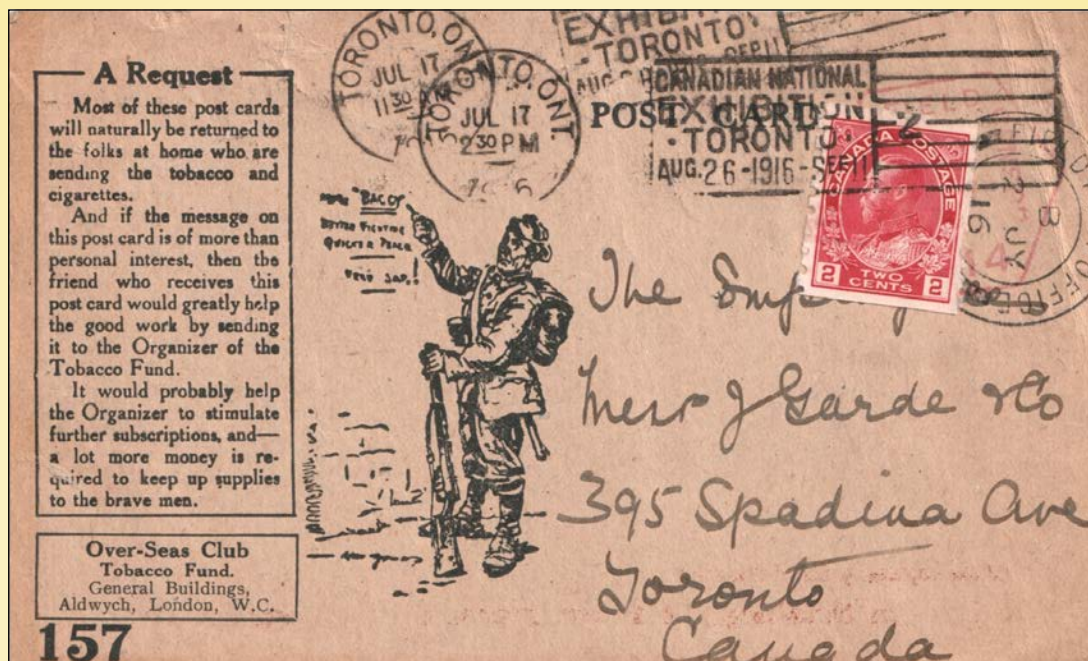


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TOBACCO FUNDS IN WORLD WAR I - A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE



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TOBACCO FUNDS IN WORLD WAR I

– A Canadian Perspective

BY JEAN WANG

In World War I, decades before the health dangers of smoking were recognized, newspapers and organizations such as the Over-Seas Club in London set up charitable funds to send cigarettes and tobacco (“smokes”) to British Empire troops fighting overseas. For soldiers, smoking relieved stress and boredom, boosted morale, created a sense of camaraderie, and provided a momentary escape from the daily horrors of the battlefield (Figure 1). Smoke masked the stench of death and the squalor of the trenches. Smokes were considered so essential to soldiers’ well-being and effectiveness that they were included in rations issued to men on active service; smoking became part of soldier culture.



Figure 1. Daily Mail Battle Pictures. Caption at the back reads: Before battle, in battle, and after battle, our “Tommies” are ready for a “fag”. These men are lighting up after a scrap.

Providing smokes for the troops was viewed as patriotic, a means for people at home to contribute to the war effort. The funds collected donations from subscribers, along with contributions from tobacco manufacturers.

Every parcel of smokes sent to the front included a postcard with the name and address of the donor so that the recipient could reply with a message of thanks. The returned postcards gave civilians a tangible connection to the men serving overseas, and these souvenirs stimulated further donations.

The British War Office assisted by providing transportation and distribution of donated tobacco to the front, and the French and Belgian governments agreed to allow such tobacco to enter duty free.

In 1914, Canada was a self-governing dominion of the British Empire but did not control its own foreign affairs. This meant that when Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, Canada was also at war. By the end of the war, more than 600,000 Canadians had enlisted for service overseas, out of a population of just under eight million in 1914. At home, Canadian contributions to the tobacco funds took many forms, including donations from individuals, the establishment of Canadian newspaper tobacco funds, and the supply of smokes by Canadian tobacco companies.

BERT THOMAS CARTOONS ON TOBACCO REPLY POSTCARDS

Cartoonist Herbert “Bert” Samuel Thomas was born in Newport, South Wales and served as a Private in the Artists’ Rifles. His most famous cartoon shows a British “Tommy Atkins” lighting his pipe and quipping “Arf a mo’ Kaiser!” (that is, “Hold on a moment



Figure 2. “Arf a mo’ Kaiser!” cartoon by Bert Thomas on an appeal postcard from *The Weekly Dispatch* (right) and on a tobacco reply postcard mailed from the Western Front by a Corporal with the 1st Lincolnshire Regiment (below).





Figure 3. "Are we downhearted?" appeal postcard from *The Weekly Dispatch*.

Kaiser while I have my smoke!"). Thomas provided this cartoon, drawn in less than fifteen minutes, to *The Weekly Dispatch*, a prominent British Sunday newspaper, to use in their tobacco fund appeals; the cartoon was also printed on reply postcards early in the war (Figure 2).

However, the "Arf a mo' Kaiser!" cartoon was soon replaced by a different

Bert Thomas cartoon depicting a Tommy sitting on a crate of smokes labeled "From *The Weekly Dispatch*", with the caption "Are we downhearted?" (Figure 3), a line from a popular British song from World War I. The reason for the change was explained in an article that was published in *The Vancouver Daily Province* on July 6, 1915¹:

"The well-known cartoon 'Arf a mo' Kaiser!' was originally drawn for the reply postcard, but knowing the highly sensitive feelings of the super-sausages at Berlin, a thoughtful fear was felt lest any British soldier was caught with one of the cards in his possession, the humorous slang phrase might be made a convenient excuse for shooting the owner of the card out of hand on the charge of lese majeste. For that reason the 'Are we downhearted?' cartoon was substituted."

A variety of cartoons, including several others by Bert Thomas and all showing soldiers smoking or asking for smokes, were printed on reply postcards through the course of the war, although cards in the waning years of the war often dropped the illustration. Despite the large quantities of cigarettes and tobacco that were sent overseas and the large number of postcards that were returned, reply cards are fairly scarce, some designs more so than others.

The reach of the various tobacco funds can be understood by studying the postal markings and written messages on reply postcards that were sent back from the front. Cards were for the most part sent unfranked through the military postal service, even when addressed to destinations outside the British Empire such as the United States. In most cases, the soldier's unit and location can be identified by the Field Post Office (FPO) date stamp and/or the censor mark and signature. Early on, writers also often included regimental information in their replies. However, sometime during 1916, red text was added on the back of most reply postcards advising against giving unit details "at the request of the Authorities", presumably for security reasons.

The name of the tobacco fund was generally not printed on reply postcards before November 1915. While it is not possible in such cases to know with certainty which fund was providing the smokes, one can surmise that donors outside Britain, including those in Canada, were responding

to appeals by the Over-Seas Club, while those residing in Britain were most likely subscribers to tobacco funds organized by British newspapers such as *The Weekly Dispatch* as well as local and regional papers.

THE OVER-SEAS CLUB AND CANADA'S TOBACCO FUND

The Over-Seas Club was formed in 1910 to "make the peoples of the British Commonwealth better known to one another."² It was a non-party society of British subjects and British-born people residing outside the United Kingdom. The Club opened its central premises in London on Empire Day (May 24) 1914.



Figure 4. Excerpt from an Over-Seas Club collecting list printed by *The Times Weekly* (London). Note the Canadian donor address on the reply card. Source: Hastings District Libraries, <https://hastings.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/9521>.

In September 1914, the Club established a Tobacco and Comforts Fund in response to the "urgent needs of the troops in the coming winter". The aim of the Fund was to keep the fighting men supplied with smokes while the war lasted. Every



1s (25¢) provided one week's supply of smokes to one man: ¼ lb tobacco, 50 cigarettes and some matches (Figure 4). By the end of the war, the Club had raised £368,203 for the Tobacco Fund.

The Club appealed

Figure 5. Poster for Canada's Tobacco Fund, organized by the Over-Seas Club. Source: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2005695791>.

to its broad overseas membership for donations to its funds. A Canadian office was established in the Windsor Hotel in Montreal to organize donations for "Canada's Tobacco Fund" (Figure 5). A Club Headquarters was also set up in the Flatiron Building in New York to reach American donors.

Smokes donated by Canadians through the Over-Seas Club's tobacco fund were initially sent to soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force at the Western Front, but were subsequently directed to Canadian troops, beginning a few months after the First Canadian Division arrived in France in February 1915.

TREATMENT OF REPLY POSTCARDS BY THE CANADIAN POST OFFICE

Canadian soldiers on active service were entitled to free postage on ordinary letters and postcards sent to Canada (Canadian soldiers at camp in Britain were considered "at home" and had to pay postage). To avoid confusion and ensure that unfranked soldiers' mail would be delivered to the addressee without the collection of postage due, the Post Office Department in Ottawa instructed postmasters at Canadian exchange offices to affix sufficient postage on such incoming mail.³ This practice was initiated on October 8, 1914 and discontinued on July 28, 1917, when free postage was allowed for all Canadian servicemen in Britain as well as in France.

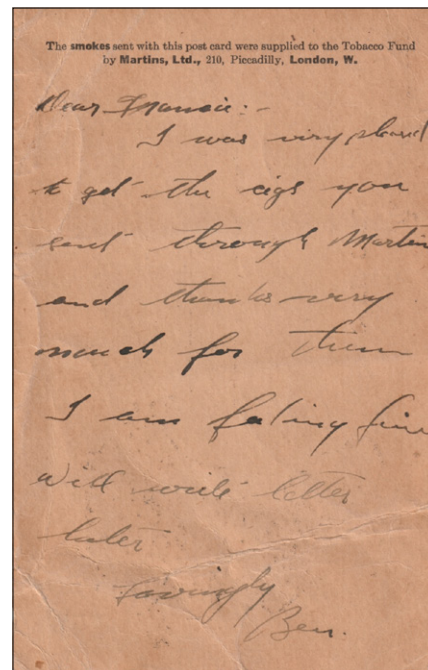
Most tobacco fund reply postcards addressed to donors in Canada have an added Canadian stamp, often affixed over the FPO date stamp, although some cards slipped through and were delivered without the added postage. Postage rates changed on April 15, 1915, with the imposition of a 1¢ War Tax raising the



Figure 7. Front and back of reply card posted July 12, 1916 at FPO 4X, 2¢ stamp added at Kamloops, BC. 1¢ postcard rate plus 1¢ War Tax, rate effective April 15, 1915. FPO 4X was used by the 1st Canadian Brigade, 1st Division during Security Phase I.



Figure 6. 1¢ stamp added at exchange office in Victoria, BC on March 18, 1915, 1¢ postcard rate effective until April 14, 1915. Sent by Corporal J.D. Watson, 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment, British Expeditionary Force.



inland postcard rate from 1¢ to 2¢. Thus, cards with a 1¢ stamp added (Figure 6) are far outnumbered by cards with a 2¢ stamp (Figure 7).

Of note, the message written on the back of the card shown in Figure 7 is a personal one: "Dear Francie...Lovingly Ben", evidence of the fact that donors had the option of directing smokes to specific soldiers.

CANADIAN NEWSPAPER TOBACCO FUNDS

Following the lead of British newspapers, a number of papers across Canada set up their own tobacco funds – it was felt that Canadians should look after their own. Smokes sent through

Twenty-Five Cents Sent to The Herald's "Tobacco Fund" Will Provide an Adequate Supply of "Smokables" to Two Canadian Soldiers at the Front---Send Your Quarter Now!

IT IS WITH NO APOLOGIES and with the utmost confidence that The Herald opens a campaign for money with which to purchase cigarettes and pipe tobacco for Canadian soldiers at the front. The fund will be specially for Canadian soldiers and it will be managed in such a way that the tobacco will be supplied to men who are in, or about to enter, the trenches. No matter where our gallant soldier boys are sent the tobacco will be supplied to them as long as they are not in a position to secure it by purchase. There have been many calls upon the pockets of Calgary citizens since the war started. Each of the numerous funds has had its particular merits. All were for the good of the people or of the soldiers; but this appeal is for the personal comfort of the gallant men who are risking their lives for us, fighting our battles and braving death itself in order to uphold the glorious traditions of the British Empire.

The Canadian soldier is well paid, well fed, well clothed and everything has been done to assure his comfort while on active service. Military regulations see to all that. He is well able to buy the best cigarettes and tobacco while in town, but it is when he is in the firing line and needs it most that he cannot purchase his favorite weed. "My Lady Nicotine" is a favorite with the soldiers in the trenches. Once in the firing line, or held in readiness to enter it, the soldier has no chance of purchasing tobacco or cigarettes. He cannot carry a large stock with him and the long nights in the trenches soon eat up his limited stock.

The Herald has arranged that all the facilities secured by the Weekly Dispatch of London, England, will be placed at the disposal of The Herald Tobacco Fund and for every twenty-five cents contributed two soldiers will each be supplied with a package containing 35 cigarettes, two ounces of pipe tobacco and a box of matches. The name of the donor of the package will also be enclosed and a postcard for a reply from the soldier boy who receives it. Further particulars will be found on page 10 of this issue.

Figure 8. Ad on front page of February 6, 1915 issue of *The Calgary Herald* advertising its tobacco fund for Canadian soldiers.

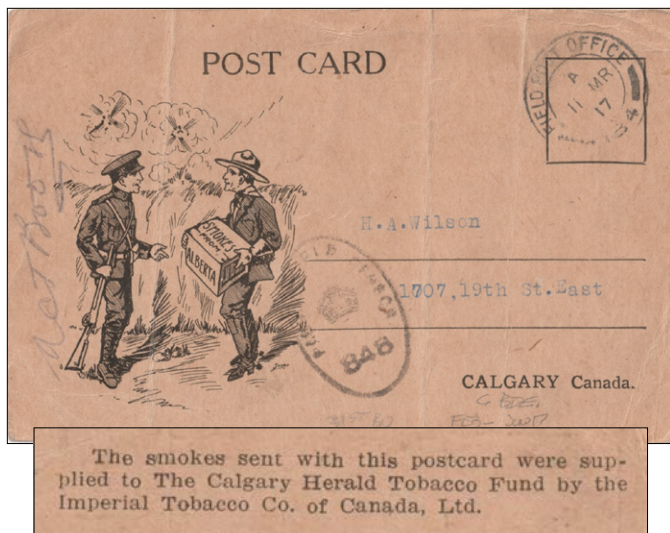


Figure 9. March 1917 reply card from *The Calgary Herald* tobacco fund, sent from FPO 184, 6th Canadian Brigade, 2nd Division. This card did not have a stamp added on entry to Canada. The only card known from the *Herald*.

Canadian newspaper funds were mostly, but not always, sent to soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

The first Canadian newspaper to advertise a tobacco fund was *The Calgary Herald*, which made arrangements to use the facilities secured by *The Weekly Dispatch* for sending smokes to the front. The ad appeared at the top of the front page of the February 6 issue (Figure 8), more than a week before the 1st Canadian Division landed in France on February 15. A donation of 25¢ supplied two soldiers each with a package containing 35 cigarettes, two ounces of pipe

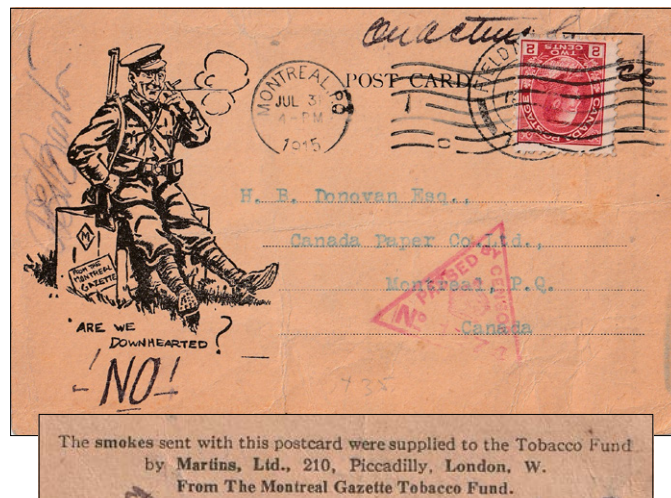


Figure 10. Excerpt of full-page ad from March 27, 1915 issue of *The Montreal Gazette*.



Figure 11. Reply cards from *The Montreal Gazette* tobacco fund, sent July 1915 (top) and January 1916 (bottom), both from FPO TX, 1st Canadian Division Train. Note the switch in suppliers from Martins, Ltd. to the Imperial Tobacco Company of Canada, Ltd. The cartoon by an unknown artist on the 1916 card shows a Canadian soldier sitting on a crate labeled "From *The Montreal Gazette* Tobacco Fund", 4¢ (double deficiency) postage due charged as soldiers' mail to the US was not free.

tobacco, a box of matches, and a postcard with the donor's name and address.

The reply card shown in Figure 9 is the only one known from the *Herald*. The cartoon on the front is by an unknown artist and shows a Mountie handing a crate labeled "Smokes from Alberta" to a Canadian soldier.

It's interesting to note that by 1917, smokes were supplied by the Imperial Tobacco Company of Canada, Ltd. Initially it was more expedient and cost-effective for Canadian newspaper funds to use the supply chain for duty-free British tobacco already established by British newspapers and the Over-Seas Club. However, soon after the first shipments of tobacco reached the front, complaints were received from Canadian soldiers regarding the quality of the smokes. As a result, some funds switched their supplier to the Imperial Tobacco Company of Canada to provide Canadian brands (see below).

The Montreal Gazette, an English-language daily newspaper, announced their tobacco fund with a full-page ad on March

27, 1915 (Figure 10), soon after the first casualty list reached Canada and it was clear that the Canadians were at the front. A 25¢ donation purchased 50 cigarettes, four ounces of pipe tobacco and some matches, while for \$1 the soldier received in addition a briar pipe, a rubber-lined tobacco pouch and a tinder lighter (a \$3 value). The *Gazette* initially targeted their fundraising to send tobacco to the 13th (Royal Highlanders) and 14th (Royal Montreal) Battalions of the 1st Canadian Four Division, mostly made up of boys from Montreal. At the outset, the *Gazette* sent smokes through the British supply pipeline, but by late 1915 they were working with Imperial Tobacco to provide Canadian soldiers with the brands to which they were accustomed (Figure 11).

The *Gazette* tobacco fund ran continuously for 195 weeks, closing down at the end of December 1918, having collected nearly \$1,000 a week and sent 25 million cigarettes, 500,000 packages of pipe tobacco, 550,000 plugs of chewing tobacco, 125,000 plugs of pipe tobacco, 6,674 pipes, and 4,122 pouches and lighters to the front.⁴

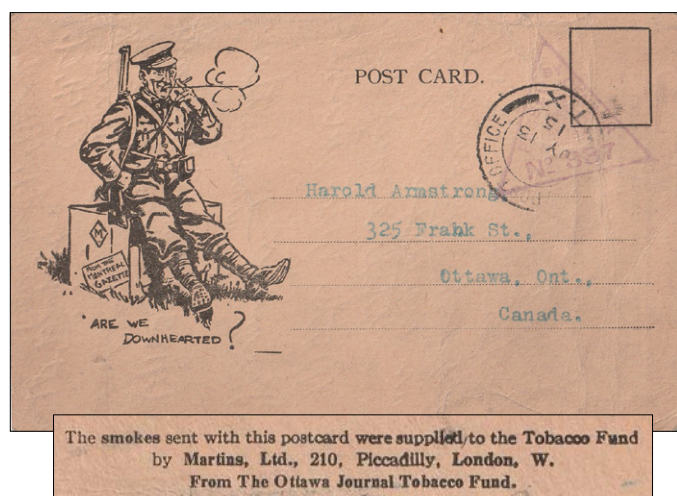


Figure 12. July 1915 tobacco reply card from *The Ottawa Journal*. Note the label on the crate of smokes, "From *The Montreal Gazette*", reflecting the cooperation between the two funds.



Figure 13. November 1915 reply card from the *Vancouver Daily Province* tobacco fund, sent by a British soldier in Gallipoli to an American donor, 1¢ foreign postcard rate (British soldiers' mail was not free to the US).

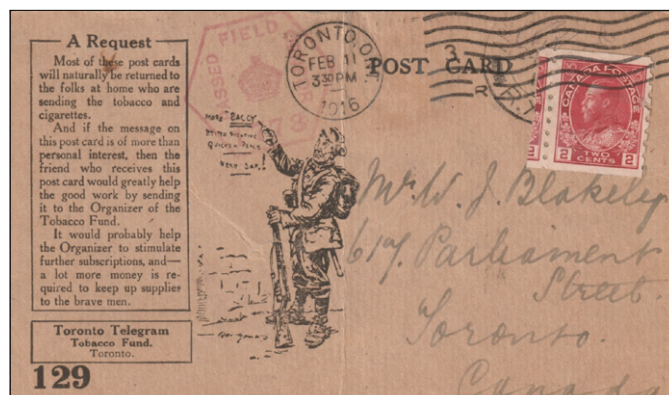


Figure 14. February 1916 reply card from the *Toronto Telegram*. The Bert Thomas cartoon shows a Tommy asking for "More 'baccy'". The only card known from the *Telegram*.

Several other newspapers across Canada set up their own tobacco funds. *The Ottawa Journal* first advertised theirs on April 12, 1915 and cooperated with *The Montreal Gazette* for their tobacco supplies (Figure 12). *The Vancouver Daily Province*, which had the largest circulation in Vancouver until 1949, ran their first ad on July 2, 1915. *The Province* made arrangements with the Over-Seas Club to use their British supplier for distribution of smokes donated through the newspaper's tobacco fund. The reply card shown in Figure 13 was sent by a British soldier to an American donor, showing the wide reach of the fund. No reply cards from *The Province* are known with Imperial Tobacco as the supplier.

The *Toronto Evening Telegram*, an afternoon newspaper with the largest daily circulation in Toronto until 1932, also made arrangements with the Over-Seas Club to receive its subscriptions for the purchase of cigarettes and tobacco for Canadian soldiers at the front, starting in July 1915 (Figure 14). Even the *Toronto Daily News*, a small paper published only from 1914 to 1919, had its own tobacco fund (Figure 15).

On the east coast, the *Halifax Chronicle* and its evening edition, the *Daily Echo*, provided smokes manufactured by the Imperial Tobacco Company of Canada, supplying their familiar brands of Sweet Caporal cigarettes and Old Chum smoking tobacco (Figure 16). No cards are known from this fund with a British supplier.

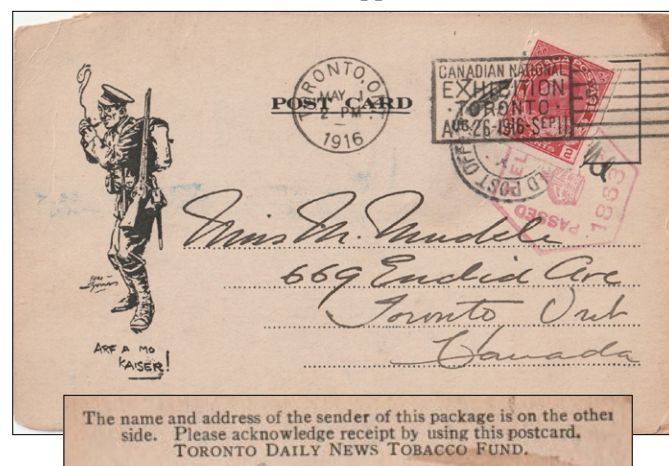


Figure 15. May 1916 reply card from *Toronto Daily News* tobacco fund. Late usage of the "Arf a mo' Kaiser!" cartoon.

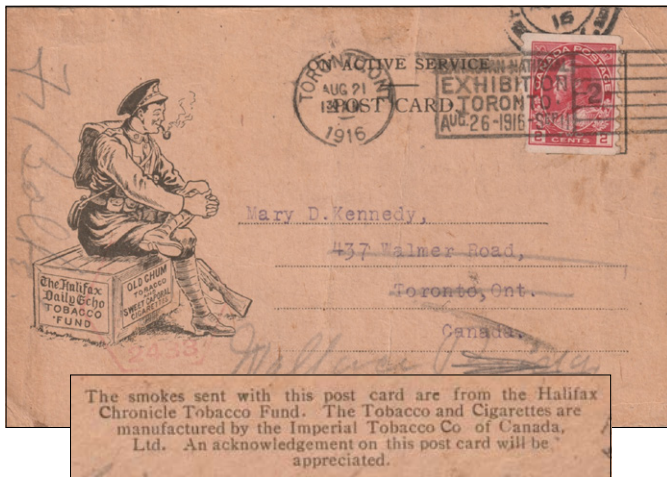


Figure 16. August 1916 reply card from Halifax Chronicle tobacco fund, showing a Canadian soldier sitting on a crate of Imperial brand cigarettes and tobacco. Artist unknown.

TOBACCO SUPPLIERS

The various tobacco funds were aided by a centralized supply chain. Messrs. Martins, Limited of Piccadilly, London was the largest supplier of British cigarettes and tobacco to troops at the front, supplying both the Over-Seas Club and the majority of newspaper funds. Smokes were shipped from their bonded (duty-free) warehouse on the island of Guernsey.⁵

After complaints were received by Canadian newspaper funds from Canadian soldiers who did not like the British tobacco, the Imperial Tobacco Company of Canada, Limited, located in Montreal, was asked to undertake the supply. Although they were not able to manufacture “in bond”, thereby avoiding payment of inland revenue and custom taxation, they nevertheless provided Canadian tobacco and cigarettes at prices equal to the low British prices. Major-General Sir Sam Hughes, who was Minister of Militia at the time, accepted the smokes at Montreal as military stores. They were shipped overseas on transports consigned to the Canadian Ordnance Corps at Ashford, Kent, and then sent from there to units at the front.

In addition to supplying tobacco to various Canadian newspaper funds, Imperial also shipped parcels of tobacco directly on behalf of donors (Figure 17). Reply cards can also be found from other tobacco manufacturers such as Tuckett Limited of Hamilton, Ontario (Figure 18).

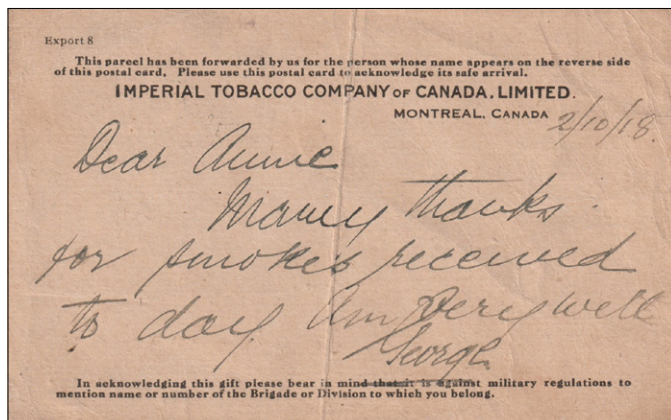


Figure 17. October 1918 reply card from Imperial Tobacco Company of Canada, addressed to a donor in Victoria, BC.

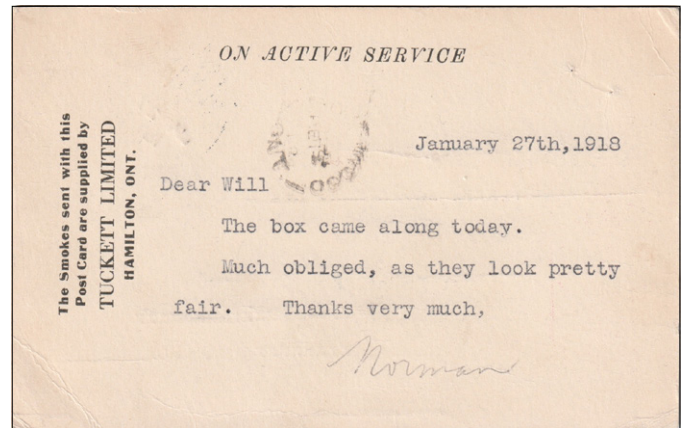


Figure 18. January 1918 reply card from Tuckett Limited of Hamilton, Ontario, addressed to a donor in Morewood, ON.

SMOKES FOR THE WOUNDED

Tobacco wasn't just considered essential for soldiers on active duty – a smoke was often one of the first things offered to an injured soldier. The scene in the postcard shown in Figure 19 is taken from a September 1916 photo (Library and Archives Canada). The sentiments of the men in this matter were clearly expressed in a letter from a Gunner with the 10th Field Battery, published in *The Globe* on September 14, 1915⁶:

“...Nine times out of ten when a poor wounded soldier is carried in on a stretcher the first thing he asks for is a cigarette. As soon as he gets it the difference of expression on his face is noticeable, no matter how great the pain. I know several chaplains who carry cigarettes about with them, not for their own use, but to bring the comfort to the wounded which they know from experience is genuine and not imaginary”

Figure 20 shows an Over-Seas Club reply card sent in July 1916 to a donor in Toronto. The “Thanks for cigs” message on the back was written by Chaplain Thomas Augustine Wilson, Major, then attached to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) at Bailleul, France. A CCS was the first medical facility in which the wounded would receive treatment, and tobacco was a welcome comfort.



Figure 19. Daily Mirror Canadian Official Series postcard, “Wounded but not too ill for a smoke”.

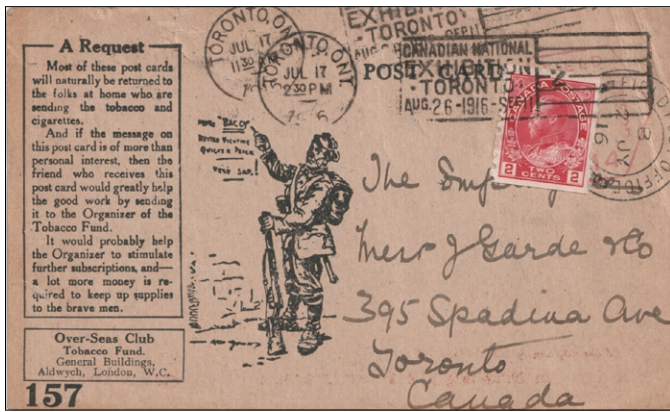


Figure 20. Front and back of Over-Seas Club reply card sent July 1916 from No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station.

PRISONERS OF WAR WERE NOT FORGOTTEN

Tobacco was also felt to be a necessity to lighten the burden of soldiers held in German Prisoner of War (POW) camps. Staff Sergeant Charles Crean worked in the Canadian Expeditionary Force Pay and Record Office, which was Canada's War Office in London, headquartered at Westminster House. He

organized a fund to send cigarettes and tobacco to POWs as well as to soldiers at the front⁷ (the fund later confined its work to POWs). In addition to donations, money was raised through sales of a magazine titled *The Maple Leaf*, edited by Crean, which included battle reports, short fiction, poetry and other musings (Figure 21).

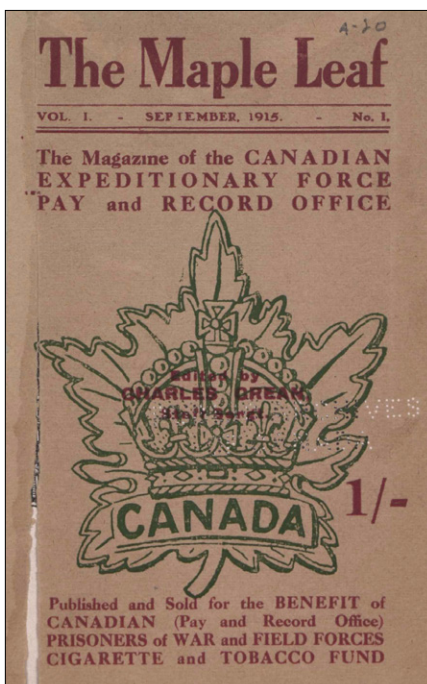


Figure 21. First issue of *The Maple Leaf*, September 1915.⁷



Figure 22. Postcard dated November 15, 1915, sent by Corporal G. Graham, a POW at Evangelisches Krankenhaus in Oberhausen, giving thanks for cigarettes and tobacco. Received December 11 in London.⁸

The Pay and Record Office fund made arrangements with the British-American Tobacco Company, Limited, to supply and ship their Wills and Players brand smokes duty-free; postage costs were paid by the fund. As with newspaper and Over-Seas Club tobacco funds, a postcard was included in every parcel so that the soldier could acknowledge receipt. No reply postcards from this fund addressed to individual donors are known, but cards addressed to Crean at the Pay and Record Office can be found (Figure 22).

Smokes were also included in care packages sent to POWs by organizations such as the Red Cross. The postal stationery card shown in Figure 23 is part of a correspondence between the Nova Scotia Branch of the Canadian Red Cross and the family of Morley Pineo, a Private with the Royal Canadian Regiment who was reported missing in October 1916 and later reported wounded and held at Reserve Lazaret III Johannisthal Stettin, a military hospital for POWs. The message on the card reassures his father that the Red Cross is sending "...more food than ever before - \$14.50 worth every month, besides 12 lbs bread & plenty of tobacco..."

AFTER THE WAR

Tobacco funds played an important role in providing comfort for the troops during World War I; some funds even carried on after the war to supply the Armies of Occupation. The smokes sent overseas represented a piece of home and were a reminder to the men that they were not forgotten by the people they were fighting for.

At the same time, the provision of free tobacco created an addicted generation - over 90 percent of soldiers returning home were smokers. Fueled by wartime promotion, cigarettes boomed in popularity and moved into mainstream culture in the decades after the war. The resulting rise in lung cancer rates eventually led to recognition of the health dangers of smoking in the 1940s.

Despite their unintended legacy, the tobacco funds were a remarkable success story - one built on the cooperation of international government and military authorities, tobacco manufacturers and civilians at home, who all came together to provide a necessary comfort to men who faced the unthinkable horrors of trench warfare. ☒

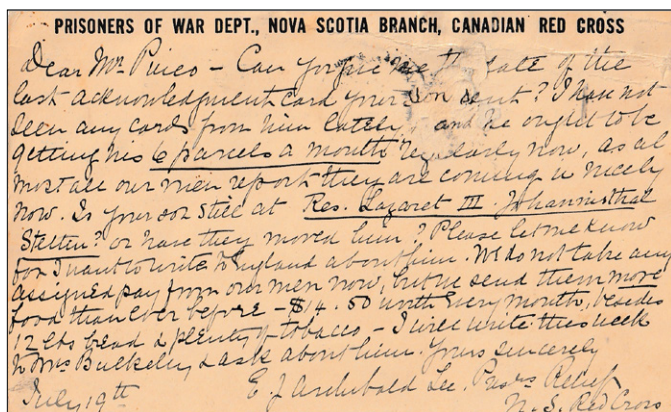
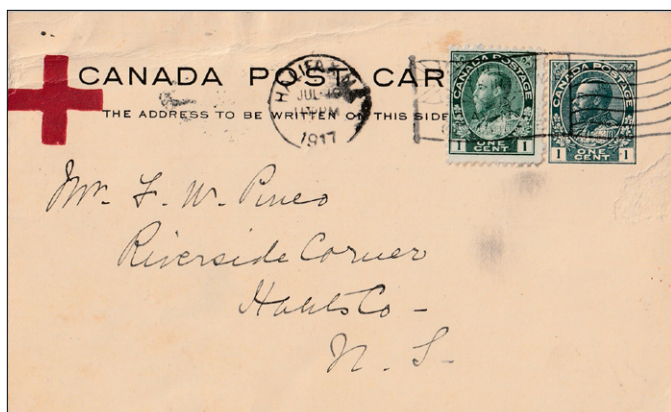


Figure 23. Front and back of 1917 Canadian Red Cross stationery card, cross printed on the front, 1¢ postcard rate plus 1¢ War Tax.



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