

Michael Holden, University of New Brunswick

Michael Holden received his B.A. from Mount Allison University in 2000. After graduation he was a participant of the 2000 edition of the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation study tour. Michael worked at Fisheries and Oceans Canada for one year but thought that working 'was for the birds' so he returned to school and completed his M.A at the University of New Brunswick. His research interests focus around the First World War, specifically the Hundred Days Campaign, and general battlefield learning. His paper at this symposium is based on his thesis research from UNB.

Abstract

In 1915, the United States was arguably the most important neutral nation for the warring European states. American President Woodrow Wilson appeared fervently committed to neutrality, US economic production benefited the belligerent powers, and much of the American population was contently cocooned in its perceived isolation. However, by the next year, the climate had changed dramatically. On the outside, Wilson's neutrality remained, but underneath that cautious exterior, the president turned to embrace the preparedness movement, translating international affairs into a key domestic issue.

This paper will show that the shift to preparedness was a ruse. Wilson wished to mediate the European peace from the first days of war, when he issued a letter to the leaders of the belligerent states from his dying wife's bedside. By the preparedness speech tour of January and February 1916, Wilson had recognized that he would have to earn his way to the head of the negotiating table—and that that would require more than the promise of a new, war-free world order. Wilson responded in Mahanian terms, calling for the development of a navy bigger than even Great Britain's.

The shift to a navy second to none was a political strategic coup, for it satisfied both national and international force requirements. On one hand, Wilson explained the need for a navy to his constituents as a defence issue; on the other, this paper will argue that he was acting to ensure the illusion of a superior offensive force. In fact, a reading of the General Board's concerns and recommendations prove that Wilson was thinking less about readying his nation for actual threats than he was about making a statement to the European powers. Ultimately, while the 1916 naval appropriations act called for "incomparably the greatest navy in the world," it actually looked to put Wilson at the head of the Great War peace talks, with

his nation standing firmly behind him.

This paper fits into the 2003 CDA/Queen's/RMC conference mandate by looking at the balancing act involved in overcoming a domestic obstacle to reconcile national will and international issues, to meet the goal of adequately fulfilling one nation's armed forces requirements. I have already applied for travel funding from my university, and have heard that there are occasionally funds available from CDA to top-up other funding. A \$200 travel grant from CDA would allow me to cover my costs for this conference, and I would be grateful for any consideration given to meet this end.

Training, Multi-National Formations, and Tactical Efficiency: The Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigades in 1918

Introduction

Just after 12:30pm, on August 8th, 'C' Battery, No. 2 Group, Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade (CMMGB) made a gallant move in the direction of Mezières, which succeeded in outflanking the Germans holding the village, and forced them to surrender. This movement was accomplished with the battery mounted in their motor trucks while a section of the Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion (CCCB) covered their approach in a very skilful manner with rifle fire.^[i] One could be excused for thinking that this tactical situation of 'fire and movement' was part of an Allied advance after D-Day in 1944. In reality, however, this fighting was part of the First World War, and the year was 1918. For many, the mental construct of a Great War battlefield would not have had a place for the flanking manoeuvre of 'C' Battery. They would have asked "what about the mud, barbed wire and miles of trenches?" By 1918, while these elements remained part of the battlefield, solutions had been found so that they were no longer major obstacles. The battery's tactics demonstrated the fact that the CMMGB made a successful tactical shift from trench warfare to the 'open-warfare' style employed during the Battle of Amiens and the Allies' subsequent drive to victory, later termed the 'Hundred Days' campaign.

Too often, the lengthy stalemate, the wire, the trenches and slaughter dominate the literature of the Great War. The result is frequently an image of war frozen in time and space. Lately, however, the "recent revisionists"^[ii] have concluded that the Allies simply required time in order to successfully integrate the tools of battle and small unit manoeuvres in order to effectively shift to open warfare, ultimately winning the war. Historian Paddy Griffith, a well-known advocate of the tactical development of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), perniciously noted that for many, "the very idea of 'tactics on the Western Front' has often

been seen as a logical contradiction in terms...Trenchlock and attrition were the result precisely of a breakdown in tactics, and their effect was to stifle any further use of tactics for the duration of hostilities.”^[iii] However, Griffith’s work demonstrates that tactical learning occurred within BEF formations over a number of years

In the past three years the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade (CMMGB) and the man behind their creation, a Frenchman living in Canada named Raymond Marc Pierre Brutinel, have received some attention. Cameron Pulsifer has published two articles on the unit in Canadian Military History while Yves Tremblay has written about Brutinel.^[iv] The argument presented here builds on the works of Pulsifer, Tremblay and the themes of the revisionists, suggesting that the CMMGBs are an excellent example of a unit that was able to adapt new tactics and make an immediate and successful transition from trench warfare to open style combat. Additionally, the brigade’s accomplishment deserves to be highlighted because it is unusual. Dominick Graham, like Griffith, pointed out that the BEF required a number of years of trial and error before they adapted successful small and medium unit methods of attack. Graham wrote that on the Somme in 1916, most British combat arms did not “manage the transition to open warfare, or even to conduct semi-open warfare successfully, due to lack of training and suitable tactical doctrine.”^[v] In this way the CMMGBs (or, the Motors) are a classic example of the case for study and effective tactical development during the war, and illustrate the new style of war that the Allies used in 1918 to beat the Germans.

Background

The first motorized mobile machine gun carriers emerged as early as the 1890s but were not used in battle until the Italian conquest of Libya in 1912.^[vi] Surprisingly, at the outbreak of war in 1914 there were no armoured cars in the great powers’ armouries.

When war in Europe seemed inevitable, former federal minister Sir Clifford Sifton and Brutinel developed a proposal for a privately funded “mobile motorized machine gun unit.”^[vii] Brutinel felt that in addition to its defensive qualities the weapon had great offensive capabilities. It has been held that Brutinel developed modern armoured cars, with broad, flanking capabilities. The reality, it seems, is that the brigade was created in order to facilitate the movement of the machine guns on the battlefield in order to stabilize the line with the guns’ great firepower. In fact, in November 1914 each one thousand-man infantry battalion of the Canadian Contingent had only one 2-gun (machine guns) section of 15 men.^[viii] Thus, the CMMGB represented a formidable concentration of firepower. Here was a force of some one hundred and fifty men who could quickly concentrate twenty Colt machine guns in one area!

The Automobile Machine Gun Brigade No.1 authorized on September 2, 1914, had a very small headquarters and was divided into two batteries (dubbed Sifton ‘A’ and Sifton ‘B’ in honour of the former minister of the interior). ^[ix] Each battery was composed of two 2-

armoured autocar sections.^[x] In addition to the Sifton 'A' and 'B' Batteries three other motor machine gun units emerge from Canada. The Borden Machine Gun Battery, the Eaton Machine Gun Battery, and Boyle's (Yukon) Mounted Detachment were formed separately from the CMMGB but were eventually absorbed by Lieutenant-Colonel Brutinel and became 'C', 'D' and 'E' batteries respectively.

At the outbreak of the war the CMMGB was mounted in lightly armoured vehicles and the men were trained to bring the firepower of their machine guns to bear in a number of locations. Additionally, the unit learned how to advance and hold ground while mounted in their vehicles. However, upon arrival in Belgium and France in 1915 rather than a battlefield suited to the movement of autocars, the brigade found a static battlefield characterized by miles of trenches and barbed wire. The men adapted very well to the static nature of fighting. At night they reversed into prepared positions on the front and carried out pre-arranged shoots. Over time they developed and refined the multiple-gun machine gun barrage. During the 'bite and hold' attacks of 1916 and 1917, the Motors dismounted and proved effective in support of an infantry advance while moving their guns forward by foot. Eventually, the brigade adapted to trench fighting but it remained to be seen if they could operate in open-style combat.

The German offensives of spring 1918 were the unit's first open-style action and it has been suggested that this was the time the brigade came into its own as a mobile force. However, its accomplishments in the spring were an aberration. The Motors adjusted well to the tactical situations they faced, and selected and exploited targets of opportunity, the chaos of the ever-changing British front line suited the brigade. When the German hurricane bombardment began, British divisions quickly lost men and guns, and fell out of touch with their commanders and the units around them. This created a situation that was perfect for the original design of the CMMGB: armoured mobile machine gun posts designed to stabilize the line with firepower in a number of locations. Therefore the '*Kaiserschlacht*'^[xi] of spring 1918 saw the brigade operate in a defensive-style infantry support role, and was not a test of the brigade's capacity to adjust to the changed nature of warfare. The real trial would come after the unit doubled in size and trained in new methods.

Summer 1918

Summer 1918 was spent preparing for an offensive campaign by both the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and the Canadian Corps. Historians like Paddy Griffith and Dean Chappelle have stated that the period of training during the summer was not of any great benefit to the British Corps of the BEF or the Canadians. They argue that British formations had

been learning tactical lessons since the Somme, and that the summer was used to refine methods of attack used since July 1916.[\[xiii\]](#) For the most part, the weapons available to the Corps had changed little since the start of the war, but the lessons from 1916 and 1917 illustrated that tactics had developed significantly. Bill Rawling, in *Surviving Trench Warfare* concluded that the training lessons were not new; the tactics were those that had been accumulated during a lengthy learning process. Having mastered the limited, set piece style of attack in the more 'slow motion' environment of 1917, the Canadians trained with similar tactics but in 'double time', as it were, during 1918.[\[xiii\]](#) The summer was a vital time for the Motors. The brigade spent years adapting to and training for trench warfare, and although the experience of the *Kaiserschlacht* in March and April began the process, breaking from the trench paradigm was not easy.

The 11th of April was the first day of what turned out to be several months the CMMGB and Canadian Corps spent in British 1st Army area building-up the Vimy-Arras sector. The War Diary reported that the men were engaged in ordinary drill, machine gun drill and training.[\[xiv\]](#) It is unclear what method of training was used at this time. After experiencing motorized mobile fighting for the first time, it is not likely that the men would have wished to return to training for infantry support on foot. The period allotted for training was probably used to familiarize the new replacements within the brigade system and for all men to practice their machine gun techniques.[\[xv\]](#) But before the Motors could return to any form of unit training, they received an order for the reorganization of the batteries and the brigade structure that would see the creation of a second motorized brigade and increase the overall size and firepower of the two brigades.

The original Sifton 'A' and 'B' Batteries and the Borden Battery remained as 'A', 'B' and 'C' Batteries of the 1CMMGB. Men from the disbanded 18th Machine Gun Company of the 5th Canadian Division formed 'D' and 'E' Batteries. Meanwhile, the Yukon and Eaton Batteries became 'A' and 'B' Batteries of the 2CMMGB, respectively. 'C' Battery was formed from men of the 19th Company; 'D' from the 17th Company; and 'E' was a mix of 17th and 18th Company personnel.[\[xvi\]](#)

The decision to increase the strength and power of the units was perhaps more important than the creation of a second motor machine gun brigade. In terms of men and vehicles, the new brigades were twice as big as the original unit with four hundred and six men. The six armoured autocars that remained formed the fighting core of the two Brigades. Approximately forty light Napier Trucks mounted with two machine guns each, and sixty motorcycles joined them.

On 14 May, the Motors received instructions, which stated that the brigades were to be engaged the following day in 'Tactical Training carried out under Corps Orders'.[\[xvii\]](#) The "live fire"[\[xviii\]](#) drills were designed to teach the men of 1 and 2CMMGB to think and operate in an open warfare setting. The first day witnessed a relatively simple mobile flanking and

pincer movement. The first group created a diversionary head-on attack from the north while other motor machine gun batteries paired with half squads of cavalry from the Canadian Light Horse (CLH) and the Canadian Corps Cyclists Battalion (CCCB) moved in on the position from the east and west.[\[xix\]](#) The movements were carried out efficiently and the objective taken very quickly. The following day, the Motors were engaged in another tactical training scheme that required the men to move into a position as if to fill a gap until a replacement infantry brigade could be moved into the line.[\[xx\]](#)

On the 21st of May the tactical scheme changed slightly. Some of the Canadians, including the Motors, now represented enemy forces on the attack against a railway line. The change was effected in order to give the men the semblance of opposition and to help the units along the learning curve, with respect to the observation of offensive operations. There were small communication and initial cooperation problems but overall the general exercise was deemed successful.[\[xxi\]](#)

It is important to understand how the CMMGBs trained during summer 1918 because it had a direct influence on their success during the Hundred Days. In May 1CMMGB and 2CMMGB had been involved in two open warfare tactical schemes. The first, the pincer movement was relatively easy. While the assault on the railway proved a little more difficult, it must be remembered that as of 1 May, the Motors doubled in size. Naturally, the brigades felt some 'growing pains'. Nonetheless, the exercise proved to be very useful. On the 17th of June the CMMGBs fought in a large tactical scheme, this time on the Allied side.

In this latest exercise the Canadian Corps with an attached mobile force, part of which was comprised by the 1stCMMGB, was sent to reinforce the Allied (British) line and keep the enemy from gaining high ground. The mobile force left its transports, and proceeded to dig in. The Motors used direct and overhead fire to prevent the enemy from establishing a footing in the northern side of a densely wooded area. They were also successful in moving their guns by foot to foil the enemy's advance on the southern edge of the woods.[\[xxii\]](#) The defence of the woods finished by mid-day, and the scheme indicated next that a gap had been created to the North and the brigade might be used to great advantage in that location. Consequently, the men quickly returned to their vehicles and prepared for action.[\[xxiii\]](#) The fictitious gap was never deemed to have required CMMGB assistance. The orders were designed to provide an opportunity for the brigade to practice preparation for re-deployment.

During July the units took time to learn tactical collaboration with the recently attached sections of 6-inch trench mortars, and practiced using autocars to draw fire and allow the accompanying troops to identify the location of machine guns and points of resistance.[\[xxiv\]](#)

A number of lessons were derived from the July exercises. It was found that the use of motor cyclists for scouting and liaison was deficient. During the intra-brigade exercise,

defenders did not make proper use of outposts or attached troops to screen and protect the machine gun nests; snipers and enemy patrols had encroached too easily. It was decided that future instruction would revolve around these points.[\[xxv\]](#) However, this training never occurred. The men were ordered into GHQ reserve and were told that they might be called on to support either the French First Army or the British Fourth Army on the Amiens Front.

Planning for a major Allied offensive near Amiens had begun as early as April. Following the German spring attack, it was decided that Amiens and the vital Paris-Amiens rail line must be protected from the possibility of another German attack. It was thought that three other offensives, in quick succession at various points, would be used to keep the enemy from shifting his reserves and thus destabilizing the line in a number of areas. British command felt that these weak points would be the point of the long sought after 'breakthrough'.

The officers of the CMMGBs received L.C Instruction No.1 on 5 August.[\[xxvi\]](#) They were instructed that the Canadian Corps was attacking the enemy's position between the Amiens-Roye Road (A-R Road) and Villers Bretonneux-Chaulnes Railway, both inclusive on a frontage of nearly eight kilometres. The orders noted that the Canadian Independent Force (CIF), composed of the two CMMGBs, CCCB, and section of mounted trench mortars, was not assigned to any particular division. Commanded by General Brutinel, the CIF was under special orders due to their great mobility.[\[xxvii\]](#)

British 4th Army planners expected that during the advance, the tendency of the French would be to swerve to their right, and the Canadian to the left, so that a gap probably would open between the two armies along the road. Previous battles had shown that forces operating along a boundary line tended to fight away from the border in support of their own troops. At the operational level of planning the Independent Force was expected to manoeuvre between the Canadians and French and fill the anticipated gap.

The CMMGBs, like every other unit of the Canadian Corps, moved into position ready for *Zero Hour*, August the 8th and signalled their readiness with the code word '*Llandoverly Castle*.' The CIF would not 'jump off' with the Canadian infantry rather they would wait for the French to begin their advance. The French bombardment would last for an additional forty-five minutes in order to compensate for the lack of tanks. Thus, the Motors were set to engage in their first offensive campaign of movement, where they would fight while mounted in their vehicles and protect the flank of the Canadian advance.

The 100 Days Campaign

The Canadian Corps emerged from the spring and early summer of 1918 rested and

well prepared for the coming Allied offensives. After the successful campaign against the Germans in the spring and a very productive summer, a lot was expected of the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigades. What was most impressive about the CMMGBs in the last months of the war was their ability to cooperate with other units and adapt to a variety of tactical situations, including the need to advance and seize ground, despite a limited amount of experience and a constantly changing unit composition. The Motors therefore maintained a high level of tactical efficiency throughout the last months of the war. They embodied the fact that the Canadians could fight open warfare using 'all arms battle' techniques, and reinforced that the final year of the war represented something altogether new, not more of what was seen in 1916 and 1917.

During the second-last Corps training scheme of the summer, the CMMGBs demonstrated their capacity for rapid deployment, by truck or by foot, and subsequent quick re-deployment. Throughout the inter-brigade exercises, the Motors' only major weakness was their use of attached troops. Overall, the brigades had shown that they were proficient in using machine gun fire and trench mortars to cover small unit advances. Additionally, the Motors were effective when "they worked on exploitation of success, forming defensive flanks, the use of armoured cars as a mobile reserve or advance guard, holding and consolidating ground, and outflanking and overcoming strong points."[\[xxviii\]](#) These abilities are interesting to note because for the most part, the CMMGB did not have a great deal of open-style combat expertise that would have assisted them in breaking from the trench war paradigm. Even though June and July provided the Motors ample opportunity for instruction and preparation, they only managed seven days of open-style training. Therefore, by early August, the CMMGB had a total of three weeks mobile experience.

At 4:20am on August 8th the great battle of Amiens began with total surprise, marking the so-called "Black Day of the German Army".. Through the heavy morning mist, more than two thousand guns suddenly flashed in barrage and counter-barrage formations. The CIF prepared to carry out its special orders of providing flank protection and liaison along the Amiens-Roye Road (A-R Road) between the infantry and cavalry, and between the Canadians and French.

It was not until almost 7:00am that Canadian artillery pieces were reported to have cleared the way, and just past 7:30am when the brigades commenced their move, in tactical columns. The Armoured Car Detachment (ACD), reinforced by the two armoured cars from No.3 Group, went forward to make contact with the enemy.[\[xxix\]](#) Slowly the CIF progressed toward Dodo Wood and the nearby crossroads where HQ was set-up.

Up until 10:00am, the CIF experienced very little action. At that point a message was received indicating that Canadian infantry units had advanced beyond the first objective (Green Line), but that French troops were held up at Mezières and that machine gun nests on the eastern outskirts of the village still held out.[\[xxx\]](#) Brutinel ordered No.1 Group to push forward

and form a flank to the cavalry, who were reported to be near the second objective (Red Line) on the north side of the road. Number 2 Group, the Trench Mortar Detachment (TMD), and half of the ACD was ordered to assist the French troops near Mezières.

Two autocars and one section of cyclists from the ACD encountered the enemy on the northern outskirts of the village. The machine guns in the cars opened fire, while cyclist troops moved on enemy groups, including a German 5.9" gun. They eventually captured it, with about 30 prisoners. At the same time, two other autocars and a truck with a six-inch trench mortar co-operated with French infantry during a successful attack. The Canadians positioned their guns to keep the eastern side of Mezières under fire until the infantry could rush the machine gun nests.^[xxxii] Canadian soldiers remained in their vehicles as they assisted the French, managing to disable various machine gun nests. Furthermore, they used effective trench mortar fire to knock out points of resistance and destroy enemy machine guns. The success of this improvised attack is noteworthy because the Canadians and French had not previously trained together. Moreover, the attack was illustrative of the fact that small unit tactics had evolved significantly since the start of the war, because in the years leading up to the Great War, army doctrine stated that the crucial element of attack was the infantry and their ability to achieve fire superiority. To that end, more infantrymen were added to the firing line rather than increasing each man's firepower. In this instance, however, mounted and mobile Canadian machine guns and trench mortars provided covering fire while French infantry advanced on German positions. In this way, the Canadians and French proved that they were not static in their thinking and that their tactics could change and evolve based on the situation.

Despite the efforts of this ad hoc force, the infantry was unable to enter and hold the village. However, no second attack by the Franco-Canadian force proved necessary, for 'C' Battery, No. 2 Group, shifted to the western side of the village and attacked. A section of the CCCB laid a base of fire while the men mounted in their motor trucks succeeded in outflanking the Germans holding the village.^[xxxii] This also proved to be a very important manoeuvre because it forced the Germans to withdraw, kept the attack moving along the inter-army gap, and demonstrated that the three attacking batteries of the brigade, diverse in their manpower, equipment and firepower capabilities, were adept at adjusting to variations of combined arms 'fire and movement' warfare.

While the attacks occurred at Mezières, the remainder of the ACD's autocars operated along the A-R Road, marking the southern flank of the Canadian cavalry. After the enemy resistance was overcome, No.1 Group joined the ACD and then progressed by 'leapfrogging' each other. It was at this time that effective cooperation between cyclist troops and scouts, and the mounted machine guns was first seen. Private A.L. Bebeau scouted ahead of the batteries in his motorcycle and rode through the enemy's lines. As he did, he drew the enemy's fire and forced the disclosure of their machine gun positions.^[xxxiii] The following autocars and trucks used precise trench mortar and machine gun fire, and dealt effectively with the German

machine guns.

This overall cooperation enabled the men to proceed to the chalk pits southeast of Beaucourt very quickly, but soon heavy shelling was brought on, illustrating stiffening German resistance.^[xxxiv] At the chalk pits, the units were pinned down by the German artillery's concentrated fire, or machine guns that were "dispersed at great depth across the front" and under "excellent cover provided by...tall, billowy grain" in the fields.^[xxxv] At the outset there was a machine gun firefight in which the Canadians prevailed and forced the Germans to retreat. However, enemy artillery positioned at a distance from the side of the road continued to shell the batteries' position. This resulted in a number of casualties, because the men could return fire from the trucks. The machine guns, trench mortars, and hand grenades could not reach the German artillerymen until they were dismounted and carried forward because the vehicles of the Force were restricted to the roads. These lessons were not lost on unit commanders, and subsequently, a Hotchkiss machine gun detachment from the Canadian Light Horse (CLH) was attached to No. 1 Group and the ACD. Horse-mounted machine gunners had the capacity to reach areas that the CIF cars and trucks could not, and would later break up numerous points of resistance.^[xxxvi]

By late afternoon on 8 August the speedy advance of the CIF had ground to a halt. At Le Quesnel, an anti-tank gun controlled the village entrances. It had destroyed four tanks and thus stopped the Independent Force. Meanwhile 'C' and 'E' Batteries assisted the French in the attack on Fresnoy. Even though the batteries of the CIF and French infantry managed with fire and movement to reach the village, they choose to withdraw and establish a solid line for the night.

In the early hours of August 9th, a few light trucks and armoured cars from No.1 Group 'A' Battery leapfrogged one another to the western edge of the Le Quesnel. From the secured jumping off point, the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade (CIB) and a small number of cavalry made the assault. It is important to note that the movement of the infantry and cavalry was covered by the TMD because the trench mortars were highly effective. Resistance was relatively light as most of the enemy had withdrawn, but the trench mortars of the CIF were of great assistance to the infantry, destroying a number of machine gun posts that remained.^[xxxvii] Meanwhile, the French who had been forced from their position outside Fresnoy during the night counterattacked. Number 1 Group 'B' Battery co-operated successfully with the French infantry, inflicting many casualties and capturing a large number of prisoners. Again, the resistance was light due to an enemy withdrawal.

For the rest of the day, the CIF effectively searched out the enemy and neutralized various strong points along the A-R Road and in nearby villages. This included numerous artillery pieces, machine gun nests, and an anti-tank gun that had destroyed two tanks and a Whippet.^[xxxviii] Around midday when the autocars and trucks were unable to dislodge a German 'whiz-bang' battery dug in behind a railway embankment, six-inch trench mortar

rounds were used to keep the enemy pinned down as attached troops advanced. However, there proved little need for the infantry. The twenty-five mortar rounds silenced the guns completely. Later in the afternoon thirty-five rounds were used to good effect on an enemy position in a nearby wood. Once again, the Force demonstrated that the warfare they conducted was not one-dimensional. They chose the weapons and adjusted their tactics according to obstacles that needed to be overcome.

By nightfall the variety of weapons at the disposal of the CMMGB was increased with the reorganization of No. 3 Group.^[xxxix] Twelve mounted Hotchkiss Guns from the CLH, four platoons of cyclists and ten motorcyclists were now available for deployment. Number 3 Group joined No.2 Group in action and they positioned themselves on the southeastern side of Bouchoir and Arvillers. The two groups protected the flank of the 5th Canadian Mounted Regiment (CMR) and acted as a link between the Canadians and French. Meanwhile, the ACD and No.1 Group had been withdrawn from action and were in reserve at Maison Blanche. No.2 Group followed them into reserve after assisting another French attack.. The phase of open warfare had come to an end, and the Canadian Corps was now consolidating its gains. Accordingly, Corps commanders then disbanded the CIF.

The after-battle reports that reached the men of the CMMGBs were very similar in their context and findings. It was held that the brigades had done very well engaging themselves in heavy fighting to assist nearby units, but that there was room for improvement. However, it must be remembered that the Battle of Amiens was the Motors' first instance of offensive warfare while mounted in their vehicles. The process of adapting to mobile offensive operations was still very new. It appears that of the entire Canadian Corps, the CMMGB was one of the few units to benefit from the tactical schemes of the summer. In his thesis, William Stewart quoted a Canadian infantry officer who put his men through a summer of open-style training and then admitted that, "the tenets of trench warfare hung around their necks like a millstone."^[xl] The CIF, in contrast, got excellent value from its recent training.

Allied strategy during the last months of the war was to strike the enemy with successive blows on a number of fronts, in an effort to keep Germany off balance and ready to collapse. There were simultaneous attacks in Flanders, the Argonne, the Somme valley and, by late summer, along the Hindenburg Line.

The Hindenburg ran along the plain between Arras and Cambrai, and contained three large defensive trench lines, each supported by a smaller trench and several switch lines in a vast spider's web of interlocking defences. This was the strongest German position in the west. The Canadian Corps, under the British 1st Army, was given the task of breaking the first two lines and advancing to the Canal du Nord at the end of August.^[xli]

Within the first hours of the attack near Monchy, General Brutinel's CIF was ordered to reform. It was then composed of the CMMGBs, 2 sections of trench mortars, the CCCB and the

18th (British) Corps Cyclist Battalion. The Force's task was one of general reconnaissance and exploitation along the Arras-Cambrai Road (A-C Road). The men had good success in filling the emerging gap after a mid-morning boundary shift forced the 3rd and 2nd Divisions to cover their flanks and diverge north and south respectively from the A-C Road. Additionally, the tactical high point of the day occurred when one battery from 1CMMGB fired their guns from their trucks and permitted cyclist troops to enter the village of Guemappe and occupy it.[\[xliii\]](#)

After a short pause, the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions renewed the attack on 27 August at 4:55am. Two batteries from the 2CMMGB helped the 43rd and 21st Battalions get into the southwest part of Vis-en-Artois to hold off a counterattack with the firepower of their machine guns. The CIF was then disbanded for a second time. One might argue that the forming and disbanding of the CIF was due to failures to achieve operational objectives. It appears, however, that the decision depended more on the operational situation than failure. The unit had proven to be adaptable and very effective when on the flank of an advance, but also useful when an infantry assault required an overhead machine gun barrage, or the line needed supplemental firepower. To this end, the CIF continued to maintain a high level of tactical efficiency, successfully engaged in a variety of roles, remaining a significant Corps asset throughout the offensive campaign.

The following day, 28 August, a force known as 'Brutinel's Brigade' was formed from the CMMGBs, the CCCB, a trench mortar section, and the 101st British Machine Gun Battalion. Over the next two days the unit demonstrated that it could complete a variety of tactical orders despite its evolving composition. On the right side, the machine guns and a trench mortar were dismounted from the trucks of 2CMMGB, and progressed "following by bounds from shell-hole to shell-hole."[\[xliv\]](#) On the left side, the advance was by bicycle and foot. Cyclist troops and guns from the 101st Machine Gun Battalion progressed very slowly but ultimately made it to their objective.

The high command envisioned a number of great things for the CIF prior to the attack on the Hindenburg line. In addition to holding a defensive flank, it was thought that the unit might operate in cavalry-like fashion and proceed down the A-C Road to exploit success as the opportunity occurred. During the actual fighting, however, the problem was that conditions, namely the roads, and an effective German rearguard did not permit a great exploitation or breakthrough. Nonetheless, when the CIF was in combat it proved adept at selecting the best tactics for the situation. Additionally, it was significant that the CIF had an ever-changing composition, yet still succeeded in its tactical assaults.

Throughout September, October, and November the CMMGBs continued to fight. When the 2nd Division crossed the Canal-de-l'Escaut on 8 October, the Motors assisted with overhead machine gun fire. In addition, the CCCB and CLH, the only mobile troops available, progressed quickly beyond the front in order to hold a small position of high ground.[\[xlv\]](#) The machine gunners maintained their efficiency as they followed the Germans through northern

France and into Belgium; ultimately, the CMMGBs were in Mons the day the war ended.

Initially, the end of the war was viewed as the result of continued attrition that by 1918 had finally worn the Germans down. However, in recent years, works have examined battlefield learning and doctrinal changes that affected Allied tactical, operational and strategic effectiveness in 1918, concluding that the Allies managed to learn from previous battles to successfully adopt combat's tools to win the war. This theme is clearly demonstrated by the high level of tactical efficiency maintained throughout the war by the CMMGBs.

Conclusion

It can be seen that the Motors are illustrative of the themes proposed by the 'recent revisionists' and are a classic example of the new style of war that the Allies used to beat the Germans in 1918. Generally, the unit prepared for a 1914 battlefield, in which they would provide the infantry with covering fire but also advance and occupy ground. Throughout 1915, 1916, 1917 and the spring of 1918, the Motors were employed in an 'infantry support' role only. Then, despite their previous experiences, the CMMGB returned to their dual-role during the final Allied advances. This is a remarkable point given the fact that the brigade's wartime experience was very diverse and their final development occurred during a very short period of time.

The unit's capacity to adjust to trench warfare and then open warfare had a lot to do with the way the men applied their equipment to the tactical situation. By using the cars as machine gun posts for indirect fire machine gun barrages, the Motors had a notable effect on the static battlefield. Throughout the Hundred Days, the brigade illustrated that they could revert to a dual role, covering infantry rushes but also taking and holding ground themselves. Thus, it is significant that the CMMGB managed to shift quickly because historians have shown that other units required a longer period to adapt.

Historians Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham have argued that the process of adapting successful methods of attack in the BEF required a number of years of trial and error.^[xlv] Paddy Griffith added that the BEF's success in 1918 had everything to do with the work done during the preceding years of war. With respect to the Canadian Corps, Bill Rawling, William Stewart, and Dean Chappelle have argued that senior Canadian commanders learned from British experiences and synthesized their own style of attack. During the summer of 1918 the Corps applied lessons of the set-piece attack from the previous year, but in 'double time'. Thus, the history of the CMMGBs reinforces these interpretations, and suggests that innovation was much quicker and more thorough in some formations than even these historians recognize. In this way the CMMGB are a classic example of the case for steady and effective tactical development during the war, and are illustrative of the new style of war that the Allies used in 1918 to beat the Germans.

[i] National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG 9, vol. 3943, folder 51, file 3, "Summary of Operations – Canadian Independent Force (CIF) 8-8-18 to 10-8-18".

[ii] The term is borrowed from Shane Schreiber, Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War, (Newport, Conn: Praeger, 1997), p. 152.

[iii] Paddy Griffith, Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-1918, (London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 20.

[iv] For an excellent examination of the CMMGB see Cameron Pulsifer, "Canada's First Armoured Unit: Raymond Brutinel and the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigades of the First World War" in Canadian Military History, Vol. 10, No. 1, (Winter 2001): 44-57 and "Death at Licourt" in CMH (Summer 2002, Volume 11, Number 3): 49-64.

The life of Brutinel is shrouded in mystery and Yves Tremblay's biography of the man is eagerly awaited. In the meantime see Tremblay's article on Brutinel in Bernd Horn and Stephen Harris, eds. Warrior Chiefs: perspectives on Senior Canadian Military Leaders, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2001), pp. 57-70 and in Roch Legault and Jean Lamarre, eds. La Première Guerre Mondiale et Le Canada: contributions sociomilitaires

québécoises. (Montreal: Meridian, 1998).

[v] Dominick Graham, “*Sans Doctrine: British Army Tactics in the First World War*”, in T.H.E. Travers and Christon Archer, (eds.), Men at War, (Chicago: Precedent, 1982), p. 81.

[vi] Cameron Pulsifer, “Raymond Brutinel...”, p. 2. The Austrians produced the first armoured car in 1904, the Daimler Panzerwagon, with plating that was three millimetres thick and used a Maxim machine gun as its weapon, quoted from George Forty, A Photo History of Armoured Cars in Two World Wars, (Poole, Dorset: Blandford Press, 1984), p. 12.

[vii] NAC, RG 9, vol. 4803, file 144, “Organization of the Machine Gun Automobile Brigade”, 2 September 1914.

[viii] Bill Rawling, “Technology in Search of a Role: The Machine Gun and the CEF in the First World War”, Material History Review, vol. 42 (Fall 1995), p. 88.

[ix] The cumbersome title was changed in 1915 when the unit moved to France. It was then designated as the 1st Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade (1CMMGB, or CMMGB) and nicknamed the Motors.

[x] NAC, RG 9, vol. 4347, NAC, Powley Papers, MG 30, E 333, vol. 3. Tape 3, and Wallace, p. 16.

[xi] The *Kaiserschlacht* (or Kaiser’s Battle) was twenty days in late March and early April, named in honour of the Reich’s patron saint ‘*Michael*’ and characterized the German effort to win the war in 1918. The Germans utilized infiltration tactics and restored mobility to the Western Front for the first time since 1914.

[xii] Griffith, Battle Tactics; Dean Chappelle, The Most Brilliant of Successes, (M.A. Thesis), (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick, 1992).

[xiii] Rawling, Surviving Trench Warfare, p. 169.

[xiv] NAC, RG 9, vol. 4987, “War Diary 1st CMMGB”.

[xv] The war Diary indicated that the men spent April 13th engaged in “ordinary drill, machine gun drill and reorganization of batteries” and on the 14th at “ordinary drill and machine gun drill”. NAC, RG 9, vol. 4987, “War Diary 1st CMMGB”.

[xvi] NAC, RG 9, vol. 4987, “War Diary 1st CMMGB”

[xvii] Op Cit.

[xviii] Although termed ‘live fire’, a bugler sound off and the vigorous waving of a

specific coloured flag represented the firing of guns.

[xix] NAC, RG 9, vol. 4345 folder 2, file 19, "Operations (Reports on) 16-5-18 to 16-6-18"

[xx] Ibid.

[xxi] Ibid.

[xxii] NAC, RG 9, vol. 4345 folder 2, file 19

[xxiii] Ibid.

[xxiv] NAC, RG 9, vol. 4987, "War Diary 1st CMMGB".

[xxv] Ibid.

[xxvi] Operational instructions for the attack bore the initials "L.C." The *Llandoverly Castle*, a British merchant vessel serving as a Canadian hospital ship, was torpedoed on the 27th of June 1918, while returning to England from Halifax. Of a Canadian crew and medical staff totalling 258 all ranks, only 24 survived. Each division reported that their assembly was completed by sending Corps HQ the code word "Llandoverly Castle", Nicholson, p. 398n.

[xxvii] NAC, RG 9, vol. 3943, folder 51, file 3.

[xxviii] Wallace, p. 63; NAC, RG 9, vol. 4987, "War Diary 2nd CMMGB".

[xxix] Logan and Levey, vol. III, p. 553.

[xxx] NAC, RG 9, vol. 3943, folder 51, file 3, "Summary of Operations".

[xxxi] Logan and Levey, vol. III, p. 533 and 544.

[xxxii] NAC, RG 9, vol. 3943, folder 51, file 3, "Summary of Operations".

[xxxiii] Private Bebeau was awarded the Military Medal (MM) for his action.

[xxxiv] NAC, RG 9, vol. 3943, folder 51, file 3, "Summary of Operations".

[xxxv] Beatty, p. 113.

[xxxvi] NAC, RG 9, vol. 3943, folder 51, file 3, "Summary of Operations".

[xxxvii] Grafton, p. 150.

[xxxviii] NAC, RG 9, vol. 3943, folder 51, file 3, “Summary of Operations”.

[xxxix] After the 2 autocars were attached to the ACD on August 8th No. 3 was composed of cyclists and motorcyclists.

[xli] William Stewart, Attack Doctrine in the Canadian Corps, (M.A. Thesis), (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick, 1982), p. 197.

[xlii] NAC, RG 24, vol. 1871, file 9, “Narratives Covering Operations of the 1st CMMGB, CIF, The Composite Brigade and Brutinel’s Brigade during 1918”

[xliii] NAC, RG 9, vol. 3944, folder 56, file 4, “Report on Ops - August 25th to September 5th, 1918.”

[xliv] NAC, RG 24, vol. 1871, file 9, “Narratives Covering Operations”.

[xlv] NAC, RG 9, vol. 3945, folder 61, file 5, “Brutinel’s Brigade – Summary of Operations, 8-10-18 to 12-10-18.”

[xlvi] Bidwell and Graham, p. 116.