To those who fall, I say: “You will not die, but step into immortality.” Arthur Currie, Lieutenant-General, Canadian Army Corps (March 27, 1918)
When conflict reaches an ultimate impasse…war is the tragic result.

And when Canada, the British Empire, and even the United States of America, were embroiled in such conflict Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was there from the get-go… contributing to the war efforts in North America and overseas. Not content to be just an economic and political tool linking Canada’s east and west, CPR was also a major Canadian, North American and world strategic weapon.

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CPR AND THE RIEL REBELLION

CPR was not just an economic and political tool to link Canada's east and west in the 1880s. CPR was also a major Canadian strategic weapon. As strange as it may sound, CPR actually served to keep Americans and their “manifest destiny” at bay below the 49th parallel. There was a definite move afoot in 19th Century United States of America to push the western international border between Canada and the US northward. In the first half of the century, cries of “54-40 or fight” rang out in the US – in a bid to push the boundary as far north as 54 degrees, 40 minutes of latitude in the northern hemisphere. The arrival of the CPR established a presence in the Canadian West. CPR linked British Columbia with Central and Eastern Canada, putting an end to all this talk.

Aside from strategic benefits, CPR actually helped quash an armed insurrection at home on the Canadian Prairies.

Trouble started brewing soon after Canada was formed, July 1, 1867. The Hudson's Bay Company (Hbc) sold a huge tract of land it owned in the Canadian northwest to the Canadian government. In 1869, Hbc sold the 1.5-million-square-mile Rupert's Land to the federal government for $1.5 million. This was almost twice the size of the US's Louisiana Purchase at only one-tenth the cost. The feds were happy with their purchase from "The Bay." The natives and Métis (half native and half French-Canadian or Scottish-Canadian) were not. After all this was really their land that was trading hands so quickly, easily and cheaply. So the natives worked on setting up reserves. And Métis leader Louis Riel set up a whole province – Manitoba. Not as big as today’s Manitoba, provincial status came nevertheless to the province on July 15, 1870…only after a bitter Riel-led insurrection. Riel's mistake was he decided to execute upstart Ontario Orangeman and Red River settler, Thomas Scott. After Scott was shot, Riel managed to sneak off un-prosecuted and take refuge in the US. But, in the 1880s, civilization, and now the CPR, again threatened the Métis' way of life. So Riel was back by invitation in Canada's northwest to “deliver his people.”

Canadian militia, on route to quash the "Riel Rebellion", travel in relative comfort on a CPR day coach.
Ref. Canadian Pacific Railway Archives. A.4253
But this time his rebellion backfired. The CPR, epitomizing eastern encroachment, helped quash the rebellion and save the day...and it saved the CPR too. CPR was on the brink of bankruptcy in 1885. Half a year before the last spike was driven, Louis Riel teamed up with Gabriel Dumont, Poundmaker and Big Bear, and waged a bloody battle at Duck Lake, on March 26, 1885. His actions proved the national security benefit of the CPR. CPR came to the rescue with logistical finesse, transporting troops from the east over its nearly completed main line, to the western hot spots. The 1885 rebellion was quelled in a matter of weeks. Whereas, back in 1870, it took Colonel Wolseley three months just to get his troops to Manitoba.

In 1899, Canada got involved in its first overseas conflict. For the first time since becoming a nation, Canada was involved in a conflict outside North America. It sent volunteers and troops to South Africa to fight in the South African War – more commonly known as the Boer War (1899 - 1902). Great Britain was in conflict with the two Afrikaner republics of South Africa (or Transvaal) and the Orange Free State. Canadians were already split on whom to back. The government and much of English Canada backed the Brits.

French Canadian nationalists, led by Henri Bourassa, saw growing British imperialism as a threat and backed the Afrikaners (or Boers). Wilfrid Laurier’s government reluctantly raised an initial contingent of 1,000 infantrymen to fight in the war. But British reversals of fortune, injuries and casualties called on Canada to ante up a further 6,000 volunteers. And then a third contingent of 1,000 was sent to replace the Halifax reserves that were overseas. Canada’s total wartime bill for all this? $2,830,965.

This clearly was not enough for the Dominion of Canada – a loyal member of the British Empire. So CPR’s senior director, driver of the last spike and, at that time, Canadian High Commissioner to London, Donald Smith a.k.a. Lord Strathcona and Mont Royal, had an idea. He would raise, equip and fund...with his own money...a mounted cavalry to send off to South Africa to fight in the war. On New Year’s Eve, the day before 1899 became 1900, Lord Strathcona sent a telegram to Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier:

“Very confidential. Should like to provide and send to South Africa my personal fund squadron mounted men and officers say four hundred men and horses from North West, single men if possible. Force will be Canadian but distinct
from Government contingent. Men must be expert marksmen, at home in saddle, and efficient as rough riders and rangers. I propose pay cost shipment similar that of Canadian contingent and transport if you approve proposal.”

Laurier accepted immediately. And the contingent, though Strathcona wanted to remain anonymous, was called “Strathcona’s Horse.” Men and horses were recruited in Winnipeg, went east on CPR trains – the men in CPR tourist cars and the horses in CPR “palace horse cars” – and then overseas on a future CPR ship: the Monterey. The highly trained double squadron of 400 men and horses fought with distinction, under fabled Canadian hero Sam Steele, and returned home highly decorated – the decorated survivors traveling on CPR’s Imperial Limited transcontinental train. One member, Sergeant Arthur Richardson, was awarded the coveted Victoria Cross.

And what was the CPR director’s personal tab for Strathcona’s Horse? Over $1 million…a huge sum in those days!

Originally called the Great War, World War I was “great” only for the great number of nations, people and resources involved – and, alas, the great number of casualties that resulted. Canada and Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) were very much involved in this world conflict. When all was over, and the Armistice was signed, on November 11, 1918, a total of 32 nations had fought on both sides of the conflict, mobilizing over 65 million soldiers. A mind-numbing 8.5 million souls died as a result. Canada’s share was an awesome 60,000. And CPR’s was an appalling 1,116.

CPR put the entire resources of the “world’s greatest travel system” at the empire’s disposal…this, during CPR’s heyday, when the railway was much more than just a railway. Not only were the railway’s trains and tracks at the British Empire’s disposal, but also its ships, shops, hotels, telegraphs, and, above all, its people.
Aiding the war effort meant transporting and billeting troops; building and supplying arms and munitions; arming, lending and selling ships. Fifty-two CPR ships were pressed into service during World War I, carrying more than a million troops and passengers and four million tons of cargo. Twenty-seven survived and returned to CPR. Twelve sank, mostly torpedoed by U-boats; two sank by marine accident; 10 were sold to the British Admiralty; and the Maharajah of Gwalior turned the Empress of India into a hospital ship. But CPR’s most important contribution was its men and women, at home and abroad. 11,340 CPR employees enlisted. A catastrophic 10 percent (1,116) were killed, and nearly 20 percent (2,105) were wounded. Two CPR employees received the coveted Victoria Cross and 385 others were decorated for valor and distinguished service.

CPR also helped the war effort with money and jobs. CPR made loans and guarantees to the Allies to the tune of $100 million. CPR also took on 6,000 extra people, giving them jobs during the war. And when the fighting was over and the troops came home, CPR found jobs for the ex-soldiers. 7,573 CPR enlistees came back to jobs with the company. And CPR gave jobs to an additional 13,112 who made it back from overseas fighting.

At the time, CPR was the strongest and most viable railway in Canada. So it set up and formed the major part of the Canadian Overseas Railway Reconstruction Corps – a group of skilled railroaders and engineers who went overseas during and after World War I to rebuild Europe's railway infrastructure.

As a lasting tribute, CPR commissioned three statues and 23 memorial tablets to commemorate the efforts of those who fought and those who died in World War I.
As soon as the British Empire got involved, Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) got involved too. There was no question but that CPR, its people, its resources, its ingenuity and expertise were needed at home and overseas in World War II.

CPR had built up a large measure of war expertise. After all, it was not only significantly involved in World War I, but also contributed to the Boer War (1899 to 1902) and even the 1885 Second North-West (Riel) Rebellion.

And with the outbreak of World War II, the entire CPR network was again at the disposal of the Allied war effort. On land, CPR moved 307 million tons of freight and 86 million passengers; including 150,000 soldiers, nearly 130,000 army and air force re-patriots, and thousands of sailors. At sea, 22 CPR ships went to war with 12 of them being sunk, including CPR's largest passenger ship ever, which was almost as big as the Titanic – the Empress of Britain II. In the air, CPR pioneered the “Atlantic Bridge” – the transatlantic ferrying of bombers to Britain. CPR set up pilot training schools and opened Canada's strategic far north, creating Canadian Pacific Air Lines in 1942. CPR transformed major portions of its shops in Montreal and Calgary to build munitions, naval guns and tanks. By V-J Day, CPR shops had turned out 1,420 Valentine tanks; 75 main engines for corvettes, frigates and landing craft; over 600 naval vessel power equipment components; 3,000 naval guns and 1,650 naval gun mounts; 2,000 anti-submarine devices; and 120 range-finding and fire-control equipment.

CPR reorganized its entire shop system for the war. Much of Angus Shops, in Montreal, was turned over to building Valentine tanks and munitions. Calgary's Ogden
Shops were mostly dedicated to naval guns; building guns not only for Canada and Great Britain, but for the US as well. Weston Shops, in Winnipeg, became the main locomotive shops for the system. Wartime shop production signaled the end of the Great Depression and offered jobs to many laid-off CPR employees. And with the conscription debacle raging on in Canada, the company also provided jobs on the home front to CPR employees’ offspring who wanted to contribute to the war effort. One such case was a CPR Angus Shops carpenter’s son. Hockey legend Maurice “Rocket” Richard worked as a machinist for CPR’s Munitions Dept., in 1942.

Although on leave since October 1942, the “Rocket” didn’t resign his “secure” CPR job until he was comfortable with his hockey career... a few weeks into the 1944-1945 hockey season, when he scored his record-setting 50 goals in 50 games.

Canadian Pacific also provided the memorable setting for the two Quebec Conferences it hosted at the Chateau Frontenac in 1943 and 1944. It was there, in 1943, that Churchill and Roosevelt set the stage for the D-Day invasion that turned the tides of World War II.

21,787 CPR employees enlisted in World War II. 658 sacrificed their lives.
CPR participates to this day in Canadian troop movements and field exercises, shipping army vehicles and equipment by rail to remote training grounds or in preparation for shipment overseas.

In a logistics move reminiscent of World War II or before (minus the movement of troops), CPR moves all sorts of Canadian Forces Base (CFB) vehicles to and from “on-line” bases, such as CFB Suffield in Alberta. With more lines in the east in the late 1980s and early 1990s, CPR would undertake massive military equipment moves between CFBs – CFB Gagetown, N.B.; CFB Petawawa, Ont.; and even a 2,100-vehicle move between CFB Valcartier, Que., and CFB Suffield, Alta.

CPR’s military involvements since World War II stretched past Canada’s borders to its US affiliates and beyond. CPR employees in Maine and Vermont, and Soo Line employees in the Midwest US were involved in the Korean War and the war in Vietnam. CPR also answered the call to military duty in more recent times. A Canadian Pacific bulkship became a water tanker in the Falkland Islands War. CPR and the Soo Line helped redistribute rail cars during the national boxcar pool crunch caused by the 1991 Gulf War. And CPR moved military equipment for the mid-1990s Bosnian conflict.
Award for Most Supportive Employer in Canada

In May 2003, CPR won the Canadian Forces Liaison Council’s national award as Canada’s most supportive employer of primary Reserve Force personnel. Reservist-employee Master Seaman Julie McDonald acknowledged the support reservists receive and also acknowledged the history of support CPR has given throughout.

Winston Churchill once said, “The reservist is twice the citizen.” Reservists contribute to the country through civilian endeavors and also as members of the military. Canada’s Minister of Defense stated: “Not only does CPR contribute to the economic well-being of Canada, it has proven it is ‘twice the corporate citizen’ by giving reservists time off, without penalty, for their military endeavors.”

CPR’s Winnipeg “winged angel” statue

September 19, 2003, a 1922 CPR statue of a winged angel carrying off a fallen soldier was unveiled and re-dedicated in Winnipeg – on the beautifully reworked grounds of the Deer Lodge Centre.

The statue is not new. But it’s a lasting, reverent and solemn tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice in war.

CPR employees invested heart and soul in the “Great War”– World War I. Many paid with their lives. When it was all over, November 11, 1918, 32 nations had fought on both sides of the conflict, mobilizing over 65 million soldiers. A staggering eight-and-a-half million died in the war. Canada’s share was 60,000. CPR’s was a mind-numbing 1,116.

So CPR proposed a lasting tribute and commissioned Montreal sculptor Coeur de Lion MacCarthy to render three statues and 23 memorial tablets. These would commemorate employees who fought and died in the Great War. Henry-Bonnard Bronze Company of Mount Vernon, N.Y., produced the statues and tablets. They were unveiled with appropriate solemnity and ceremony, in 1922, at CPR locations in North America and overseas. CPR offices from London to Hong Kong got war memorial tablets. The three winged angel statues went to CPR stations in Montreal, Winnipeg and
Vancouver. Montreal’s statue was unveiled right where it stands today – at the south end of the Windsor Station concourse – with governor general Baron Byng doing the honors.

Winnipeg’s “winged angel” was first unveiled in front of the station/office/hotel complex on Higgins Avenue where it stood silent tribute for nearly seven decades. In 1990 the statue reigned at a new home – in the Disraeli Freeway Park in front of the CPR offices at 150 Henry Avenue. The statue fell into disrepute in this location, and offered little reverence, reflection, and remembrance. So CPR, the Intrepid Society and Winnipeg’s Deer Lodge Centre moved the statue to a new location and placed it on a brand new granite plinth recognizing all contributors to all wars…placed front-and-center on the redesigned Portage Avenue grounds of the former veterans’ hospital.

A challenge launched 81 years before was met. Montreal’s The Gazette entreated in their April 28, 1922 article “Pledges to the Dead”: “Let those who come after see that these memorials now being erected are never allowed to fall into disrepute.” The statue’s new home and caretakers answered that challenge!

CPR renames a vintage passenger car after World War II hero Ernest “Smoky” Smith

And on November 29, 2003, CPR honored Canada’s last surviving Victoria Cross recipient by renaming a vintage passenger car after World War II hero Ernest “Smoky” Smith. The idea came from CPR locomotive engineer Darrel Sundholm. Actually, Darrel thought CPR should name a locomotive after Canada’s only surviving Victoria Cross winner. So he approached CPR president and CEO Rob Ritchie with his great idea. The president decided to go one better. He named a CPR passenger car after the war hero. You see…there are 1,649 CPR locomotives out there…and only a dozen CPR passenger cars. Locomotives often go about their business in relative obscurity…in out of the way places, or under the cover of darkness. But CPR’s vintage CPR passenger cars are more often than not in public view. The car chosen to honor “Smoky” Smith spends spring, summer and fall traveling all over Canada and on CPR’s US network in the company of CPR’s roving ambassador – a 1930 steam locomotive: CPR Empress.

Funds for the Canadian War Museum

In 2004, Canadian Pacific Railway made a commitment to commemorate its and its employees’ 13-decade-long contribution to Canada’s war efforts. CPR president and CEO Rob Ritchie pledged $450,000 over the next four years to help preserve Canada’s military heritage. The money will help, in CPR’s
headquarter city of Calgary, Alta., the Sharing our Military Heritage campaign and its development of the largest tri-service military museum in the country. This contribution also helps the Passing the Torch Campaign that is raising funds for the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. CPR’s significant contribution will help the Ottawa museum tell the story of CPR’s role in Canada’s conflicts. CPR will get its very own “war room” display centered on a recovered CPR Valentine tank from Russia.

*World War II soldiers, waiting to “ship out” overseas, cluster around Coeur de Lion MacCarthy’s commemorative statue in Montreal’s Windsor Station concourse.*

*Ref. Canadian Pacific Railway Archives. A.17411*