

Evidence 1.14

November 20, 1914
 To Arthur Alexander, Esq.,
 North Buxton, Ont.
 H.Q. 297-1-21

Sir, —

The Honourable Minister of Militia and Defence has duly received your letter of 6th instant enquiring about coloured people not being allowed to enlist in the Canadian Militia for Overseas Expeditionary Force.

Under instructions already issued, the selection of Officers and men for the second contingent is entirely in the hands of Commanding Officers, and their selections or rejections are not interfered with from Headquarters.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,
 Your obedient servant,



Lt.-Col.
 Military Secretary

Evidence 1.15

Sir Willoughby Garnons Gwatkin, KCMG, CB
 Chief of the General Staff
 13 April 1916
 Memorandum on the
 enlistment of Negroes in
 Canadian Expeditionary Force

Excerpt from Major-General Gwatkin's memo of April 13, 1916.

1. Nothing is to be gained by blinking facts. The civilized negro is vain and imitative; in Canada he is not being impelled to enlist by a high sense of duty; in the trenches he is not likely to make a good fighter; and the average white man will not associate with him on terms of equality. Not a single commanding officer in Military District No. 2 is willing to accept a coloured platoon as part of his battalion (H.Q. 297-1-29); and it would be humiliating to the coloured men themselves to serve in a battalion where they were not wanted. ...
2. In France, in the firing line, there is no place for a black battalion, C.E.F. [Canadian Expeditionary Force]. It would be eyed askance ...

Evidence 1.16

What reasons do you think the government had for preparing this poster, given the views expressed in Evidence 1.13, 1.14, and 1.15?

COLORED MEN!

Your King and Country
 Need YOU!

NOW is the time to show your Patriotism and Loyalty.

WILL YOU HEED THE CALL AND DO YOUR SHARE?

□ □ □

Your Brothers of the Colonies have rallied to the Flag and are distinguishing themselves at the Front.

Here also is your opportunity to be identified in the Greatest War of History, where the Fate of Nations who stand for Liberty is at stake. Your fortunes are equally at stake as those of your White Brethren.

□ □ □

NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

Now being Organized All Over the Dominion
 Summons You. WILL YOU SERVE?

The British and their Allies are now engaged in a great forward movement. Roads, Bridges and Railways must be made to carry the Victors forward. The need of the day is Pioneers, Construction Companies and Railway Construction Companies. No. 1 Construction Company has been recruited. No. 2 Construction Company is now called for.

Lt. Col. D.H. Sutherland is in charge of the Company's Headquarters at Pictou; at Halifax applications may be made at the Parade Recruiting Station; elsewhere to any Recruiting Officer, or by letter to —

MAJOR W.B.A. RITCHIE, Chief Recruiting Officer, Halifax, N.S.

Some White Canadians tried to help Black Canadians serve overseas. J.R.B. Whitney, publisher of the *Canadian Observer* in Nova Scotia, for example, raised a platoon of Black men. However, no battalion would accept the Black platoon, and Whitney had to disband it.

In May 1916, the British government indicated that it would be willing to accept a non-combatant Black battalion. In July, Black Canadians were finally given an opportunity to enlist in the newly formed No. 2 Construction Battalion. This was the first and only Black battalion in Canadian history. Most of the over 600 men came from Nova Scotia, with others from New Brunswick, Ontario, Western Canada, and the United States. Over 10 percent of Canada's Black population served during the war.

In 1917, the No. 2 Construction Battalion arrived in England. In May, the battalion departed for France, where its members assisted in logging, milling, and shipping operations that provided the lumber needed to maintain trenches on the front lines. They also repaired roads and helped provide water. The battalion was commanded by Lt. Colonel D.H. Sutherland, a White Canadian. Sutherland recommended that the members of the battalion be transferred to the Western Front because of their excellent work. However, the war ended before the battalion could be sent. The No. 2 Construction Battalion was disbanded in 1920.