

Talbot Papineau, the future all before him



Talbot Papineau, 1916. (Library and Archives Canada, C-13222.)

Sandra Gwyn's 1992 book *Tapestry of War* focuses on the lives of several Canadians in the early twentieth century. Talbot Papineau is its central figure and tragic hero. "The beau idéal of his generation," he was "handsome, clever and athletic, a gifted orator and writer, impeccably bilingual, and possessed of a charismatic personality."

Talbot Mercer Papineau was born on March 25, 1883 at Montebello, Quebec, in the Papineau family's seigneurie of Petite-Nation. As the great-grandson of Louis-Joseph Papineau ("la Patriote" of the 1837 Lower Canada Rebellion), Talbot inherited a famous name and considerable social standing in Quebec, though three of his four grandparents were American and his mother, the former Caroline Rogers, was from Philadelphia. Strong-willed and estranged from her alcoholic husband by the time Talbot was a teenager, Caroline raised four boys on her own. Gwyn writes that Talbot:

... grew up completely at home in either culture, ... The Papineaus had long been free-thinkers, so he was not brought up Catholic, and thanks to Caroline's influence (cleverest and handsomest of her sons, Talbot was the apple of her eye, and she to him was "rather a deity"), he was educated almost exclusively in English alongside the sons of the Montreal Anglo-Scottish ascendancy at Montreal High School, McGill University, and subsequently, Oxford.

Despite his urban education, it was Montebello's streams, hills, and woodlands that shaped his interests and made him happy. Montebello was somewhere he could play, explore on foot and by canoe, and sketch. It offered harmony and a retreat from study and ambition, and it drew him into the natural world.

Classmates at Montreal High remembered Talbot as "gregarious, competitive, cocky, and handy, when need be, with his fists." In 1920, George McDonald, an old friend, spoke to the Canadian Club in Montreal about his former schoolmate and fellow officer:

My earliest recollection of Talbot Papineau goes back to an affair that took place in the lane between Peel and Metcalfe Streets in which he acted as one of the principals. It was an affair of honour. He acted with courage and with chivalry and earned the admiration and respect of all his schoolfellows. That admiration and respect continued in whatever walk of life his subsequent career found him and it increased as he developed.



Talbot (on the right) and Walter Molson, Percy Molson's younger brother.
(Courtesy Karen Molson.)

At McGill, Talbot described himself as French Canadian, and while editor of the student newspaper showed a tendency to mischief and contrariness. Gwyn notes that he “stirred up a row by writing an article arguing that the students themselves were the best judges of their professors, and then answering himself in an angry reply signed with a pseudonym.”

In 1905, Talbot, with his friend Percy Molson, founded the Montreal Chapter of the Canadian Club. (Seventy years earlier, their ancestors – Louis-Joseph Papineau and John Molson Jr. – had helped found the Mechanics Institute of Montreal.) Percy, the Chapter's secretary-treasurer, was 24 or 25. Talbot, its president, was three years younger.

A year later, Talbot left Canada for Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship. He studied law at Brasenose College for two years, rowed for his college, became secretary of the Boating Club, and played hockey for the Oxford Canadians but, academically, managed only a second class degree, not the first he and his mother had set their sights on. Sports aside, he wasn't happy at Oxford. He missed Montebello, and in June 1908, after his Finals, he wrote his mother:

. . . all is over now, and I am delightfully and happily free. . . . I am tremendously pleased to leave Oxford and delighted beyond expression to be returning home. I am so anxious to see the stables and the horses and all the improvements, and to be there generally with you again.

To mark the occasion, he rented a canoe and paddled the very long way to Richmond with a puppy.

In 1909, a year after returning to Montebello and Montreal, he was called to the Quebec Bar and set up a law practice with his friend Andrew McMaster, a fellow Liberal Party member. He spent the next five years practicing law, involving himself in party politics, and speaking on behalf of the Canadian Club, “specializing in explaining Quebec to the rest of the country.” And he socialized. “He played as hard as he worked. No Montreal bachelor was more sought after, the ornament of many ballrooms and tennis parties and weekends in the Laurentians.”



Talbot, dressed formally in an informal setting, time and place unknown. (Library and Archives Canada, PA-185550.)

His own weekend parties were premier social events for the moneyed young of Montreal, and in its Talbot Papineau fonds, Library and Archives Canada has photos of the era, including several of “leisure activities at the Papineau manor Montebello, such as badminton, canoeing, and dance.” Several of Talbot’s drawings and paintings, often of Montebello, are also in the fonds. In this relatively idyllic pre-1914 world, he developed an interest in Quebec history and culture, subjects rooted for him in Montebello’s beauty, to which he returned whenever possible.

Restless and ambitious, however, he found this period trying. The Liberal Party's defeat in the 1911 federal election frustrated the political dreams he shared with his mother, who was determined to see her son succeed in public life. Unable to get on with his plans, and impatient with marking time, "he became a compulsive traveller, testing his mettle climbing mountains in Switzerland and driving the terrifying corniche road along the Amalfi coast of Italy at breakneck speed."

In August 1914, everything changed. Talbot, now 31, was in Vancouver at the Canadian Club's annual convention when war was declared. Speaking to the membership from a prepared text, he broke off to exclaim: "Canada did not have one word to say in the diplomatic negotiations leading up to the war, nor in the declaration of war."

Nationalist pique notwithstanding, he tore back to Ottawa after telegraphing his old friend Major Hamilton Gault. Volunteering for Gault's brand-new and privately-raised Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Talbot found himself an instant lieutenant despite a complete lack of military experience or previous interest in the military. A past critic of the Boy Scouts for its "militaristic overtones," Talbot was now a very junior but bona fide army officer.

His reasons for volunteering, Gwyn writes, were straightforward:

The war was an adventure and a calculated risk. Unlike so many young British aristocrats, he was not half in love with the idea of dying a hero. Instead, he wanted to have a brilliant career. A "good war," as the saying went, would enable him to leap up the ladder, bearing battle-honours.

But nothing about Talbot was straightforward. There's no doubt that he was motivated by the desire to get ahead – with Talbot, ambition was usually at the core of things – but he was also motivated by patriotism. He believed the war was Canada's chance to come into its own, to recognize its unique and separate identity, and to be seen and treated as a country in its own right. He was, as the next three years show, ambitious not only for himself but his nation as well.

The commission as a lieutenant with the PPCLI was due no doubt to Talbot's friendship with Gault, and to their mutual respect. At the same time, the regiment, though determined to recruit men with military or militia experience, was a privately-raised unit and hence ineligible to draw on the militia for junior officers. Suitable candidates may have been scarce in the PPCLI's heady and hurried first days.

In late August, Talbot wrote his mother:

I do not allow myself to think and therefore I cannot write about my feelings at leaving you. You must know that I love you more than anything else on earth. I will not speak as though this were more than an ordinary separation and I want you to keep the same thing in mind. I should be mad with sorrow if I allowed myself to imagine what might occur. I am steeled to take things as they come and not to anticipate sorrow. You must do the same. You simply must.

He also wrote that he was growing a moustache, “a very poor thing yet but growing rapidly.” He wasn’t keen on it – “I do not consider it very becoming” – but Colonel Farquhar, the regiment’s first and very British commanding officer, patterned the PPCLI on a traditional Guards unit, so the moustache came with the commission.

In late September 1914, the Patricias sailed for England, where they were stationed first on Salisbury Plain, then at Winchester. Talbot wrote his mother about his best friend among the officers, Charlie Stewart, a roguish adventurer, man of the world, experienced soldier, and supremely unusual figure. “He is the most pronounced character I have ever met,” Talbot later wrote. “He has the vitality and appearance of Hercules but remains normal by constant undermining operations – such as fifty cigarettes a day and the output of a whiskey factory.” In early December, however, the friendship proved near-fatal when the tent they shared caught on fire as they slept and both men suffered serious burns. While convalescing, Talbot was “taken up” by Lady Donoughmore, Farquhar’s mother-in-law, who had him to tea and encouraged him to write to a young American named Beatrice Fox.

By late December, Talbot and Charlie were fit enough to leave with their regiment for France. Serving with the British Army at this stage of the war, the Patricias went into the trenches in early January 1915, the first Canadian fighting unit at the front. In late February, Talbot and Gault took part in a trench raid at St. Eloi. The first of its kind, it yielded intelligence about German trenches and served as a model for future raids. In recognition of their daring success, Talbot and Gault were awarded the Military Cross and Distinguished Service Order respectively, and the raid was, as David J. Bercuson writes, the first Canadian attack of the war.

Recalling this period, George McDonald later said of Talbot’s early service at the front:

His personal courage, his untiring energy and his resourcefulness soon proved his sterling worth. He served with his battalion in the trenches during the first hard winter and he was in the forefront of all the engage-

ments in which it was concerned during that period. He was the first Canadian to win the Military Cross. . . . He was a pioneer in the aggressive form of trench warfare for which the Canadians afterwards became famous.

In a letter to his mother, Talbot described his part in the raid. Dated March 3, 1915 and addressed to Dearest old Mother, it is conspicuous for its boasting, bathos, and Boys Own brand of splendid, dashing, derring-do. It begins: "We have made our attack at last and I have led it!" (It's true he'd led part of the attack and done it well, but that's all.) Then he tells his mother how he shot a German: "I dropped on one knee and fired point blank. He disappeared. I said to myself 'I have shot him.'" But the most ghastly part of the letter is a detailed, sensational, and maudlin description of a fellow officer's head wound. Major J.S. Ward, mortally wounded – as was Farquhar – suffered for hours before a stretcher-party moved him to the rear:

Poor Ward . . . sank back into my arms. He bled frightfully. He had been shot in the back of the head. I bound his head up as best I could. The brain matter was oozing out. I put on about four field dressings and staunched the blood. I loved old Ward. . . . It was terrible for me to see him like that so suddenly. . . . I made Ward as comfortable as I could. He was now conscious and could recognize me though his mind wandered. He was in great pain and I gave him a good deal of morphine. He would hold my hand sometimes. He said "Talbot, you're an angel."

The letter closes with:

I am feeling splendidly now dearest, and full of hope and confidence. This is a time of trial but it will make life worthwhile, which it would not be otherwise. I have faith in your courage, so I tell you what I am doing. Good night now, my loving, lovable little mother.

Even allowing for Edwardian style and taste, not to mention mother and son etiquette, this is a tough, uneasy read.

Two months later, in early May 1915, the PPCLI was broken at the Battles of Frezenberg and Bellewaerde Ridge. Most of the "Originals" – the officers and men who had joined the Patricias in August 1914 – were killed or wounded. Talbot lived, unwounded but "shattered," and for a while wrote nothing more.

In late May, after promotion to captain and a brief leave in England, Talbot returned to what was left of the regiment and resumed writing to his mother almost daily. As Gwyn notes, however:

The feverish quality of these letters suggests a man living on his nerve ends. As recently as April, still on a high from the trench raid at St. Eloi, he'd written Caroline jauntily, even a little calculatingly – about his Military Cross. "It is very pleasant to have such a fuss made, and when I come home it will be a help, I am sure, 'in my business.'" Now he was sombre. "It is a good thing to have this ribbon on my chest. I cannot show fear, can I, when I am labelled brave?"

He tried to describe what had happened at Bellewaerde Ridge on May 8, when the regiment suffered 450 casualties, but stopped part way. Then: "Any courage I have comes from you and not the Papineaus. I am tired of this grandfather business. . . . On that awful 8th of May, it was your confidence that again and again gave me the courage to go on."

He still hoped to get through the war and return home. In his letters, the subject was often Montebello, its beauty and serenity and his fear that it and the way of life it signified might not endure. When he learned that two of his brothers might enlist, he wrote his mother: "Don't let them come. Their duty is there. Canada must not be too seriously hurt. I am afraid and depressed today – not for myself, but for our civilization, our people, our world."

He continued to sketch, and Gwyn includes three of his pieces in *Tapestry*. One is of a fellow officer (Captain R.A.S. "Beau" Nash) reading Stephen Leacock's *Nonsense Novels*, and two are of Montebello. About the latter, which depict the estate's chapel and lodge gates, Gwyn writes that they "were done from memory and speak of his longing for home." Around this time, in the early summer of 1915, he wrote Lady Donoughmore's young American, Beatrice Fox, that he was the only officer of the regiment's original forty not killed, wounded, or invalided out.

He had taken "Lady D's" advice and started an exchange of letters with Beatrice, a 24-year-old sculptor from a wealthy family in Philadelphia. Gwyn covers their correspondence in detail and describes the complexity of their relationship, which, on Talbot's part, veered from the romantic, intimate, and hopeful to the cool, harsh, and dismissive. Beatrice saved Talbot's letters. Since he was at the front and had to keep his kit light, he didn't save hers, so the reader has to rely on his responses for a sense of what Beatrice wrote and what she was like. At first, their letters were tentative, though Talbot's could also be surprisingly direct and urgent:

Since August I have been a licensed killer, since January I have tried to kill – I have succeeded in not being killed at any rate . . . rather a record of good fortune but a record which may be broken this evening or in ten minutes for all I know . . . I should sleep, but the fresh adventure of writing to an unknown rather appealed to me. Would you forbid this appeal, and deny a poor soldier?



Beatrice sent Talbot this miniature of herself for his thirty-fourth birthday. It is “the most precious thing I have ever had,” he told her. He returned it, saying he hoped she’d give it to him in person someday. (Library and Archives Canada, C-137034.)

Like the man himself, his letters were mercurial, by turns superficial and guileless. Reflecting his increasing confusion, some were light-hearted and flirtatious, others sad, bleak, and jumpy:

I hate this murderous business. I have seen so much death – and brains and blood – and marvellous human machines suddenly smashed like Humpty Dumpties. . . . Never shall I shoot duck again or draw a speckled trout to gasp in my basket – I would not wish to see the death of a spider.

Also, most revealingly:

It is over a year now since I volunteered and since then life has seemed like the ball in a game of roulette. . . . In the meantime I have moments of gaiety with companions – moments of sadness when I think of home – moments of terrific anxiety and responsibility – and black moments when I question myself, my courage and even the final success of our cause. . . . It is a great mistake for a soldier to have too keen an imagination or to allow his thoughts to dwell morbidly on his dangers. . . . I am not by nature intrepid, not even quarrelsome enough to make fighting enjoyable. On the contrary I shrink from the naked disclosures of human passions – I dislike intensely loss of control – drunkenness, insanity, hatred, anger – they fill me with a cold horror and dread. . . . There should be no heroism in war. No glorification – no reward. For us it should be the simple execution of an abhorrent duty – a thing almost to be ashamed of.

And:

Had I been born under Prussian influence I should have believed their cause and fought for it, but I have been differently trained and so I fight against it.

Talbot was careful when writing to family and friends, but with Beatrice he expressed his fears, erratic impulses, mounting inner conflict, self-doubt, self-contradiction, and hurt. He could be gentle one moment, sarcastic the next, first vivacious then dark, or charming and anguished at the same time. “You are the best correspondent I have ever had,” he wrote. “You are almost a dream come true.”

By late 1915, the PPCLI had to decide whether to go to a different British division or join a Canadian division. Gault and Major Agar Adamson, later the regiment’s commanding officer, argued for the former, while Talbot and several other officers made a case for the latter. In the end, the Patricias went to the 3rd Canadian Division over Gault’s strong objections and was brigaded with three other units, including

the 42nd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada). As the only formation with front line experience, the PPCLI was considered the senior unit.

For Talbot, however, the autumn of 1915 was a particularly unhappy time, and his next leave in London made things worse. The city in wartime had descended into what Lady Diana Cooper termed the “nightmare years of tragic hysteria.” Talbot hated the frenzied, sybaritic excess and detested himself for taking part in it. On October 3, he wrote Beatrice:

How I have come to hate London! Not so much London's fault, I suppose, as my own, but for me it has come to mean – long walking in an alien crowd, the ceaseless flow of money, innumerable dashes in taxi-cabs, feverish excitements of nightclubs and music halls, health-destroying restaurants and lounges, and the ceaseless passing of painted faces, the hideous pageantry of commercial affection. If I have been drawn into this side of life I blame myself a great deal, but I also blame disturbing influences of the war, and generally, the extraordinary moral laxity of the people.

Ashamed of himself for his own moral laxity, he confessed:

I wanted affection – beauty – laughter – companionship – I wanted them immediately and so I bought them – the cheap, readymade articles, and so I have cheapened myself until I was sick with disappointment and glad that tomorrow I go back to the front and so perhaps end it all.

If, under the circumstances, that seems self-pitying, overwrought, or far too self-critical, it says something about Talbot's sense of right and wrong, his belief in personal integrity, and sticking to an exacting standard of conduct.

At the front, things got worse. The cold autumn rains started, Talbot's lucky penknife vanished, and, worst of all, his little dog “Bobs” disappeared. It was too much. A week after losing Bobs, Talbot was sent to hospital for acute bronchitis, though by his own account he was “more hurt in mind than in body.” He was no longer the breezy, confident junior officer who, after the Second Battle of Ypres six months earlier, had written: “I understand that the Canadians were used in some heavy fighting last night and there will be many sad hearts. . . . Some reports are appalling. I should feel dreadfully if they are true, yet what a glorious history they will have made for Canada.”

In early 1916, after almost two months in hospital and another short tour at the front, Talbot accepted a staff appointment at Canadian headquarters and left the regiment. Arranged by Max Aitken, who Talbot

had met in London, this appointment made him aide-de-camp to the commander of the Canadian Corps, something that could only further his military career and his post-war prospects. He was both excited and wretched: "Yesterday I cried like a baby when it came time to say goodbye. . . . All the NCOs in my company paraded to say goodbye and I couldn't say a word."



With Bobs in France. (Library and Archives Canada, C-13224.)

Talbot was on staff for almost a year and a half, though he was seconded to the Canadian War Records Office in France after several months. Run by the increasingly powerful Aitken (later Sir Max, Lord Beaverbrook), the War Records Office made full use of Talbot's energy, versatility, and drive. Among other things, he wrote communiqués and supervised cinematographers visiting the front. He worked hard but lived well, in comfort, and far enough from the firing line to imagine surviving the war. "By his name," Gwyn writes, and by "his education, his fluency in both French and English, his network of friends and kin, not to mention his vaulting ambition, he possessed all the credentials to reach for the top once the war was over."

Meanwhile, as part of Max Aitken's empire, he was spared the misery of the trenches: "His office at Canadian Headquarters in France," Gwyn says, "was in the middle of a beautiful park with a château nearby that reminded him of Montebello." He had a personal secretary, a Daimler and chauffeur, and a bay mare he named Queen Bee.

As for his letters to Beatrice at this time, they were inconsistent, even baffling. He was "very happy at the rate of progress in Romance which we have made," he wrote, then added that in a relationship between a soldier and a young woman it was impossible to gauge its seriousness:

We cannot possibly tell, not until after the war. In the meantime, it is safer to play. I want you to love me and write me love letters for they will charm and amuse me, but I don't want you to really care. I want in return to charm and amuse you. I don't want to cause you any anxiety or sorrow. It is bad enough to have Mother thinking about me that way.

"I should like nothing better than a honeymoon in cathedrals and libraries," he said. "I could show you Oxford and Touraine and Capri ." But then: "The strange thing is that whereas I have loved others and yet did not think them suitable, I think you are suitable but do not love you." But then again, in a sort of daisy petal back and forth rhythm – he loves me, he loves me not – there's a reversion to giddy romance: responding to a coded telegram in which Beatrice declared her love for him, he replied: "We are engaged. We are lovers! I have hastened to the Signals Office and directed a cable to your address with the one word 'Congratulations' because it is the code word you suggested."

In the end, nothing seems to have come of this, and, as far as we know, Talbot never expressed his love for Beatrice plainly and credibly.

Romantic inconsistency was matched and perhaps fueled by Talbot's confusion about his role in the military. Success as a staff officer no longer seemed enough, and, drawn in different directions by conflicting impulses, he felt badly about leaving the Patricias. "Should I go back to the Regiment?" he asked Beatrice. "I cannot make up my mind. I should really be happier [there], but it is such a temptation to remain here

and feel important and be comfortable.” The work and status – he had become Aitken’s Official Eyewitness at the front – appealed to his vanity but left him, in his words, “simply looking pretty.” He wasn’t a real soldier. He was respected for his work, but being a staff officer, a “red tab,” ate at him.

The year before, demoralized after combat, Talbot told Beatrice that his profession was “speeching not fighting,” and in July 1916 he did make a kind of speech. In an open letter to Henri Bourassa, his first cousin and the formidable editor of *Le Devoir* in Quebec, Talbot argued that a hesitant French Canada must throw itself into the war. A week later Bourassa replied, coolly and adroitly, and their exchange brought Talbot a sudden highly partisan fame at home and abroad. His arguments failed to move Bourassa and many other French Canadians, but in a clash of nationalisms (the one for Canada, the other Quebec) Talbot’s heated, patriotic language and tendency to high rhetoric played well in London and English-speaking Canada:

As I write, French and English Canadians are fighting and dying side by side. Is their sacrifice to go for nothing or will it not cement a foundation for a true Canadian nation, a Canadian nation independent in thought, independent in action, independent even in its political organisation – but in spirit united for high international and humane purposes to the two Motherlands of England and France?

A Canadian nationalist ahead of his time, Talbot wrote Beatrice: “My whole inclination is towards an independent Canada with all the attributes of sovereignty, including its responsibilities.” For Talbot, the war was “the great national opportunity for Canada.” If Canada played its part, “a strong, self-reliant spirit of Canadian nationality” would result.

Talbot’s political war had begun. A public relations success, he leapt at Aitken’s suggestion that he go on a speaking tour of Canada, then changed his mind when Liberal Party friends said it might make him seem Sir Max’s man. Aitken, a Tory with many enemies, had become a political liability and Talbot began to distance himself. Writing to Beatrice, he explained: “My name was becoming associated with Sir Max. He is a power in the land. He has immense influence in both Canadian and English governments and consequently the greatest influence upon the Army. This is wholly pernicious. I am deeply opposed to political influences (particularly Tory!)”

Around this time, Talbot visited the Patricias. Adamson, now commanding officer, “shooed” him away, describing the event in a letter to his wife, Mabel:

Papineau turned up two days ago with a cinematographic camera and wanted us to pose for him. I suggested he take photographs of the graves of the fallen and ordered him to get out of the lines as I did not think it fitting that in the present critical situation officers should be going about with a Punch and Judy Show.

The general heard of it and quite approved, but my views are not shared by many Commanding Officers, who are only too anxious to advertise themselves. . . . If Papineau returned to the Regiment and did his bit, it would be more to his credit than playing into Max Aitken's hands and driving about in motor cars and sleeping in a comfortable bed 16 miles behind the support lines.

In fairness, Talbot had become even more unhappy with his staff role. To Beatrice: "More friends have gone. By what strange law am I still here? What right have I to selfish pleasure any longer? Should my living life not be consecrated just as their dead lives have been?"

After the Battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917, his tension, confusion, and sense of remorse became intolerable. His last task as Aitken's representative was to write the Canadian Corps report of the battle. On April 11, two days after the first assault, Talbot wrote his mother that he was safe, that he'd slept only four hours in the previous forty-eight, that he'd been along the new front line, and that the Canadians had won a "splendid victory." What he didn't say, Gwyn writes, "was that never in his life had he felt more frustrated than during those forty-eight hours. While he looked on, scribbling notes and sketching out maps, the Canadians had scored . . . the most important British victory of the war thus far."

Talbot's natural polarity and uncertain future continued to shape his letters to Beatrice, and she must have been alternately charmed and stung by his remarks, with their mixed signals and ambiguous, even contradictory implications. He returned over and over to their relationship and whether they'd be together after the war, but he ran hot and cold. At times romantic and dreamy, at others curt and careless, he could be both abstract and erratic. Was their relationship mere friendship, he wondered, or the first stage in a sublime romance that would last forever? Nor was he erratic solely on the subject of romance. A derisive comment on Beatrice's art or character would be followed, in a subsequent letter, by abject contrition: "I am a miserable worm!! . . . I am contemptible."

Sometimes vain and self-indulgent, Talbot almost certainly took advantage of Beatrice. In his defence, there was the war's vile horror and his fear of death, mutilation, or disgrace. As others had learned, however, he tended to be inconstant, and it was probably in his nature to be not merely rash but immature and inconsiderate. In any case, while Beatrice was clear about her love – "When I say I really love you, there isn't any comeback" – he wasn't clear at all, and his letters, while often extraordinary, make uncomfortable reading.

Gwyn is candid about Talbot's selfishness, egotism, and capacity for melodrama. She likes and admires him but can write: "The flip side to Talbot's flair and panache was arrogance and conceit. His own opinion of himself was golden; he was more than ready to use his charm to curry favour in high places, and not above bullying those whom he considered to be his inferiors into doing what he wanted."

If his friend and fellow PPCLI officer Percy Molson (simple, gentle, and with "an extraordinary sense of honour," according to Adamson) was kin to Chaucer's parfit gentil knight, Talbot was Shakespearean in complexity and paradox. Self-doubting Hamlet and headstrong Hotspur warred within him, turning him this way and that.

In June 1917, motivated by loyalty, ambition, and the need for self-respect, Talbot returned to the Patricias. Percy and Charlie welcomed him. Adamson did not. Though Talbot told his mother, who had moved to London to be closer to him, that his commanding officer was delighted to have him back, the opposite was true. Agar wrote Mabel that when he talked to Talbot about the terms of his return, the latter behaved as if he were doing the regiment a favour. He expected immediate promotion to major, appointment as second-in-command, and:

He wants to go to Oxford for five weeks to get fit rowing, playing tennis racquets and running, then two weeks with his mother in the country, then six weeks military training at some school in England. . . . He said he intended to go into public life after the war, and thought that he would have a better chance of getting the support of the public if he could show that he had been with the Regiment through some big push like the last one. . . . I told him that if he came back he must do so as a Company Commander, and that he must make up his mind to stay as I did not propose to make the Battalion a training ground for the convenience of staff officers. . . . He can think of nothing but himself and annoyed me very much, although I did not comb him down as much as the self-seeking bounder deserved.

As always with Talbot, idealism and ambition went hand in hand, if uneasily. Though he dreaded the front and the risk he took in returning to it, he felt compelled to do so: "if I have the necessary courage and character to see it through, I shall have proved myself much more of a man than I can ever do as a scribe." In practical terms, he was right: without more service in the trenches, he couldn't expect further promotion in the military or the first-rate war record he wanted for a future in politics. At the same time, in characteristic self-conflict, he wrote his mother: "Why oh Why am I so ambitious, my dear mother? Could we not be happy with less honour and glory, more security and comfort?"

Soon, however, he was simply back, all indecision gone. He set to work, focused on his duties, shed his ambivalence and self-doubt, and found that his courage hadn't left him. Within a week or two, Adamson had revised his opinion. Describing an action in which Talbot distinguished himself by his cool, intelligent leadership under fire, Adamson wrote: "Papineau is really very good." And though he remained a company commander, he was promoted in August: "I am a major and a real one," he wrote his mother. "I have put up my crown and I feel very important indeed." Gwyn quotes one of Talbot's corporals: "Our company commander is Major Papineau, of whom you have no doubt read. He is a gentleman and a sport, and very popular." In 1920, George McDonald said of Talbot's reputation that he'd won not only the Military Cross but "the love and respect of his men and of his brother officers. He always looked after the comfort of his men before thinking of his own and he never ordered his men to do anything or go anywhere he did not personally lead them."

So the summer passed and the war went on. Talbot threw himself into his regimental role, which included organizing sports and a company concert. He wrote upbeat letters to his mother – a dangerous daylight raid had been "all great fun" – and kept from her the awful events of the time, except Percy's death in July.

In an early letter to Beatrice, Talbot had written: "I have had a man apparently uninjured die from the shock of the explosion as his elbow touched mine." Now something similar had happened to his friend.

Since coming to France, Talbot had kept his mother informed about Percy and other old friends. In early letters, he wrote: "I shall be very glad indeed when Geo. McDonald & Percy Molson come." And: "Gault is back and with him George McDonald . . . Percy Molson, Phil Mackenzie, Currie and Cornish. We are a very jolly crowd once again. I suppose we shall play lots of bridge."

After the Battle of Mount Sorrel in 1916, while Talbot was at Corps headquarters, he wrote: "The regiment has suffered very severely. They say it was worse than last year even. De Bay is dead. Percy Molson is shot through the chin, tongue and jaw." And in June 1917, after Talbot returned to the regiment, he wrote that "Col. Adamson & Charlie and Percy Molson are all here." Ten days later he wrote that he was about to play bridge with Percy, and then, on July 5:

Dearest Mother, . . . You will be very sorry to hear that Percy Molson was killed last night. He and another officer were standing together and were both killed by concussion of a big trench mortar bomb which appears to have exploded between them. This is a serious loss for the Regiment & I lose another old friend. . . .

By then, things had cooled between Talbot and Beatrice. The problem seems to have been his retreat from intimacy, but once he'd returned to the regiment it must have been hard to think about a future with Beatrice or anyone else. Dogged by the very real possibility of death, he wrote her in late September: "Please dear B., don't think you mean any the less to me but I have rather felt strain recently and somehow have lost interest in everything except my work." And to his mother:

Sometimes, I feel I am not doing enough. I should be writing or speaking but I suppose that by just serving and waiting, and even by being killed I can accomplish far more in the long run . . . nearly 35 I am and very little or nothing done, and just as young as ever in some ways.

In early October, he went on leave to England. He saw his mother in London, then travelled to Oxford, where he visited former tutors and punted on the Cherwell. At the end of his leave, during a weekend spent with friends in Surrey, he had a romantic and perhaps sexual affair with Sarah Shaughnessy, the young widow of a friend from Montreal. Talbot was, in spite of what he'd said to Beatrice, desperate for passion and experience. "The critical difference between Beatrice and Sarah," Gwyn writes, "was that Sarah was there."

On October 15, the day after leaving Surrey, Talbot wrote Sarah: "I wish the future were not so uncertain. I have nothing to depend on, not even you." He left England the following day, rejoining the Patricias as they moved from France to Belgium.

On October 21, he wrote Beatrice: "I am on the eve of grave events. I have only a short minute in which to write but I wished to make sure you heard from me." In effect, Talbot said goodbye. "Whatever happens," he wrote, "you must realize that I have thought of you and been happy and grateful for you now and to the end. I am in excellent health and spirits. . . . Better wait for my next letter before replying. Then I trust we can have a real resumption of correspondence. . . . Believe me always affectionately and gratefully, Your Talbot."

And to his mother the same day: "I never felt better in my life. This morning we had a church service and sang 'Nearer my God to Thee,' familiar of how we used to sing as kids at Montebello." Then, referring to his recent leave: "Dear little mother, how pitifully little I seem to have seen of you. Too bad – my restless soul. One hesitates to allow emotion to come out – my whole policy is one of suppression and control. . . . We will find a fund of buried affection after the war."

Two days later, the Patricias moved up to ready themselves for the Third Battle of Ypres, "Passchendaele." Adamson wrote Mabel that "the shelling on both sides is most intense. . . . The ground is just one mass of shell holes all full of water." Talbot wrote his mother: "It has been very rainy and wet but we managed to build a little open fire and were jolly and happy." There was nothing left to do but his duty. No more ambivalence or contradictory instincts, just the one thing.

The first Canadian attack started on October 26, but the Patricias weren't in it. A second attack was scheduled for October 30. On the 27th, Talbot wrote his mother:

Just a hurried line, my last, I'm afraid, for a few days. By the time you receive it I shall be all right, or you will have news to the contrary, so you need have no anxiety. I am enjoying the whole thing enormously so far and have as yet not the least nervousness. . . . Always know that if I do get killed I was completely happy and content to the last minute and that my only regret is due to the sorrow it will cause you. . . . I have a sensible feeling, however, that my chances are good and that I can still write you gallant tales! I have already missed a number of shells today and the auguries are good.

On October 28, the PPCLI moved up to the front line. The next day, a final letter to his mother:

We have been fortunate so far and all things are cheerful. I have even shaved this morning in a little dirty water. . . . There seems so little to say, when if only I knew what was going to happen I might want to say so much. These would be poor letters to have as the last ones but you must know with what a world of love they are written.

Then he quoted Robert Herrick: “‘Always remember I could not love thee so well, or you love me, did I not love honour more.’ You have given me the courage and strength to go very happily and cheerfully into the good fight.”

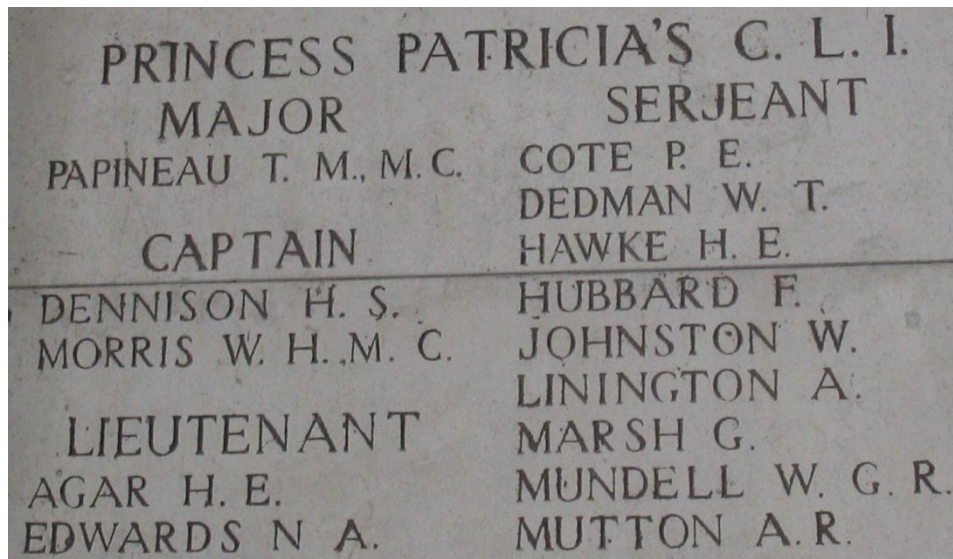
Shortly before six the next morning, Talbot and his men went over the top. His last known words, spoken to Major Hugh Niven: “You know, Hughie, this is suicide.” Within a couple of minutes, his life was over.



Whether Passchendaele was the good fight is debatable. Field Marshall Haig, commander of British and Allied Forces, wanted it. Major General Arthur Currie, commander of the Canadian Corps, didn’t. For Haig it was a chance to break through the German lines and validate his past and present tactics. For Currie, it meant little but the slaughter of his men. Haig won out.

Three days earlier, Adamson had written Mabel that, in his opinion, “no C.O. in certain shows should be over 29 years old.” He was in his early fifties. On the 31st, he listed the officers lost since the previous morning and concluded: “Less men are left than on the historic 8th of May.” Two days later: “I cannot help wondering if the position gained was worth the awful sacrifice of life.”

Because Talbot’s body was never reported found and buried, his name is inscribed at the Menin Gate in Ypres, where many of the missing in Belgium are memorialized. In fact, however, three weeks after Talbot’s death, Charlie Stewart did find his friend’s partial remains. On November 16, he wrote Adamson: “My dear Colonel. . . . We found Talbot’s body and are having a service and putting up a cross tomorrow.” On the 20th, Adamson wrote Mabel that Talbot, “poor fellow,” “could not have known what hit him.” As with Percy, so with Talbot.



The inscription at the Menin Gate in Ypres. (Photo by the author.)

The PPCLI never told Caroline Papineau about Charlie's sad discovery. Perhaps his fellow officers thought it wise to spare her the details. Three weeks into grieving, she could continue to think of her son as simply disappearing, the way so many sons did.

"To a degree that was extraordinary," Gwyn writes, "Talbot Papineau became for Canadians the symbol not only of Passchendaele, but of all the golden promise cut down by the Great War." The *Ottawa Citizen* wrote that Talbot had been "destined to fill a high place in public life. Many people who had no personal acquaintance with him regarded him as the one man specially fitted to lead in the task of reconciling the two races." The British papers joined in, and the *Financial Times* of Montreal wrote: "The only consolation for a loss like this is the hope that by the very nobility of his sacrifice, the late Major Papineau's memory may in years to come effect more for the unification of his country and the triumph of his principles than his own living effort could ever have accomplished." Journalistic hyperbole notwithstanding, Talbot's death sparked sincere and widespread grief, and there was a profound sense of public loss.

Nothing, of course, could equal Caroline's sorrow. From her reply to Adamson's letter of condolence:

Dear Colonel Adamson,

Please accept my sincere thanks for your letter, and your sympathy. Every word said about Talbot I read and reread and in the expressions of admiration and esteem in which he was held, I find my only solace. The courage and readiness with which he faced what I am told was a desperate attack, fills my heart with pride,

but also with great bitterness – I've nothing. Nothing can console me for the loss of my boy who had been the joy and comfort of my life. I shall always be deeply interested in the Regiment, and it will ever have my unbounded admiration, and it will be a welcome service to do anything I can for it, for the sake of my beloved boy. I should be very grateful if you could let me know the whereabouts of any of Talbot's men who may have been wounded.

Yours very sincerely,

Caroline R. Papineau

But Caroline was not alone in her sorrow. On December 4, 1917, a friend of Talbot's named John Archibald wrote Beatrice. John and Talbot had attended McGill and Oxford together, and Talbot often stayed at John's when in London:

Miss Fox,

I have your letter of Nov. 11th. Your name is very familiar to me as Talbot often used to speak to me about you. . . . Talbot knew, on his last leave, that he was going into a place from which he was likely enough not to return, but I never knew him happier or quieter in mind. He was glad to be back with the regiment and refused to consider an offer of a staff position in England. After all, the front line was his element and he felt it. His death is a calamity to his mother and almost as much to some others of us – but not to him. And yet poor Talbot – he loved life so keenly; it was no tired, blunted life he gave up. But he was not one to go in to anything with reservations. He had been my nearest friend since we were boys so it means a good deal to me. I never knew anyone like him and never expect to find another. If we meet someday in the future, as may happen, we shall talk about Talbot, for I think that you too appreciated what he was.

Yours sincerely

John Archibald

Perhaps they did meet. It would be nice to think so. In any case, according to Gwyn, Beatrice led a satisfying post-war life: she married, became a successful sculptor, wrote four books, and lived until her late seventies. Her obituary in *The New York Times*, December 7, 1968, notes that she made relief maps for the armed forces in both world wars. In 1934, she sent Talbot's letters to the Canadian Army Historical Section. The intermediary was Philip Mackenzie, a former PPCLI officer and friend of Talbot and Percy's.



Beatrice, 1949. Painted more than thirty years after Talbot's death, this portrait by Alice Kent Stoddard is entitled "Beatrice Fox Griffith of Haverford West, Pennsylvania." (With the permission of Alderney Library, Channel Islands, U.K.)

Caroline Rogers Papineau "lived on and on" until 1951, never recovering from Talbot's death. In 1929, she sold what was left of Montebello to an American developer. "There I was born," Talbot had written Beatrice, "and there my heart is." Today Montebello is a resort hotel and national historical site.

In many ways, the personal and public sides of Talbot's character came together in his passion for Montebello and Canada. His parts combined in an intense attachment to landscape and nation. In this attachment, his drive to achieve – and its opposite, his desire for release – were integrated. An ambitious man who craved an end to ambition, and a private man who threw himself into political action, he was one in his love of place.

In an early letter to Beatrice, Talbot appended lines from a poem by Octave Crémazie, the nineteenth century Quebec nationalist exiled or self-exiled to France. The final lines are:

*Canada! quand sur ta rive . . .
Heureux qui peut passer sa vie
Toujours fidèle à te servir,
Et dans tes bras, mère chérie,
Peut rendre son dernier soupir.*

In very rough translation:

*Canada! when on your side . . .
Happy he is who spends his life
Always faithful in your service
And in your arms, dear mother,
Can take his last breath.*

Far from Quebec, Crémazie's exile longs for home. He wants to serve his motherland, faithfully and always, and to die there. To Crémazie's lines, Talbot added: "I wonder if I shall be more fortunate than the unhappy author. He loved his Canada, but he did not love it more than I do."

In 1917, while still on staff at Canadian Corps headquarters, Talbot addressed the Corps School in France. His talk was activist, nationalist, and concerned above all with the "social and political changes which may be expected to occur after the war." As in his open letter to Bourassa, he spoke in the emotional and unironic high style of the time: "There will also be the undercurrent of sad and reverential memory for those whose supreme sacrifice has made such joy possible." And:

[There will] be a realisation that in the trial and pain and bloody sacrifice of war the national life of Canada has taken birth. Such has been the history of every great nation and Canada will now have a history – a

history to raise the heads and thrill the hearts of countless generations to come – a history that will form the firm foundation for a national reconstruction.

In the presence of our victorious armies the nation will feel an uplift of pride and confidence. Canada, for instance, will no longer fear an absorption by America, she will no longer doubt her ability to trade with foreign countries. She will demand a recognition of her national status. She will wish to continue to play a part in the politics of the world. Briefly, there will result a strong, self-reliant spirit of Canadian Nationality.

He foresaw a change in the constitutional relationship between Canada and the United Kingdom, a new association with Allied or neutral countries, even the development of an independent diplomatic corps and a foreign policy to go with it: "The participation of Canada in the war will have given her a position in the eyes of foreign countries which she should maintain."

He predicted post-war prosperity and expansion in Canada but warned against a "wanton exploitation of natural wealth." Advocating controlled immigration and sensible laws of conservation, he said that Canadians must guard their "precious heritage." Above all: "we may find Canada and America playing leading roles in the establishment of that international police force which so many now believe to be the best guarantee against future wars."

Laying out his convictions, Talbot referred to a "deep reverent feeling of indebtedness" to those who had fallen and said that those who lived must be dedicated to the purpose for which the others had died: "the establishment of a great, free and happy nation." As for returning soldiers, they must not demand too much. "We are fighting not for ourselves, not for any particular body of citizens, but for the nation as a whole." However:

One thing which we will demand above all others is decency and honesty in our public men. That is a thing upon which we will all agree and which, if we are true to ourselves and true to the sacred trust which our dead have left in our hands, we can most assuredly control.

And near the end: "Sacrifice is the keynote of our service here. It should continue to be our guiding principle in our citizen life."

After Talbot's death there were the predictable "what ifs," and, as Gwyn says, they persist. "Even now Papineau remains a vivid and tantalizing presence. The easiest description of the loss Canada experienced by his death is that he was the Pierre Elliott Trudeau who never was." On November 3, 1917, Mackenzie King, grandson of another 1837 rebel, wrote in his diary: "I saw notice of Talbot Papineau having

been killed in action. One of the finest and bravest of men, a great loss to Canada, the British Empire and the world."

Ralph Hodder-Williams, a former PPCLI officer and author of its post-war history, wrote that Talbot, "through the happy combination of a proud name, clear vision and great personal charm, might well have lived to render further valuable service to the state in time of peace."

In *The Globe and Mail*, July 18, 2006, Brian McKenna, director of the CBC TV miniseries *The Great War*, said about Pierre Trudeau that "he left behind the folly of his youthful radical views and became, like Papineau, a champion of a bilingual Canada and an enemy of narrow Quebec nationalism." Another writer, also referring to the series, said that "the similarities between the two men are actually quite extraordinary. Both were born in Quebec, the sons of English-speaking mothers and French-speaking fathers, and both were flawlessly bilingual. Both travelled the country seeking to impart a greater understanding of Quebec, and both battled the narrow nationalism of their home province."

R.C. Fetherstonhaugh, the author of *McGill University at War* said of Talbot that, "bearing a name famed in Canadian history," he would be remembered for his vision of a Canada "undivided by the schisms of race and creed," its identity as a true Canadian nation secured by the sacrifice of war.

It was this true Canadian nation that Talbot loved most and was most willing to serve. He faced death for it, and sacrifice was the keynote of his service.

In many ways, Talbot and Percy Molson were opposites. If Percy was mild, temperate, and of a piece, Talbot was wild, intemperate, and of many pieces. If Percy was modest but quietly assured, Talbot was immodest but fundamentally unsure of himself. And if Percy's ambitions were measured, Talbot's were not. The two men complemented each other.

And they did have things in common, including a sense of duty and pride. Both regarded service, including wartime military service, as their obligation, and both returned to their frontline unit when they didn't have to. Then, too, both were capable of fineness, delicacy, and sensitivity. Percy was famous for it,

Talbot less so, but as the front first shocked and then wore him down, he changed: *Never shall I shoot duck again or draw a speckled trout to gasp in my basket. . . . There should be no heroism in war. No glorification – no reward. For us it should be the simple execution of an abhorrent duty – a thing almost to be ashamed of.*

And they shared the happier duties: to their regiment, their fellow officers, and their men. They remained true to the code they lived by, and they spared their families whatever they could.

In Talbot's case, there was the additional duty to Beatrice. At times capricious, insincere, even mean, he wanted in the end not to hurt her: *I don't want to cause you any anxiety or sorrow.* It's not hard to conclude from his letters and what we know of the war that he forced a distance in his relationship with a remarkable young woman because he'd lost faith in his survival. And so, at the end of a spirited if sometimes selfish life, he rose to the occasion and did what he could for Beatrice, and for his mother, bar living.

There's no way to know, of course, but it's possible that his final calm – as evidenced by John Archibald and his own letters – was the result of letting go and putting an end to uncertainty, confusion, fear of failure, and tiresome ambition and compromise. In any case, this inconstant and self-contradictory man died with resolve, verve, courage, and concern for others. ■

Sources and supplementary material

(page 1:)

See Sandra Gwyn's *Tapestry of War: A Private View of Canadians in the Great War* (HarperCollins Publishers Limited, 1992) and Heather Robertson's *A Terrible Beauty* (James Lorimer and Company, Ltd., 1977). Robertson has also written a novel drawn in part from Talbot's life: *Willie, A Romance* (James Lorimer and Company, Ltd., 1983). Gwyn writes that in *Willie* "Papineau appeared in semifictional form as a romantic hero, the great love of the book's fictional heroine, the delightful Lily Coolican, herself a kind of metaphor for Canada." (*Tapestry of War*, pp. 508-9.) Gwyn's book is the source of much of the information in this article – and all references to Gwyn are to *Tapestry* – while several excerpts from Talbot's letters were found in *A Terrible Beauty*.

The beau idéal quote is from a 2006 Winnipeg Realtors article on a four-hour CBC television series based on Gwyn's book. *The Great War*, which aired in 2007, portrayed Talbot Papineau, played by Justin Trudeau, as the story's hero. While Trudeau agreed that there were strong similarities between his father (Pierre Elliott Trudeau) and Talbot Papineau, he said: "I chose to play him, not because he was similar to my father, but because he was similar to me." Trudeau stressed the importance of "remembering the noble values and noble ideas that we were defending in a war that did not even directly affect us," and said he was "particularly struck by Talbot Papineau's courage and overarching sense of duty." (*Ottawa Citizen*, CanWest News Service, April 6, 2007.)

On October 19, 2015, Justin Trudeau led the Liberal Party of Canada to victory in a federal election and became Canada's twenty-third prime minister. The son of the fifteenth prime minister, Justin represented the Montreal riding of Papineau, named after Joseph Papineau, a renowned Quebec cultural figure and Talbot Papineau's great-great-grandfather. Minutes after Trudeau's election, his mother remarked that Pierre, Canada's prime minister from 1968 to 1979 and again from 1980 to 1984, had "raised his sons to serve: that was it. We had been given so much, and we had to give back." (Margaret Trudeau in a CTV interview with Craig Oliver.)

About Talbot's early life, see the chapter in Gwyn entitled "The Unlikely Lieutenant."

The source of the references to the Quebec landscape, and to the Papineau family's seigneurie of Petite-Nation between Montreal and Ottawa, is the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online* (DOCBO) and its entry on Talbot.

George McDonald's remarks introduced the reading of an address – summarized on pp. 23-24 of this article – that Talbot gave at the Canadian Corps School in France three years earlier.

(pages 2-3:)

The *DOCBO* is the source of the statement that Talbot described himself as French Canadian at McGill. On pp. 93-94 of *Tapestry*, Gwyn describes Talbot's prank while editor of the student paper.

My source with respect to the Canadian Club is Karen Molson's *The Molsons: Their Lives & Times, 1780-2000*, p. 304.

For more on the Mechanics Institute of Montreal, see: [Mechanics Institute](#). On p. 230 of *The Molson Saga*, Shirley E. Woods, Jr. writes that "the association between the Molson and Papineau families went back a long way."

My main sources for Talbot's time at Oxford are Gwyn and the *DOCBO*. The same is true for Talbot's life from 1909 until his joining up in 1914. See Gwyn, pp. 95-98. The Canadian Club involvement is noted on p. 96 of *Tapestry*. The story about Talbot, the canoe, and the puppy is recounted on the previous page.

Again, the *DOCBO* mentions Talbot's attachment to the Quebec landscape and his cultivation of an interest in Quebec's distinctive culture.

(pages 4-5:)

See Jeffery Williams, *First in the Field* (p. 64) about the PPCLI and its commissioning several men with little or no experience. See also David J. Bercuson's *The Patricias: The Proud History of a Fighting Regiment* (2001, pp. 24-26).

Talbot's late August 1914 letter to his mother is quoted in *A Terrible Beauty*, while the source of the quotations about his moustache are from *First in the Field*.

Charles Ritchie, Canada's legendary diplomat and diarist, was Charlie Stewart's nephew. On p. 31 of *My Grandfather's House*, Ritchie reminisces about his adored uncle and his visit to the Ritchie home in Nova Scotia while on leave: "He came to us straight from the trenches, and our settled home life must have seemed strange to him. His reality was elsewhere, and of that elsewhere he could tell us little. He did not talk of martial exploits, he had no words of hatred for the Hun, and what he did say sounded a wrong note in our ears. His stories of muddle and confusion in the High Command, his contempt for the red-tabbed staff officers, were like tales told out of school. Above all, it was his jokes which shocked ("Ha ha, that's when George got his head knocked off"), jokes that made broad comedy out of violent death, desperate jokes of fighting men that sounded meaninglessly callous to us."

Gwyn quotes Talbot's remark that Charlie was the most pronounced character he'd ever met, a comment made in a letter to Beatrice Fox.

The tent fire is noted in Ralph Hodder-Williams's regimental history, *The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry 1914-1919*, p. 16. On p. 117 of *Tapestry*, Gwyn writes that "the burns to Papineau's face and right hand were extremely painful, and for a few days Stewart's life was actually feared for."

The sources about the trench raid at St. Eloi are Hodder-Williams (pp. 33- 35), Bercuson (pp. 47-48), and Jeffery Williams, *First in the Field* (p. 82).

Talbot's Military Cross citation reads: "For conspicuous gallantry at St. Eloi on February 28th, 1915 when in charge of Bomb Throwers during attack on Enemy trenches. He shot two of the enemy himself and then ran along the German Sap throwing bombs therein." Talbot was also mentioned in dispatches two months after his M.C. was gazetted.

George McDonald's description of Talbot's strengths is quoted in Brooke Claxton's *La Petite Nation and the Papineaus*, 1957. Thanks to Karen Molson for referring me to this work.

(page 6:)

Talbot's March 3, 1915 letter is quoted in *A Terrible Beauty*.

About Colonel Farquhar's death, see especially Bercuson (pp. 48-50). Talbot wrote Lady Evelyn Farquhar the day after her husband was buried: "There is not a man in the Regiment who does not feel a great and personal loss. No other man in so short a time could have won so much respect and affection. As a Canadian I feel a national debt of gratitude to him." An experienced English officer, Farquhar could have commanded a regular British unit but, in Talbot's words, "accepted the task of creating, as well as commanding, a new and untried Canadian regiment."

The Battles of Frezenberg and Bellewaerde Ridge and Talbot's role in them are outlined in Gwyn (pp. 154-55, 205) and Hodder-Williams (pp. 68-69). When the latter wrote that Percy Molson and George McDonald ("the men who organized the University plan of reinforcements") saved the Patricias from extinction, he meant the PPCLI just after Frezenberg and Bellewaerde Ridge, when its "Originals" were essentially wiped out.

(pages 7-8:)

Gwyn covers the last half of May 1915 on pp. 205-6, and the month of June on pp. 207-8. See her remarks on Caroline Rogers Papineau and Talbot (p. 207): "However much the intensity of their relationship jars our post-Freudian sensibility, we begin to see Caroline as Talbot must have, a hard-pressed single mother, undignified by widowhood, bringing up a quartet of young sons after being abandoned by a profligate husband, dependent upon a monthly allowance from her father-in-law. . . . A less determined woman would have gone home to Philadelphia, where Caroline's family, though not particularly wealthy, had plenty of social position. Instead, she stayed on at Montebello . . . for the sake of her beloved Talbot who loved the woods and the hills and the river as much as life itself."

Talbot often sent his sketches to Beatrice. Hence their survival.

Lady Donoughmore's enthusiastic recommendation of Beatrice is described in *Tapestry*, p. 210.

Gwyn quotes Talbot's first letter to Beatrice – the one in which he writes that he's the only original PPCLI officer not yet killed, wounded, or sent off sick – on p. 209. On the subject of Talbot's destruction of Beatrice's letters: "My baggage is limited to 35 lbs; what I have I have to carry on my back, so there is little room for accumulation. I try to memorize your letters but I am sure I must forget a lot." See Gwyn, pp. 231-32.

(pages 9-10:)

Again, see Gwyn about “this murderous business” (pp. 214-15). The reflections on “abhorrent duty” are quoted by both Gwyn and Robertson. The “Prussian” quote is from Gwyn. The excerpt re “the best correspondent I have ever had” is also from Gwyn, p. 217, and the information about Beatrice’s miniature is on p. 343.

For Talbot’s views regarding the PPCLI – whether it should stay with the British Army or go to a Canadian division – see Gwyn p. 230 and Williams, *First in the Field*, p. 95.

Tapestry’s Chapter 13 (“The City of Earthly Delights”) describes London during the war and is the source of the long letter in which Talbot details his loathing. It is also the source of Lady Diana Cooper’s description of London at the time. Lady Diana, “the reigning belle of the era,” later wrote: “The young were dancing a tarantella frenziedly to combat any pause that would let death conquer their morale.” See p. 219 of *Tapestry*.

Pets were not uncommon at the front, and Bobs was probably named after the famous Lord Roberts of Kandahar, known as Bobs. His friend, Rudyard Kipling, wrote a longish poem about him, entitled “Bobs,” which includes:

Oh, ‘e’s little but he’s wise,
‘E’s a terror for ‘is size,
An’ – ‘e – does – not – advertise –
Do yer, Bobs?

At the start of the First World War, Kipling used his friendship with Lord Roberts to get his severely near-sighted 17-year-old son John a commission in the Irish Guards. After John was killed at Loos in 1915, Kipling wrote: “If any question why we died / Tell them, because our fathers lied.” (Source: *Epitaphs of the War*, “Common Form.”)

The source of information about Bobs – and about Talbot’s being “more hurt in mind than in body” – is Gwyn, p. 233. The post-Second Ypres quote is also from Gwyn, p. 149.

(page 11:)

The loss of the penknife is recounted twice in *Tapestry*. It shows up the second time after Talbot has returned to the regiment in June 1917, so the timing of its loss may be uncertain.

See Gwyn, pp. 313-14 and 336-37 for more on Max Aitken, Talbot's staff appointment, and the latter's conflicting emotions about being away from a line regiment. In *McGill University at War* (p. 39), Fetherstonagh states that Talbot was mentioned in despatches while serving as a staff officer, but the only record I can find of an MID dates from June 1915, the year before, while he was still with the regiment. See the note re "Talbot's Military Cross citation" above. The source of the remark about his "credentials to reach for the top" is Gwyn, p. 314.

(pages 12-14:)

The same source, pp. 332-66, provides a thorough description of Talbot's inconstancy. The really puzzling passages are on pp. 334-35. On p. 334, Gwyn quotes Beatrice's declaration of love. Did Talbot save that particular letter? Did he repeat what she'd written in a reply?

Again, Gwyn is my main source with respect to Talbot's exchange of open letters with Henri Bourassa, though that exchange is covered in many other publications.

Bercuson, p. 26, is the source of the quote about Canada's "great national opportunity" and its "strong, self-reliant spirit." Details about the cancelled speaking tour are drawn from Gwyn, pp. 338-40.

See *Tapestry*, p. 338, for the long excerpt from Adamson's letter to his wife, and for Talbot's "more friends have gone" remark.

If Kipling writes approvingly that his friend Lord Roberts "does – not – advertise," there's Adamson's bitter claim that many commanding officers were "only too anxious to advertise themselves." The literature of the last century contrasts the modest and immodest, the self-effacing and self-promoting, the selfless and self-serving. A fine example: in his introduction to *The Siren Years*, Charles Ritchie describes his colleagues at Canada's fledgling Department of External Affairs in the 1930s: "They worked together without feeling for respective rank, without pomposity, with humour, despising pretence, intolerant of silliness, and scathing in their contempt for self-advertisement."

About Talbot's role at Vimy, see Hodder-Williams, p. 215. A brief excerpt from Talbot's Vimy report, quoted in the same source, gives a sense of his official writing style. His frustration at and after the Battle of Vimy Ridge is described in Gwyn, p. 344.

(pages 15-16:)

On p. 334 of *Tapestry*, Gwyn quotes Beatrice's "*When I say I really love you, there isn't any comeback.*" It's not clear how this declaration of brave love has been preserved. Did Talbot save the letter in which Beatrice wrote this, or did he, in a reply, repeat what she had written?

The quote about Talbot's flip side is also in *Tapestry*, p. 381, and the same source sums up Talbot's reasons for returning to the regiment and quotes Adamson on his encounter with "the self-seeking bounder" (pp. 380-81).

On pp. 381-83, Gwyn covers Talbot's quick readjustment to life at the front, while George McDonald's statement that Talbot had gained the love and respect of his comrades is quoted in Claxton's *La Petite Nation and the Papineaus*.

(pages 17-18:)

Percy's death is mentioned on p. 382 of *Tapestry*. Talbot's description of a man dying by concussion is quoted on p. 215.

Re Talbot's letters to his mother in which he refers to Percy, I'd like to thank Mr. Conrad Tittley for his research on my behalf at Library and Archives Canada (LAC), and especially for locating these particular references.

On pp. 383-86, Gwyn addresses Talbot's waning interest in Beatrice and his sudden romance with Sarah Shaughnessy. The source of the excerpts from Talbot's final letters to Beatrice and Caroline is Gwyn, pp. 396-99, though Robertson includes Talbot's October 27 letter to his mother in full.

(pages 19-20:)

Gwyn describes Talbot's death and the discovery of his remains on pp. 399-40 and p. 496. See also Williams, *Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry*, p. 24, and Bercuson, p. 107.

It's not hard to find Talbot's name at the Menin Gate. Sadly, most names are inscribed far above his, and many are hard to spot at all. The Menin Gate, a key stop on the Great War battlefields tour, means different things to different people. Siegfried Sassoon, a veteran of Ypres and the enemy of senior military and civilian authorities who fought the war from their offices and clubs in London, saw in it a sentimental glorification of dying for one's country and hated it: "Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime / Rise and deride this sepulchre of crime." ("On Passing the New Menin Gate," 1928.)

Adamson's letters are excerpted from *Letters of Agar Adamson, 1914- 1919* (CEF Books, Nepean, Ontario, 1997). Charlie Stewart's letter about Talbot's remains is included in that work, p. 313, while Adamson's November 20 letter to his wife Mabel, which describes Charlie's grim discovery, is on pp. 314-15. Stewart succeeded Adamson as the PPCLI's commanding officer but was killed in September 1918 at the Battle of Canal du Nord. Again, see Charles Ritchie's *My Grandfather's House* for more about Ritchie's spectacular Uncle Charlie.

Talbot and at least one of his officers, Captain Rider Lancelot Haggard, died together, as Percy had died with his subaltern Lieutenant Donald MacLean.

Bearing (and doubtless burdened with) a name intended to recall both the chivalric Arthurian knight and H. Rider Haggard, the hugely popular novelist-adventurer, the young Haggard enlisted as a private in Ottawa in August 1914. Commissioned from the ranks in 1915, he was promoted to captain in 1916 and died at the age of 24. Source: [H. Rider Haggard](#).

On p. 258 of his PPCLI history, Hodder-Williams writes that neither Papineau nor Haggard got through the German artillery barrage. Haggard had been one of the first to enlist in the Patricias, saw a great deal of service, and commanded an infantry company at the Battles of Courcellette and Vimy Ridge.

On pp. 400-3 of *Tapestry*, Gwyn summarizes the public response to Talbot's death.

(pages 21-22:)

Caroline Papineau's letter to Adamson, dated November 25, 1917, is in *Letters of Agar Adamson*, p. 319. On p. 403 of *Tapestry*, Gwyn writes that Adamson's letter of condolence is not among Caroline's papers, though her reply is in his. *Letters* transcribes the first words in the second paragraph as "The courage and regiment," but Gwyn probably got it right with "The courage and readiness."

John Archibald's letter to Beatrice is at LAC. Gwyn cites it and explains the connection between Talbot and Archibald.

See *Tapestry*, pp. 403-7, for more about the post-war lives of Caroline Rogers Papineau and Beatrice Fox. It is Gwyn who writes that the former's life went "on and on."

In *The Molsons*, p. 304, the author says that Talbot was a sometime beau of Mabel Molson's. If her brother Percy's death killed the brightness in her – "At the age of thirty-nine, she became devout, stern, and seemed to have lost all her joy" – Talbot's death must have further saddened her. See *The Molsons*, p. 332.

Gwyn, p. 405, is the source of Talbot's "there I was born and there my heart is."

(pages 23-24:)

The quote from Octave Crémazie is on p. 407 of *Tapestry*. The translation is mine.

Talbot's address to the Canadian Corps School in February 1917 was reprinted in the *McGill News* (the "Official Organ of the Graduates' Society of McGill University") in March 1920. Quotes are from that reprint. As noted earlier, Talbot's address was read to members of the Canadian Club in Montreal, prefaced by George McDonald's comments. McDonald, who had been Percy and Talbot's friend at home and overseas, became a well-known accountant in Montreal. He and his cousin, George Currie, formed McDonald Currie, a PricewaterhouseCoopers legacy firm. McDonald and Currie, both former PPCLI officers, finished the war as major and lieutenant-colonel respectively. Source: <http://www.pwc.com/ca/en/about-us/our-history/currie-mcdonald.jhtml>

Re the address itself: Talbot's statement that the Canadian dead had sacrificed their lives to advance the creation of a "great, free and happy nation" was at best misleading. Canadian soldiers risked their lives for many reasons, including the defence of their motherlands Britain and France from German militarism. Talbot, in his romantic, oratorical, and nationalist zeal, overlooked this.

Gwyn's remarks about the "what ifs" – and the quote from Mackenzie King, Canada's future prime minister – are on p. 401 of *Tapestry*.

(pages 25-26:)

Hodder-Williams's observations are on p. 16 of his regimental history.

McKenna's comments are in a short piece entitled "Trudeau and Papineau." The second quote is from [Winnipeg Realtors](#). See the note re "beau idéal" above.

The quote from *McGill University at War* is on p. 39 of that work.

On p. 26 of *The Patricias*, Bercuson notes that Papineau turned out to be correct about the way in which the war led to a stronger, more self-reliant Canada and a broadened national outlook. On the subject of a closer relationship between English- and French-speaking Canada, however, he would have been disappointed. In part because of the Conscription Crisis of 1917 and the increasing tension between English and French Canada, the war pushed the two cultures, each reflecting a distinct nationalism, farther apart. And it was Bourassa's views that later spoke for Quebec, not Papineau's. In Quebec, Jonathan F. Vance writes, Papineau was "consigned to the roll of interesting but slightly misguided souls." (Source: *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, p. 260.)