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CANADIAN STUDIES PROGRAM

ABOUT CANADA

THE HOME FRONT IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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D. B. Scott

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The "Little Happy Gang," children's knitting club of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, does its bit for the Red Cross and soldiers, May 1940

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Preface

To promote a broader understanding of Canada, the Department of Canadian Heritage, Canadian Studies Program, is publishing "About Canada," a series of works dealing with the country and its people.

We are confident that distribution of these publications, which are available free of charge from the Department of Canadian Heritage, will help bring about a greater appreciation of Canada, its inhabitants and its distinctive characteristics and will instill in Canadians an even greater sense of national pride.

Note on the Author

David (D. B.) *Scott is a Canadian writer, editor and publisher with extensive experience in the magazine field.* His *company,* Impresa Communications Limited *of* Cambridge, Ontario, *consults to the magazine and newspaper industry.* He *was the editor of* ***Canada Remembers****, a magazine commemorating the* 50th *anniversary of the end of the* Second World War, *published in* 1994 *by the* St. Clair Group (Toronto) *in cooperation with the* Canada Remembers Commemorative Committee. Mr. Scott *was also the author of* **Toronto 150: Portrait of a Changing City**, *published by* Statistics Canada *in* 1984.

Introduction

The Second World War was fought and won on many fronts, not all of them military. True, Canadian soldiers battled through Sicily and the Italian boot and marched to liberate northeast Europe. The navy and the merchant mariners endured the bone-chilling convoy duties of the North Atlantic and the run to Russia. Aircrew flew seemingly endless sorties in the Battle of Britain and nerve-wracking bombing raids over half of Europe. Canadian troops were even underground, digging tunnels in Gibraltar. They were backed up overseas by tens of thousands of men and women who saw no combat, but who did vital work as ground crew, in supply depots, in hospitals. Meanwhile, Canadians who never left their home soil were making it all possible.

The stories of Canadian soldiers and their battles have been told in countless books and articles. But the story of war on the Canadian home front has sometimes been neglected; how millions of ordinary Canadians mobilized to make their own contribution to the victory effort.

The home front provided all-important moral support for the dangerous, necessary jobs its sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, cousins, aunts and uncles were doing overseas. But there was more than moral support. The home front was also critical in the largely anonymous work of providing the hardware, the bullets, bombs, tanks, ships and aircraft needed to do those jobs. Few of them could have imagined how the war and their part in it would change the Canada they had known.

The Canada that went to war in 1939 was much different from the Canada of today. Before the war, the country was still predominantly agricultural, thick with family farms and rooted in traditions going back generations, although the population drift to the cities had started years before. The war just

accelerated it. The total population was just a little over 11 million (less than 40 percent of what it is now). Canada was a minor player in the affairs of the world, not far removed from its role as an obedient colony of Great Britain.

Yet within six years, Canada had put more than a million people into uniform and the efforts of the 10 million or so left at home had turned the country into an industrial powerhouse. During its course, the war wiped out the grinding 15 percent unemployment in 1939 that lingered from the Great Depression. In 1944, unemployment was down to 1.2 percent, although it began to increase slowly in 1945.

With many of the country's jobs left vacant, women by the tens of thousands were drafted into work traditionally reserved for men. This country-wide movement thus sparked a post-war trend of women working outside the home, a trend that has continued to this day. Exhorted by posters, pulpit and radio, Canadians of all ages contributed. The "Little Happy Gang" from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan busily knitted socks and mittens for the troops. Prairie boys gathered abandoned farm machinery as scrap, envisioning cauldrons where the scrap would be melted into steel skins for snorting tanks. There were work enough and challenges enough for all.

Wartime on the home front was also a time when Canadians from different regions and backgrounds felt the keen sting of intolerance and a clash of values: on the West Coast, thousands of people of Japanese origin, many of them born on Canadian soil, were dispossessed by government decree; in Quebec, bitter responses came from both sides on the contentious issue of conscription.

Overshadowing the hectic activity on the home front, of course, was the stark reality of death. Nearly every Canadian experienced first hand or knew someone who suffered the shattering loss of a friend or loved one. By the war's end, almost 42,000 had given their life to the cause.

The loneliness of the average Canadian soldier, sailor, airforce or merchant marine member was alleviated by letters or packages from family and friends back home. For many, the time to write or post a package was squeezed out from the long hours put in at the factories in Canada forging weapons.

Civilian life was disjointed, dislocated and thrown into turmoil by the separation of families and the demands of the war economy, but somehow most Canadians adapted. So successfully did they adapt, in fact, that an equally wrenching adaptation was required when the war ended.

Rural mailman collecting items to be recycled in wartime industrial production, Ontario, *circa* 1942

National Archives of Canada/PA-112898

Those who thought it was going to be business as usual, however, were sometimes shocked about what was now "normal." For it can be argued that the Second World War fundamentally altered the structure of Canadian life — the kinds of jobs Canadians worked at, the houses in which they lived, the cars they drove, the social welfare programs available to them, the immigration they welcomed, their nation's unaccustomed role in world affairs; everything changed. And, like all change, much of it came as a surprise.

Expectations of a firm and final peace though, did not last much beyond V-J Day (Victory over Japan), August 15, 1945. The Cold War was upon the world, and with it the brand-new

fear of nuclear annihilation, which hung around expectations like a shroud. Now, half a century later at the end of the Cold War, it is sometimes hard for the younger of today's generations to imagine the lives and times of the last world war played out without the overarching shadow of nuclear weapons.

The need for a continental-wide defence during the Second World War also drew Canada into an ever-closer relationship with the United States and loosened its connection as part of the British Empire, an empire that is now just a memory.

The war on the Canadian home front and in the services was a time of massive mobilization and mass commitment; a time when Canadians pulled together, united by a common cause. It was not the best of times but, curiously, it was not the worst either. A great many people remember it as being the most exciting time of their lives, rarely equalled. It was when Canada and its people did a lot of growing up in a very short time.

Poster reading: *Fight This Army of Saboteurs*
Take Care of What You Have

National Archives of Canada/C-74140

The Threshold of War

To understand what a dramatic difference the war made in Canada, it is necessary to understand what the country had been like before. While the Great Depression of the 1930s had begun to wane, unemployment among workers was still dramatically high. The country had just come through a decade during which news rarely had gone from bad, unless it went to worse. World trade had virtually collapsed and recovery had proved painfully slow.

Farms on the Prairies literally had been drying up and blowing away; they had been doing so since 1932. Canadian dust bowl conditions were every bit as bitter and tragic as the plight of Oklahomans which inspired the famous John Steinbeck book *The Grapes of Wrath*. This was yet another blow in a succession of economic hardships that farmers had been subjected to since the stock market crash impoverished the country in 1929. Food prices dropped in direct proportion to people's ability to pay.

Saskatchewan had been the most prosperous farming region in the world in the 1920s. But it was dependent upon one crop. When the bottom fell out of the wheat market, 90 percent of the farmers' incomes went with it. The weather then compounded the problem by bringing on a drought that, in some places, lasted throughout the decade.

People in Saskatchewan and Manitoba shuddered as, one after another, so-called black blizzards packing 90-kilometre-an-hour winds, pushed walls of airborne topsoil and grit ahead of them, virtually blotting out the sun. Clouds of grasshoppers attacked what crops were left. Although some of this may be blamed on poor farming practices and lack of conservation measures, which we now take for granted, a great deal of it was simply bad luck.

Migration of dispirited farm families to cities across the country, searching for work, only added to the roll of those on relief (sometimes called, derisively, pogey). Unemployed workers in Winnipeg saw thousands of these penniless families descend on the city to compete with them. The ranks of the unemployed in Vancouver were joined by unemployed miners and forestry workers. By 1936, unemployment was estimated to be 1.5 million or about a quarter of the labour force. To top it off, unemployment insurance afforded

no protection — it was not brought in until 1940.

The country was in a state of desperation and despair. Things were so bleak that the Government of Alberta defaulted on its bonds, the first province in Canadian history to do so.

The federal government announced it was spending $125 million to provide work and relief, although it was clear this did not come close to meeting the magnitude of the problem. Those who were receiving assistance often had to move to live in relief camps and toil at public works projects like the building of highways and dams. Upwards of 60,000 men (and they were mostly men — women were still considered the responsibility of their husbands and if they needed work, they often had to go into domestic service for as little as $4 a week) were guests of the state. If women's pay seemed poor, it was worse still for relief camp workers at 20 cents a day. Conditions in the camps led to sit-down strikes and marches on Ottawa.

The national news was full of labour turmoil, with clashes between rival unions and a whiff of fear about communist influence in trade unions. All the while, international news rumbled with resurgent German militarism and questions about whether another confrontation was to come.

At the same time, there also seemed to be a near manic wackiness when it came to the state of affairs in Canada, perhaps the result of or a distraction from the gloom of international concerns. For instance, nine women each got $75,000 as "winners" of the Stork Derby, in which the estate of eccentric millionaire Charles V. Millar was to go to the woman having the most children in the 10-year period after his death. And the world continued to swoon over every detail about the Dionne quintuplets (born in 1934), who signed a movie contract in 1938 as fashion designers rushed out designs based on what the five girls from Callander in northern Ontario were said to be wearing. On the eve of war, there was even a momentary run of stories about a six-day race of endurance between a horse and a veteran of the First World War.

Important things were happening, too. Trans-Canada Airlines (later to become Air Canada) inaugurated flights across the country; the Governor General's awards were presented for the first time by Lord Tweedsmuir (a.k.a. novelist John Buchan); and a monument was unveiled at Vimy Ridge, honouring the site of one of the Canadian Corps' greatest victories and the memory of the 60,000 Canadians who died in the First World War.

As the thirties moved along, the political situation in Europe was disintegrating. It became less and less likely that war could be avoided. Even the misplaced hope of Prime Minister Mackenzie King (writing in his diary in 1937 that Hitler "impressed me as a man of deep sincerity and a genuine patriot") had evaporated by the late summer of 1939, as Hitler invaded Poland, and ignored a British ultimatum to withdraw German forces from that country. Britain reacted by declaring war on September 3. Canada, a day later, invoked the *War Measures Act* and called up the militia. Prime Minister King said, "It is now apparent that the efforts which have been made to preserve the peace of Europe are likely to be of no avail."

Canada suffered its first war death around 9:00 p.m. on the day Britain declared war, when the British liner SS *Athenia*, en route from Liverpool to Montreal, was torpedoed by a German U-boat some 300 kilometres off the Outer Hebrides. Ironically, although the number of Canadian women who were to become involved and die in

combat was extremely small, it was a female passenger from Quebec City, Hannah Baird, who became Canada's first war casualty.

A week later on September 10, the Canadian Parliament, in an unrecorded vote, declared war independently (in 1914, it had simply gone to war because Britain had gone; its declaration was considered to be Canada's, too). It was the first — and so far only — time that Canada has ever done so.

The War Comes Home

That first fall and winter (1939-40) was the so-called *sitzkrieg* or phony war, while the world waited to see what Hitler and Mussolini would do after the invasion of Poland. The atmosphere was eerie, with talk by Prime Minister Mackenzie King's government of a limited liability suitable to a country that was not a great power, and one that was insulated from the scenes of battle in Europe and later in Asia.

Canada shipped its first convoys of goods to Britain within a few weeks of the declaration of war and the advance party of Canadian officers landed in Britain to prepare the way for the expeditionary force that everyone assumed was going. However, Canada had allowed its armed forces to atrophy after the First World War. There were only 4500 men and 7 women in the active militia in 1938 and they were poorly equipped. The Royal Canadian Navy consisted of seven decade-old destroyers, a handful of coastal patrol vessels and fewer than 2000 officers and enlisted personnel. The Royal Canadian Air Force, while undergoing a peacetime expansion, was still insignificant. The country had only one munitions plant and Canadian shipyards had not built a new merchant ship in two decades. The Canadian aircraft industry was so small that it was said to produce only a few "string and stick machines" — old-fashioned training aircraft which it had supplied to Britain.

Most Canadians supported the war effort and King's obvious restraint, however, and showed it resoundingly in the spring of 1940 by giving Prime Minister King a thumping election victory, essentially creating a majority war government. The re-elected prime minister declared he was proud to have shown the British Empire that "it was possible to carry on an election without impairing the war effort of a united country." This was a bit of bravado, because he knew that there was no great love of the war in Quebec, in particular. To be fair to King, it was clear he remembered the slaughter of Canadian men in the trenches of the First World War at places like Vimy, the Somme and Passchendaele,[1] and that he was reluctant to commit the next generation of Canadian soldiers to the same fate.

[1] These were First World War battlefields in France and Belgium where Canadians distinguished themselves in action. The casualties were horrific. For example, at Vimy Ridge, now the site of the major Canadian war monument in Europe, 3600 Canadian soldiers were killed among the more than 10,000 casualties in just five days of fighting (April 9-14, 1917). During the final battles of the war, in late 1917 and 1918, more than 30,000 Canadian soldiers were killed or wounded.

The lull of the phony war was broken in April and May 1940 by the German invasion of Denmark, Norway, Belgium and Holland. In six weeks, the *blitzkrieg* had driven the British army (and a brigade of the Canadian 1st Division which had landed in Brittany to support it) off the continent. France surrendered. While 338,000 British, French and Belgian troops were almost miraculously plucked off the beach at Dunkirk, vast amounts of weapons and heavy equipment had been lost and the prospects were bleak, as German aircraft began to pound British targets.

The crisis of that spring and summer of 1940 galvanized Canadians. Now, previously unthinkable questions were asked: What if Britain fell? Could Canada save itself? The idea of limited liability was dropped in favour of total mobilization of the nation.

The *National Resources Mobilization Act* drafted young men (women were exempt) for compulsory military service **in Canada only**. In other words, individuals could be drafted, but they could not be forced to fight. There was still no stomach for confronting the divisive issue of conscription. There was little protest in Quebec, however, since there seemed to be some real need for a defence of Canadian soil. The government had also made an example of the mayor of Montreal, Camillien Houde, who was jailed in August 1940 for the duration of the war because he urged Quebecers not to register for the draft.

By October 1940, 30,000 draftees had been given short courses in military training, with the earnest hope that many of them would volunteer to fight. In effect, Canada had two armies. The first volunteered immediately and in large numbers to go overseas. The second, made up of conscripts and nicknamed Zombies (after the undead of horror films), was a so-called "home defence army" which could not be forced to serve anywhere but in Canada (later, Alaska and the West Indies.) At its peak in 1943, the conscription army numbered 69,299 compared to the 410,355 in the volunteer army.

The growth of the Canadian army during the war can be seen from the following table (in 1944, the number of women in the army — all volunteers — topped out at 16,581, or about 3.4 percent of the total shown):

Year end	Volunteer	Conscripts	TOTAL	% increase
1939	63,476		63,476	
1940	117,810		117,810	85
1941	258,166	16,647	274,813	133
1942	364,552	55,840	420,392	52
1943	410,355	69,299	479,654	14
1944	428,155	63,769	491,924	2.6
1945	261,265	40,843	302,108	(38.6)
1946	29,988	1,054	31,042	

Source: C. P. Stacey, *Six Years of War*

As complicated as it was to create an army, it was more complicated to support it with all the goods from clothes to ammunition and to provide many of the military supplies also needed by the British. Clarence Decatur (C. D.) Howe was named as Minister of Munitions and Supply, charged by the prime minister with supervising the war production effort. The aim was to turn Canada — in which manufacturing accounted for less than a third of all wages and salaries at the beginning of the war — into "an arsenal of democracy."

Under Howe's autocratic guidance, Canada was to become the fourth largest producer of war goods for the Allies. On a per capita basis (depending on whose statistics you accept) Canada was number one. About two thirds of this output was shipped to British and American forces, the rest going to support the Canadian military.

Howe was born in New England, educated as an engineer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and taught at MIT and Dalhousie University in Halifax. After becoming a Canadian citizen, he made himself wealthy as the pre-eminent builder of grain elevators in Western Canada. He ran for Parliament and became Prime Minister King's Minister of Railways and Canals and Minister of Marine which he promptly and characteristically turned into one "superdepartment," the Department of Transport. It was he who reorganized Canadian National Railways, established the National Harbour Board and launched Trans-Canada Airlines. Under his ministry, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) was organized. All of this was a mere prologue to his new position, in which he was given immense discretionary power. Backed by a sweeping *Munitions and Supply Act*, which gave his department the right to do virtually anything necessary to produce munitions, and the *War Measures Act*, under whose regulations the control of resources had been transplanted from the provinces to Ottawa, Howe was nervously nicknamed "Minister of Everything."

He surrounded himself with "dollar-a-year men," who were to be paid for the war's duration by the civilian firms he plucked them from, and gave them wide latitude. Under pressure of the times, Canada had accepted the necessity of major centralized government intervention in the economy.

Among the dollar-a-year men were the B.C. lumber tycoon H. R. MacMillan (whose name is recalled today in the multinational MacMillan Bloedel) as Timber Controller, and Hugh Scully, the Commissioner of Customs, who became the "supremo" over the steel industry. All Howe asked of them was to "take charge."

Typical of the take charge attitude was the way Scully got Stelco, Dofasco and Algoma Steel to freeze their prices for the duration of the war: he told them that, since he controlled their supplies, he was in a position to help those who cooperated. They understood the underlying implication (for those who did not cooperate) and agreed to the freeze.

At the suggestion of one of his dollar-a-year men, Gordon Scott, a former Quebec treasurer, then a Montreal banker, Munitions and Supply secretly began to set up Crown corporations to buy supplies without pushing prices up.

One of Howe's biggest problems was getting the British to write out an order — to say what goods they wanted Canadians to make. There was a reasonably well-founded suspicion that British manufacturers, even in the face of the blitz, did not want to see competitive sources of supply set up in Canada. To secure a better understanding, Howe sailed to London but his ship was torpedoed and sunk along the way. The hours spent in a lifeboat (and undoubtedly the death of Gordon Scott, who had accompanied

him) seemed to harden Howe's resolve. In January 1941, he returned to Canada — on a battleship with Lord Halifax, the new ambassador to Washington — with a clear list of the military requirements for the next two years and the determination to fill the order.

One way he did it was to bypass Parliament by issuing orders-in-council, which did not require a vote by members of Parliament. Over the course of the war there were 90,000 such orders issued. Asked about the costs and how Canada, or Britain for that matter, could pay for the goods, Howe said simply that before the war was over, all the goods would be needed. "If we lose the war, nothing will matter.... If we win the war, the cost will still have been of no consequence and will have been forgotten."

By spring of 1941, only a year and a half since war had been declared, a booming Canadian economy had built 135,000 military vehicles, 100 Corvettes (small, manœuverable escort ships) and mine sweepers, and 350 smaller coastal vessels. And now there was not one munitions plant, but sixteen.

The vast majority of this manufacturing of munitions went to private sector companies which retooled to produce things that bore only passing resemblance to what they made in peacetime. For instance, naval guns were manufactured by General Motors in Regina and Bren gun components were machined and assembled by the John Inglis Company on what had been its washing machine assembly line.

A *girl welder at the* Bren *gun plant,* John Inglis Co., Toronto, Ontario

National Archives of Canada/C-7481

The National Steel Car Corporation of Malton, Ontario was renamed Victory Aircraft and began producing Lancaster bombers in its enormous sheds. The Canadian Car Company and Foundry in Fort William (now part of Thunder Bay, Ontario) was retooled to produce Harvard, Hell Diver scout and dive-bomber planes, and employed Elsie McGill, Canada's woman aeronautical engineer.

Polymer Corporation was a Crown corporation created to produce synthetic rubber after natural rubber sources were curtailed by the Japanese capture of Singapore in February 1942. Within 18 months, Polymer made its first rubber. That company became the current Polysar, based in Sarnia, a mainstay of the modern Canadian petrochemical industry.

Howe expropriated all the shares of a little-known mining company, Eldorado Mining and Refining, in 1944 and declined to say why. With the explosion of the atomic bomb, it became clear why. Eldorado mined uranium and, through this new Crown corporation, Canada contributed to the now famous Manhattan Project, the name given to the program under which the first atomic bombs were developed in the United States.

The magnitude of what was accomplished — and its impact on jobs — was astounding. In the two years after C. D. Howe returned from London with his list of military requirements, his department issued 700,000 contracts worth $3 billion — everything from tanks to army boots.

By the war's end, consider the following list (drawn from the official history of the Department of Munitions and Supply) of what Canadian workers had turned out in plants all across the country:

- 16,000 aircraft
- 741 naval vessels (not counting 3302 landing craft)
- 410 cargo vessels
- 800,000 transport vehicles (not counting American Jeeps which were imported, disassembled and shipped from Kitchener, Ontario)
- 50,000 tanks of various types
- more than 148,000 heavy guns
- 2 million tons of chemicals and explosives
- 133 million rounds of heavy ammunition
- 5 billion rounds of small arms ammunition
- uniforms and supplies for the entire armed forces.

Shipbuilding eclipsed forestry as British Columbia's largest industry, as Vancouver yards pushed the hull of a new seagoing merchant ship down the ways every two days by 1943. In 1939, Canada's 14 shipyards and 15 boat plants had employed only 3400 people, mostly doing repairs. By October 1944, there were 80,000 men and women working in 90 shipyards.

Annual steel production doubled. Near the town of Steep Rock Lake in northwestern Ontario, the Seine River was diverted as thousands of workers toiled to drain part of a lake, remove a 115-metre layer of glacial sediment from the bottom and get at the incredibly rich beds of iron ore. The task of removing nearly 70 million cubic metres of material was a task bigger than building the Panama Canal!

Automobile plants were switched exclusively to war production in 1942 and automobile workers became responsible for producing about one quarter of Canada's total munitions output.

Brand new aluminum smelters produced more of the precious aircraft metal in

Canada than had been produced in the entire world before the war. The 717,000 kilowatt Shipshaw project on Quebec's Saguenay River was completed in the face of winter conditions, changing the course of the river to meet the demands of the Aluminum Company of Canada, today nearly always called Alcan.

All this had to be paid for, of course, and as one British diplomat said bluntly: "Boys, we're broke. We need your money."

Traditionally, Canada had run a trade surplus with Britain and used it to pay for a trade deficit with the United States. Now, with Canada importing aircraft parts, machine tools and raw materials from the United States to manufacture weapons to be shipped overseas, Britain was unable to pay. And, when the United States agreed to a "lend-lease" program to Britain, with goods in exchange for bases and other concessions, why would Britain pay Canada? The whole Canadian economy was under threat.

A solution was found when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Prime Minister King agreed that the United States would buy as many goods from Canada as Canada bought from the United States to build munitions for Britain. The United States also agreed to count Canada's shipments to Britain under the British account under lend-lease. The effect was to put Britain further into debt, of course, and it also strengthened Canada's ties with the United States.[2]

Munitions and Supply could not take credit for the weather, but just as the industrial sector boomed, so did farming. Ironically, just as weather and demand coincided to produce bumper crops, farmers had seen their sons, daughters and farm workers taken away to war. In March 1942, farmers and their sons were exempted from compulsory service, but Prairie enthusiasm for volunteering was such that emergency calls went out that summer for college students to go out west to help bring in the 1.2 billion bushel harvest.

Canadian scientists, at the National Research Council and elsewhere, made their own contribution, with developments such as improved shipboard refrigeration, improvements in radar, improved bomb fuses, and even anti-fog windshield washer and de-icers for airplane propellers. After Pearl Harbor, Canadian scientists went to MIT to help the United States set up its own radar program.

[2] Once the agreements with the United States were struck, Canada was able to be very generous to Great Britain, giving it a total of $3.5 billion of aid over the course of the war, including a $1 billion gift in January 1942.

McGill sends 440 boys to Harvest Grain in manpower-short Saskatchewan

National Archives of Canada/PA-108360

Many Hands, Much Work

There was no way to mitigate the grief felt by those left at home about casualties on the battlefront. It has always been the burden of those at home to wait with apprehension for news that could be bad.

Some communities experienced particularly heavy burdens. Winnipeg had the double tragedy of 139 Winnipeg Grenadiers killed in late 1941 in the fall of Hong Kong; then in 1942, 60 Cameron Highlanders were killed, 103 wounded and 167 taken prisoner at Dieppe.

Along with the tragedy, there was still plenty of work to be done aimed at achieving victory. Jobs were plentiful, and there were ones that paid well, too. It was not uncommon to earn $80 to $90 a month. This would have seemed like a fortune to a Prairie farm worker who took a job packing cordite on the explosives line at Defence Industries Limited in what is now Ajax, Ontario.[3]

Although men still predominated in the wartime workplace, more and more fit young men were extracted from the labour force to serve in the military, and it became clear that women had to be recruited to work in traditionally male occupations. In a rush, starting in 1942, all women between 20 and 24 years of age were registered for work. By the end of 1942, a training program graduated 20,000 women as aircraft overhaulers, metalworkers, welders and radio assemblers. Pay for a trained woman aircraft worker averaged about 79 cents an hour, which was virtually at par with a man in the same job.

The awareness of the role and the necessity of women workers was heightened dramatically. By the end of the war, nearly a million women held war and civilian factory jobs. Women drove streetcars, pumped gas, bottled beer, indeed did virtually any job going. They oiled engines at the Canadian National Railway yards in Toronto, machined parts for Bren guns, and ironed the fabric onto the wings of aircraft. There was a bursting pride among these women, not only at helping the war effort, but in showing that they could do anything and do it well.

[3] Defence Industries Limited was virtually a defence "city," with 9,000 workers, most of them women, most of whom lived in company-provided barracks, two to a room.

Munitions manufacturing in Ajax, Ontario, during the Second World War

National Archives of Canada/RD-823

"Roll Up Your Sleeves for Victory!" shouted one of the many posters recruiting women to war work. It became commonplace for movie houses to run films in the morning for women war workers coming home from night shifts. Miss War Worker contests celebrated "Rosie the Riveter" (although that nickname was actually coined in the United States) and popular magazines featured glamourized pictures of "typical" overall-clad munitions workers, their hair swept up under kerchiefs.

The movement of workers to jobs in the cities created housing shortages that made some people desperate and provoked some wry humour, such as the ad in an Ottawa newspaper: "Have you ever lived with your mother-in-law for six months? Army officer and wife seek rescue in the form of a small, central apartment." Despite the efforts of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, which in 1941 went into intensive action and achieved remarkable overall price stability, there were extra efforts needed to control rents and special appeal tribunals for those who thought they were being gouged.

Being far from the action, Canadians generally did not believe themselves to be physically threatened, although, on the West Coast after Pearl Harbor, people blacked out their windows to forestall expected aerial attack and volunteers worked as airplane spotters. In reality, the only direct attack on the Canadian mainland occurred June 21, 1942, when a Japanese submarine surfaced and lobbed 20 shells at a wireless station on Estevan Point, halfway up the west coast of Vancouver Island. No superficial damage and no injuries were sustained.[4]

[4] The first enemy action in inland Canadian waters was about six weeks earlier, when two freighters were torpedoed by a German U-boat in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, with the loss of 14 crew members.

1941 *Victory Bond Drive, Prince Rupert, British Columbia*

National Archives of Canada/PA-95708

Everyone wanted to help win the war in Europe in his or her own way, especially now that prosperity had come and jobs were abundant and income often more than adequate (in sharp contrast to the pervasive gloom and poverty of the Great Depression).[5] One tangible way to contribute was Victory Bonds. The famous Canadian propensity for saving demonstrated itself when the government launched a publicity- and celebrity-driven series of bond drives. Whether it was children saving 16 25-cent Victory stamps on a card to buy a $4 bond (which would pay $5 in 7½ years), or a Toronto racetrack which paid off winners with certificates, or giving the bonds as Christmas gifts, Canadians contributed an astonishing **$8.8 billion** to the war effort.[6]

In rural and small town Canada, doing their bit involved thousands of women using their skills in other ways. One woman in Clive, Alberta resolved to knit a sweater and two pairs of socks for each Clive man who joined up. By the end of 1943 she had made 64 sweaters and 128 pairs of socks.

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[5] One indication of prosperity was the ability to pay taxes. Income tax had been brought in during the First World War as a "temporary" wartime measure but was never repealed. By the middle of the war, a single man was paying about a quarter of his income in taxes and enforced savings. There were also more people with income to tax. Between 1939 and 1942, the number of salary and wage earners went from 2.2 million to 3.1 million, an increase of 41 percent.

[6] One woman in Nova Scotia took almost two years to collect 10,000 pennies and turn them into a bond.

Even if a woman did not work in a factory, she was often on her own juggling the single-parent demands of her family as her partner went off to war. She tilled a victory garden in her own backyard and probably worked a few hours in a community garden nearby, growing hard-to-find vegetables and preserving them. She and her children took great pride in their contributions to salvage drives, shipping tons of used clothing overseas, scrounging newspapers, rags and tin foil.

"Here is your secret weapon," one ad from the National Salvage division of the Department of National War Services said. "SAVE FATS AND BONES." Housewives were encouraged to "sell" a pound or more of fat drippings to the butcher or their local salvage committee, who would pay them in ration tickets. "You can be your own munitions maker right in your own kitchen," the ad said, explaining that fat made glycerine and glycerine made high explosives to sink submarines!

Winnipeg was one of many Canadian cities with a well-organized volunteer effort. There, the central volunteer bureau kept 10,000 women busy, among other things running a huge salvage operation that earned $378,359 and made a profit of $112,847, which they plowed back into canteens, giving out movie passes and doling out hospitality to service personnel involved in the Commonwealth Air Training Plan.[7]

Since many service men and women were in training, often far from home, the volunteers tried to provide them with some comforts and a friendly ear. Harold Sutherland wrote in *Saturday Night* magazine about the Active Service Canteen run by volunteers on Adelaide Street East in Toronto:

> *...if you're hungry, they'll feed you; lonesome, they'll talk to you; want to play ping pong or cards, they'll play with you; dance, they'll dance with you. If you have a parcel to wrap, they'll wrap it for you; want to shave or shine your shoes, they'll provide you with a kit. They'll even sew a button on your pants. But you must be a soldier or an airman.*

One of the less fondly remembered aspects of life on the home front was rationing, first imposed on gasoline in April 1942 through the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. Rationing was never as draconian or as dour in Canada as in Britain.[8] The meat ration was never less than a pound and a half a week, per person, for instance. Before long, however, the list expanded to include coffee, tea, butter and beverage alcohol (beer, whisky and wine). Ration books meant that a shopping trip required more advanced planning. There were 11 million ration books in use, and coupons had to be torn off in the presence of the store clerks. And, while there were always stories of people bending or getting around the rules, Canadians generally followed the sometimes complicated and contradictory regulations to the letter and raised thrift and parsimony to high art and an article of faith. For children, it was just expected that they would make do with "Canadian whites," black and white comic books, domestically

[7] Isolated from the European battlefield, Canada was chosen to provide the training for fliers from all the Allied countries. The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan became a decisive factor in achieving air supremacy over France and Germany, graduating almost 132,000 pilots, bomb aimers, navigators and wireless operators and supplying 45 percent of all the Commonwealth squadrons. The Royal Canadian Air Force alone sent 72,835 recruits through the system. Within a matter of months, from a standing start, a hundred training strips were created from coast to coast, complete with prefab hangars and all the supporting apparatus. The scheme cost $1.28 billion.

[8] Rationing had not even been considered for the first eight months of the war because the economy was still operating well below its capacity.

"Loyal citizens do not hoard" — Rationing sign in store window

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produced to replace the four-colour American comics banned by wartime belt-tightening. It was not just thrift and a rule but a patriotic duty for everyone to squeeze a toothpaste tube until it squeaked, then turn in the empty to get a full one.

"YOU NEED NOT HOARD. YOU MUST NOT HOARD" said the posters explaining "What you should know and do about sugar rationing." Some restaurants displayed signs saying "Use less sugar and stir like hell. We don't mind the noise." (They also featured meatless Tuesdays and Fridays.) It became a major undertaking for a family to scrounge enough ingredients to bake a wedding cake.

The shortage of gasoline and auto parts, made more difficult still when the plants went to full war production after 1942, meant that Canadians walked, biked or car-pooled their way around the home front. A popular slogan was "A gallon a day will keep Hitler away." Non-essential car drivers were restricted to 545 litres of

gasoline a year, enough to drive perhaps 3200 kilometres.[9] Tires were precious because if they went bald, they could not be replaced. One company sold a product that tires could be dipped into to keep them "young, elastic, resilient." Drivers learned to drive and accelerate carefully, squeezing the last metre of mileage out of the gasoline they had. It became a common practice (albeit a dangerous one) to turn cars off and coast down long hills.

Advertisers got into the spirit of the home front by mixing their commercial messages with uplifting exhortations about thrift and supporting the troops.

Parker Pen ran full-page ads about homesick soldiers, pining for a letter, presumably written with a Parker pen, perhaps on a V-mail form, a miniaturized form of stationery. Incoming and outgoing mail was subject to censorship, and it was considered quite acceptable that a letter from overseas would arrive taped up with an "opened by censor" sticker, or with portions blacked out or cut out.

"Save gasoline for the armed forces, keep your Champion spark plugs clean," trumpeted another ad.

The Westclox company of Peterborough ran ads warning its customers that it had been converted to war work and that they should take good care of their — for now — irreplaceable alarm clock. "Guard Your Baby Ben!"

Coping with shortages and rationing was one thing, but men and women also found the war affected what they wore. Fashion regulations began to dictate not only the availability of certain fabrics (silk, for example, was no longer imported after mid-1941) but even the cut and tailoring and the length of hems. Skirts could be no longer than 76 centimetres, waistband included, for a size 16. There was to be no "cloth over cloth," hence no flap pockets, no cuffs, no double-breasted jackets, no double yokes, only one breast pocket, and so on.

Fashion writer Thelma Lecocq of *Maclean's* wrote: "The word *manufacturer* ... includes every woman who makes her own little house frock and if she puts more than nine buttons or a hem wider than two inches on it, she's guilty of breaking the law."[10]

Radio became a prime source of hungrily sought information about the progress of the war. Every night families would gather around the radio at 10:00 p.m. as the CBC news was read by Lorne Greene, the so-called "Voice of Doom" (who was later to become Pa Cartwright on the 1960s television series "Bonanza." It also was a prime source of entertainment, with programs from the United States such as "Fibber McGee and Molly" or "Ma Perkins" and Canadian programs like "The Happy Gang" (*Knock, knock*. "Who is it?" "It's the Happy Gang." "Well, come onnnnnnn in."), "Borden's Canadian Cavalcade" and "Carry on Canada." Soap operas like "John and Judy" and "A Soldier's Wife" mixed sentiment and spine-stiffening propaganda. Johnny Wayne and Frank Shuster first made their names as entertainers on "The Army Show," broadcast on radio

[9] The situation was not without humour; one cartoon published at the time showed a father saying to his son, "May I have the bike tonight?"

[10] Youthful rebellion against fashion regulations led in 1943 to the brief and zany craze for "zoot suits." Young men, in particular, sported over-long jackets with exaggerated lapels worn over baggy, pleated or draped pants. Their non-conformity led to some dustups in Montreal nightclubs with soldiers on leave, but the fad soon faded.

as well as touring overseas, and on programs aired late in the war, such as "Wife Preservers" which was designed to help war-weary women.

Such help was not to be needed for much longer, however, because the war was being won. It was clear to the government a few months after D-day, June 6, 1944, that the problems of supplying war material were all but over and the problem of dismantling the war machine was sooner or later going to be at hand. C. D. Howe, for one, had time to think about what came next. He had himself put in charge of the new Department of Reconstruction in October 1944. Even before V-E Day (Victory over Europe), May 8, 1945, Howe's department had wound down some contracts and paid off the suppliers.

Gloomy predictions had been made of a massive crash when the wartime jobs were no longer necessary and returning troops flooded the job market, but this turned out not to be so. The conversion to the peacetime economy was, if not easy, successful. Providing reconstruction to a devastated Europe, meeting the long pent-up demand for consumer goods, and building desperately needed housing were to create almost more jobs than returning troops could fill.[11]

On schedule, the Canadian war machine began to dismantle itself on August 15, 1945 — V-J Day. A total of $150 million in contracts were cancelled overnight. Howe told the House of Commons he estimated $175 million more would be needed to pay for work partially completed. For instance, three half-built merchant ships would be finished, then sold.

All of the Crown corporations built just for wartime were to be closed or sold off and everything they had in stock was considered scrap. If Canada was to become a peacetime place, what need did it now have for stocks of military underwear or stockpiles of tank tread?

Opponents criticized the government for selling off surplus at one cent on the dollar. Tanks were sold for their weight in metal. A $500,000 Mosquito aircraft was sold for $5000. Still, the salvage operation eventually netted the treasury $500 million.

Howe urged Canadian companies to invest in buildings and machinery and create jobs for the returning service personnel. Within months, companies such as General Electric reconverted to civilian production and had double the work force it had before the war.

With the sudden shutdown of war factories, most women war workers were no longer needed — 80,000 of them were laid off in September 1945 alone. All married women were released from the CBC and the civil service on the ground that they were "temporary" wartime workers. The goal was to provide places for returning service personnel and it seems that most women at least reluctantly accepted the opportunity to return to their homes full time. But, it is also clear that, having had a taste for full-time, non-traditional jobs, these women increasingly moved back into the work force and would raise daughters who would insist on work outside the home.

Post-war Canada was not idyllic, however. Returning soldiers had great difficulty reorienting themselves to

[11] Overcoming the challenges of wartime production had led C. D. Howe to say something with which the post-war worker would agree: "Never again will there be any doubt that Canada can manufacture anything that can be manufactured elsewhere."

unstructured civilian life after so many years of orders and discipline. Most able-bodied soldiers were expected to get on with their own lives, with minimum assistance. Most of them did so. Unlike the soldiers who went to the First World War in a burst of pious, patriotic enthusiasm, the Second World War veterans had gone without enthusiasm, but a quiet will because the job needed doing, and they maintained the same quiet will to reclaim their lives once demobilized.[12]

By 1948, a boom was under way in housing, manufacturing and in the family. The war economy and the reconstruction it necessitated were ironically kind to Canada, particularly in contrast to Great Britain, where many cities were devastated, rationing continued into the 1950s and the debts of wartime weighed the country down and, some said, led inevitably to the end of its colonial empire.

The reunion of families in Canada led to a rush of births, starting in 1947 and continuing until 1960, the so-called "baby boom." It was at least in part a product of renewed optimism, a confidence that was created by a combination of state support (baby bonuses were instituted in 1945)[13] and an energetic economy. The people wanted to get on with building, consuming, creating, after so many years of restrictions, destruction, uncertainty and fear. Canada had a new position in the world, too, and took its responsibilities seriously.

With the same enthusiasm they had shown for the job of war, the Canadian people were getting on with the job of peace.

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[12] They demonstrated their independence and failure to be militarized by their widespread refusal to collect the service medals to which they were entitled.

[13] One of the fall-outs from the war was the determination to create a social welfare climate that would cushion the shock of the return to a peacetime economy. The Marsh Report, named after the research director of the Committee on Reconstruction, made several recommendations that were later enthusiastically taken up by the Liberal Party. When the Liberals were re-elected in 1944, they established programs for family allowances (baby bonus) and promised to work with the provinces for health insurance and a contributory old age pension; it took many years of debate, but this led eventually to Medicare and the Canada Pension Plan.

A Final Word

It is difficult for today's generations, most of them children and grandchildren of people who lived through the Second World War, to put themselves in their parents' and grandparents' place. Was the war a romantic time? In many ways, yes, it was, and is fondly remembered with big band tunes framing the background. Was it awful? Yes, it was, as the families of Canadian casualties will testify. Was it exciting? Yes, and no. It was exciting to live in a time of momentous change. But it was dreary to live with privation and separation of families.

We seem to have a capacity to remember good times and let the bad times fade. Time also erodes memory, particularly 50 years on when we are losing many veterans of those six world-shaking war years and when the former enemies — Germany, Japan and Italy — are now important trading partners.

We have movies and books to help preserve the feel of wartime battles, but there are fewer tangible reminders about the lives of ordinary Canadians. On the home front, the Second World War was an extraordinary time, when ordinary people did extraordinary things. Grandma may have packed explosives and kept a victory garden. In her own way, she helped build a peace that has lasted two generations. That is something well worth remembering.

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