Salute to the Canadian Solider!

Monday, November 8, 2021 by Danielle Robichaud

Over the past year I've redescribed the initial set of records that make up the Schneider family collection [GA134]. The work was undertaken to make the related descriptive records searchable via the Archives Database. Consisting of a wealth of photographs, textual items and audiovisual material, the records were originally maintained by the Schneider family at the J.M. Schneider, Inc. factory. Given the Schneider family's long-standing relationship with Kitchener-Waterloo, the family donated the records to Special Collections & Archives in 2000 prior to J.M. Schneider, Inc's merger with Smithfield Foods in 2001. Additional donations followed in 2003 and 2004.



As part of the redescription effort, I've had the opportunity to take a closer look at the contents of the collection. In doing so, I've paid careful attention to records that I know will be of use to those with

an interest in the local history of the Region of Waterloo. Records related to Schneider employees who enlisted in World War II and the company's support of military personnel and their families are one such example.

During the Second World War, Schneider's sent care packages to soldiers overseas. In a July 16, 1942 letter from Cyril Hayes [GA134-16-16.5-6-2] to deployed Schneider's employees he comments that the shipments are meant to "help satisfy some of the cravings your rations don't supply." An April 15, 1945 letter from Norman C. Schneider [GA134-16-16.5-6-6] shares that the 45th round of care packages is being prepared for shipment, providing info about their destinations: "two to India, one to Ceylon, two to Australia, Italy and all over Europe, including Germany."



This photo of Canadian soldiers, seated around a table with Schneider products on top, suggests that the contents of the company's care packages were a source of comfort for more than just the recipients. Describes as "The Boys" an inscription on the back of the photo lists the soldiers as (from left to right) "Slim" - Kitchener, Ont., LAC Keefe - Charlottetown, P.E.I., SGT Pilsworth - Englehart, Ont., CPL Morris - Fort William, Ont., CPL Sylvester - Pembroke, Ont., LAC Stewart - Toronto, Ont., LAC Dulude - Montreal, P.Q., LAC Brammer - New Westminster, B.C., LAC MacDonald - Vancouver, B.C., LAC Carr - Toronto, Ont., LAC Sloan - Hamilton, Ont., and LAC McKellar - Galt, Ont. [GA134-16-16.6-1]

Letters like these were likely sent to deployed soldiers at regular intervals over the course of the war. Special Collections & Archives, however, only has six of these letters. They were kept, presumably by Norman, when they were sent back to Schneider's. The envelopes that accompany them include commonplace reasons for their return. Some were simply undeliverable, while others were returned for grimmer reasons like the recipient having been killed in action.

Despite the small number of letters available to read, there's much to be gleaned from them about the experiences, emotions and concerns of those at home and abroad. A perhaps surprising through line in each of the letters is an intentional sense of humour. A letter from Norman dated July 3, 1942 [GA134-16-16.5-6-1] shares news of a special Army Week edition of The Voice [GA134-16-16.5-8-1] featuring photos of deployed employees. As part of the update, he includes: "Sgt. Major Max Zink will understand that the pictures are arranged alphabetically." Another light-hearted example comes from Cyril in a letter dated July 15, 1944 [GA134-16-16.5-6-4] in which he thanks Bill Schmidt for sending home an Italian gas mask for the company's collection of souvenirs and adds: "Think it improved the looks of one or two members of the office staff who tried it on."

In addition to the six letters [GA134-16-16.5-6], the Schneider family collection contains copies of The Voice featuring photos of deployed employees [GA134-16-16.5-8], and ephemera from a welcome home dinner [GA134-16-16.5-10] hosted by J.M. Schneider, Ltd. for ex-service personnel at the Walper House on December 4, 1946. You can review these, along with a growing selection of other digitized records, as part of the Schneider family collection on the Waterloo Digital Library.