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***“To make the unmistakable signal ‘Canada’”:***  
**The Canadian Army’s “Battle Flag”**  
**during the Second World War**

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A couple of years ago my wife and I were celebrating our anniversary with a short vacation to the picturesque city of Kingston, Ontario, a historic community on Lake Ontario where the western end of the St. Lawrence River meets the Great Lakes. While there, we visited the Military Communications and Electronics Museum. As I was walking around, looking at the exhibits, I came across a flag, a very large flag in fact, at least ten feet in length. My first thought was, hmm...that seems rather impractical. My second thought was, wait a minute, I’ve seen this somewhere before. Soon after, I came across documentation and imagery which not only explained where, but told some of its wider story.<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1)



*Figure 1. One of the full-sized Canadian Army “battle flags” currently displayed in the Military Communications and Electronics Museum in Kingston, Ontario.*

Sometimes a flag is just a flag. It has specific parameters—parameters not intended to vary or expand over time. However, at other times, these factors do change. The Canadian Army’s “battle flag” during the Second World War proved to be the latter. Created to fulfill a narrowly defined purpose, it briefly became a candidate in the search for a Canadian national flag.

The first mention of the battle flag (as it will be referred to here) came quietly enough. On 18 November 1939, Colonel Archer Fortescue Duguid sent a message to Major George Morley Parker noting: “Reference our telephone conversation. Enclosed is drawing (coloured) of the proper motor-car flag of the G.O.C. [General Officer Commanding] 1st Division, C.A.S.F. [Canadian Active Service Force]. If, however, a flag for the Commander, C.A.S.F. is required, I have another suggestion. Please let me know.” Colonel Duguid was the Director of the Army’s Historical Section in Ottawa. Major Parker was a Royal Canadian Army Service Corps officer serving with the Canadian Active Service Force in Ottawa. Duguid’s notes on the conversation incorporate two drawings: one (in colour) of the automobile flag, the other (in pen) of an image entitled “Commander of the Cdn Forces [in] the Field.”<sup>2</sup> (Figure 2)

Canada had entered the war on 10 September 1939 and, as part of its early mobilization, formed the Canadian Active Service Force as its primary land-based response. It was, in all but name, the Canadian army as



Figure 2. Colonel A. F. Duguid’s 1939 sketch of flags for the Commander of the Canadian Forces in the Field (the “battle flag”) and the automobile flag for the General Officer Commanding, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, Canadian Active Service Force.

mobilized to fight in Europe. The initial Canadian contribution to the fight was the 1st Canadian Division, commanded at this point by Major-General Andrew George Latta McNaughton. It was to Major-General McNaughton that Colonel Duguid had directed his message.

Within three days Colonel Duguid's advice on the automobile flag was accepted by Major-General Andrew George Latta McNaughton, General Officer Commanding, 1st Canadian Division. At the same time, it was reported that General McNaughton felt "he should also have a distinctive flag as Commander of the C.A.S.F. overseas, and would be very glad of your other suggestion for a flag for that purpose."<sup>3</sup>

It only took Duguid until 25 November to respond to McNaughton's request. The answer came in the form of a memorandum enclosing a coloured sketch of a "flag suitable for G.O.C., C.A.S.F." Duguid explained that the design was "directly adapted from the Armorial Bearings of Canada as assigned by Royal Proclamation, 21st November 1921, and also that the devices used are all already authorized, and that each is placed in accordance with the laws of heraldry to express its proper significance." The three maple leaves "proper, conjoined on one stem on a white field" represented Canada, the Union Flag in the canton (upper left hand side) represented Great Britain, and "Old France" was represented in the upper fly (right hand side) by three golden fleur-de-lys on a blue background within a circle to indicate "an ancient and honourable connection."<sup>4</sup>

Two days later Major-General McNaughton raised the issue of the flag with the Minister of National Defence, Norman McLeod Rogers. McNaughton wrote: "The matter of the proper flag to be flown by the Headquarters of the senior formation of the Canadian Active Service Force after it leaves Canada has been the subject of discussion with the Director of the Historical Section, Canadian General Staff." McNaughton agreed with Duguid's proposal of the 25th, and asked the minister to approve the battle flag that Duguid described for use by "The senior Canadian Military Formation in the field." At this time that formation was McNaughton's 1st Canadian Division, but he also stated that if the Canadian military mobilized a corps for service overseas, the proposed flag should go to it. McNaughton ended his report with his favourable impression of the "gra-

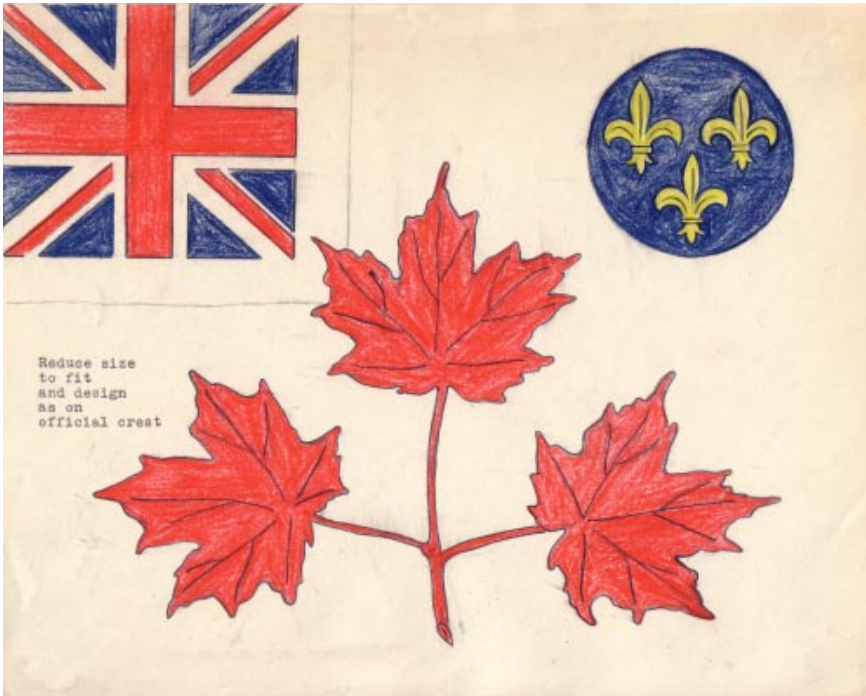
cious compliment to France which, by reason of our present close alliance, seems very timely and appropriate.”<sup>5</sup>

Nearly a week after his submission to Major-General McNaughton, Colonel Duguid called Colonel Ernest W. Sansom, the Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General of the 1st Canadian Division, on 1 December to inquire as to the outcome of his proposal. Colonel Sansom informed him that McNaughton had submitted the battle flag to the Minister of National Defence, “who liked it and would have authorized it at once.” However, McNaughton felt that it should be submitted to the Defence Council—the Minister’s military advisory group—for its approval.<sup>6</sup>

On the evening of 7 December a meeting was held with the Minister of National Defence, Colonel Clyde Rutherford Scott, Military Secretary to the Minister, Major-General Thomas Victor Anderson, Chief of the General Staff, and Major-General McNaughton in attendance. Minister Rogers informed the others that Colonel Duguid’s proposed battle flag had been approved in Cabinet Council that afternoon, with minor changes (specifically, increases to the size of the Union Jack and decreases to the size of the maple leaves).<sup>7</sup> (Figure 3)

William Lyon Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister of Canada, recorded in his diary on 7 December that council had approved Duguid’s flag design for “Canadian Headquarters.” Prime Minister King had suggested that the Union Jack should be larger. In fact, King was so taken by the design that he told Minister of National Defence Rogers it “might, in time, become the flag of Canada with perhaps different colours but identical in design.” King also felt that one maple leaf would be better than three, but understood that three were necessary. King noted that the “design should be submitted to me for final approval by Duguid who has the matter in hand in the Defence Department. It will be for the present merely [a] Defence flag around headquarters.”<sup>8</sup>

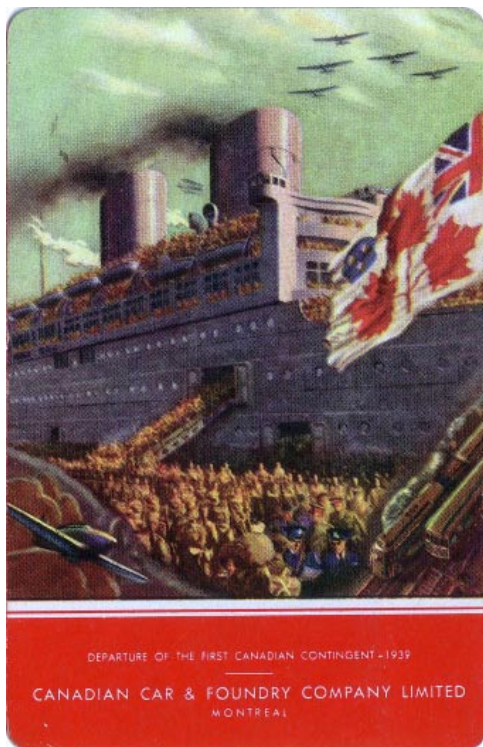
Colonel Duguid had been informed of the Defence Council’s decision not long after the conclusion of its meeting on the 7th. Major-General McNaughton telephoned him to pass on his request for two versions “of this design [to be] made forthwith”. The first was a “large bunting flag, (to



*Figure 3. The sketch of the proposed battle flag as reviewed by government officials on 7 December, 1939 with minor suggested changes.*

fly from trans-Atlantic transport)”, the second a nine-inch by six-inch metal automobile flag. The cloth battle flag, measuring 11’ 7” by 5’ 9.5” (2:1), was completed at 1.00 p.m. on the 8th. Ten minutes later Duguid handed it to McNaughton at the Isabella Street rail siding in Ottawa. Five minutes after that the train carrying the headquarters staff of the 1st Division, C.A.S.F., pulled out of the station. Unfortunately, the metal battle flag was not completed in time, it being noted that there was “no time for [the] paint to dry.”<sup>9</sup>

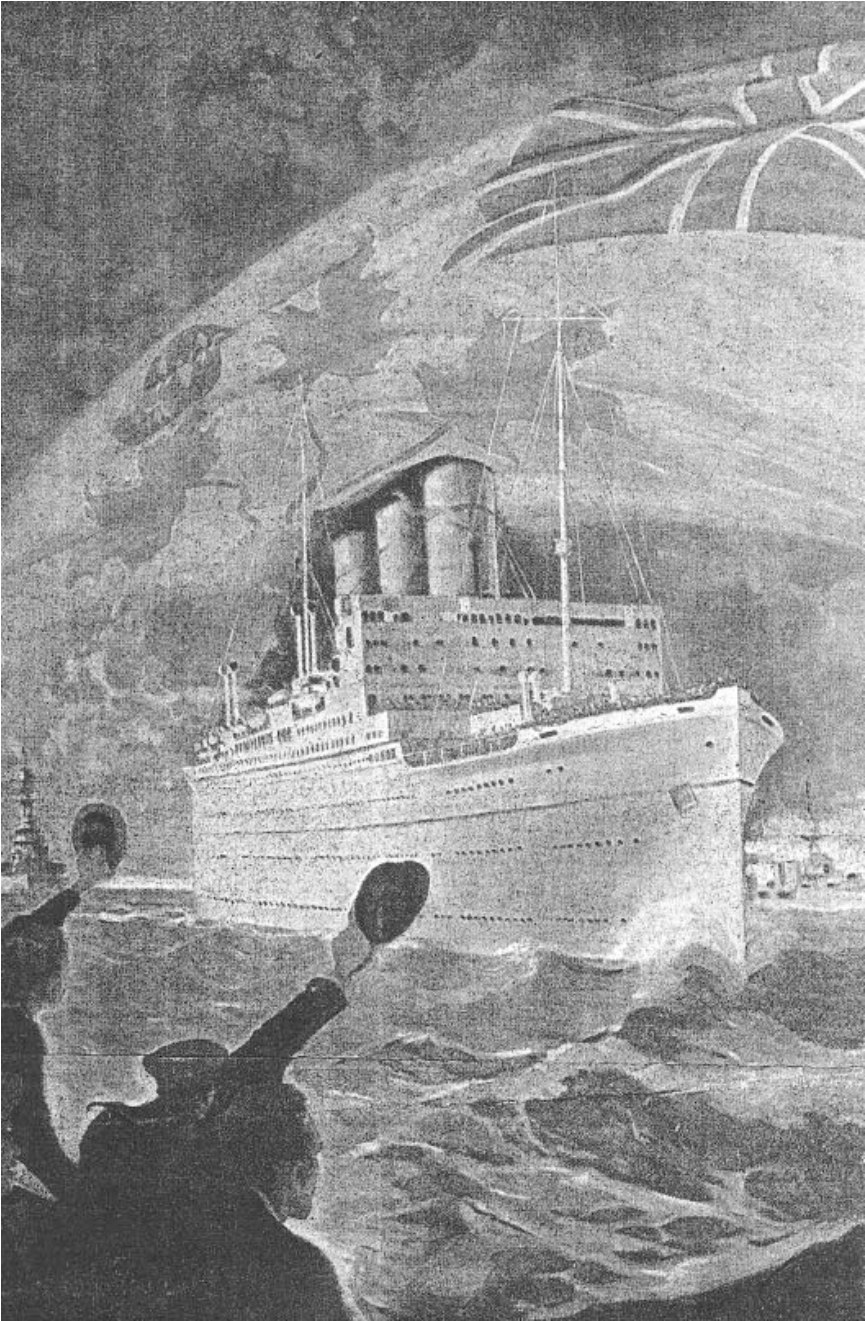
Major-General McNaughton wasted no time making use of the large cloth version of the battle flag. The senior Royal Navy officer on board the *SS Aquitania*, the lead troopship taking 1st Canadian Division to Great Britain, had no objections “to the flying of the Canadian Battle Flag on the *Aquitania* on the voyage between the dock [in Halifax harbour] and the gate vessel [at the edge of open water]” when asked for permission on 10 December.<sup>10</sup> As McNaughton noted in a telegram to the Prime Minis-



*Figure 4. A tobacco card depicting the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division embarking aboard the SS Aquitania in December 1939, with the battle flag flying over the troops.*

ter: “This morning the Battle Flag of the First Canadian Division was unfurled for the first time from the mast head of one of the transports which are to carry us to Europe in the great crusade on which we have now embarked to join our kinsmen from the British Isles and France.”<sup>11</sup> (Figure 4) At 11.45 a.m. that same day the battle flag was dedicated at a ceremony in the ship’s lounge. Major-General McNaughton spoke first, and then had Lieutenant-Colonel Guy Roderick Turner, his General Staff Officer 1 (GSO 1), read telegrams of good luck from the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence. Dedicatory prayers were offered in English and French, and the Canadian Broadcast Corporation recorded the ceremony.<sup>12</sup> (Figure 5)

On 16 December Colonel Duguid sent a memorandum to the Chief Press Liaison Officer, continuing a conversation he had had that day with a member of the staff. In the memo Duguid explained why the battle flag was proper. He outlined “five essential requirements” for a flag: it should “convey one primary idea” (in this case, Canadian), “express identity correctly” (emblems of Britain, Canada, and France), “be distinctive” (not be confused with another flag), “be in accord with the authority granting permission to use the devices displayed” (the 1921 Royal Proclamation of King George V), and “be distinguishable at a distance against any background”.<sup>13</sup>



*Figure 5. The battle flag flying in the sky over the SS Aquitania in December 1939.*

The flag was quickly noticed. In fact, it soon took on a life of its own. On 20 December the *Ottawa Journal* ran an article on Colonel Duguid, “creator of the battle flag of the Canadian Active Service Force”. Duguid had been in Kingston the previous day to watch his son graduate from the Royal Military College. The newspaper article noted it was learned after the ceremony that Duguid had “realized a lifelong dream” when his flag was accepted by Major-General McNaughton “as the emblem of the Canadian army”.<sup>14</sup>

On the same day the *Montreal Gazette* ran a story titled “Flag Designed for 1st Division May Be Adopted for Dominion”. The article, dated 19 December out of Ottawa, noted: “Canada may soon have its first national ensign and the perennial demand in Parliament for a distinctive Canadian flag may be met.” According to reporter F. C. Mears, Colonel Duguid designed the flag, but had “no thought of creating a national flag”. Duguid had simply quickly designed the flag for Major-General McNaughton based on sketches “for the same purpose” he had produced as early as 1924.<sup>15</sup> In fact, in March 1940, Duguid would admit that he had submitted the design later used for the battle flag in June 1925 as part of proposals for a “Canadian National Flag for Use Ashore” (as opposed to a merchant flag).<sup>16</sup>

On the evening of the 19th, after seeing the evening edition of the *Gazette*, a representative of [*Messrs.*] *Dupuis Frères Ltee* sent a telegram to Colonel Duguid stating the company’s interest in the “new Canadian flag” described in the Montreal paper and noting that they would “be pleased to have official design with permission to have this flag made by our staff[.] Is it adopted as official Canadian emblem[?]”.<sup>17</sup> Duguid responded four days later, noting that the flag mentioned in the *Gazette* was “The official emblem of the Canadian Active Service Force. Should the design be adopted as the official Canadian emblem, official announcement will be made in due course.”<sup>18</sup>

By the end of December 1939 Colonel Duguid had received, and responded to, requests for information on the new flag from a number of correspondents. He sent an illustrated description to the editor of *The Canadian Almanac* and similar material to the *Toronto Star Weekly*



and *Saturday Night*. He also responded to an article in the *Cowichan Leader*, defending the design of the flag and noting that it complied with the Royal Proclamation of 21 November 1921.<sup>19</sup> The 1940 edition of *The Canadian Almanac* placed a sketch of the battle flag inside the front cover under the title "new Canadian Flag" and noted it was "the battle flag used by the First Division of the C.A.S.F."<sup>20</sup>

Duguid also began to receive letters in support of transforming the battle flag into a national emblem. T. L. Bullock, Esq., a member of the PanCanadian Union, enclosed the copy of a telegram it had sent to the Prime Minister recommending Duguid's creation "for adoption as the flag of Canada". Duguid certainly didn't object: "There has been so much confusion of thought and uninformed bandying of words as to what a flag is and what it should be that I would be delighted if the design were nationally recognised as the solution."<sup>21</sup> In response to another letter Duguid noted that if he wanted "to send the signal 'British' I run up the Union Jack. But sometimes I want to send the signal 'Canadian'. What then?" He then outlined in extensive heraldic detail the benefits of his design and tackled some of the objections raised to the design from other observers.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps emboldened by the support his design had received so far, Colonel Duguid took charge of the issue in a letter to Mr. A. D. P. Heeney, the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, on 30 December 1939. Duguid wrote that in "view of the reiterated suggestions that this design should be adopted for the national flag of Canada," he was enclosing an "argument"—a Memorandum on the C.A.S.F. Flag—for the Prime Minister's "perusal." As Duguid put it: "I understand that the matter of a national flag appears on the order paper for [the] next session [of Parliament]."<sup>23</sup> John W. Pickersgill responded for the Principal Secretary on 2 January, noting that Duguid's items would be brought "to the Prime Minister's attention at the first opportunity."<sup>24</sup> Two days later Pickersgill wrote to Duguid again, stating that Prime Minister King considered the battle "flag should be regarded as a device pertaining exclusively to the Overseas Division. It, therefore, appears that regulations governing the display of this flag might properly

be a question for the Minister of National Defence, and Mr. King has directed me to refer any further communications on the subject to that department.”<sup>25</sup> If Prime Minister King still saw the battle flag as a potential national flag of the future, he wasn’t making his opinion known at the time.

Meanwhile, the public debate over Colonel Duguid’s flag continued. Under the title “Origins and Objects of New Flag for Our Forces,” the *Ottawa Evening Citizen* of 13 January 1940 included an editorial on the merits of the design. It noted that Parliament would likely be the scene of some discussion on the subject when it met later in the month. The newspaper stated the flag was “a signal intended to proclaim to all who see it that the people who display it are of Canada” and the “new flag design has been suggested as a good one for the proposed Canadian national flag. Whether or not it will reach that status depends upon Parliament, of course. But it covers the necessary ground very simply and attractively and is superior to the red ensign usually but incorrectly used as a Canadian flag.”<sup>26</sup>

However, not everyone agreed. For example, T. S. Ewart wrote to the *Citizen* from Ottawa that same day, objecting to Colonel Duguid’s design becoming a national symbol. Reiterating the *Winnipeg Free Press*’s conclusion that Duguid’s banner “would be instantly recognized as a British flag,” he wrote that any national symbol should be “instantly recognized” as Canadian. He concluded: “Any other flag should never have the respect of patriotic Canadians and a colonial flag would be a disgrace.”<sup>27</sup>

As the debate continued, the flag maintained its high profile at home and abroad. For example, the 20 January 1940 issue of the popular magazine *Saturday Night* ran a colour illustration of the battle flag with the caption “Canada’s Banner goes into War.” The magazine also noted: “It is widely believed that when Canada is ready to adopt a national flag of her own, as several other Dominions have already done, Col. Duguid’s design is most likely to be accepted.”<sup>28</sup> (Figure 6)

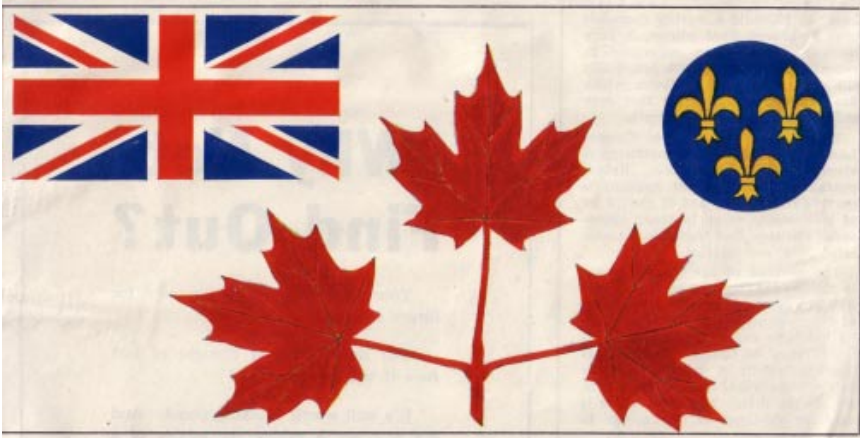
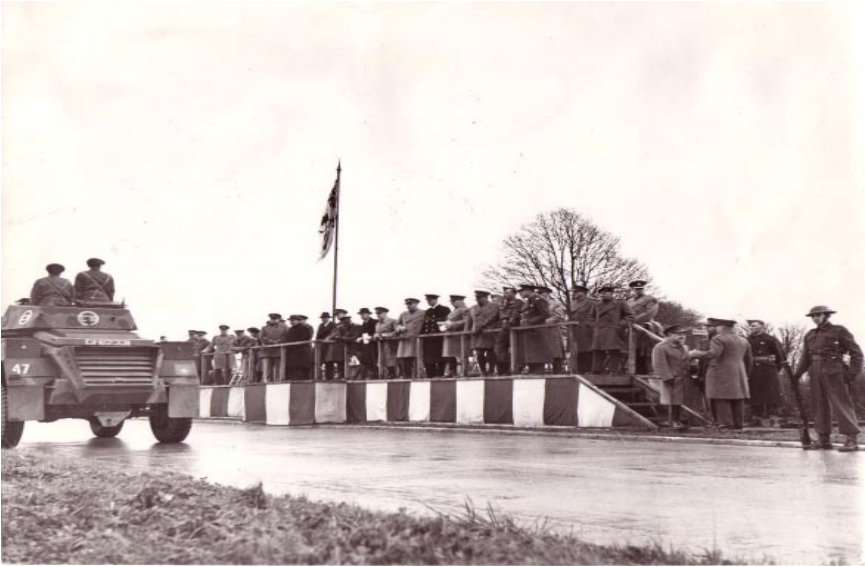


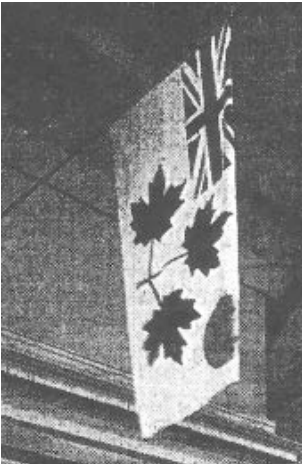
Figure 6. The illustration of the battle flag published in the popular magazine *Saturday Night* in January 1940 under the caption "Canada's banner goes to War".

Five days later the *Ottawa Citizen* reported that a presentation of a miniature of the "official battle flag of the first Canadian division" had been made to King George VI the day before. While inspecting the Canadian troops encamped at Aldershot, England, the King had taken notice of the battle flag "fluttering at the staff of divisional headquarters." When asked, Major-General McNaughton explained that Colonel Duguid had designed the flag. McNaughton presented the King with the miniature battle flag from McNaughton's own automobile at the end of the visit.<sup>29</sup> It was unclear from that report whether the flag was, indeed, the original 1st Canadian Division commander's flag or the senior Canadian commander's flag designed by Duguid. This uncertainty was, however, cleared up by a report in the *Montreal Gazette* that same day which described "the flag which combines the Union Jack, maple leaf, and fleur de lys on a white field."<sup>30</sup> A couple of months later Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. Walford, the acting Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General for the 1st Canadian Division, wrote to Duguid, informing him that Major-General McNaughton had had two miniature battle flags produced for use on his car after the division's arrival in England, and that one of those had been given to the King. Lieutenant-Colonel Walford noted: "the flag has created the greatest interest, and has helped to illustrate the fact that we are here as the



*Figure 7. A Canadian armoured car passing the saluting base during the parade which marked the third anniversary of the landing of the first flight of Canadian troops in 1939 (original caption from 17 December 1942).*

voluntary representatives of a sister nation of the Commonwealth. Everyone feels that the design is most appropriate and attractive.”<sup>31</sup> (Figure 7)



*Figure 8. The battle flag being flown in the concourse of Windsor Station in Montreal in 1940 by the Canadian Pacific Railway.*

The battle flag was even being flown in Canada. It was reported on 30 January 1940 that the “new battle flag of the Canadian Army” was being flown in the concourse of Windsor Station in Montreal, “where the Canadian Pacific Railway has put it on display so that the people of Montreal can see the much discussed new standard.”<sup>32</sup> (Figure 8)

Meanwhile, as some—including the Native Sons of Canada organization—continued to oppose Duguid’s design becoming the national flag, others took the ongoing debate as an opportunity to submit their own creations. In early February 1940 Mr. Percy

McLean, a twenty-one year old resident of Ottawa, reportedly submitted designs for a "battle flag" and a national flag to the Department of National Defence. The proposed battle flag depicted designs representing the navy, army and air force on the left of the flag, with a Union Jack at the top centre, a blue emblem with three maple leaves and a fleur-de-lys in the bottom centre, and nine bars representing the provinces with a beaver on the top bar, all on a white field. His design for the national flag incorporated a red field, a Union Jack in the upper left corner, an emblem with three maple leaves and a fleur-de-lys in the lower left corner, and the nine bars with a beaver on the top bar on the right side of the flag.<sup>33</sup>

While this was happening, Canadian Army officials overseas were responding to inquiries about the battle flag and trying to ensure its proper "place" was maintained. On 2 February Colonel P. J. Montague, Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General with Canadian Military Headquarters in London, responded to a letter from the Chief Trade Commissioner at Canada House, London, noting the flag was "that of the 1st Canadian Division only and is not intended to be used by anyone else. It is not the official flag of Canada,"<sup>34</sup> Colonel Montague, in turn, asked Major-General McNaughton for background on the battle flag. McNaughton responded that the flag had been designed by Colonel Duguid "and approved by the Government of Canada as the battle flag of the Senior Canadian Formation Overseas; in consequence, it is now the battle flag of 1 Cdn. Div. but, on the formation of the Canadian Corps, will become the battle flag of that formation. This flag may only be flown by the Commander of the Senior Canadian Formation Overseas."<sup>35</sup>

In February 1940 Colonel Duguid received further support for the extension of his battle flag design into a national symbol. Victor Odlum, a retired general and officer commanding the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade during the First World War, wrote to Duguid on 6 February to say that he had just seen the battle flag in *Saturday Night* and thought it was "very effective." Odlum felt it would eventually become the Canadian Corps flag and that Duguid should start thinking about related designs for the First and Second Canadian Divisions. Duguid responded on the 14th and wrote that the flag's "military purpose is to mark the headquarters of

the senior Canadian commander, as the Union Flag distinguishes the G.H.Q. [General Headquarters] of a British force in a theatre of operations. It was not adopted as a corps or divisional flag: it is flown by General McNaughton, not in his capacity as G.O.C., 1st Division, C.A.S.F., but because he is the senior commander of the C.A.S.F.” He went on to describe existing regulations governing corps and divisional flags and noted: “no other provision is made in regulations for anything in the nature of a flag to distinguish a formation, and further departure or innovation seems unnecessary and undesirable.” After discussing, at some length, the pitfalls of formation flags, Duguid concluded by writing that it “has been suggested that the C.A.S.F. design should be adopted for the national flag—that would give a distinctive and appropriate signal for ‘CANADA’, superseding the mercantile marine flag ashore.” One week later Odlum wrote back and commented: “I am delighted to be able to say that the design definitely appeals to me as suitable for a future Canadian flag. Many people are opposed to any distinctive Canadian flag, but I am not. I think that we should have one as soon as the majority of the country wishes it.”<sup>36</sup>

Even poetry began to be dedicated to Duguid’s creation. On 14 March 1940 the *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph* ran a poem penned by Annie Bethune McDougald from Montreal entitled “The Canadian Army’s Battle Flag”:

’Neath their battle flag they play the game  
That was played on Eton’s fields;  
Young hearts today have caught the flame, -  
That Britain never yields.

’Tis Freedom’s voice, be sure we hear,  
Not for pelf, nor loot, nor gain;  
Higher it rises, cheer on cheer, -  
‘The Empire we’ll maintain!’  
By Vimy’s heroes, Mons, Paschendale! [sic]  
Be it ‘Tommy’ or ‘Poliu,’ [sic]  
These men we’ll not betray, nor fail, -  
They fought for me and you.

Red Maple 'neath Union Jack's broad fold,  
And the Lillies of Old France,  
Ever as in the days of old, -  
'Tis Freedom we advance.

What matter the different words we say?  
Our hearts are all the same, -  
'Liberte! Vive la Liberte!'  
'Up! Up! and play the game!'<sup>37</sup>

In the spring of 1940 the debate continued when Colonel Duguid faced off against two other experts in *The McGill News* under the title "The Canadian Flag Question Again!" The other two gentlemen were Percy E. Nobbs, a "well known authority on heraldry," and D. Stuart Forbes, a draftsman and expert on the production of flags. In its introduction to the three points-of-view, the journal noted that Duguid "has weighty arguments to support his point [that his battle flag design be adopted as the national flag], not the least being that the flag he designed has actually been accepted by our Army. That circumstance may constitute a very potent factor in moulding the public opinion which will eventually decide what the pattern of our national flag will be."<sup>38</sup>

Before moving on to his usual defence of the design of the "flag of the Canadian Active Service Force," Colonel Duguid wrote that the "main purpose of the flag required to designate the Canadian Active Service Force overseas was, and is, to declare 'CANADA' as directly and forcefully as possible."<sup>39</sup> Percy Nobbs's article on "Canadian Flag Problems" followed and noted that the "flag now flown at Canadian Headquarters, Overseas, was specifically designed and made up for that specific purpose. Its appearance on the scene has revived interest in that hardy perennial question: the Canadian flag; to be or not to be; and if so, what? Why not this flag." Nobbs had no intention of criticizing the battle flag as designed by Duguid, but he did wish to discuss the "proposal to adopt it, as it stands, for the Canadian flag." His primary objections to such a move came down to his belief that a national flag should be simple, and Duguid's design was



*Figure 9. The simplified suggestion for the battle flag as a national flag submitted by D. Stuart Forbes to The McGill News during its flag debate in 1940.*

not.<sup>40</sup> Stuart Forbes commented in much the same vein under the title “C.A.S.F. Flag Needs ‘Certain Simplifications’.” Forbes thought the battle flag “ably represent[ed] Canada in the war, but suggested certain simplifications which he felt might well create a flag worthy of national adoption.” In fact, he included an illustration of his proposed design.<sup>41</sup> (Figure 9)

Surviving documentation from mid-1940 through 1942 on this subject—mostly to Colonel Duguid from individuals and publications, and his responses to them—deals primarily with questions regarding the availability of reproductions of the flag, his justification for the design, and requests for images of the flag.<sup>42</sup> By early August 1941 Duguid was able to inform one correspondent that the flag was “a special military flag introduced to designate the Headquarters of the senior formation of the Canadian Active Service Force (now Canadian Army—Active Force) overseas. It would therefore be at present flown at Headquarters, Canadian Corps.”<sup>43</sup> Any mention of the use of the battle flag as Canada’s national flag during this period seemed to have dramatically declined.

In fact, the previously accepted status of the battle flag even within the Canadian Army began to come under question in March 1943. Colonel Duguid first received a telephone call at 3:10 p.m. on the 3rd from the



Chief of the General Staff's office regarding the background to the "flag distinguishing Headquarters Canadian Army Overseas."<sup>44</sup> The significance of the time was that the House of Commons was in question period, the period having started at 3.00 p.m. and some questions were posed by the Member of Parliament for the riding of Québec-Montmorency, Mr. Wilfrid LaCroix, to the Minister of National Defence, James Layton Ralston. Mr. LaCroix asked: "has it been found necessary in England to adopt a special flag for the Canadian army to distinguish it from that of England and the sister dominions?" and "Will the Canadian flag adopted in England be the one used in Canada after the war? If not, what will then be the Canadian flag."<sup>45</sup>

Whether the telephone call to Duguid came before or after (likely after) the questions were asked is not known. Minister Ralston's response in the house, however, is: "The answer is no. It may be that the hon[ourable] member has in mind a pennant which was presented to General McNaughton when he was general officer commanding the first Canadian division. That banner has no official status as a flag."<sup>46</sup>

On 12 March a memorandum was submitted to the Deputy Adjutant General's office at National Defence Headquarters, regarding the background documentation for the approval of the battle flag. Although the author of the memo was certain that Major-General McNaughton and Minister of National Defence Rogers had agreed to the design, there was no record of Cabinet ever approving the flag. The Privy Council Office noted that there was "no official record of any Cabinet decision" on the matter. In fact they could only confirm that Prime Minister King approved of the design as of 4 January 1940.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, three days later Colonel Duguid provided his response lines to a series of questions submitted by Mr. LaCroix on 4 March to be answered in the House of Commons by the Minister of National Defence. After noting that Field Service Regulations permitted the flying of "certain flags and pennons" to "identify various headquarters of the field Army," Duguid outlined the path by which the battle flag had travelled and its place in Canada's national insignia:

In 1939 Major-General (now Lieutenant-General) McNaughton suggested that a distinctive flag of this type should be available to be flown by the Commander of the Headquarters of the Senior Formation of the Canadian Active Service Force. A design was approved by the then Minister of National Defence, for the purpose indicated. This flag was presented to General McNaughton as Commander of the Senior Formation of the Canadian Active Service Force when the First Division proceeded overseas in December 1939. At that time this Division was the Senior Formation overseas and its flag was flown by the Divisional Cmdr. [Commander] at his Headquarters. Later the flag was transferred to the Commander of the 1st Canadian Corps and later to the Commander of 1st Canadian Army as these became in turn the Senior Formations of the Canadian Army Overseas.

This Headquarters flag does not displace the “Union” (ordinarily known as the Union Jack) as the flag designating the fighting Forces of His Majesty The King. It has no status as a national flag, but is a special flag simply to distinguish the Headquarters of the Commander of the Senior Formation overseas. It may be compared with the use of the red ensign flown at buildings occupied by Canadian Government offices outside of Canada.

This flag identifies these Headquarters and no other.<sup>48</sup>

On the following day Colonel Duguid submitted a memorandum to the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of National Defence, noting the “basic difficulty in replying to these [LaCroix’s] questions is that, while the flag in question has been approved, up to date no Order, either of Council or Canadian Army has been promulgated to specify its uses, who may fly it, and where and when.” Duguid also enclosed a copy of the 4 January 1940 letter from J. W. Pickersgill stating Prime Minister King’s approval of the flag “as a device pertaining exclusively to the Overseas Division.”<sup>49</sup>

On 17 March 1943 Minister Ralston answered Mr. LaCroix’s questions on the “Canadian Army Emblem” in the House of Commons. LaC-

roix had asked whether a "distinctive emblem" had been adopted for the use of the Canadian Army in England, whether it was a "banner or a flag," whether the "British flag" was the flag of the armies of South Africa, Australia, and Canada, and whether there was a "non-official flag" belonging to the Canadian Army overseas. Ralston answered the question about the Union Jack first, noting that it was used in the King's Colours of Canadian regiments and that it was flown over "buildings occupied by the Canadian army in Canada." He then answered the other questions all at once, beginning by noting that various flags appeared in regulations for different formations and appointments, but that no such flag "designating the commander or the headquarters of a dominion force at sea or in the field" existed when the war began. The Minister continued by discussing the familiar tale of how Duguid's battle flag had come to be produced, and remarked that it was

for special identification: to afford a ready means of distinguishing the character of the headquarters over which it floats, and the portion of the commonwealth to which they belong. It has no status as a national flag. Its use does not interfere with, or infringe upon, the prescribed uses of the union flag. Its use may be compared with the present use of the red ensign with the Canadian arms in the fly, flown on suitable occasions on buildings owned or occupied by the Canadian government and situate[d] without Canada.<sup>50</sup>

Later that year, in mid-August, Colonel Duguid also had to clarify the matter of the battle flag to the Canadian Army itself. On 19 August he sent a memorandum to Major-General H. F. G. Letson, the Adjutant-General, entitled the "Canadian Army Flag." Duguid discussed the design of an "official flag for the Canadian Army," noting that its appearance would depend on the "uses to which the flag is to be put and on the designs of flags presently in use." He thought such a flag would be flown at military buildings throughout Canada, where the Union Jack was currently flown. Referring to the battle flag, he commented that

the paramount purpose of this special flag is to make the unmistakable signal "CANADA", and in fact it takes the place of the

Canadian land ensign or national flag—at present non-existent. Its adoption as the national flag of Canada—superseding the mis-used red and blue ensigns with the shield of Canada in the fly—would solve all difficulties and provide a proper flag for Army use, and for many other occasions when the Union Flag is inappropriate, confusing or deceptive.<sup>51</sup>

Duguid then gave the particulars of why the battle flag should be adopted, including its use of previously approved devices, the King's verbal approval, its "favour" with the Canadian Army overseas, and its distinctiveness from other British and Commonwealth designs. He concluded that the battle flag "should be authorized for Army use, both in and out of Canada, on specified occasions, at specified places, and by specified officers," while the Union Jack should be retained for use on the direction of the Minister of National Defence or District Officers Commanding (regional army commanders within Canada).<sup>52</sup>

In mid-October Colonel Duguid drafted a letter for the signature of Lieutenant-Colonel G. S. Currie, the Deputy Minister of National Defence (Army), in response to the 1943 edition of *The Canadian Almanac* and its "Flags Flown in Canada" section. That periodical had sent the Department of National Defence a draft of its flag section, which read in part: "battle FLAG—The Battle Flag of the Canadian Army, Overseas, authorized by the Department of National Defence, carries the Union Jack in the upper half..." Duguid's letter to *The Canadian Almanac* noted that its "present wording is open to misinterpretation" and suggested, instead, that the relevant section read: "The CANADIAN ARMY FLAG—Authorized by the Department of National Defence, has a white field..." The 1944 edition of the almanac, indeed, read as Duguid recommended.<sup>53</sup>

Discussion and debate of the battle flag issue continued within the Department of National Defence. At the end of November 1943 Major D. G. Ross, with the office of the Deputy Adjutant General, wrote to his superior with respect to the October letter from *The Canadian Almanac*. He noted that the periodical had implied that "General McNaughton's flag" was the "official Canadian Army Flag." Major Ross pointed out that

battle flag "is not the Canadian Army Flag. It has been the subject of more than one inquiry in the House [of Commons] and returns have been tabled stating that it has no official status as a flag and is for identification purposes only." He then revealed that the Army Council, in a meeting held on 26 August 1943, had "agreed that the Red Ensign with the Canadian Coat-of-Arms on the fly is the most appropriate flag for adoption as a Canadian Army Flag." The Cabinet War Committee agreed with the Army Council decision on 8 September of that year and, furthermore, on 27 October agreed that the Canadian Army "provide for flying the Canadian Red Ensign where Canadian forces were serving with forces of other nations."<sup>54</sup>

Four days after Major Ross's memorandum was written, Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Philip Sprange, with the Army's Directorate of Administration, wrote to Colonel Duguid concerning the latter's letter for the Deputy Minister with respect to the wording of flag section in the 1943 edition of *The Canadian Almanac*. Lieutenant-Colonel Sprange noted that Duguid's "letter has now been questioned as will be seen and it is implied that the information conveyed to the Proprietors of the Canadian Almanac is incorrect." He ended his letter: "Your remarks are requested, please."<sup>55</sup>

Colonel Duguid responded to Lieutenant-Colonel Sprange's request for information on 5 January 1944 (although that date on the memorandum has been scratched out and replaced with 2 February 1944). Duguid began by detailing where the Red Ensign with the "shield of Canada in the fly" could be flown on land, including "where units of the Canadian Army are serving with forces of other nations." He then remarked that the Red Ensign could not be described as "'The Canadian Army Flag.'" any more than it could be described as "The Canadian Air Force Flag.'" Continuing, Duguid discussed the battle flag, noting that it had been "introduced to indicate the Headquarters of the senior Canadian combatant formation overseas" and had been approved by that formation's commander, the Chief of the General Staff, the Minister of National Defence, and by Cabinet Council." He realized that approval for the battle flag did not appear in the minutes of Cabinet Council for 7 December 1939 but that was "ac-

counted for by the fact that their discussions are not recorded verbatim,” and suggested a review of the Minister of National Defence’s comments in the House of Commons on 17 March 1943.<sup>56</sup>

Colonel Duguid further explained that the battle flag had been appropriately authorized for its original purpose. He noted that the Canadian Army itself had called the flag the “special flag for the 1st Canadian Division.” the “C.A.S.F. flag,” and the “official Flag—C.A.S.F.” in various messages and Duguid concluded: “Since then the C.A.S.F. has merged into the Canadian Army,” He stated that King George VI approved of the flag and that since then “The significance of this flag has been expanded,” successively becoming the flag of the Canadian Corps and of the First Canadian Army. Minister of National Defence Ralston had reportedly written “The Battle Flag has been well received and has become the Army Standard.” On 3 September 1943 the minister donated a six-foot long copy to the Ottawa Blood Donor Clinic “to be grouped in display with the White Ensign and the R.C.A.F. ensign, to represent the Canadian Army as distinct from [the] Navy and Air Force.”<sup>57</sup>

After noting the battle flag’s heraldic correctness, Colonel Duguid admitted:

Although, so far as is known, no specific orders or regulations have been promulgated covering the flag flown to indicate the Headquarters of the Senior Canadian Combatant Formation Overseas[,] action has been taken by responsible officials and officers of the Department as if such instruments and orders had been issued. For four years the flag has served the purposes for which it was intended, and this usage is an acknowledgement that the flag belongs to the Canadian Government. [...] It is quite clear that approval of the flag has been sought and granted by the proper authorities, although full authorization on paper is lacking.”<sup>58</sup>

Colonel Duguid concluded his memorandum by noting that the letter he drafted to *The Canadian Almanac* “was prepared chiefly to correct the faulty description of the design which appears in the 1943 issue.” He noted that although the title “battle Flag” was not used within the Depart-

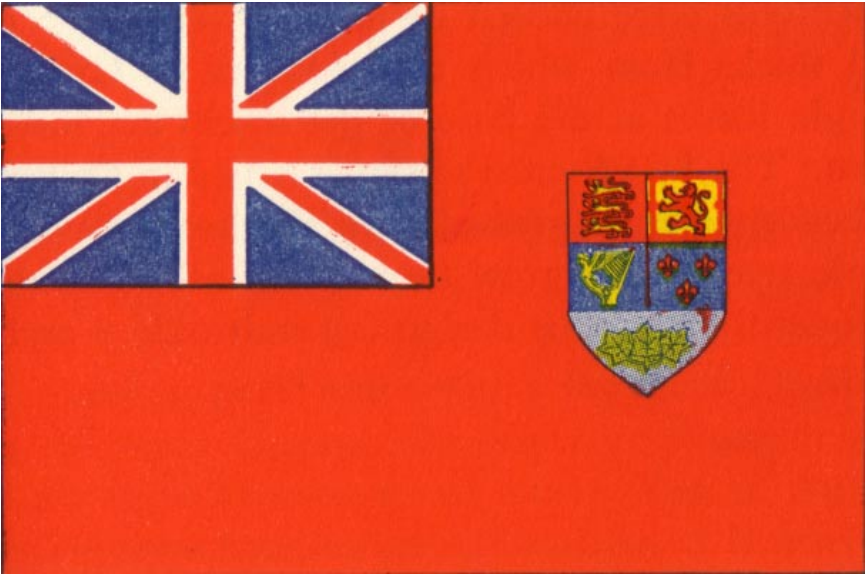


Figure 10. The Canadian Red Ensign as flown by Canadian Army Routine Order No. 4021 in January 1944.

ment of National Defence, the flag had been authorized, it had been used in Canada to indicate the Canadian Army “and indications are that usage will be extended,” and that no amendment to his letter to *The Canadian Almanac* was necessary.<sup>59</sup>

No record has been found of a response from the Army's Directorate of Administration to Colonel Duguid's memorandum, just two Canadian Army orders in January and May 1944 that ruled on the status of the Canadian Red Ensign within the army, at home and overseas. (Figure 10) On 22 January 1944 Canadian Army Routine Order No. 4021 (“Flying of Flags at Canadian Army Stations”) stated: “The Canadian Red Ensign with the Shield of the Coat of Arms of Canada in the fly is to be flown at all units of the Canadian Army serving with forces of other nations.” Four months later, on 10 May, a Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order, entitled “Flying of the Canadian Red Ensign” covered the ensign's overseas usage in great detail:

1. The Canadian Red Ensign with the shield of the Coat of Arms of Canada in the fly is to be flown on all appropriate occasions by

fmns [formations] and units of the Cdn Army Overseas when serving in the same comd [command], fmn or area with, or in proximity to, British, Dominion or Allied Forces.

2. Normally flags will be flown by fmns down to and including bdes [brigades] and by inf [infantry] bns [battalions] and units of comparable size when on detached duty. They will also be flown under such other circumstances as the comd concerned, not below the rank of brigadier, may in his discretion decide.

3. Flags will be flown by fmns and units of the Cdn Army in accordance with directions issued by:—

(a) The GOC-in-C [General Officer Commander-in-Chief], First Cdn Army, for fmns and units under his comd.

(b) The senior Cdn comd in a theatre of operations outside the UK for all fmns and units in that theatre.

(c) CMHQ [Canadian Military Headquarters], for all fmns and units under comd.

4. Canadian Red Ensigns on the scale referred to in para 2 above will be issued initially to fmns without indent when supply is available. Further requirements for replacements will be demanded as required through normal channels.<sup>60</sup>

John Matheson, the Member of Parliament central to the adoption of Canada's current national flag, would later write that wartime Canada had been, in fact, without a "distinctive flag." In his opinion, it "was to remedy this situation" that the Canadian Army had issued its January 1944 order to fly the Canadian version of the red ensign at all Canadian Army units across the country. He further noted: "the exigencies of the military had brought the question of the appropriate land flag for Canada into the forefront of Canadian politics, if only because the Rules and Regulations (Canada) 1939 [...] stated categorically that the flag of Canada 'was the Union Jack.'" Matheson made no mention of the battle flag.<sup>61</sup>



Colonel Duguid's design was, however, not entirely forgotten. On 5 July 1944 a lengthy letter from Charles E. Holmes, a resident of Pointe-aux-Trembles, Quebec, appeared in the Montreal Gazette. Holmes discussed how it was that Canada did not have a national flag. Even the Canadian version of the Red Ensign was not the national flag. He praised Colonel Duguid for his design of a "distinctive standard that should (and would) be acceptable to all elements of Canada's population." He wrote that the battle flag was "extensively used by our soldiers overseas. It was also displayed in, or painted on the walls of, recruiting stations throughout the Dominion." The design was, in his opinion, well received by the French press in Canada and stated that numerous "articles and editorial comments urged its adoption as Canada's national flag." Holmes then wrote: "Then came the conscription referendum and (can it be mere coincidence?) someone high up in government or army circles decided that this standard is 'taboo.' It vanished almost overnight from barracks and recruiting stations."<sup>62</sup>

The issue of the battle flag remained on Colonel Duguid's agenda into 1945. On 21 February he responded to a letter from retired Lieutenant-Colonel R. P. Locke, with respect to the particulars of the flag. Duguid began by noting that it was "a form of the national flag and belongs to the Canadian Government by virtue of the Royal Proclamation of 21 Nov 21." After detailing its background and authorization, as he had justified in his memorandum one year previously to the army, Duguid wrote: "Although official use has been made of the flag, as above, no Army regulations or orders covering the design or use of the flag have been printed or promulgated. During the past five years it has been widely used in decorations, posters, postcards, illustrations, jewellery, etc. to express 'CANADA'."<sup>63</sup>

Two days later, on 23 February, Colonel Duguid continued his defence of the battle flag in a response to the District Officer Commanding, Military Headquarters No. 2, in Toronto. Duguid noted that his design had been called, at various times, "The Canadian Active Service Force Flag." "The Canadian Army Flag." "The Canadian Battle Flag." "The Canadian Troops War Flag." and, erroneously, "Lieut.-General McNaughton's Flag."

After noting that the flag was “a form of the National flag of Canada,” he provided a detailed explanation of the flag’s design and wrote: “The flag in question may be flown, used, or displayed in any place, in any manner, and at any time proper to a national flag.” He stated that replicas of the flag could be “used for decorative or representative purposes wherever appropriate as representing the Canadian Army, for example in a church or public building where the Union Jack, the White Ensign[,] the Canadian Red Ensign or the RCAF Ensign might be displayed.” After mentioning the flag’s use already overseas, and its use in Canada in railway stations and in commercial contexts, he added that “various devices” of the flag’s design were also being used on the badge of the Canadian Infantry Corps, on the General Service lapel badge, on the patch of the Royal Canadian Army Cadets, on the funnels of Canadian warships, and on various other materials issued by the government.<sup>64</sup> (Figure 11)

Several months later, on 5 December, Toronto’s *The Evening Telegram* reported that a joint committee of members of the House of Commons and the Senate, charged with “selecting a design for a distinctive Canadian flag,” heard from Colonel Duguid on the subject. Reportedly, the previous day Duguid lectured on “ensigns armorial, flags and their meaning, heraldry and considerable additional interesting information.” He remarked he was “not offering any particular design” as the committee had already received some 1,200 proposed designs for a national flag. He did use the Union Jack, the Red Ensign, the Blue Ensign, and some of the proposed designs to demonstrate his lecture points and *The Evening Telegram* reported Duguid mentioned one of the latter “had a particular appeal to him. It contained a Union Jack in the canton, three large maple leaves on one stem on a white field, with a circle in the upper right hand corner of the fly containing three gold fleur-de-lis on a blue background.” Duguid stated that the senior Canadian Army commander overseas had flown it during the war and that King George VI had “seen and expressed approval of it.”<sup>65</sup>

Archer Fortescue Duguid, now a civilian, was indeed the first expert witness to testify before the Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons Appointed to Consider and Report upon a Suitable Design for a Distinctive National Flag for Canada. And, the newspaper reporter was



Figure 11. The battle flag in advertising under the headline "Canada's Banner on the Firing Line".

substantially correct. In addition to his lecture on heraldry and flags, Duguid answered questions from the members of the committee. He also assured the committee members that he was "not going to present any brief for any particular flag," even though his battle flag design was one of the twelve flags he used as props for his presentation. Duguid explicitly pushed the battle flag, again without mentioning his role in designing it,

stating it was “a form of the national flag of Canada,” After briefly describing the design, he declared: “The message it conveys is unmistakable, ‘Canada, honourably associated with Britain, honourably associated with Royal France’. This flag was flown by the senior commander in the Canadian Army Overseas. The King has seen and expressed approval of it.”<sup>66</sup>

The work of the 1945-46 committee did not lead to the creation of a Canadian national flag, in any form. John Matheson, the member of parliament central to the adoption of Canada’s national flag, noted, however, that Duguid did not give up on the possible extension of his battle flag design as the national flag. In 1964 Duguid appeared before the latest embodiment of the Flag Committee (the one that helped produce the current Canadian symbol) according to Matheson, ever “the heraldic purist, preferring that the colours and the emblems of the arms be repeated intact on the flag. He was undoubtedly influenced by his contribution to the First Canadian Division in creating the ‘battle flag’ in 1939.”<sup>67</sup>



## Endnotes

1. For their assistance with this paper, my thanks go to Dr. Steve Harris, Warrant Officer Carl Kletke, Madeleine Lafleur-Lemire, Major Paul Lansey, Major Jim McKillip, and Tara Scagnetti from the Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence; to Sylvie Denis from the Library of Parliament; to the members of the North American Vexillological Association, especially Peter Ansoff and Ted Kaye; and to my wife, Barbara Dundas.
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14. DHH, 92/252, file 3-1-2 pt.1, copy of newspaper clipping, *Ottawa Journal*, 20 December, 1939.
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16. DHH, 92/252, file 3-1-2 pt.1, Notes on Letter from Mr Larson (signed A.F.D.), 7 March 1940
17. DHH, 92/252, file 3-1-2 pt.1, Dupuis Frères Ltee to Duguid, 19 December 1939
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23. DHH, 92/252, file 3-1-2 pt.1, A.F.D. to Heney, 30 December 1939
24. DHH, 92/252, file 3-1-2 pt.1, Pickersgill to Duguid, 2 January 1940
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53. DHH, 92/252, file 3-1-2 pt.2, Deputy Minister to Editor, *The Canadian Almanac*, 18 October 1943; *The Canadian Almanac and Legal and Court Directory for the Year 1943* (Toronto: The Copp Clark Company, 1943), p. 324; *The Canadian Almanac and Legal and Court Directory for the Year 1944* (Toronto: The Copp Clark Company, 1944), pp. 329-30
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### **Sources of Illustrations**

Figure 1. Photograph by author

Figure 4. Postcard purchased by author

Figure 7. Department of National Defense photograph held by Library and Archives Canada

All other figures: DHH, 92/252, file 3-1-2 pts. 1 and 2