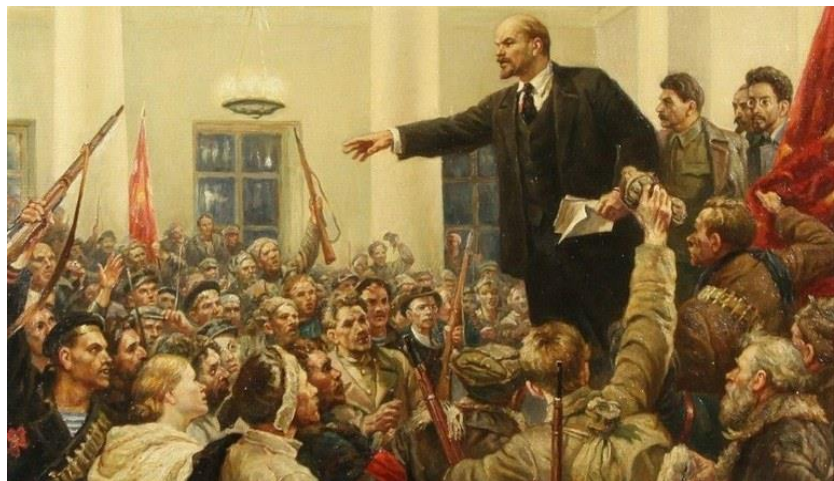


# VLADIVOSTOK

October 1918 - April 1919

As World War One slogged to its bloody conclusion, the last army recruits enlisted at Perth were sent not to face Germans on the western front, but to fight the Bolshevik Red Army in Russia's far east. While the survivors of their WW1 cohort made their way home from the killing fields of France and Belgium, those last eight men, five of them draftees, served king and county, however briefly and bloodlessly, in the ranks of the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force (CSEF).

Having suffered more than 2,000,000 men killed in three years of fighting Germany and Austria, mutinies in the Russian Army sparked the 'February Revolution' of 1917 and, in March, forced the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II (1868-1918) in favor of a Provisional Government. Dominated by business interests and the aristocracy, that administration was soon locked in a power struggle with local 'Soviets'



*V. I. Lenin Proclaims Soviet Power*  
(Painting by Vladimir Serov)

comprised of workers, the urban middle-class and rank-and-file soldiers and sailors. Nine months later the Bolshevik<sup>1</sup> faction staged their 'October Revolution',<sup>2</sup> overthrew the Provisional Government, and seized power. Having promised to end Russia's participation in the war, in March 1918 the Bolshevik regime signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany taking Russia out of the war and the Allies' Eastern Front collapsed.

Although the Bolsheviks enjoyed broad support in the largest cities, elsewhere they had many enemies both domestic and foreign and Russia shortly erupted into a prolonged and bloody civil war. On one side were worker militias, welded together by Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) into the Bolshevik Red Army. Contending for power was an alliance of regional independence movements, monarchists, army officers, Cossacks, bourgeoisie, liberals, and anti-Bolshevik socialist parties loosely assembled as the White Army.

The Whites soon secured the backing of the Allied Nations still fighting Germany -- the United Kingdom, France, the United States and Japan. The Whites were seen as useful in preventing war supplies provided by the Allies to the Czarist regime from falling into German

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<sup>1</sup> Later the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

<sup>2</sup> November 7, 1917, new calendar.

hands, by capture or by sale by the Bolsheviks, and for blocking German access to the natural resources of the Russian Far East. There was also hope in Allied capitals that a White victory might lead to recovery of 13 billion rubles in war loans made to the Czar but repudiated by the Bolsheviks. Finally, they hoped that if the Czar or Provisional Government could be restored, Russia would re-establish the Eastern Front against Germany.



*Canadian Gunners at Tulgas, Siberia, 200 K, south of Archangel.*  
(Courtesy of LAC)

Following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk German troops quickly occupied the former Czarist territories of Belorussia, Transcaucasia, and the Ukraine. In September 1918, about 30,000 Allied troops, half of them British, landed at the Arctic ports of Murmansk and Archangel with the mission of re-possessing war supplies, blocking any move by German troops then in Finland, and preventing the Germans from using the ports as submarine bases. With that force were two batteries of the 16th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery<sup>3</sup>, manned by 22 officers and 475 other ranks, veterans of the Western Front. Their mission

expanded in 1919 when the fiercely anti-Bolshevik Winston Churchill (1874-1965) became British Secretary of State for War. He pressed for Allied troops to be used in support of the Whites against the Red Army.

Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden (1854-1937) agreed, and the Canadian gunners soon found themselves fighting the Red Army in the icy wilds of northern Russia along the Dwina and Vaga Rivers, in support of American and British infantry. Within a few months, however, the Red Army pushed the Whites and their allies north, leading to their withdrawal. The Canadians evacuated from Archangel in June 1919 and from Murmansk in August 1919. Eight men had been killed and 16 wounded.

As the Allied intervention on Russia's northern flank was getting underway, another expedition was in planning for the Russian far east.<sup>4</sup> More than 650,000 tons of the war materiel shipped to the Czarist Army lay piled on the wharves of Vladivostok, Siberia, stranded by logistic problems and fighting along the Trans-Siberian Railroad, when, in early 1918, a Bolshevik led committee took control of the city and workers' Soviets occupied its factories and port.

On June 28, 1918, the White Army allied Czecho-Slovak Legion<sup>5</sup> spearheaded an Allied seizure of Vladivostok. Japanese, British, American, and Chinese marines landed, toppled the local Soviet, and occupied the railroad station, the powder magazine, and other strategic points.

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<sup>3</sup> The force also included an air arm and 18 of its pilots and observers were Canadians serving in the Royal Air Force.

<sup>4</sup> In 1917 another British-led force of 30,000 went to the Caucasus and southern Russia and in 1918 a French-led force also intervened in Southern Russia (1918-1919).

<sup>5</sup> Consisting of 66,000 former prisoners of war and deserters from the Austrian Army, marooned by the revolution, the Czecho-Slovak Legion joined the Whites to bolster their nationalist cause and won recognition as an official Allied army. The Czecho-Slovaks seized a 6,000-kilometre stretch of railroad from the Ural Mountains to Vladivostok. This 'army without a country' formed the advance party of Allied intervention, fighting Bolsheviks in a desperate bid for statehood.

On August 12, 1918, at the request of the British War Office, the Canadian Government approved formation of a 4,200-man Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force (CSEF), to help secure the port of Vladivostok and support White Russian forces in Siberia. The CSEF joined a 166,500 man multinational force drawing troops from 10 countries -- Japan (70,000), the United States (12,000), Poland (12,000), China (5,000), Serbia (4,000), Romania (4,000), Italy (2,000), France (1,850) and Britain (1,500).

In reporting the assignment of 400 men from Army Camp Petawawa to the Siberian expedition, the *Perth Courier* explained that,

*... its purpose is to prevent the great stocks of supplies and war munitions in Siberia from falling into German hands and assist the Czecho-Slovaks in their efforts to restore order out of chaos in Russia and throw off the German yoke which through the Bolshevik Government is being fastened upon the Russian People.*<sup>6</sup>

*Canadians go to Siberia to show that the British people stand behind those Russians loyal to the Allied cause. The contingent will be small but ready to withstand the rigors of climate or any other fate that may befall it in order that the shattered fragments of the old fighting Russian nation [i.e., the White Army] may be backed up with moral force and military power.*<sup>7</sup>

Canada's decision to participate was not based entirely upon military considerations. Noting that the German-owned trading firm of Kunst & Albers Company<sup>8</sup> had abandoned Vladivostok, Canadian intelligence officer James Mackintosh Bell (1877-1934)<sup>9</sup> suggested to Prime Minister Robert Borden that events presented "... a wonderful chance for Canada". Borden agreed, observing that "... other nations will make very vigorous and determined efforts to obtain a foothold and our interposition with a small military force would tend to bring Canada into favorable notice...". Representatives of the 'Canadian Siberian Economic Commission' were attached to the CSEF. As the *Perth Courier* explained it,



**CSEF Cap Badge**

*Canada has a stake in the movement beyond the direct service of the expedition. Russian trade after the war will ride the waves of the Pacific to the western ports of Canada and Canadian exports will fill the cargo holds on the return journey.*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Perth Courier*, August 23, 1918.

<sup>7</sup> *Perth Courier*, September 6, 1918.

<sup>8</sup> An organization akin to the Hudson's Bay Company in Canada.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. James Abbot McIntosh Bell, born at St André, Quebec, died at Almonte, Ontario, the son of Andrew Bell (1835-1912) of the Geological Survey of Canada, and great-grandson of Rev. William Bell (1780-1857) of Perth. He spent two years in Siberia during the Allied intervention.

<sup>10</sup> *Perth Courier*, September 6, 1918.

The Siberian adventure was thus presented to a war-weary Canadian public as a trade and economic opportunity, but exhausted by four years of war, class conflict, labor unrest, and social protest were on the rise across Canada. Many Canadians were sympathetic to the Bolshevik government and opposed sending a military force against it.

As the Canadian body count on the western front approached 60,000, there were insufficient volunteers to fill the ranks of a new expeditionary force. As a result, 1,653 of those enlisted, 40% of the force, were conscripts. Of the men from Perth, five of eight, or 63% were conscripts. The 1917 Military Service Act under which they were compelled to serve, was unpopular in many quarters, especially in Quebec, and more broadly the Canadian public was not looking to fight any more wars. Nevertheless, preparations for the Siberia adventure continued.

The Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force was made up of two infantry battalions. The first was the 259<sup>th</sup> (Canadian Rifles), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Albert E. 'Dolly' Swift (1866-1948)<sup>11</sup>, composed of four companies: Company-A manned by troops from Toronto, Company-B from Kingston and London, Company-C from Montreal, and Company-D from Quebec City. The second battalion was the 260<sup>th</sup> (Canadian Rifles), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Charles Jamieson (1875-1966)<sup>12</sup>. It also consisted of four companies: Company-A from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Company-B from Manitoba, Company-C from Saskatchewan and Alberta, and Company-D from British Columbia.

The CSEF also included an engineering field company, a machine-gun company, an artillery battery, and various support units, as well as a cavalry force of 200 troopers from the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP) with nearly 300 horses<sup>13</sup>. This body of troops, plus a 1,500-man British contingent, was put under the overall command of Canadian General James H. Elmsley (1878-1954), a veteran of the Second Boer War 1899-1902 and the Western Front of 1914-1918.

*A number of boys who have been at Petawawa this summer were home on last leave over the weekend. The artillery having been disbanded, they have either joined the tanks or the expeditionary force for Siberia ... Messrs Elmer James and Alphonse Quigley are with the Siberian force.*<sup>14</sup>

Private Elmer Alfred James<sup>15</sup>, born at Perth on March 5, 1899, was the son of Charles Alfred James (1863-1947) and Elizabeth Steadman (1863-1944). He was 19 years of age, single, a farmer, and a volunteer, when he enlisted on May 14, 1918, at Kingston. He was first assigned to the 75<sup>th</sup> Depot Battery at Kingston and on September 16<sup>th</sup>, was transferred to the CSEF Ammunition Column. James sailed to Siberia aboard HMT *War Charger*,<sup>16</sup> departing Vancouver on November 17<sup>th</sup> and disembarked at Vladivostok on December 14, 1918.

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<sup>11</sup> In the 1880s and 1890s, Swift was well known as an amateur hockey forward playing for his hometown Quebec Hockey Club of the Amateur Hockey Association of Canada. He also played with the Montreal Victorias. He was the most successful goal scorer of the 1890s.

<sup>12</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Jamieson, born at North Gower, Ontario, was a lawyer in civilian life and died at Edmonton, Alberta.

<sup>13</sup> 1,632 horses were purchased to support the Siberian Expedition but due to a lack of shipping capacity only 291 were sent.

<sup>14</sup> *Perth Courier*, October 4, 1918.

<sup>15</sup> Regimental # 346053

<sup>16</sup> HMT *War Charger*, built by J. Coughlan & Sons Shipyards, Vancouver. Launched in July 1918 and delivered in November that year just after the war had ended. In 1920, the ship was purchased by Saliaris Bros. Steamships of Chios, Greece, and registered under the name *Navarchos Kountouriotis*. It burned and sank at Thessaloniki, Greece May 27, 1921.





*HMT War Charger under construction at Vancouver  
(Courtesy Vancouver Archives)*

Private Isadore Alphonse Quigley<sup>17</sup>, who was at Perth on 'last leave' with Elmer James, did not in fact reach Siberia. Born on July 4, 1897, at Westport, Ontario, the son of Michael Edward Quigley (1861-1948) and Sarah Ann Quinn (1866-1941), he was a blacksmith at Perth and unmarried when he was drafted at age 20 under the Military Services Act. He was attested on October 25, 1917, sent to the 75<sup>th</sup> Depot Battery at Kingston and then transferred to the 85<sup>th</sup> Battery CSEF. On October 29, 1918, Quigley was transferred again to the CSEF Ammunition Column and, on December 11<sup>th</sup>, boarded HMT *War Charger* at

Vancouver with Elmer James. However, Quigley was disembarked from the troop ship on the same day. His service file is not entirely clear as to why he left the ship at the last moment, but he was probably ill. The influenza epidemic was sweeping through the ranks of the CSEF at the time. He was discharged from the army on April 5, 1919.<sup>18</sup>

The advance party of the CSEF had sailed from Vancouver two months earlier, on October 11, 1918, aboard the RMS *Empress of Japan*.<sup>19</sup> Totalling about 680 personnel from the headquarters, administrative, medical, logistics and cooking staff, the party included General Elmsley and, among the rank-and-file, Private Errol Conlon, of Perth.

Private James Edward 'Errol' Conlon<sup>20</sup> was a draftee. Born December 11, 1891, at Eganville, to Richard Thomas Conlon (1864-1935) and Mary Theresa Letang (1867-1949), his attestation record of June 26, 1918, shows he was an unmarried 27-year-old farmer. First sent to the 74<sup>th</sup> Battery of the Canadian Field Artillery, on September 14, 1918, he was shortly transferred to the 'Remount Depot Squadron' and posted to the CSEF. On October 11<sup>th</sup> Conlon embarked at Vancouver on the SS *Empress of Japan*, bound for Siberia. While at sea, on October 31<sup>st</sup>, he was attached to the "RNWMP for duty, rations and quarters", although the horses he would care for did not sail until February 12<sup>th</sup> aboard the second voyage of the SS *Empress of Japan*.

The advance party disembarked at Vladivostok on October 26<sup>th</sup>, less than three weeks before the Armistice, signed on November 11<sup>th</sup>, ended the fighting in Europe.

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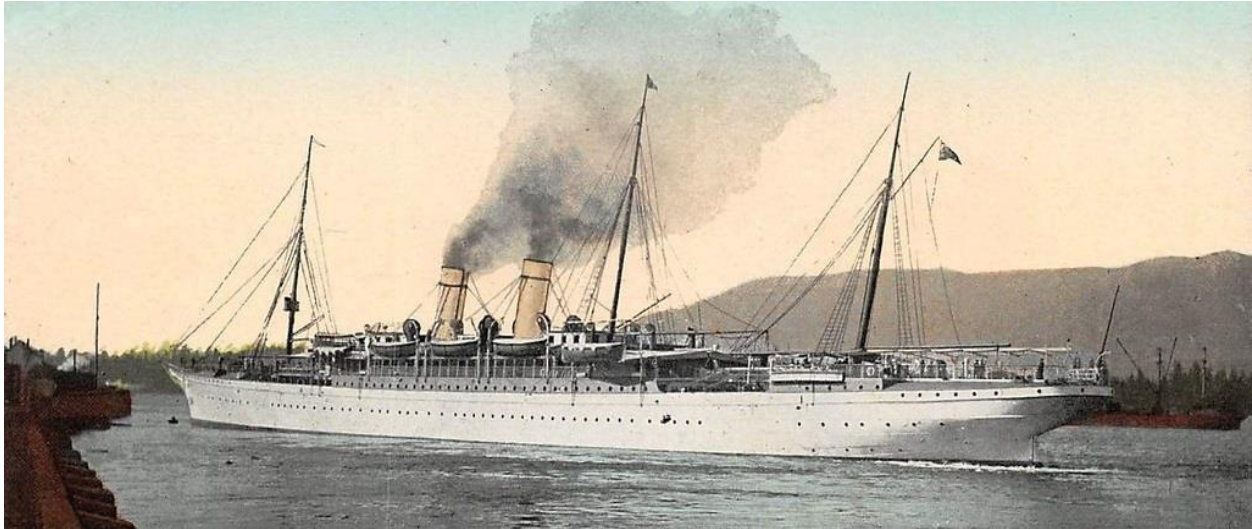
<sup>17</sup> Regimental # 3058024

<sup>18</sup> On June 1, 1921, he married Theresa Regina Smith (1895-1992). Alphonse Quigley died November 18, 1967, at Wayne County, Michigan.

<sup>19</sup> RMS *Empress of Japan*, Canadian Pacific Steamships, built by Naval Construction & Armaments Co., of Barrow-in-Furness, England. In service 1891-1922 and scrapped in 1926.

<sup>20</sup> Regimental # 3324704

With the war in Europe over before the main body of the CSEF could depart Canada, questions were raised about whether or not the Siberian venture should proceed. In fact, Prime Minister Borden's cabinet, sensing the mood of the electorate, urged that the expedition be cancelled. Borden, however, attending a conference in England where he was attempting to raise Canada's post-war profile, cabled his insistence that it should proceed.



**S.S. Empress of Japan**  
(Courtesy Vancouver Archives)

As the expeditionary force mustered at Vancouver and Victoria, discontent grew in its ranks and among the Canadian population at large. The labor councils in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal all went on record as opposing the intervention. Farm organizations, including the United Farmers of Ontario and the Grain Growers Association of Saskatchewan, also condemned the deployment. One Member of Parliament told a public meeting in Montreal that the expedition "*should be considered a crime*".<sup>21</sup> The *Toronto Globe* and *Hamilton Spectator* questioned anyone's right to interfere in Russia's internal affairs.

In compliance with the Prime Minister's instructions, however, preparations continued. Then, as the main body of the CSEF readied itself to board ship, demonstrations and public meetings were organized by labor activists in Victoria and Vancouver under the banner 'Hands Off Russia'. Among the crowds attending were many CSEF soldiers, in particular those who had been conscripted against their will.

On December 21<sup>st</sup>, as the 259<sup>th</sup> Battalion was being marched from its camp at the Victoria exhibition grounds to board the troopships SS *Teesta*<sup>22</sup> and SS *Protesilaus*<sup>23</sup> at Rithet's Wharf, when they stopped briefly at the corner of Fort and Quadra Streets a mutiny broke out among the French-Canadian troops of Companies C and D.

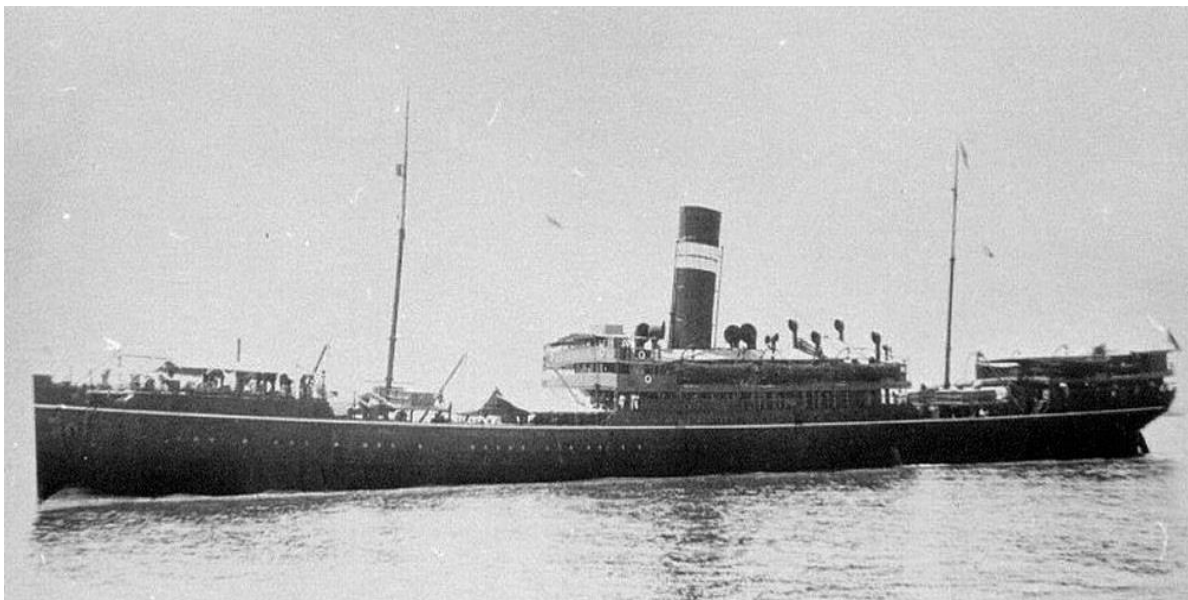
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<sup>21</sup> *From Victoria to Vladivostok*, by Benjamin Isitt (2010)

<sup>22</sup> RMS *Teesta*, passenger-cargo liner, 6,296 gross tons, built 1903 by Sr. J. Laing & Sons, Sunderland, UK, for British India Steam Navigation Ltd., operated by P&O Group. Sold to Torakichi Yamauchi in 1927, scrapped at Kobe, Japan, 1927.

<sup>23</sup> SS *Protesilaus* – Combined passenger-cargo vessel, built 1909 by Hawthorn Leslie & Co. Ltd., Newcastle, UK, sunk by a mine January 1940.

Officers shouting orders to 'carry on' and firing their pistols in the air had no effect, so soldiers of the anglophone Companies A and B were ordered to remove their webbing belts and whip the mutineers back into line. By this means and pushing at bayonet point, after a full day of confrontation, the mutineers were eventually forced aboard ship.



**SS Teesta**  
(Courtesy greatwarforum.org)

The *Teesta* sailed for Siberia on December 22<sup>nd</sup> with 899 men aboard, 13 of them in the ship's cells. Ten of those faced general court martials on arrival at Vladivostok and were sentenced to prison terms or field punishment. However, many officials in both the military and government doubted the legality of having deployed men drafted under the Military Services Act for a mission not directly connected to the defense of the British Empire. With an eye on opinion back home, none of the sentences were ever carried out.

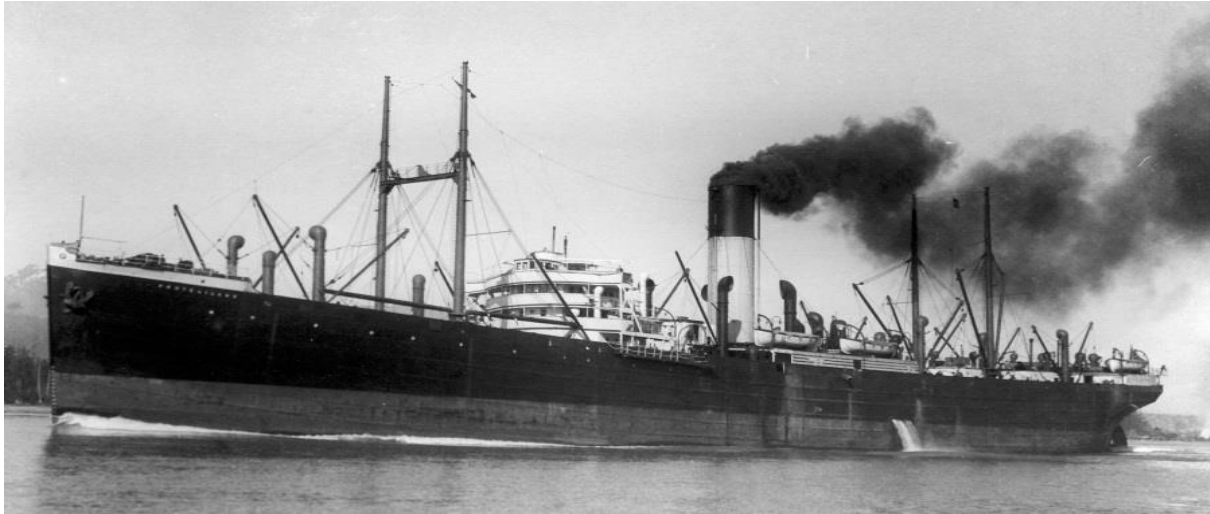
Four days after the *Teesta* weighed anchor, the *SS Protesilaus* set sail from Victoria. Among the troops aboard *Protesilaus* were three men from Perth.

Private Reginald Arthur Meighan<sup>24</sup> was a volunteer who enlisted on October 9, 1917, more than a year before joining the CSEF. At age 33, he was an experienced soldier having previously served for three years in the United States Cavalry. He was born August 16, 1885, at Perth, the son of William Arthur Meighen (1858-1934) and Julia Theresa Henderson (1855-1927). His father was a partner in the mercantile firm of A. Meighen & Brothers. Ltd. at Perth. Although he gave his home address as Perth and named his mother at Perth as his next-of-kin, his wife Mary Jane Hurst (1879-1942), and daughter, Julia Elizabeth, were living at Victoria. From his enlistment in October 1917 Private Meighen served with Lord Strathcona's Horse until October 13, 1918, when he was transferred to the 260<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Canadian Rifles) of the CSEF. He embarked on the *SS Protesilaus* at Victoria on December 26, 1918, and arrived in Siberia on January 1, 1919.

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<sup>24</sup> Regimental # 2293567

Sergeant Alexander Berlangette<sup>25</sup> also boarded the SS *Protesilaus* at Victoria on December 26, 1918. He had been born April 3, 1883, at Perth, to John Samuel Berlangette (1859-1913) and Mary Grace (1858-1933). His father was a carriage painter with a shop on North Street. Attested as a draftee on October 29, 1917, Alex Berlangette was 34 years of age and unmarried. He was first posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Depot Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Central Ontario Regiment but, no doubt because he had been a 'druggist' in civilian life, on July 19, 1918, he was sent to the Army Medical Corps Training Depot, at Niagara. On September 9, 1918, Berlangette was assigned to the 16<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, Canadian Army Medical Corps, and attached to the CSEF.



**SS Protesilaus**  
(Courtesy Vancouver Archives)

Private James Charles Publow,<sup>26</sup> another draftee, completed the trio of Perthites who boarded the SS *Protesilaus* at Victoria in December 1918. Born at Perth on January 2, 1892, he was the son James Alfred Publow (1855-1919) and Bridget Brady (1855-1919)<sup>27</sup>. When attested on March 1, 1918, he was a 26 year old unmarried farmer. Initially sent to the 1<sup>st</sup> Depot Battalion of the Eastern Ontario Regiment, on November 16, 1918, Private Publow was shortly transferred to the 259<sup>th</sup> Battalion CSEF and sent to Victoria, BC, for deployment to Siberia.

The *Protesilaus* had a difficult passage. Sea sickness was rampant, even among the horses, two men died and a propeller was lost when the ship became stuck in the ice of the northern Pacific. Moreover, the Blue Funnel Line, had

*... secured a contract from the government to transport the Siberian Expeditionary Forces to Vladivostok in Russia. This contract included the rationing of the troops enroute. War profiteers, like so many others, they half-starved the soldiers -- for the duration of the voyage, a thin soup or stew being the chief diet for twenty-six days.*<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Regimental # 3311798

<sup>26</sup> Regimental # 3056973

<sup>27</sup> James Publow's mother, Bridget Brady-Publow, died on May 6, 1919, while he was serving in Siberia.

<sup>28</sup> *Bouillon a la S.S. Protesilaus*, in *Songs of Siberia and Rhymes of the Road*, by Dawn Fraser (1919)



Conditions aboard the *Teesta* were much the same but, on January 24, 1919, the *Perth Courier* could report that,

*A number of local boys with the Siberian force arrived at Vladivostok when the troopship Protesilaus docked. There were 96 officers aboard and 1,660 other ranks.*<sup>29</sup>



***Cossacks of the White Army parade in front of the Vladivostok Railway Station, 1919***  
(Unknown Russian photographer)

Just as the main body of Canada's Siberian Expedition reached Vladivostok aboard the *Teesta* and *Protesilaus* in mid-January 1919, the Canadian government bowed to public pressure and decided to bring them home.

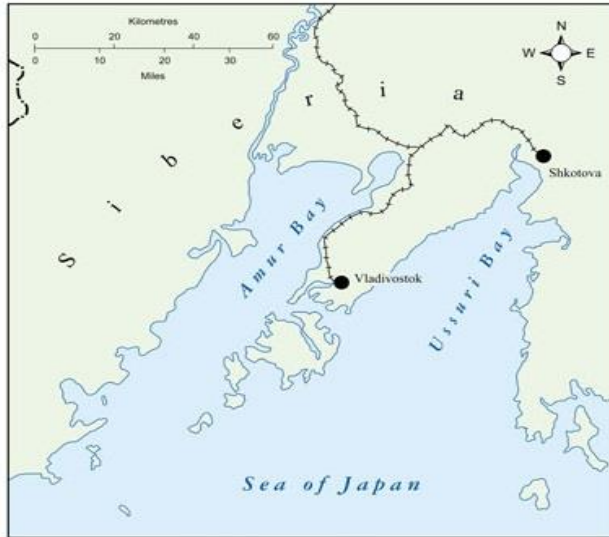
*A feeling of uneasiness prevails as to the status of the Allied nations regarding Russia ... In Britain the Allies are being called upon to make a statement of purpose, and throughout Canada various organizations and journals are calling upon the Government to withdraw all Canadian troops from Siberia. The Toronto Star says we should not send an army to Russia until we have more information and expressing a fear that unwittingly we might be helping to rebuild an autocracy in Russia.*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 24, 1919.

<sup>30</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 10, 1919.

An evacuation could not take place immediately, however, as an army on the move is difficult to turn around. The final contingent of the CSEF, including the last two Perth men, sailed from Vancouver aboard the SS *Empress of Japan* on February 12, 1919, and reached Vladivostok on February 27<sup>th</sup>.



Vladivostok and Shkotova

Sergeant Thomas George Bowey Wilson<sup>31</sup> was an unmarried 29-year-old 'Hotel Keeper' when he enlisted as a volunteer on November 28, 1916. He had been born at Perth on May 7, 1887, to John Wilson (1848-1919) and Jane Bowey (1856-1930). His father was proprietor of Perth's Revere House and, later, the Hicks Hotel. Private Thomas Wilson was first posted to No. 2 Overseas Army Service Corps (CASC) Training Depot – Horse Transport but was re-assigned to the 20<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Company attached to the CSEF on October 31, 1918. He was promoted Corporal on December 26<sup>th</sup> and Sergeant in March 1919. Wilson embarked at Vancouver on the SS *Empress of Japan*.

Private Colin Blackwell Sewell<sup>32</sup> was another draftee. Born at Toronto on August 2, 1899, he was the son of Colin James Sewell (1871-1954) and Robina Buchan Blackburn (1870-1953). His father had come to Perth as manager of the Sovereign Bank of Canada and, in 1912 when the Winn Shoe Company failed, joined with Francis W. Hall (1827-1959)<sup>33</sup>, to create the Perth Shoe Company. Colin Sewell was single and a student when he joined the army on September 23, 1918. Sent directly to the 6<sup>th</sup> Signal Corps he embarked on the SS *Empress of Japan* at Vancouver on February 12, 1919, attached to the CSEF Base Headquarters unit. Back home the *Perth Courier* reported that,

*Pte. Colin Sewell, who enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force for Siberia some two months ago, sailed from Vancouver a week ago with his unit for Siberia.*<sup>34</sup>

The *Empress of Japan*, carrying the last 311 members of the CSEF and its 291 horses reached Vladivostok on February 27, 1919.

*The city itself, swollen to more than 150,000 residents by floods of refugees fleeing the Bolsheviks and the Whites opposing them, was a swamp of "corruption and vice," or so the Army official historian described it. There were shootings and robberies galore, and the refugees were in pitiful condition, sick with typhus and many starving.*<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Regimental # 2003540

<sup>32</sup> Regimental # 3328561

<sup>33</sup> Francis William Hall (1871-1959), Perth Mayor 1909-1912, President of the Perth Shoe Company 1912-1916, MLA for Lanark South 1914-1919. Hall was found guilty of theft in 1927 and sentenced to 18 months in prison.

<sup>34</sup> *Perth Courier*, February 21, 1919.

<sup>35</sup> *Legion Magazine*, February 23, 2019, by J.L. Granatstein.

The closest Canadian troops would come to seeing action in Siberia came in the spring of 1919 when 200 Canadians were attached to an international force under Japanese command and sent to deal with a partisan insurgency led by a local farmer that threatened the Allied coal supply. When they reached the partisans' base in a village a short distance north of Vladivostok, however, the 'Reds' had fled. Another contingent of 55 men was sent 4,300 kilometers up-country to Omsk, capital of the White Russian government in Siberia, to act as headquarters staff for two British battalions stationed there. Other Canadian troops guarded supply trains delivering materiel to Omsk. In one attack on the rail link, 18 NWMP horses, under British and Russian guard, were killed.



**Soldiers of the CSEF in Siberia 1918-1919**  
(Courtesy LAC)



**Sports day at Vladivostok**  
(Courtesy of LAC)

For the bulk of the Canadian force however, guard duty and administrative assignments at Vladivostok were their main tasks. One veteran of the expedition recalled that "... we sat on our fannies, it was all a complete farce".<sup>36</sup> Most of their days were filled with whatever entertainment they could find or create. A sports day, held in December 1918, included field events, hockey and a boxing match.

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<sup>36</sup> *Canadian History Ehx*, quoting Private Alexander Calhoun.



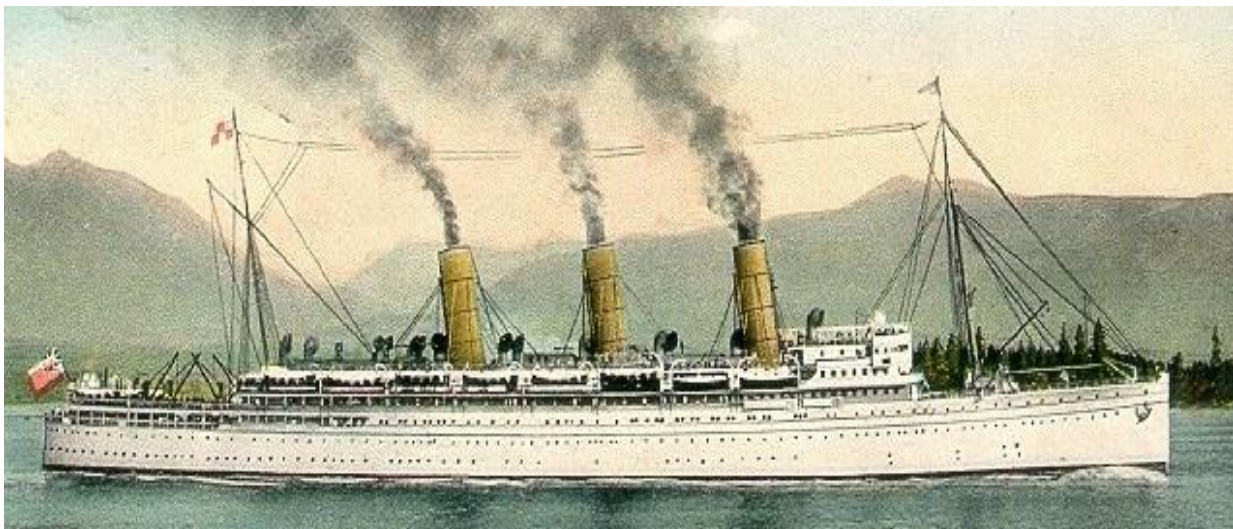
*There was a hockey league, soccer games, two brigade newspapers and an international sports day. For the more adventurous, there was a thriving district of movie theatres, cafes, and brothels on 'Kopek Hill', and the Canadians and soldiers from a dozen more armies frequented them all. Not surprisingly, one-quarter of the admissions to the Canadian hospital were cases of venereal disease.<sup>37</sup>*

Private Elmer James seems to have been the first Perth man repatriated from Siberia. The specifics are missing from his file, but it does record that he was back at Fort Henry, Kingston, by February 8, 1919.

The full-scale evacuation of Vladivostok got underway in April 1919, as Red partisans laid siege to the city killing Allied and White Russian troops and destroying vehicles and supplies. Perth men, Berlangette, Conlon, Publow, Sewell, and Wilson embarked on the SS *Empress of Russia*<sup>38</sup> on April 19<sup>th</sup> and reached Vancouver 10 days later. Reginald Meighen followed them aboard SS *Monteagle*,<sup>39</sup> departing Vladivostok on April 21<sup>st</sup>, sailing via Hong Kong, and disembarking at Vancouver on May 5<sup>th</sup>. By mid-June 1919, the Perth men were reaching home.

*Comrades Colin Sewell, James Publow and Earle Conlon have returned to Perth from Siberia.<sup>40</sup>*

Most of the remaining Allied force completed their pull-out by April 1920, with the Japanese last to leave in 1922.



**RMS Empress of Russia**  
(Courtesy of Vancouver Archives)

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<sup>37</sup> *Legion Magazine*, February 23, 2019, by J.L. Granatstein.

<sup>38</sup> RMS *Empress of Russia*, built for Canadian Pacific Lines by Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering of Glasgow and launched in 1912. Destroyed by fire at Gareloch, Scotland, while undergoing a refit in 1945.

<sup>39</sup> SS *Monteagle*, built 1898 for Canadian Pacific Lines by Jarrow-on-Tyne by Palmer's Shipbuilding and Iron Company, scrapped in 1926.

<sup>40</sup> *Perth Courier*, June 20, 1919.



The entire intervention in Siberia was short-lived. The Provisional Russian Government and its White Army were badly led, and Vladivostok's White administration was toppled by Red partisans in October 1919. The Bolshevik Army slowly gained ground on the Whites and eventually reached the Siberian coast at Vladivostok. The last area controlled by the White Army, the Ayano-Maysky District, directly to the north of Vladivostok, was finally given up when the White Army capitulated in 1923.

Although the CSEF fought no battles, 21 Canadians died. Fourteen men were buried in Churkin Naval Cemetery, Vladivostok. Five of those died of pneumonia, one of exposure, one of smallpox, one by suicide,<sup>41</sup> and the rest from influenza and meningitis. On the voyage home, five soldiers died at sea and back in Canada two more died while in quarantine. Seven of the dead were conscripts. There were also six deserters.

Sergeant Alexander Berlangette was discharged from the army on June 13, 1919. He returned to the Pharmacy business in Toronto and died there, unmarried, on February 18, 1960.

Two months after his discharge, on June 12, 1919, Private Errol Conlon married Mary Ann Brady (1889-1967) on August 19, 1919. He made his home at Perth, working as a butcher, and died at Perth on April 15, 1959. He was buried in St. John the Baptist Parish Cemetery.

On his return to Canada, Private Elmer James was discharged from military service on March 4, 1919. He went on to study medicine, interned at St. Lawrence State (Psychiatric) Hospital, Ogdensburg, New York, from 1923 and married Agnes Elizabeth Crawford (1903-1994) at Ogdensburg in 1925. He established a medical practice at Kingston, Ontario, and during WW2 returned to military service serving as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC). He died at Kingston in 1992 and was buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Perth.

While serving in Siberia, Private Reginald Meighen fell ill with pneumonia. He was admitted to the army's No. 11 Stationary Hospital at Vladivostok on March 24, 1919 and transferred to Gournostai Bay Hospital two weeks later. While in hospital he developed a severe abscess. He was hospitalized for the remainder of his time in Siberia and, on his return to Canada, spent four months in Sydenham Military Hospital at Kingston. Discharged from the army as 'medically unfit' on October 8, 1919, Meighen died at age 41 in North Elmsley Township on June 6, 1926. He was buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Perth.

Private James Publow disembarked from the *Empress of Russia* at Victoria, BC, on May 29, 1919, and was discharged on June 12, 1919. He married Mary Magdeline Gaudreau (1891-1976) on April 12, 1920. Publow died August 15, 1974, at Ottawa and was buried in St. John the Baptist Parish Cemetery, Perth.

Having also returned to Canada on the SS *Empress of Russia*, Private Colin Sewell received his discharge on June 11, 1919. On April 18, 1936, he married Gertrude Leah Johnson (1902-1981). Sewell died at Halifax, Nova Scotia on July 11, 1968.

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<sup>41</sup> Lieutenant Alfred Henry Thring (1879-1919).

Sergeant Thomas Wilson disembarked at Vancouver on May 29, 1919, and was discharged from the army on June 13, 1919. He lived his life in western Canada and never married. He died at Vancouver on May 23, 1943, but was buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Perth.

- *Ron W. Shaw (2023)*