

Tom Longboat and the First World War

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In May 1919, Tom Longboat returned to Toronto after serving just over three years in the Canadian army and two years overseas in Europe. When asked by the prominent *Toronto Daily Star* sports reporter, Lou Marsh, what he had done “over there”, Tom simply replied: “Oh, anything – carrying messages, running, dispatch riding and digging ditches.” This taciturn reply prompted Marsh to complain to his readers: “In my time I’ve interviewed everything from a circus lion to an Eskimo chief, but when it comes down to being the original dummy, Tom Longboat is it. Interviewing a Chinese Joss or a mooley cow is plo compared to the task of digging anything out of Heap Big Chief T. Longboat.” [sic] But if Marsh had been able to see past his own racist stereotypes and his subject’s tendency toward self-deprecating understatement, Tom had indeed outlined his experience in the Canadian armed forces.² Whereas most previous studies on Tom have understandably focused on his illustrious pre-war running career,³ a deeper examination of his life between 1916-19 indicates that the First World War had a more profound impact on his life and running career than previously understood.

“Running”

When the First World War began in 1914, Tom was entering the autumnal stages of his great career as a runner. He was still a strong athlete, but his most famous victories were behind him. Moreover, the pre-war depression reduced the amount of disposable income in the

¹ Thanks to Daphne Tran for suggesting this topic to me and to Amy Stupavsky for encouraging me to write it.

² Lou M. Marsh, “Interviewing Big Indian a Tough Job. Tom Longboat more taciturn than ever – two years in France.” *The Toronto Daily Star* [TDS], May 21, 1919, 30.

³ Wilton Littlechild, “Tom Longboat : Canada's outstanding Indian athlete” (University of Alberta, master’s thesis, 1975); Bruce Kidd *Tom Longboat* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1992); Jack Batten, *The Man Who Ran Faster Than Everyone. The Story of Tom Longboat* (Toronto; Tundra Books, 2002); Will Cardinal, *Tom Longboat. Running Against the Wind* (Canada; Eschia Books, 2008). Due to time constraints, I was unable to consult: William Brown, *Remembering Tom Longboat: A Story of Competing Narratives* (Concordia University; Master’s thesis, 2009).

pockets of sporting fans, which had led to a drop in the size of purses available for professional running.⁴ It seems clear that Tom's professional prospects were declining. Meanwhile, mounting casualties at the front in France were putting increasing pressure on able-bodied Canadian men to join the colors. Tom had been affiliated since 1911 with the 37th Battalion,⁵ which was a militia unit of some kind based in Haldimand Ontario, but he did not immediately decide to volunteer for overseas duty, probably because he was not single and had the responsibility of supporting his wife Loretta. But in February 1916, Tom enlisted for active duty overseas.

In a move reflecting his public profile, this decision to join the army became a public event. Tom initially took the oath of service in Brantford on 17 February 1916,⁶ but he then attended a public recruiting meeting on 20 February in Toronto's Hippodrome Theatre, where he was one of 12 recruits who joined the 180th Battalion to "hearty applause." Over the winter of 1915-16, the Toronto based 180th Sportsmen's Battalion was engaged in a recruiting drive for volunteers, preferably with an athletic background. Other sporting figures affiliated with the battalion included Lieutenant Lou Marsh,⁷ whose interview with Tom began this story, and the 180th's paymaster, Captain Tom Flanagan,⁸ Tom's hated former professional manager. One wonders if Flanagan's presence was just a coincidence or, more likely, if the two former associates had come to some sort of reconciliation, and if so, on what basis?

One might ask why a Sportsmen's Battalion was formed in the first place? In fact, this sort of recruiting method was widespread at the time throughout the British Empire. The British during the First World War, for instance, raised units of Pal's Battalions, or "Pal's Bals", in which local dignitaries were encouraged to raise local battalions of 800-1000 men of friends, co-workers, or local community members for service together at the front. Canada also adopted this practice wholesale, often with odd results. Roughly concurrent with creation of

⁴ Cardinal, 109.

⁵ www.collectionscanada.gc.ca, Soldiers of the First World War, CEF. Longboat, Thomas Charles, digitized file 5730-27 [Hereafter: Longboat personnel dossier].

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ TDS, 21 February 1916, 4.

⁸ TDS, 17 May 1916, p. 8.

the 180th Sportsmen's Battalion, the 228th (Northern Fusiliers) Battalion recruited elite hockey players and fielded an extremely popular high-scoring team in the 1916-1917 National Hockey Association season before it was shipped overseas. Given that the 228th's hockey players later claimed that they had been offered officers' commissions just to play hockey,⁹ one wonders if Flanagan had made similar inducements to Tom to lure him into the 180th.

Whatever the case, Tom's athletic skills were soon put to the service of Canada's official recruiting propaganda. His first foray as an official representative of the 180th was a boxing match in the Gayety Theatre against Tommy Daly, trainer of the Toronto Ball club and St. Michael's hockey club.¹⁰ It is not clear what happened in this fight, but it was probably not a success for Tom because he apparently never stepped into the boxing ring in public again. Later in 1916 while stationed in Camp Borden, Tom also mused about taking up shot put but he dropped this notion after being easily beaten in an informal competition against a Catholic Chaplain.¹¹

Tom's main contribution to recruiting propaganda was his ability to run at an elite level. In contrast to his earlier career as a marathoner, he reinvented himself during the war as a specialist in the mile and the three mile race. His first big event was a Sports Exhibit in Riverside Park in Toronto in April 1916, which attracted an estimated 15,000 spectators. Although this event featured five hard fought boxing matches, the event of the day was the mile long race featuring the crowd's favorite, Tom, against the east end champion, George Black, and the young star, Jim Corkery, who had just won the English marathon of 1912. In a dramatic race, Tom narrowly lost to Corkery,¹² who went on one week later to place fourth in the Boston marathon with a time of 2:30:24.¹³ Tom, however, had his revenge in a rematch against Corkery in June 1916 at a Military Sports meet at the Toronto Exhibition. In front of a crowd of an estimated 10,000 enlisted men

⁹ [wikipedia.org/wiki/Toronto_228th_Battalion_\(NHA\)](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Toronto_228th_Battalion_(NHA))

¹⁰ TDS, 25 February 1916, 16.

¹¹ TDS, 25 August 1916, 10.

¹² TDS, 10 April 1916, p. 14.

¹³ wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston_Marathon_1916.

and an unstated number of civilians, he beat Corkery and Ted Wood in a three mile race to win the *Toronto Daily Star* Trophy.¹⁴

Tom clearly remained a favorite in the eyes of the Canadian sporting public, and was an overall asset to the recruiting drive, but his personal behavior was less than exemplary. In one interview, he described his life in the army in terms that would dismay every patriotic recruiting officer, boasting that he had little work and stating that army life was: “The easiest time I ever had in my life – nothing to do and a dollar ten a day for doing it.”¹⁵ On another occasion, he went Absent Without Leave. When the 180th was assigned to guard a troop train leaving Toronto, Tom was invited on board for drinks by admirers, and ended up traveling without permission to Halifax.¹⁶ Perhaps most seriously, Tom was charged in Women’s Court for a “serious offence” against a Toronto restaurant waitress. Although the exact nature of the offence is unknown because the trial was held *in camera*, Tom was remanded for a week, forcing Flanagan to put up a hefty \$ 1000.00 bond.¹⁷

Tom and the 180th Sportsmen’s Battalion were shipped out to England on the S.S. Olympic in the early November 1916, The voyage across the North Atlantic at that time of year on a crowded troop ship could not have been pleasant, and with the notorious sinking of the great passenger liner Lusitania the year before, everybody on board would have been additionally stressed by the menace of being sunk by German torpedoes. The 180th successfully eluded the threat of German submarines on its crossing, but was soon destroyed by the incompetence of Canadian military administration. Under the chaotic leadership of Canada’s Minister of Militia, Colonel Sam Hughes, most of the “Pals Battalions” raised in Canada for action at the front were broken up in England, with the majority of officers (such as Marsh) sent home, and the men transferred to depot units, from which they would be generally fed in piecemeal drafts to other units, usually to replace casualties at the

¹⁴ TDS, 31 May 1917, p. 12. TDS, June 5, 1916, 14. The TDS advertised an 18 mile marathon between tom and Corkery on Toronto islands, but I could not find the results for this race, so perhaps it was cancelled. TDS, 2 May 1916, 8.

¹⁵ TDS, 25 August 1916, 10.

¹⁶ Cardinal, 112.

¹⁷ TDS, 17 May 1916, 8.

front. Thus in January 1917, Tom and the other men from the 180th were transferred to the 3rd Reserve Battalion, from which he and some of the original Sportsmen were then re-assigned to the newly formed 107th Pioneer Battalion in February 1917.¹⁸

Tom's transfer from the 180th to the 107th separated him from his old manager, Flanagan, and placed him under the command of Colonel Glen Campbell, who took an interest in him.¹⁹ Under Campbell, the 107th developed a strong football team, which won almost every match, and a formidable running team composed of native Canadians, which included Tom, Corporal Joe Keeper, Private W. Pataunade, and Private S.S. Macleod.²⁰ Supported by his Colonel, Tom was thus able to continue his career in army races. Again, the purpose was propaganda, but in contrast to the races in Canada, which were meant to boost recruiting, athletic events organized by the military in Britain and France were intended to maintain troop morale, which was essential given the appalling casualties suffered during in the trenches. Composed of just 905 men,²¹ the 107th's running team forged a distinguished running reputation in the British Expeditionary Force, which numbered about two million soldiers and laborers in 1917.

As in his early military career in Canada, Tom competed in shorter races. He did not always win, but he was a factor in every meet. In mid-February 1917, he led the Canadian runners to come in third in the British military race held in Woodford, England.²² Transferred with the 107th to northern France in late February 1917,²³ Tom went on to win a three mile race in late June against the best British and Canadian runners in the a sports competition held by the British First

¹⁸ Longboat personnel dossier.

¹⁹ TDS, 21 May 1919, 30.

²⁰ TDS, 23 August 1917, p. 17. It is often asserted that the 107th was an all native unit, but an examination of the names listed in the 107th's war diary does not support this view. Moreover, it is hard to see how the chaotic Canadian recruiting system could result in ethnically exclusive units. It is probably the case that the 107th's running team was based heavily on native Canadian runners, but that native Canadians were a minority in the unit.

²¹ <http://www.cefresearch.com/matrix>, 107th Canadian Pioneers, war diary, 1 March 1917. [Hereafter: 107th WD].

²² TDS, 12 February 1917, 10.

²³ 107th WD, March 1917.

Army, for which he was given “a great reception from his regimental comrades.”²⁴ At a subsequent meet held by the British XIII Corps in July 1917, Tom came in third in the mile race, placing behind Keeper, who came in second.²⁵ Perhaps the highlight of Tom’s athletic career in France came in a major British army track meet in August 1917, when he led the 107th’s team, supplemented by Sergeant Jack Tait from another Canadian unit. Not only did Tom handily win his event, but his team defeated the fourteen best British army teams. This victory prompted the *Toronto Daily Star* to comment: “it is a big feather in the camp of the 107th Battalion that the winning team should be made up of four of their Indians, and only one outsider.”²⁶ This triumph was only slightly marred when Tom came in second in the Canadian Corps’ fall athletic meet in October 1917, when he was defeated in front of a “great crowd of spectators” in the three mile race by his formidable teammate, Joe Keeper, a native runner originally from northern Manitoba.²⁷

In his meets in France, Longboat made an impression on many of the soldiers who watched him compete. In what may be taken as a typical response, a Canadian soldier from another unit, Donald Fraser, recorded his impressions of a rest camp in which he saw Tom compete, probably in a long jump competition. The observant Fraser recorded in his diary in August 1917:

The situation of the [rest] camp was first rate and attractions in the way of concerts and moving pictures were good. Sports, such as running, jumping, tug-of-war, etc. were held. I saw Tom Longboat, the Indian, running and long-jumping. He was beaten, however, by a big, broadly built Scotsman of the old Country Black Watch. Longboat had a long, steady rakish step and looked every bit a runner.²⁸

²⁴ 107th WD, 26 June 1917; TDS, 28 June 1917, 14.

²⁵ 107th WD, 7 July 1917.

²⁶ TDS, 23 August 1917, 17.

²⁷ *Globe*, 3 October 1917, p. 11; TDS, 3 October 1917, 17.

²⁸ Fraser diary, 14 August 1917, in *The Journal of Private Fraser, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1918*. Edited by Reginald H. Roy (CEF Books, 1998), 302-303.

It was during this time that Tom's fame created an unusual problem – an imitator claiming to be the real Tom Longboat. The bogus Longboat apparently first surfaced in the Los Angeles area in the winter of 1916-17, but fled upon being exposed by a visiting Canadian from Kitchener, Ontario. However, the fake Longboat re-emerged during the summer of 1917 along the American-Mexican border, where he was enrolled in the US Army transportation services, where he portrayed himself as a running coach. (Ironically, unsuspecting native American leaders in the US cited the fake Longboat as a positive example in the American war effort).²⁹ It is not known what the real Tom thought of the fake Tom. Presumably he had more important things on his mind at the time, like surviving the First World War. In any case, there wasn't much he could do about it. When shown a picture of the imposter upon returning to Canada in 1919, Tom simply commented: "He's a good-looking guy."³⁰ But the problem did not go away. For years after the war Tom received reports that this imposter (or another one) was sullyng his reputation by taking free drinks in the Hamilton region and behaving badly. He was finally able to solve the problem (apparently in the 1930s) by issuing a public letter to the *Hamilton Spectator* asking that the imposter be apprehended.³¹



Tom Longboat: An early victim of identity theft

²⁹ TDS, 11 August 1917, 17.

³⁰ Marsh, TDS, 21 May 1919, 30.

³¹ Cardinal, 130.

“Digging Ditches”

The main purpose of the 107th Canadian Pioneers in France was not, of course, running, but engineering and labor, or as Tom succinctly put it, “digging ditches.” One of several Pioneer battalions in the Canadian Corps, the 107th was apparently directly under the command of the Corps headquarters, which deployed it as needed to support the Corps’ four fighting divisions, each composed of about 18,000 men. Pioneer and Engineer units played a key role during the First World War, which was essentially a massive exercise in siege warfare. This was particularly the case in the Canadian Corps, which paid particular emphasis on strong fieldworks. According to the 107th’s war diary, its typical activities included: digging and repairing trenches, constructing dugouts or shelters, hauling ammunition, burying telephone cables, erecting and repairing barbed wire fences, building roads and mule tracks, laying tracks for light railroads to connect the front with rear area supply depots, and building plank roads so that artillery could be pulled forward through mud and other obstacles.³² Because the combat area was under the nearly constant scrutiny of German observers, who could call down artillery fire, much of this work had to be done during the relative safety of night. And because both sides in the war were using chemical warfare by the time Tom arrived in France, much of this backbreaking work had to be done wearing gas masks to guard against poisonous gases (chlorine, phosgene, mustard gas, etc). To add to the Pioneers’ misery, the entire battlefield area smelled of death and sewage, and it would not be unusual for a digging party to unearth decomposing cadavers from previous battles. Large fat rats were omnipresent day and night.

As a member of the 107th Pioneers, Tom was usually not stationed in the very front trench face to face against the Germans, but in the immediate rear, which was still well within the range of the German medium and heavy artillery. Many days passed quietly, as shown by the picture of Tom buying a newspaper from an enterprising French newspaper boy who had ventured in the rear trenches.

³² On plank roads, see: G. W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919* (Ottawa; Queen’s Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1962), 314 fn.

But the threat of German artillery was ever present and could erupt at any moment. The 107th suffered its first combat casualties near Vimy Ridge on 4 April 1917 shortly after arriving in France, when a German artillery bombardment killed three men, seriously wounded five and slightly wounded two.³³ When Lou

Marsh later asked Tom, "How did you like the whine and crump of the big fellows [shells]?", the runner gamely answered: "I dodged them,...." But he then more honestly admitted to a fear



Tom buying a newspaper from a French boy in the trenches

shared by most green troops, "By Gringoes [sic], I thought I'd never see Canada again the first time [that I was shelled]."³⁴ Veteran troops who learned to distinguish between the different sounds made by incoming enemy shells had a higher chance of surviving bombardments than rookies, but 107th's casualty lists steadily and inevitably mounted, as did the stress and homesickness felt by its soldiers. Tom was no exception. According to one anecdote, when Tom was presented to George V after a race, the king asked if there was anything he could do for him, to which Longboat replied: Yes, get me out of here and let me go home to my mother."³⁵ Tom's answer was perhaps not the one the King wanted to hear, but it accurately reflected his circumstances.

This anecdote may be based on a real meeting, for King George was indeed in the vicinity of the 107th on 17 July 1917,³⁶ so the two may well have met. But not all the stories told about Tom during the war

³³ 107th WD, 4 April 1917.

³⁴ Marsh, TDS, 21 May 1919, 30.

³⁵ Cardinal, 112-13. I concur with Jack Batten's judgment that there may have been more than one imposter. Batten, 95.

³⁶ 107th WD, 17 July 1917.

were true. According to a widely spread story during the war, which was repeated in many later accounts of his life, Tom was buried with some comrades in a dugout by an artillery bombardment where, with an ample supply of air and food, they stayed underground for six days, thus cleverly staying out of harm's way until they were finally "rescued." Tom allegedly claimed that this was the only time he got a decent night's sleep during the war.³⁷ This cute story is simply not plausible - being buried alive was not a golden opportunity for a break from the war, but was actually the stuff of many soldiers' nightmares. In fact, more recent biographies of Tom have noted that he had actually denied this story himself.³⁸ Using the 107th's war diary, it is now possible to explain how this myth began. On 28 July 1917, the war diary recorded the following event:

718128 Pte. Groff. During an intense enemy bombardment by shells of high caliber of the village of Loos, the entrance to the cellar where he [Private Groff] and seven companions were quartered was blown in. Two of his companions were killed and the remainder were imprisoned and more or less buried. Pte Groff worked himself free of the debris crawled over a broken wall, and forcing himself under a broken staircase, made his way outside, and then under shellfire to headquarters, for help. His bravery was conspicuous and unquestionably saved the lives of his companions, for the building in which they were imprisoned was completely destroyed a few minutes after they were released by the rescuing party.³⁹

So a party of 107th was briefly buried alive, but instead of taking a vacation from the war, they were saved by a quick rescue. There is no evidence that Tom himself was directly involved in the incident. It appears the press assumed that Longboat was one of the buried party simply because he was the most famous member of the 107th. Like many other war rumors, this one was based on a distortion of the truth.

"Carrying Messages and Dispatch Riding"

³⁷ Kidd, 69-70.

³⁸ Marsh, TDS, 21 May 1919, 30; Batten, 85; Cardinal, 114.

³⁹ 107th WD, 28 July 1917.

Much of what happened on the battlefields of the First World War can be explained by poor communications. By 1914-1918, armies had grown so large that they could no longer be commanded by the proverbial general on a hill as in the days of Napoleon or even as recently as the Boer War (1899-1902). Telephones were widely used in the trenches, but the telephone systems did not extend into No Man's Land between the opposing trenches, and wires were often cut during battles by enemy bombardments. Radios existed, but unlike the Second World War these were not yet portable or reliable enough to be carried into battle. As a result, troops in battle were often cut off from their commanders, who had to guess what was going on. To bridge this communications gap, armies during between 1914-18 were forced to rely on old fashioned and unreliable means such as carrier pigeons and messengers. As a professional runner, Tom had been employed in athletic events that were held in part to support Allied propaganda and to boost troop morale. And as a Pioneer, Tom was not exempt from doing a unglamorous grunt work between athletic meets. But his skills were also ideal for running messages in the trenches. His comment to Lou Marsh that he was also a dispatch rider suggests that he sometimes carried messages between units in the rear areas on roads, perhaps on a bicycle or a motorcycle.

When the 107th Pioneers were engaged in rear area work during one of the many lulls between fighting, there was less need to send messages by runner, but Tom would have been used more often in this capacity the closer his unit was to the front. Often working parties from the 107th would be sent up to the firing lines on various construction and repair projects, or on occasion even into No Man's Land itself at night to work on barbed wire obstacles. The 107th also played a supporting role in the Canadian Corps' major battles in 1917. It arrived in France in April 1917 just in time to help in the famous Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge on 9-12 April 1917. Here it was stationed near the hamlet of Ecoivres about three and a half miles behind the Canadian Corps' initial front line and subsequently had a relatively quiet time, suffering light casualties.⁴⁰ Tom's unit was hit much harder in the Canadian victory at the battle of Lens ("Hill 70") between 15-25 August 1917, requiring reinforcements in late August

⁴⁰ 107th WD, April 1917.

of 3 officers and 128 other ranks,⁴¹ followed by a week long recuperation period of training and sports.⁴²

The 107th's next major engagement was the Canadian assault on the infamous Passchendaele Ridge, where Tom and his comrades worked on the lines of communication and built emplacements for the artillery from mid October to mid-November 1917. Here they had to contend with German night bombing as well as enemy artillery shells containing Yellow Cross gas (mustard gas) and Blue Cross gas (diphenyl chlorarsine), the latter of which penetrated gas masks causing sneezing and vomiting, prompting the men to remove their protection, which in turn exposed them to other dangerous gases.⁴³ From Oct 20-28, the 107th had to additionally contend with rain and mud. Although Passchendaele was one of the worst battles on the western front during the First World War, casualties for the 107th were not as heavy as those it had taken at Lens. Nevertheless, Tom's unit still required reinforcements of 1 officer and 103 other ranks in November. Sadly for Tom, one of those who died during the operations near Passchendaele was his patron, Colonel Campbell, the commander of the 107th. If, as seems likely, Tom was used as a courier at Passchendaele, he had to run through mud, poison gas, bombs and shells, often at night, while coping with the loss of friends and comrades. For their efforts and sacrifices at Passchendaele, the 107th received a letter of commendation from the highly regarded 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, which commented: "The Pioneers have set a very high standard of work, both in quality and quantity, which has been an excellent example to our working parties."⁴⁴

After Passchendaele, Tom enjoyed a long reprieve from active military operations. In mid-November 1917, the 107th was pulled out of the battle zone. The subsequent winter was extremely cold, but was a quiet time on the western front without any major military operations. Like many other units, the 107th used this respite for rest, recuperation, training and leave. Along with many other men from the 107th, Tom was granted fourteen days leave to Britain in late January

⁴¹ 107th WD, 24 August 1917

⁴² 107th WD, 30 August – 5 September 1917.

⁴³ Nicolson, 313-14.

⁴⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel J. Sutherland Brown, 2nd Canadian Brigade, to Major Hugh Walkem, 107th Pioneers, 13 December 1917, 107th WD, December 1917.

1918, for which he was fined five days pay for returning one day late.⁴⁵ With evidence mounting that the Germans intended to launch a war-winning attack in the spring of 1918, the 107th was put to hard work in February and March 1918 preparing barbed wire and other defensive measures. When the German attack began on 21 March 1918, it inaugurated a great military crisis that strained the Allies to the utmost until early July 1918, at which point the arrival of the massive American army finally turned the tide. Fortunately for Tom and the other Canadians, these German attacks largely bypassed the Canadian Corps, focusing instead on other British units, the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps and the French. While the war was raging elsewhere, the 107th was broken up on 28 May as part of a Canadian Corps reorganization, and Tom was transferred with many of his comrades to the 2nd Battalion Canadian Engineers, which was part of the elite 1st Canadian Division. Like the 107th, the 2nd Battalion kept a war diary, but it contains no direct references to him. It is, however, likely that he was a member of the 1st Division's victorious sports team in the Canadian Corps' Dominion Day tournament on 1 July, which was attended by an estimated 40,000 Canadian soldiers and other spectators, including many generals, Prime Minister Robert Borden and the Governor-General of Canada, the Duke of Connaught. If Tom did participate in this event, this may have been one of the largest crowds ever to see him compete.⁴⁶

This, in all likelihood, was Tom's last major sporting event in the Canadian army. Soon afterwards, he was engaged in probably the most dangerous phase of his military career. Between August 8th and November 11th, the British Expeditionary Force engaged in a victorious advance known as "the Hundred Days". The Canadians, who were widely considered to be shock troops, spearheaded this drive and were engaged in nearly continuous fighting, advancing 80 miles at a staggering cost of 45,830 casualties. As part of the 1st Canadian Division, the 2nd Battalion Canadian Engineers followed behind the advancing infantry and were responsible for all the types of work the Pioneers had done, as well as bridge building, repairing

⁴⁵ Longboat personnel dossier.

⁴⁶ www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/warDiary, 2nd Battalion Canadian Engineers, 1 July 1918; Canon Frederick George Scott, *The Great War As I Saw It* (Toronto: F. D. Goodchild, 1922), 264-66, or http://www.uwo.ca/english/canadianpoetry/confederation/FGScott/great_war/index.htm, Chapter XXXVIII.

water wells and salvaging captured German supplies. As a courier in this unit, Tom was not exposed to danger to the same extent as the men in an infantry battalion, but he was much closer to the front for longer periods of time than he had been in the 107th. One of the highlights of this period was the battle of Amiens on August 8-12, the “black day of the German Army”, in which Tom’s unit worked with tanks to haul bridge-building supplies forward.⁴⁷ Later, between September 27 and October 1, the Engineers took part in one of the most complex military attacks of the war, when the Canadian Corps successfully breached the Canal du Nord, which was a key part of the formidable German Hindenburg line. During this battle, three of the four companies of Tom’s battalion were ordered to hold the front line itself, where they were briefly subjected to heavy shelling and gas before being withdrawn to receive reinforcements.⁴⁸

The Aftermath

Of the 619,000 Canadians who served in the army during the war, 424,589 went overseas. Of these, 239,605 were casualties, including 66,665 killed. Tom was one of the fortunate soldiers who successfully emerged unscathed.⁴⁹ Numerous sources state that he had been wounded twice,⁵⁰ but this was not the case. Tom’s personnel dossier indeed indicates that he received medical attention twice during the period of his enlistment, but not for combat related wounds. The first time he was treated for a minor contusion of some sort that he suffered in New Brunswick in 1916, and the second time, upon his return home, he was diagnosed with myalgia of the knee, a condition aggravated by life in the trenches but not deemed serious enough to warrant special treatment. In spite of his exposure to poison gas, Tom’s heart and lungs were declared to be sound,⁵¹ although one wonders if his exposure to poison gas had undiagnosed long-term consequences. In spite of the doctors’ analysis, it does appear that

⁴⁷ www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/warDiary, 2nd Battalion Canadian Engineers, 8-12 August 1918.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1 October 1918.

⁴⁹ Cardinal, 114.

⁵⁰ For example, <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/history/other/native/longboat>; Kidd, 69.

⁵¹ Longboat personnel dossier.

Tom's short post-war running career was hindered by knee and back pains.⁵²

While physically unscathed by his time in the trenches, Tom did not escape from the war without other consequences. Upon the armistice, there was a great let down in the morale and discipline of the Allied armies that resulted in the outbreak of widespread demobilization riots and a wave of petty crime. The free-spirited Tom was not exempt from this general breakdown in discipline, but he was punished more heavily than most other soldiers. On 10 March 1919, he was charged with being absent from his guard post despite being warned, for which he was subjected to Field Punishment No. 1 for four days.⁵³ Considered to be one of the most cruel punishments in the British Empire's forces during the war, the convicted man was "placed in fetters and handcuffs or similar restraints and attached to a fixed object, such as a gun wheel, for up to two hours per day."⁵⁴ An unusual sentence in peacetime, this punishment must have been a great blow to Tom's pride, and perhaps an indication that he was not as highly valued in the 2nd Engineers as he had apparently been in the 107th Pioneers.

Tom's marriage was also a casualty of the war. While he had been away, his wife Loretta had received an official separation allowance and possibly extracts from Tom's pay.⁵⁵ However, she had also twice received inaccurate reports informing her that Tom had been killed in action. Believing herself to be a widow, she had married another man. This development led Tom to promptly divorce her when he returned to Canada in 1919. He went on to rebuild his life with Martha Silversmith, whom he married in 1920.⁵⁶

Conclusion

In his interview with Lou Marsh in 1919, it is easy to see why Tom was so laconic in his reply to the reporter's question, what had he

⁵² Cardinal, 124.

⁵³ Longboat personnel dossier.

⁵⁴ wikipedia.org/wiki/Field_punishment (Accessed Dec 10, 2012).

⁵⁵ Longboat personnel dossier. For a non-expert in military accounting practices of the day, it is difficult to decipher the exact amounts that Loretta received during the war.

⁵⁶ Cardinal, 139; Batten, 85-86.

done “over there.” The war had such a great impact on Tom that a short interview with an unsympathetic reporter could never have done his varied experiences justice. As a family man, the war had ended his marriage. As an ordinary soldier who had many brushes with civilian and military authorities, he no doubt appreciated civilian freedom all the more after the war. As a professional runner, he had added another chapter to his storied career, playing a significant role in the Canadian propaganda effort to boost recruiting at home and to maintain the morale of the soldiers in France. As a world famous celebrity, he had been confronted during the war with the bizarre problem of having one or more imposters exploit his reputation. As a military courier, he was present in five major battles (Vimy Ridge, Lens, Passchendaele, Amiens, Canal du Nord) and the “Hundred Days”. As a sapper or grunt worker in the 107th Pioneers and the 2nd Battalion Canadian Engineers, he had played a small and unglamorous role supporting the Canadian Corps’ victories with essential engineering activities. On a personal level, his experiences as a manual laborer in the army may have actually helped him make the post-war transition from professional runner and athletic star to the more prosaic occupations of steel worker and street cleaner. In short, the First World War had a profound impact on Tom Longboat, changing his life in almost every way.