

# THE CANADIAN ARMY ON SALISBURY PLAIN

THE FIRST CANADIAN CONTINGENT  
OCTOBER 1914– FEBRUARY 1915

T. S. Crawford

At the start of the Great War Canada recruited a First Contingent of 30,600 men who, together with 537 men from Newfoundland, arrived in England in October 1914. They spent the next 16 weeks mostly in tents on Salisbury Plain in one of the wettest winters on record, enduring poor equipment, re-organizations, floods, mud and disease and helping to build hutted camps. Training suffered and discipline was questionable but both countries' officers and men went on to show immense fighting courage, the Canadians saving the day at the second Battle of Ypres soon after leaving England.

As well as detailing all its hardships, this book describes the Contingent's formation, its arrival in Plymouth, military and recreational experiences on and off the Plain, and relationships with local people.

*The Canadian Army on Salisbury Plain* presents a fascinating and detailed view of an otherwise neglected aspect of the First World War; when soldiers from far-flung parts of the King-Emperor's Dominion rallied to the imperial flag and sailed thousands of miles to take part in the greatest armed struggle the world had ever known.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

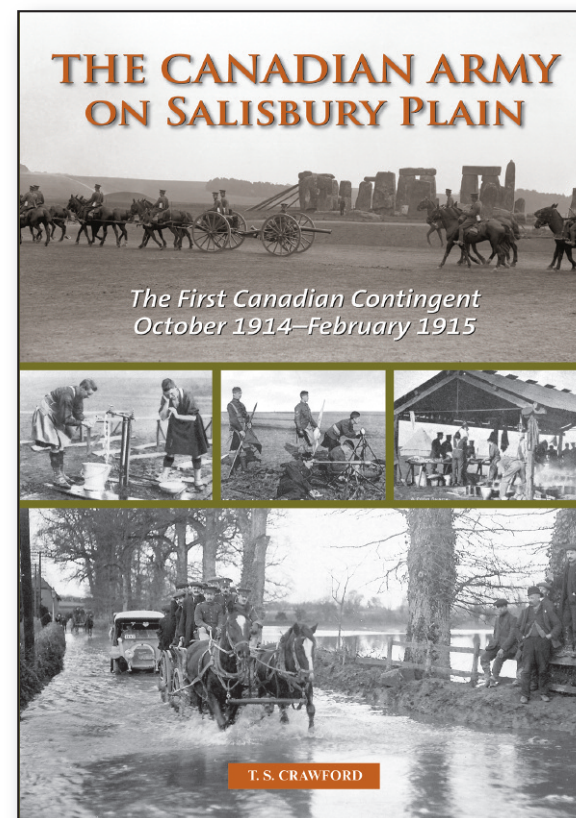
T. S. Crawford was educated at Marlborough College, close to Salisbury Plain, and studied the area's military history as a school project. After a career as a government press officer specializing in employment measures, he spent several years researching the Plain's military history between 1897 and 1920. He knows the locality intimately from cycling and walking and now spends several days a week on voluntary environmental work.

## HALSGROVE CATALOGUE

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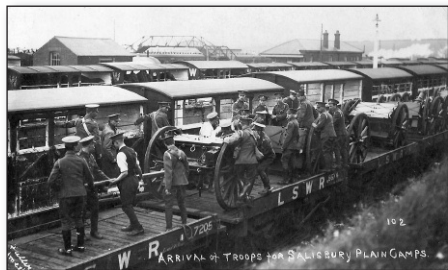
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Top left: Amesbury Station was the major railhead for Salisbury Plain and handled many troops and their equipment, as in this pre-war scene.




Above: Taps were the only washing facilities at some camping-sites.

Left: These troops are wearing the unpopular Oliver harness from which items of kit were hung.



Seen here at Valcartier, the 101st Edmonton Fusiliers comprised nearly all of the 9th Battalion.

THE CANADIAN ARMY ON SALISBURY PLAIN




A Burgess Dunne biplane of the type purchased, somewhat incredibly, for the first contingent.


After a rushed overhaul of the plane, Janney and Clifford Webster, the Burgess Company pilot, took off for Valcartier, only to make one emergency landing an hour after take-off, which resulted in them being held temporarily as suspected enemy agents, and another one just outside Champlain, where they had to be towed in to a mooring. When they finally arrived in Quebec, Janney was arrested by Canada Customs and the aircraft impounded. After Customs contacted the Department of Militia and Defence, Janney and the aircraft were released. Its misadventures on the flight from the States had damaged the aircraft, and Burgess had to send employees to repair it and replace its engine, this latter costing \$2,500. When the contingent sailed, the float-plane was tied to the deck of the SS *Athena* and transported across the Atlantic.\*

All in all, the Canadians fared well in their first weeks compared with recruits in Britain. They were quickly equipped, if with material of questionable suitability and quality, and their mobilization camp at Valcartier was developed rapidly. On 6 August Kitchener's first act as Secretary of State for War had been to appeal for 100,000 men to form his New Army, and he got them in a fortnight. By mid-September half a million had come forward. A massive hut-building programme was launched, but in the meantime the recruits were taken to camping-sites often to find that only tents had been delivered and that they sometimes had to cook their own food. Many were to lack uniforms and rifles for months. Often their trainers were a very few officers and non-commissioned officers of the Regular Army and others who had come out of retirement. Their


CANADA MUSTERS AN ARMY



The band of the Legion of Frontiersmen at Salisbury in 1910. Many of the legion's North American members enlisted in the first contingent.



Major General Edwin Alderson, the British officer chosen to command the Contingent.



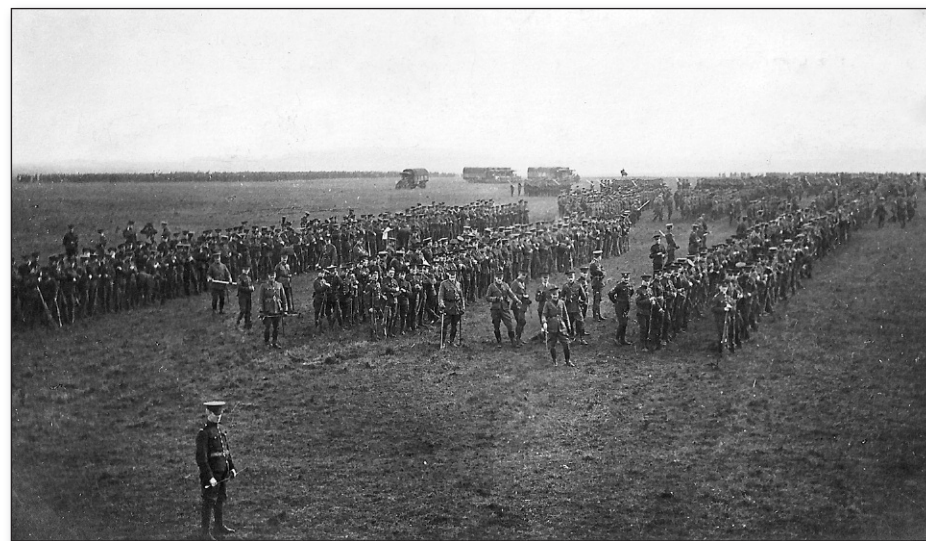
Colours are presented to the Newfoundland Regiment on 3 October 1914.

\* The information in this paragraph comes from several different sources and one suspects that the two listed landings may have been only one, with different assets being recalled for the one being held.

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Example of a double-page spread



The Contingent is drawn up for parade in 1914.