idea of someone taking their own life. Plato believed that the way society functioned depended too heavily on the role played by each citizen and, therefore, found suicide to be detrimental to the overall function of the state.⁶ Aristotle thought in a similar fashion believing that suicide was not only a crime against the state but that it was also “an act of cowardice.”⁷ Yet despite espousing such strong views against suicide, the ideas posited by Plato and Socrates did not have an immediate impact and the general culture in ancient Greece towards suicide remained relatively indifferent.⁸

² Leonardo Tondo, *A Concise Guide to Understanding Suicide: Epidemiology, Pathophysiology and Prevention* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3.

³ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 3.

⁴ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 3.

⁵ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 3.

⁶ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 4.

⁷ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 4.

⁸ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 4. “Mainly from the 5th and 4th centuries BCE.”

Suicide was also not uncommon in ancient Rome, and it was not particularly discouraged either. Suicides among recently widowed women, women who had been disgraced through rape, men who feared losing their honour, or people who were ill or in their old age all were considered justifiable reasons to pursue voluntary death (and in some cases were praised for doing so).⁹ The culture in ancient Rome was generally indifferent towards people taking their own lives (not so much for enslaved peoples, but free peoples had the agency to pursue self-murder without much societal response). Some disapproved of suicide, such as Seneca (c. 4 BC–65 AD), but this did not have a profound impact on the culture at large. Seneca espoused that death could be “a refuge against the evils of life” but remained opposed to suicide believing that individuals should assert control over their physical body. Despite Seneca’s opposition to suicide, he ultimately took his life in fear of the charges of treason by Emperor Nero. It was not until about the 6th century that suicide would come to be defined as “dishonourable” and in some cases a “crime,” but that societal position was primarily held against “soldiers..., slaves, and embezzlers.”¹⁰

After the conversion of Emperor Constantine (272–337) Christianity went from a sect in Rome to the predominant religion of Europe by the crowning of Charlemagne. With the birth of Christendom, the justice system became the arbiter, not only of what was lawful but of what was moral. The introduction of Christianity led to a shift from a cultural indifference towards suicide to suicide increasingly being seen as an abhorrent act; a direct offence against God. Opinions about religion became more all-consuming and people vehemently opposed those who broke the accords of the community.

With the unifying of a country under One God, as opposed to a pantheon of different interpretations about morality, people began to defend a right way of living. This was further solidified by the teachings of St. Augustine of Hippo (353–430) who reiterated the sixth commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ in his monograph the *City of God*.¹¹ Through this, Augustine cemented the correlation between murder and suicide. St. Augustine further believed that the act of suicide went against the belief that Christians should endure the suffering they encountered while living on earth rather than pursuing ways to escape it. This notion is repeated throughout the New Testament including in Romans:

And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not

⁹ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 4.

¹⁰ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 4.

¹¹ Exod. 20:13.

*ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*¹²

The process of intertwining Greek philosophy and religion is what created the laws, societal beliefs, and attitudes toward suicide in ancient cultures and traces of those responses could still be found throughout the twentieth century and into the modern age (mostly in religious sects). Suicide came to be interpreted as an “insult to God” by “Jewish, Christian, and Moslem religions.”¹³ The idea of self-murder came to be understood through the lens of rationality: “rational behaviour is directed by God and the irrational by the Devil.”¹⁴

The definition of suicide continued to expand into the Middle Ages. The act of duelling soon entered the same realm of voluntary death. There were three councils in the 800s that all explicitly forbade duelling: Châlons in 813, Paris in 829, and Valence in 853. It was around this time as well that some of the earliest English Laws against suicide were implemented under the reign of King Edgar I (943–975). Unlike in earlier ancient cultures, many of these laws did not require the defilement of the bodies of those who had committed suicide but instead required that all assets owned by the individuals were confiscated and came under the property of the state. These laws also made a distinction between those deemed sane at the time of suicide and those considered to be of unsound mind when the act was committed (*non-compos mentis*).¹⁵ Individuals determined to be mentally unsound were exempt from the sinful and criminal connotations typically associated with the act of suicide, deemed at this time as self-murder. During this time, as the definition continued to evolve, the laws continued to shape and bend to adjust to the shifting societal expectations of how those who committed suicide should be treated.

By the eleventh century, the historical records on suicide become less rare. This allows historians to better trace the cultural responses to suicide in judicial and religious records. The primary sources for the occurrence of suicide could primarily be found in the legal records since it was considered immoral and illegal.¹⁶ By the thirteenth century, one of the most notable contributions to the religious discussion of suicide emerged when the Italian Dominican priest, Thomas Aquinas, began writing on how suicide should be perceived. He referenced Aristotle, St. Augustine, and biblical texts to support his claims and to reiterate the teachings on suicide from centuries prior. In Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, he posited several reasons why self-murder was unlawful and sinful.

¹² Rom. 5:3–5.

¹³ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 3.

¹⁴ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 3.

¹⁵ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 6.

¹⁶ Carole M. Cusack, “Self-Murder, Sin, and Crime: Religion and Suicide in the Middle Ages,” *Journal of Religion and Violence* 6, no. 2 (2018), 206.

The harsh stance taken by Aquinas and others at this time reverberated throughout society. The rituals that society engaged in took a gripping and graphic turn. Imagine the disturbing images of bodies being severed and left as fodder for animals, the bodies of women being dragged through the streets, dead bodies being nailed to wooden boards and sent out to sea, and bodies placed on display at the side of the road with a stake driven through them (which was still common practice and required under the old English common law system until 1823). One of the most symbolic images to emerge from this period was the idea that the very bodies of suicide victims were social contagions: “It was believed that the body of a suicide could contaminate the land, lakes or rivers, that if pregnant women approached the burial site of a suicide, her offspring would follow the same fate.”¹⁷

Around the same time, however, various heretical sects of Christianity included suicide as part of their belief system. This was most evidently displayed in the heretical faction known as Albigensianism which survived in certain rural areas until the fourteenth century. In Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s translated monograph, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, Ladurie explores the Cathar ritual of suicide known as the *endura*.¹⁸ The Cathar belief was that near the end of your life you needed to undergo a process of purification to secure your salvation, starving yourself of vices including food. The *endura* would ultimately lead to the person becoming completely emaciated, dying of starvation days later. Occurring alongside heretical sects which called for suicide, the Catholic Church was becoming increasingly aware of the doctrine it professed and had a growing intolerance for religious factions which went against the prescribed dogma. This resulted in the Roman Inquisition, which aimed to root out all wayward factions of the Catholic faith, which only made obvious the need for unified doctrine.

The Renaissance period, as well as the Protestant Reformation, ushered in new ways of thinking. Although many of the attitudes and beliefs toward suicide remained, they no longer went completely unchecked. Especially after the harrowing scenes of the Inquisition, the Reformation challenged “the rules and rigidity of the Catholic Church” and although suicide was still not deemed acceptable, the taboo surrounding the topic lessened.¹⁹ Alongside these developments, living conditions had vastly improved and many philosophers began reimagining how suicide should be defined. Some argued that the issue of suicide was best understood through the lens of freedom; as the ultimate display of individual agency.

¹⁷ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 6.

¹⁸ Georges Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 19.

¹⁹ Tondo, *A Concise Guide*, 7.

There were even some from religious spheres, that did not oppose suicide and instead found that in some cases there could be justification for its occurrence. This was the case of John Donne (1572–1631), an Anglican clergyman, who wrote about self-homicide in his book *Biathanatos* (*Violent Death*). Written in 1608, Donne asserted that it was not always irrational or contrary to human nature for someone to see suicide as a viable option. Unlike in previous religious texts that vehemently opposed suicide and used biblical texts to prove the sinful nature of the act, Donne used the same texts for the opposite reason: to find justification for suicide. Donne listed biblical characters who facilitated their own death if not killing themselves outright by using examples such as Jesus, Samson, Saul and Judas as examples. Donne also challenged the prevailing view toward suicide in the military. He suggested that suicides in the military should be seen through the same lens as those who retire from the military. Donne found it illogical that suicides in the military were condemned when the outcome was essentially the same when men retired. Donne's book was only published posthumously in 1647 due to the nature of the content and had little impact on the religious perception of self-murder.

The root of military law stems from the innate need for a militaristic body to preserve the *esprit de corps* through discipline. From this sense, it is understandable that for a military establishment to be successful, military law, and the enforcement of the prescribed laws through a court martial, is imperative.²⁰ The foundation of the earliest military justice model stems from the Roman army which implemented the *magistri militum* (master of soldiers).²¹ Many of the same offences that Roman soldiers could be charged with were transferred into some of the earliest military codes in Britain, including things such as cowardice and desertion.²² Although there were early forms of the court martial in Germany (*militargerichts*) and France (*conseils de guerre*) the age of chivalry and the military code written under King Gustavus Adolphus were two of the founding contributions to what eventually came to be the basis for military law codes in Britain, the United States, and Canada.²³ It was not until the late 1600s, however, that military law came to be more systematized, formal, and constant.

The form of military law that could be found up until about the 1950s in Canada, Britain, and the United States, was not established as permanent law in Britain until about 1689. Prior to that year, when the Mutiny Act was passed, the King of England was only able to enforce the Articles of War during wartime. As soon as the war was over, the soldiers would resume their lives before the war and were no longer bound to the Articles of War. For example, if you stole from a fellow soldier during the

²⁰ David A. Schlueter, "The Court-Martial: An Historical Survey," *Military Law Review* 87 (1980), 139. According to Footnote 34, the exact origins of the term "court martial" remains unknown.

²¹ Schlueter, "The Court-Martial," 131.

²² Schlueter, "The Court-Martial," 131.

²³ Schlueter, "The Court-Martial," 131.

war this could be punished by the person accused of the theft having their head shaved and subsequently burned with hot boiling pitch (or tar) being poured over his bare head. But once the war ended, the King could no longer discipline soldiers for their behaviour during the war. With the passage of the Mutiny Act in 1689, however, the King of England was able to maintain a professional army and therefore, needed to be able to discipline soldiers both during times of war and of peace.

Prior to the First World War, the establishment of a military law code already had a firm foundation. The *Manual of Military Law* had been published throughout the centuries in the United Kingdom, and more recently in Canada, but it was edited and republished for military use in 1907 which was used throughout the First World War. The primary difference between the one published in 1907 and the one published in 1929, was that soldiers could no longer be executed under the Army Act, except for a limited number of crimes. Harold Pringle, who was executed on July 5, 1945, was the last Canadian soldier to be executed in the military due to being found guilty of desertion as well as being an accessory to murder. In the aftermath of the Second World War, many nations reconsidered their stance on military executions.²⁴

The *Manual of Military Law* (1929) listed suicide under “Miscellaneous Crimes” in the Army Act, Section 38:

Every person subject to military law who commits any of the following offences; that is to say,
(1.) Fights, or promotes or is concerned in, or connives at, fighting a duel; or
(2.) Attempts to commit suicide,
*Shall on conviction by court martial be liable, if an officer, to be cashiered, or to suffer less punishment as in this Act mentioned, and if a soldier, to suffer imprisonment, or such less punishment as is in this Act mentioned.*²⁵

Meanwhile, the law for suicide under the criminal code in Canada stated the following:

212. Every one who
(a) Counsels or procures a person to commit suicide, or
(b) Aids and abets a person to commit suicide,
Whether suicide ensues or not, is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for fourteen years.

²⁴ W.J. Lawson, “Canadian Military Law,” *Canadian Bar Review* XXIX (1951), 241.

²⁵ *Manual of Military Law*, 7th ed. (H.M.S.O., 1940), 456.

213. Every one who attempts to commit suicide is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.²⁶

From 1892, when the criminal code was first enacted in Canada until 1954, the criminal code retained its stance on suicide and attempted suicide. Many of the laws regarding suicide remained the same until suicide and attempted suicide were decriminalized in Canada in 1972.

When the first studies of death began appearing in the 1970s and 1980s, death by suicide was “conspicuously absent” from the literature.²⁷ The discourse on suicide, let alone military suicidology, is far less robust than the general study of death. The reasons for this are multifaceted. The history of death itself offers a much broader range of primary sources that can be utilized in its study. Sources such as parish registers from over the centuries offer detailed accounts of those in the parish who died. But since suicide has predominantly been viewed as a moral wrong or as a crime, parish registers offer no assistance in studying voluntary death since those who died by suicide were denied traditional religious burials. The history of suicide demands a search for a much broader range of sources, with judicial documents playing a dominant role.

By the 1990s, suicide as well as soldier suicide, began receiving attention, not only in the field of historical study but more broadly.²⁸

²⁶ “Criminal Code, 1953–1954,” *List of Proclamations, Elizabeth II., Vol. I*, (Canada. 1954), 436–437.

²⁷ Minois, *History of Suicide*, 1.

²⁸ For important contributions to the study of suicide more broadly (although many include soldier suicides, suicide in the military throughout the centuries, and the correlation between war and suicide), see Edwin S. Shneidman, *Comprehending Suicide: Landmarks in 20th-Century Suicidology* (American Psychological Association, 2002); Stephen H. Koslow, Pedro Ruiz, and Charles B. Nemeroff, *A Concise Guide to Understanding Suicide: Epidemiology, Pathophysiology and Prevention* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Georges Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Antoon A. Leenaars, *Suicide in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 1998); John Weaver and David Wright, *Histories of Suicide: International Perspectives on Self-Destruction in the Modern World* (University of Toronto Press, 2009).

For important contributions to the study of military suicidology (including the psychological impacts of warfare that lead to suicide and suicide ideation) specifically, see Terry Copp and Mark Osborne Humphries, *Combat Stress in the 20th Century: The Commonwealth Perspective* (Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2010); Shay-Lee Belik et al., “Relationship between Traumatic Events and Suicide Attempts in Canadian Military Personnel,” *PsycEXTRA Dataset*, 2008; S.-L. Belik et al., “Are Canadian Soldiers More Likely to Have Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Attempts than Canadian Civilians?,” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 172, no. 11 (2010), 1250–1258; W. R. Feasby, *Official History of the Canadian Medical Services, 1939–1945* (E. Cloutier, Queen's Printer, 1953); Craig J. Bryan et al., “Agency Is Associated with Decreased Emotional Distress and Suicidal Ideation in Military Personnel,” *Archives of Suicide Research* 18, no. 3 (2014), 241–250; Laura Bogaert et al., *Suicide in the Canadian Forces, 1995 to 2012* (Department of National Defence, Directorate of Force Health

Especially beginning in 2001, there was a notable increase in the study of soldier suicide because of the outbreak of the war in Afghanistan (2001–2021). This led to further questions being raised about the history of suicide in the military. Prior to the 1990s, research on suicide was practically nonexistent. There remains a notable gap in the literature, but the discourse has potential for increased study for two reasons. Firstly, the discourse on suicide has evolved alongside societal trends that have increasingly embraced discussions around mental health. Secondly, additional primary sources have recently emerged. Specifically, the court martial records from the Canadian Army during the Second World War became accessible to the public online. These sources will provide the opportunity to understand how suicide was perceived in the Canadian Army through the perspective of military law. The cases of John Lauzon and Albert Mulligan are two of the first to be studied in relation to suicide ideation and attempt in the Second World War.

After the First World War, the Canadian Army gained a heightened awareness of the psychological impacts of warfare. About 2.5 percent of all Canadian men who served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War suffered from shell shock, and that figure is only for the cases that were diagnosed, so the figure was likely much higher.²⁹ The attempt to combat this and prevent the occurrence of psychological breakdowns in future wars began almost immediately in the aftermath of the First World War. It was around this time too, that Canada began to see psychiatry emerge as a professional discipline and Europe continued to see an already established discipline (which emerged in the eighteenth century) continue to flourish and become more reputable.³⁰

The most notable development in psychiatry, that was pertinent to the screening and selection of soldiers, was the mental hygiene movement (although some committees dedicated to mental hygiene were created before the First World War, the movement began to gain traction most prominently in the inter-war years).³¹ Clifford W. Beers was a prominent psychiatrist who founded the National Committee for Mental Hygiene in the United States in 1909. In Britain, the Central Association for Mental Welfare was established in 1913 under the purview of the Eugenics Society (it was founded primarily as a direct response to the Mental Deficiency

Protection/Epidemiology, 2013); Craig J. Bryan et al., “Understanding and Preventing Military Suicide,” *Archives of Suicide Research* 16, no. 2 (2012), 95–110; James R. Marshall, “Political Integration and the Effect of War on Suicide: United States, 1933–76,” *Social Forces* 59, no. 3 (1981), 771.

²⁹ Copp and McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, 13; Humphries, “War’s Long Shadow,” 513. Over 15,000 Canadian servicemen were admitted for various psychiatric reasons in the First World War, 9,000 of which were considered to be suffering from shell shock.

³⁰ Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 1.

³¹ Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry*, 161.

Act).³² Clarence Hincks, a Canadian psychiatrist, was attentive to these trends and had been following Beers' work for years. Hincks was also eager to establish a mental hygiene committee of his own. Hincks and Beers eventually developed a plan to found a similar organization in Canada, and on January 26, 1918, the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene was born (present-day Canada Mental Health Association). The CNCHM primarily focused on five objectives: first to become involved in the recruitment and selection of soldiers as well as providing care for soldiers returning from war, second, to participate in the screening of immigrants coming into Canada, thirdly to provide additional facilities for the treatment of mental health patients, fourthly, to provide facilities that can adequately attend to the needs of those diagnosed with severe mental illnesses, and, lastly, to fund research dedicated to finding preventative methods for mental illness.³³

Despite the Canadian Army (as well as the British) wanting to implement an effective method to screen out those deemed 'mentally unfit' for service, neither the Canadians nor the British employed any kind of intelligence or psychiatric screening prior to enlistment. However, and perhaps stemming from an immediate sense of regret, both began experimenting with intelligence tests in early 1940.³⁴ Desmond Morton notes on the broken enlistment system employed during the First World War: "Sympathetic or careless medical officers had accepted thousands of recruits who harboured every imaginable physical or mental disability."³⁵ This had initially inspired a total revamping of the enlistment process following the First World War, but as Humphries insightfully notes, many lessons were "unlearned" in the interwar years.³⁶ Due to a seeming sense of regret, it was not long after the intelligence testing was implemented that the Canadian Army began implementing psychiatric screening in 1943, such personnel testing was primarily led by psychiatrist Colonel Brock Chisholm, who would later become the first director-general of the World Health Organization.³⁷

This led to monitoring morale through a medical purview, which had its own challenges. It was not as easy as it seemed to identify and screen out 'contaminated' soldiers. In many ways, the desire of the Canadian

³² J. Toms, "Mind the Gap: Mind, the Mental Hygiene Movement and the Trapdoor in Measurements of Intellect," *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research* 54 (2010), 18.

³³ Erna Kurbegovic and Colette Leung, "CNCHM: Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene," *The Eugenics Archives*, September 14, 2013, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/tree/5233c8595c2ec50000000008f>.

³⁴ Copp and McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, 27.

³⁵ Desmond Morton, "Resisting the Pension Evil: Bureaucracy, Democracy and Canada's Board of Pension Commissioners, 1916–33," *The Canadian Historical Review* 68 (1987), 208.

³⁶ Mark Osborne Humphries, *A Weary Road: Shell Shock in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914–1918* (University of Toronto Press, 2019), 13.

³⁷ W.R. Feasby, *Official History of the Canadian Medical Services 1939–1945: Clinical Subjects, Vol. 2* (Queen's Printer, 1953), 58.

Army to preserve morale in the military camps (as well as overseas) led to the inconsistencies between the letter of the law and how it was implemented. Morale was now no longer maintained through discipline alone, but as the psychologists and psychiatrists became more involved in enlistment and in questioning the actions of soldiers, morale came to be surveilled medically as well. Below are the cases of two soldiers. Both cases highlight the broader efforts of the military to ensure the system of morality was upheld for morale to be preserved by punishing or otherwise ignoring those deemed to be potential ‘pollutants’ to the military body.

There was only one road in Petawawa, the town dusty, dry, and filled with soldiers and the occasional wife or towns person there to support a military town. The area was dense with forests, which in the sunlight could be beautiful, but was often overshadowed by the nuisance of black bears and the humid months that filled the forests with mosquitoes and ticks. In the grim months of winter, life often felt dull and meaningless. At the beginning of this scene, we find more than one soldier who was sickened by military life.

The morning of January 7, 1944, started like any other. It was Friday, and the men at Petawawa Military Camp continued in their typical morning regimen. They woke up around 0600 hours, shaved, made their beds, and headed to the mess hall for breakfast. Unless assigned to other duties, men were expected to attend the parade at 0715 hours. Gunner Johnston was on sanitary duty that morning and began working just after breakfast, around 0645 hours, in the ablution room which served both Huts 8 and 9. That morning Johnston’s friend, and fellow Gunner, John Lauzon was returning from his leave over the Christmas break. Johnston began sweeping and carrying on with his duties until he noticed Lauzon standing in the corner of the ablution room by the stove. Johnston walked over to chat with Lauzon, who was holding tightly a woollen scarf.

Lauzon did not acknowledge Johnston but stood there motionless, looming over the stove. Johnston piped up, “What’s the matter?” Lauzon did not answer. Johnston decided to turn back and head to finish some things before getting the coal to fix the jacket heater. Lauzon suddenly responded as Johnston was walking away, “I am fed up and disgusted with things.”³⁸ Johnston tried to cheer him up, but Lauzon did not respond. Johnston gathered up his sweepings and took them outside to discard them and then went to pick up some coal to add to the jacket heater. About five minutes later, right when the parade was set to begin, Johnston returned to the ablution room. The room appeared empty, and Johnston assumed

³⁸ Witness statement of Gunner J.O. Johnston, March 1, 1944, in John Oclad Lauzon, “District Court Martial: Lauzon, J.O. B-11506. Gnr.,” March 16, 1944, File RG 150, Reel T-15667, Images 4378-4391, Library and Archives Canada, Heritage Canadiana, accessed January 21, 2022, https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_t15667/4371?r=0&s=3.

Lauzon had headed to the parade. As he walked in, he noticed Gunner Lauzon facing into the last stall. His feet were six inches from the ground. A woollen scarf was tied around the two by four above him, and Lauzon hung there motionless. Johnston dropped the two pails of coal and ran over to loosen the scarf from Lauzon's neck. After lifting him down, Johnston pulled the noose over Lauzon's head. A moment later, regaining his breath and turning to Johnston, Lauzon said, "you stopped me from doing this, but I am going to do it just the same."

Lauzon got up and left the ablution room. He saw Bombardier Beechner walking towards him. He stopped Beechner and muttered, "put me in the guard room." Beechner looked at Lauzon. His eyes seemed to bulge. "How come?" Beechner asked. "I tried to hang myself." Johnston walked out from the ablution room and noticed Beechner talking to Lauzon. "Is this true, Johnston?" Beechner asked. "Yes, sir," Johnston answered. As Beechner went to report the incident to Sergeant Davies, Johnston and Lauzon walked back to Hut 9 and Lauzon sat on the edge of the bed while Beechner spoke with Sergeant Davies.

He did not look up as Johnston looked on, he silently sat for fifteen minutes before two guards came to take watch. Lauzon now left alone without his companion, unsure and despondent, stared on as his superiors discussed the unforeseen situation. After some time, they commanded him to parade before Major Heinsworth. Embarrassed and still in shock, he returned to the ablution to give an account of what happened. After his short responses, they brought him to the Medical Inspection Room (MIR) where Captain Zeldin, the medical officer, examined his neck for marks unsure of the protocol to follow in a case like this. After the physical examination, he asked further questions in which to gauge Lauzon's current mental state.

On opposite sides of Petawawa Military Camp, laid the most abhorred of residents. The Detention Barracks on one side and Camp 33 on the other. A few months before Lauzon's trial, another was tried for the same crime with a different outcome. Unlike Lauzon's relative youth and inexperience, Gunner Albert Mulligan had been enlisted for four years and had half a dozen court martials. Having run away several times without leave, once up to sixty-five days when he was forcibly returned. Unlike the generally light ruling of Lauzon, Mulligan was already known and disliked by the Military Court.

Mulligan had enlisted in August of 1939 in Kingston and was soon shipped to Nova Scotia where he spent two years at the Fortress Headquarters in Halifax. During this time, he married his childhood sweetheart on December 6, 1939, and she became pregnant soon after. Due to his living in barracks and the difficulty of her pregnancy, she felt alienated and returned to Fort William, Quebec, to have the support of her family for when she gave birth. In February 1941, in the final month of her pregnancy, Mulligan received word that she was ill, and he requested compassionate leave. He was denied. A few weeks later, on February 22, when he was reporting for duty, he passed a junior clerk who offered his

sympathies. He was bewildered and asked what the junior clerk meant. The man replied that his wife was dead. Shocked, Mulligan went to see the telegram that the clerk had mentioned. It was dated the night before. He once again asked for compassionate leave and this time it was granted. It took him four days to reach Fort William, leaving him with only forty-eight hours to grieve, bury his wife, and meet his newborn child. Stressed that he would overstay his granted amount of leave, Mulligan hurried back, making it to Halifax on the tenth day to return to duty.

Over the next few months, he grew increasingly despondent and depressed. The death of his wife had had a detrimental effect on him. It became all the more difficult to find the previous interest he had taken in his work before his wife's death.³⁹ He asked the Fortress Commander for a transfer back to Ontario, and he was denied. In his grief and loneliness, he impulsively remarried. For a brief moment, Mulligan had what he hoped for. He was preparing to be sent overseas with his regiment, his wife was content living with her family, and he was able to occasionally visit on weekends. His melancholy had begun to lift, only for the Fortress Commander to finally grant his long-deferred request. It is here that Mulligan found himself at Petawawa Military Camp.

Having finally situated himself in Halifax he found himself uprooted once again, his second wife (like his first) found herself in a different province from her family and was unable to live with her husband. She reluctantly lived with Mulligan's parents, having no other viable options. She quickly learned just how unwanted she was. His parents, aggravated with his quick remarriage, and their new tenant, made the transition even more difficult. His wife, increasingly feeling the isolation, incessantly wrote pleas to Mulligan requesting his involvement.

He was granted a weekend pass to visit his family but fell ill and was hospitalized for two weeks in Ottawa. During this time his regiment, the 87th Field Battery, was shipped overseas. When Mulligan returned to Petawawa, he was not assigned duty for two weeks which exacerbated his despondency and made him feel as if he was the "lost soldier of the camp."⁴⁰ Impatiently waiting for an assignment, or any indication of belonging, Mulligan eventually decided to go to the Training Centre himself. When he inquired about his duty, the clerk was surprised as he could not find anyone by his name in the directory. "I just didn't exist," he thought.⁴¹ It was here, in 1942, that Mulligan began his reputation as a problem soldier.

³⁹ Statement of Albert Nevel Mulligan, n.d., in Albert Nevel Mulligan, "District Court Martial: Mulligan, A.N. P-4574. Gnr.," March 11, 1944, File RG 150, Reel T-15683, Image 3620, Library and Archives Canada, Heritage Canadiana, accessed January 21, 2022, https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_t15683/3416.

⁴⁰ Mulligan, statement, in Mulligan, "District Court Martial," Reel T-15683, Image 3620.

⁴¹ Mulligan, statement, in Mulligan, "District Court Martial," Reel T-15683, Image 3620.

After feeling disregarded by the military on multiple occasions, he chose to prioritize his family, knowing that the welfare of his wife rested on his shoulders. He was constantly reminded of how his first wife died without his care and he did not want to make the same mistake again. This compounded with the unclear status of when his deployment would be, given that his regiment had already been shipped to France and Mulligan wanted to be sent overseas. He wanted to fulfil his duties. But he often was faced with the decision of choosing between his family and military obligations.

Between his battalion leaving and the fraught situation with his family, he no longer felt obligated to respect a law that rarely took his needs into account. Beginning in the early months of 1942, Mulligan repeatedly left the camp without approved leave. He went to obtain lodging for his wife in Ottawa who could no longer stand staying with his parents, especially given her lung condition and nervous debility. Mulligan began finding other ways to support his wife as it became increasingly clear that staying in Ottawa was no longer an option. Knowing full well that he would receive punishment either way he travelled to Fort William to visit his child. While here, Mulligan developed a curious skin condition that required hospitalization. It was not long before he was apprehended by the local authorities and forcibly returned to Petawawa.

Another six months passed, and it was as if something in Mulligan snapped. He felt deeply disrespected: he had been in the Army for nearly four years and had repeatedly been promised that he would be deployed overseas in time to meet up with his regiment, only to never be sent over at all. His friends and relatives frequently made fun of him asking him why he was, “wearing [a] uniform for so long and [was] still unable to get over[seas] despite the period of time... [he had spent] in the Army... [why he] was still posted to a Training Battery.”⁴² Mulligan felt inadequate and unable to fulfil his role, as a husband, a father, or his duty as a soldier. It was here that Mulligan became disaffected with his duties. And on January 20, 1943, he took off again, this time for a period of six months. During this time, he impersonated a Staff Sergeant which made the charges and the potential punishment much more severe. He was apprehended in June, only this time they were not so lenient given the gravity of the situation. He was imprisoned and sentenced to six months in the Detention Barracks. His pay was suspended, and his wife and child were no longer eligible to receive the Subsistence Allowance they were previously entitled to.

After four months in detention on the night of October 31, 1943, Albert Mulligan received another dull super in his cell. During his duties, he had walked by the pressing table and had slipped a razor blade into his pocket. He now took it, crumbling the blade between his hands. He placed

⁴² Mulligan, “District Court Martial,” Reel T-15683, Images 3532–3533.

it in an old piece of chewing gum. He then placed it in between the pieces of his stale bread. Without giving it much more thought, he ate the bread.

The next day Mulligan began feeling a pain in his stomach. He carried on with his morning and went to attend the lecture being given by Sergeant Houston in the barracks. After the lecture, Mulligan walked up to Sgt. Houston. "Can I speak with you? Privately?" Mulligan muttered.⁴³ Sgt. Houston asked what the trouble was, and Mulligan responded, "I'm in a hell of a fix."⁴⁴ Mulligan said how he had swallowed a razor blade the night before with his supper. Sgt. Houston was in disbelief. Mulligan was the last man in the barracks who would consider doing such a thing. Mulligan begged Sgt. Houston to help him stating that he could not stand the pain any longer. Despite his disbelief, Sgt. Houston gave him a few laxatives and took him to Sgt. Chance, who was in charge of the barracks at that time. Sgt. Houston wanted to see if he could repeat the story without changing it.

Mulligan retold the story, with the same details to Sgt. Chance, repeating everything that he had originally told Sgt. Houston. Sgt. Chance could hardly believe the story. He thought Mulligan was an intelligent man, and that he had been doing well. Mulligan had even been assisting in the Legal Education Services in the barracks. That same day, Captain McCready oversaw the Military Detention Barracks and was informed of the situation. Captain McCready demanded that Mulligan be paraded before him to question the veracity of his statement. "You better not be up to something mischievous," Mulligan responded by saying that what McCready heard was true.⁴⁵ Mulligan told McCready that he had been feeling depressed owing to the unfortunate conditions at home. Immediately, Captain McCready had the medical authorities called.

Immediately after Captain Richardson received Mulligan for a physical examination, he called for an ambulance. About twenty minutes later, the ambulance arrived, and Mulligan was taken to the hospital, where he was admitted to Petawawa Military Hospital on November 1, 1943. Major Stephenson received Mulligan and after physically examining Mulligan, Major Stephenson sent Mulligan to receive an X-Ray. The X-Rays confirmed the doubts of both Sgt. Houston and Captain McCready. Twelve radiopaque foreign bodies were found lying at the bottom of Mulligan's stomach.

On November 17, Mulligan's medical treatment became much more invasive. Mulligan continued to have X-Rays, and each time the number of razor blade pieces began to decrease. This indicated to Major Stephenson that the two pieces no longer visible in the X-Ray, had dropped

⁴³ Mulligan, "District Court Martial," Reel T-15683, Image 3433.

⁴⁴ Witness statement of Sgt. J.E. Houston, January 21, 1944, in Mulligan, "District Court Martial," Reel T-15683, Image 3435.

⁴⁵ Witness statement of Captain J.E. McCready, January 21, 1944, in Mulligan, "District Court Martial," Reel T-15683, Image 3440.

low enough that they could be extracted through a sigmoidal procedure. Since all the razor blade pieces were not extracted, Mulligan was then given barium meal and castor oil. Four days later, on November 21, the rest of the pieces were extracted through the same procedure. The pieces that were pulled from Mulligan's body were small, had a bluish hue, and were about one-sixth the size of a normal Gillette razor blade. All the pieces that were extracted were taken over and submitted to the Court of Inquiry to be used as evidence in Mulligan's trial set to take place on February 7, 1944.

After the last of the razor pieces were removed from Mulligan's body, he was discharged from the hospital and returned to the Detention Barracks to finish his current sentence and await his upcoming trial. While awaiting his trial, Major Moir came to question Mulligan on January 17, 1944, to determine whether he was mentally fit to undergo the trial. After interviewing Mulligan, Major Moir determined that Mulligan was not only mentally fit now but also determined that at the time of his attempt he was too. Mulligan told Moir that he was hoping he would die; that the blades would have killed him. Although Moir had never seen such a case involving swallowing sharp objects to cause death, Moir believed Mulligan.

It is at that point that the records of John Lauzon and Albert Mulligan end, but their stories still leave many more questions to be considered.⁴⁶ These men represent two different misinterpretations of the letter of the law for the sake of morale. Little is known about the civilian life of John Lauzon. He could have been married, but a family life, if it existed, was never referenced in relation to his attempt on his life. He never speaks directly at trial but through the witnesses that quote him and the way he is perceived he seems quite young, perhaps even underage when he enlisted. It was not uncommon for young men to impulsively join the army, along with their peers, only to later regret the monumentous decision they made. Gunner Johnston, the man who found him, references in testimony that he had met Lauzon only two months prior, suggesting that this feeling sank rather quickly for him.

Whether it was his perceived youth or to conceal his true depression, the defending officer suggested that Lauzon never wanted to take his own life. Instead proposing that he was merely dabbling in theatrics. It seemed that the trial itself, though with a presumed agenda to convict him, wanted to go to great lengths to question the legitimacy of his disaffection. This goes back to the idea that the military was to be void of mentally defective recruits as it was expected to be an undiluted microcosm of society. Lauzon, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, was found not guilty to the charges of attempted suicide and was ordered to remain in training, despite clearly stating that he had no desire to be transferred to a new military camp, as he wanted to get out of the army

⁴⁶ Both of their cases are still bound by privacy restrictions and only family members are eligible to gain access to them through the Library and Archives Canada.

completely. As he stated to Captain Zeldin, the medical officer who assessed him, “I would rather be dead than hanging around Petawawa.”⁴⁷

On the contrary, Albert Mulligan maintained a keen desire to serve his country, even after being stripped of his permission to remain an active soldier. Like Lauzon, Mulligan was found not guilty of attempted suicide. However, Mulligan, unlike Lauzon, was given a second charge that of, “intending to injure himself,” and was sentenced to eight months of imprisonment and was diagnosed with a “Psychopathic Personality.”⁴⁸ It is quite likely that if Mulligan had been granted leave to visit his first wife, when she was severely ill, allowed to travel overseas to join up with his regiment or at the very minimum, had been seen by anyone at Petawawa that he would never have descended into a ‘problem soldier.’

It is important to consider when looking at his case, that prior to Petawawa, during Mulligan’s three previous years at various military camps there was never the slightest indication of a minor infraction. Neither Lauzon nor Mulligan was psychologically impacted by warfare, but both were disaffected by military life. Both were denied basic needs in the efforts of the military to preserve morale. We do not know what happened to John Lauzon, as we have no records indicating his discharge or his death, but we do know that Albert Mulligan was dishonourably discharged on May 4, 1944, following his sentence in the Detention Barracks, he died twenty-four days later. In the end, it was not the battlefields of France but the desire to preserve the perception of the military that cost Mulligan his life.

209 Canadian servicemen, 186 of them below the rank of officer, took their lives in military training camps in Canada and the United Kingdom during the Second World War.⁴⁹ These deaths, as illustrated through the cases of Lauzon and Mulligan, show that when morale is equated to morality it has a devastating effect on the lives of soldiers. This was something that had been learned through the psychological impacts of the First World War but was discarded in the quest to purge polluted bodies from the military populace. Traces of this societal code can be seen from the first recorded mention of suicide in history, throughout the Middle Ages, into the Renaissance, and is something that persists in the modern age.

In ancient cultures, bodies would be brutalized to stand as a deterrence for the collective. In the Canadian military in the twentieth century, not acknowledging suicide was the primary method of deterrence

⁴⁷ Lauzon, “District Court Martial,” Reel T-15683, Image 4375.

⁴⁸ Psychiatric assessment, December 9, 1943, in Mulligan, “District Court Martial,” Reel T-15683, Image 3494.

⁴⁹ Feasby, *Official History of the Canadian Medical Services 1939–1945: Clinical Subjects*, Vol. 2, 425. A large number of these occurred in Canadian military training camps (ninety-four), the second highest was overseas in training camps in the United Kingdom (ninety-three), and the places with the smallest number of cases were in the Mediterranean theatre with twelve suicides and ten cases in North-West Europe.

with the belief that it would preserve morale. Both cases show that despite incriminating evidence, neither man was ultimately found guilty as it would implicate not the men but the military establishment itself. It would suggest that the military was capable of creating someone who would commit the 'abhorrent act' of suicide. And in the case of military training camps, unfortunately, they could not reassign the blame to the mentally distorting nature of the battlefield.

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