

**CITY AT WAR:
THE EFFECTS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR
ON VERDUN, QUÉBEC**

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the effects of the Second World War on Verdun, Québec, an urban, working-class community with a 1941 population of 67,000. Verdun was the third-largest city in Québec and the thirteenth-largest in Canada. This study assesses the military, civilian and industrial contribution of this community to the national war effort. No comprehensive study of Canada's 'home front' war has ever been approached from the perspective of a community study.

Verdun's population was 58% English speaking and 42% French speaking. Nearly one-third of Verdun's English-speakers were born in the British Isles. Verdun's exceptional British character and its linguistic mix remain sub-themes throughout this work, which concludes that French-Canadian participation in the war effort at the local level was significantly greater than the historiography has suggested.

Verdunites of both language groups exhibited an exceptionally strong sense of community identification and civic pride and the city's wartime responses were influenced by this shared feeling of local identity. Some of the characteristics of wartime life in Verdun followed national trends: a detailed examination of these themes provides new insight into the wider Canadian home front experience.

This study intends to provide an innovative addition to the literature of Canada's participation in the Second World War and to enhance existing knowledge of Canadian and Québec social and cultural dynamics existing at that time.






RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage étudie les effets de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale sur Verdun, Québec, une communauté urbaine de classe ouvrière qui comptait une population de 67.000 en 1941. Verdun était la troisième plus importante ville du Québec et la treizième au Canada. Ce travail évalue la contribution militaire, civile et industrielle de Verdun à l'effort national de guerre. Aucune étude compréhensive de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale sur le plan domestique n'a été faite du point de vue d'une communauté canadienne.

La population de Verdun comprenait 58% d'anglophones et 42% de francophones. Presqu'un tiers des anglophones étaient nés aux Îles britanniques. Le caractère britannique exceptionnel de Verdun ainsi que sa dualité linguistique demeurent des sous-thèmes tout au long de ce travail qui tire la conclusion que la participation canadienne française à l'effort de guerre était plus significative que la littérature nous suggérait.

Les verdunois(es) des deux groupes linguistiques ont démontré un sens exceptionnel d'identité et de fierté locale et la réaction de la ville en temps de guerre fut influencée par ces sentiments communautaires. Certaines des caractéristiques de la vie quotidienne verdunoise pendant la guerre suivaient le cours des événements nationaux. L'analyse détaillée de ces thèmes nous procure une compréhension plus approfondie de l'expérience canadienne sur le plan domestique.

Le but de ce travail est d'ajouter une étude innovatrice à la littérature déjà parue sur la participation canadienne durant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale et d'améliorer les connaissances socio-culturelles canadiennes et québécoises de cette époque.



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This study suggests that Verdun was a closely-knit and proud community during the Second World War and that these characteristics helped explain that city's response to the war. Half a century later Verdunites remain proud of their wartime history and many have contributed to this work. The following persons facilitated and encouraged the research of this dissertation: Patrice Byloos, Archivist, City Clerk's Office, City of Verdun, Lois-Anne Clouthier, Chief Librarian, City of Verdun, and Benoit Arcand, Salle Canadiana, Verdun Cultural Centre. All three are now good friends. The men and women of the Verdun Branch (No. 4) of the Royal Canadian Legion were also unfailingly

helpful and enthusiastic. Many other Verdunites working on behalf of local community or parish organizations also welcomed my inquiries for information.

Dozens of men and women took the time to meet with me or wrote or telephoned me in response to public solicitations for research assistance. The late Miss R.B. Joan Adams of Williamsburg, Ontario was exceedingly generous with her time and made available her valuable collection of press clippings and correspondence relating to wartime Verdun. I am indebted to Mr. Gordon Galbraith of Brockville, Ontario for the opportunity of meeting Miss Adams as well as for his other valuable assistance. Mr. Charles Elliott of Verdun put me into contact with many people who offered their memories and memorabilia. Mary Peate of Williston, Vermont was always encouraging and helpful. Mr. Stewart Carson of Verdun made available his remarkable scrapbook of Verdunites at war. Mr. Paul Moreau of Lasalle, Québec provided valuable documents and photographs. William Weintraub of Westmount, Québec loaned me his photographs and memories. Professor Terry Copp of Wilfrid Laurier University was always encouraging. Many other people whose names do not appear in the preceding list were also kind enough to help.

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On a personal level, my family has always supported my decision to pursue a higher education and to focus on the community in which they have lived for some 70 years. My uncle, the late Arthur Ste-Marie, might have been responsible for igniting within me the spark of interest in our community's past. My mother, Béatrice Ste-Marie, provided unflagging encouragement throughout the life of this project and has helped me achieve its realization.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANQ	<i>Archives Nationale du Québec</i>
ARP	Air Raid Precautions
BESL	British Empire Service League
CASF	Canadian Active Service Force
CCA	Canadian Corps Association
CCF	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CDC	Civilian Defence Committee
CECV	<i>Commission des Écoles Catholiques de Verdun</i>
CEF	Canadian Expeditionary Force
CIL	Canadian Industries Limited
CNR	Canadian National Railways
CO	Commanding Officer
CPC	Civilian Protection Committee
CVA	City of Verdun Archives
CWAC	Canadian Women's Army Corps
CWSF	Canadian War Services Fund
DIL	Defence Industries Limited
DMS	Department of Munitions and Supply
DND	Department of National Defence
DNWS	Department of National War Services
DOC	District Officer Commanding
ESA	Emergency Shelter Administration
GS	General Service
GWVA	Great War Veterans' Association
HMCS	His Majesty's Canadian Ship
HMS	His Majesty's Ship
IODE	Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire

MCF	Mayor's Cigarette Fund for Verdun Soldiers Overseas
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MD 4	Military District No. 4
NAC	National Archives of Canada
NDG	<i>Notre-Dame-de-Grâce</i>
NDHQ	National Defence Headquarters
NOIC	Naval-Officer-in-Charge
NPAM	Non-Permanent Active Militia
NRMA	National Resources Mobilization Act
NSHQ	Naval Service Headquarters
OBE	Order of the British Empire
PSBGM	Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal
(R)	Reserve
RAF	Royal Air Force
RCA	Royal Canadian Artillery
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RCAF - W.D.	Royal Canadian Air Force - Women's Division
RCAMC	Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps
RCASC	Royal Canadian Army Service Corps
RCCS	Royal Canadian Corps of Signals
RCE	Royal Canadian Engineers
RCEME	Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
RCN	Royal Canadian Navy
RCNR	Royal Canadian Naval Reserve
RCNVR	Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve
RCOC	Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps
RMR	Royal Montreal Regiment
RN	Royal Navy
UN	<i>Union Nationale</i>

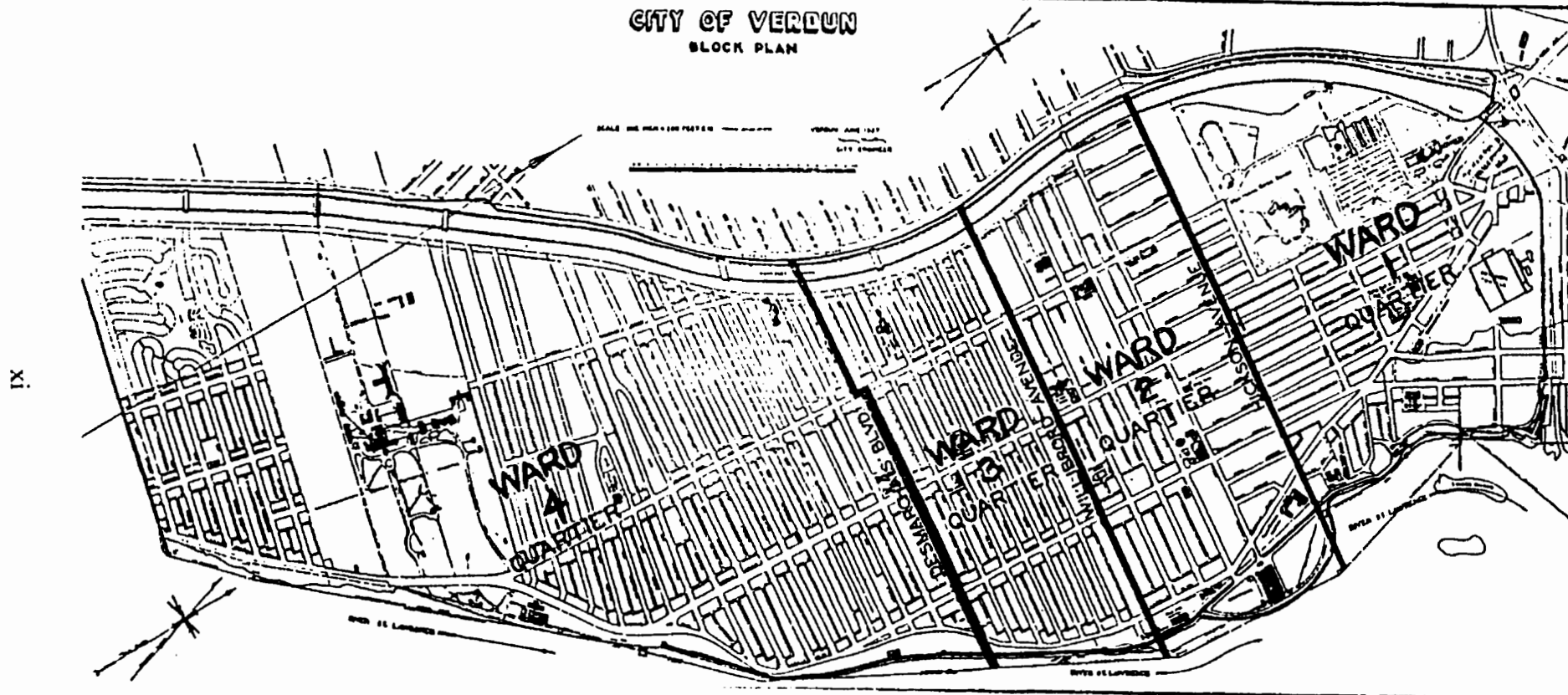


VCSC	Verdun Catholic School Commission
VE Day	Victory-in-Europe Day
VJ Day	Victory-over-Japan Day
VHS	Verdun High School
VSC	Verdun Salvage Committee
VWSC	Verdun War Savings Committee
WPTB	Wartime Prices and Trade Board
WRCNS	Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service
WVRC	Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

MAP OF VERDUN NEW WARD DIVISION

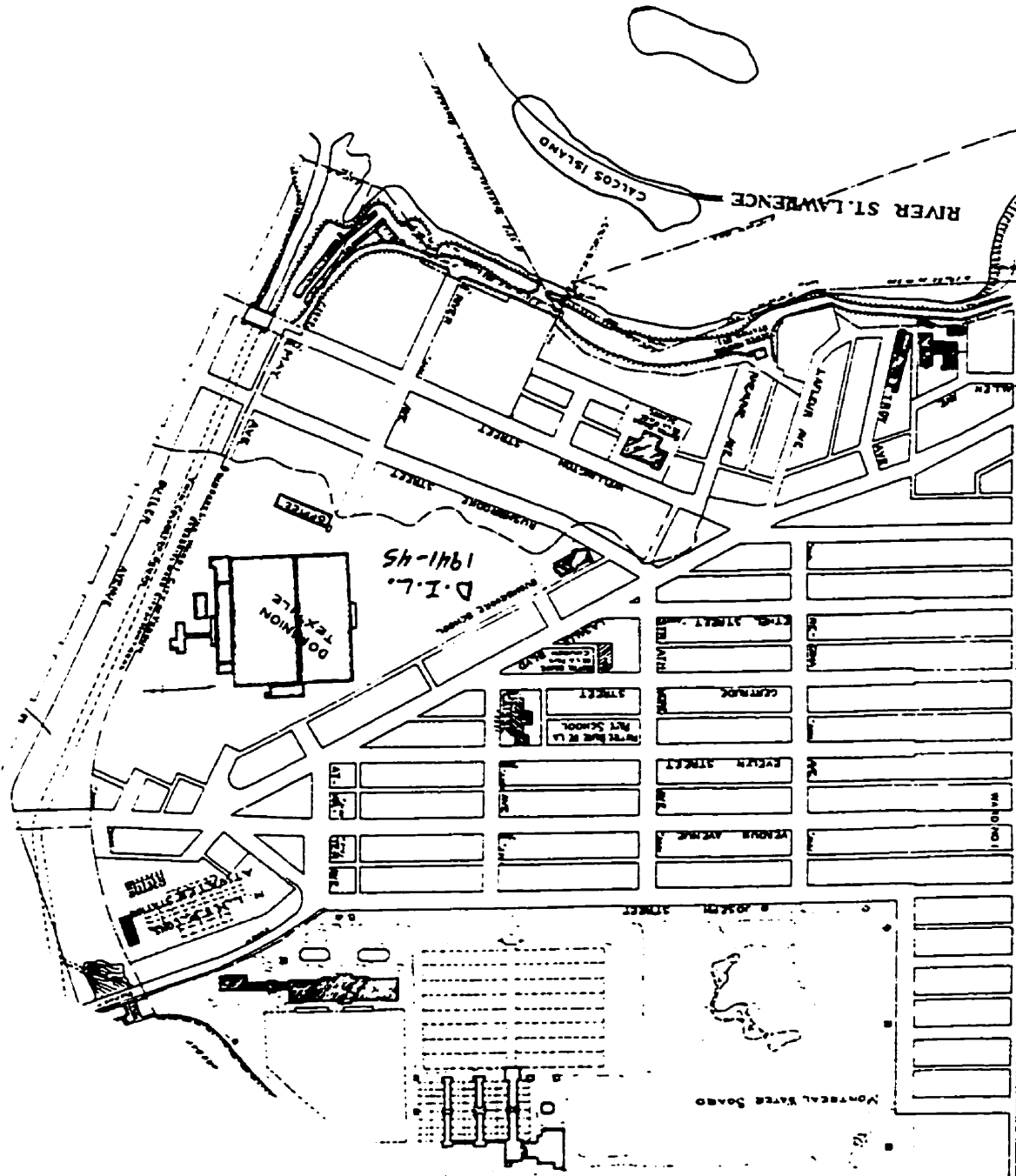
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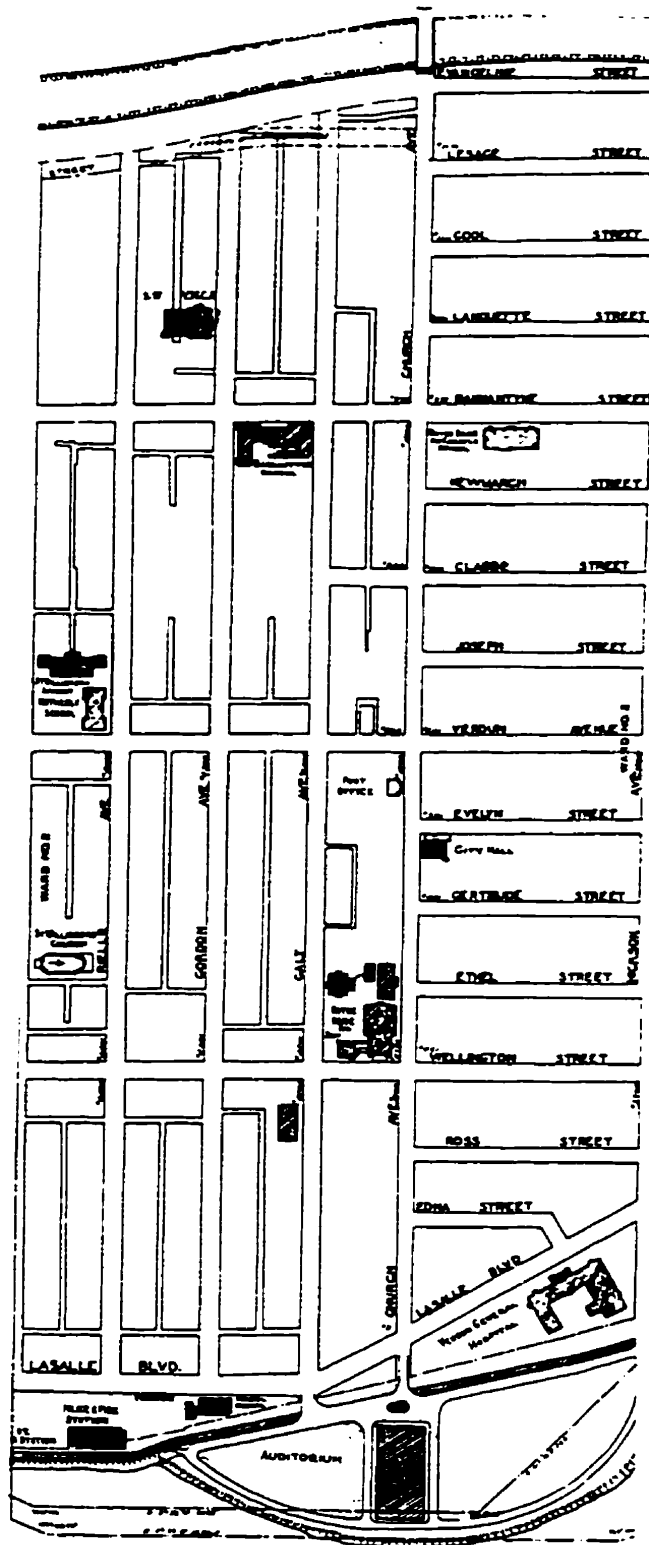
CITY OF VERDUN
BLOCK PLAN



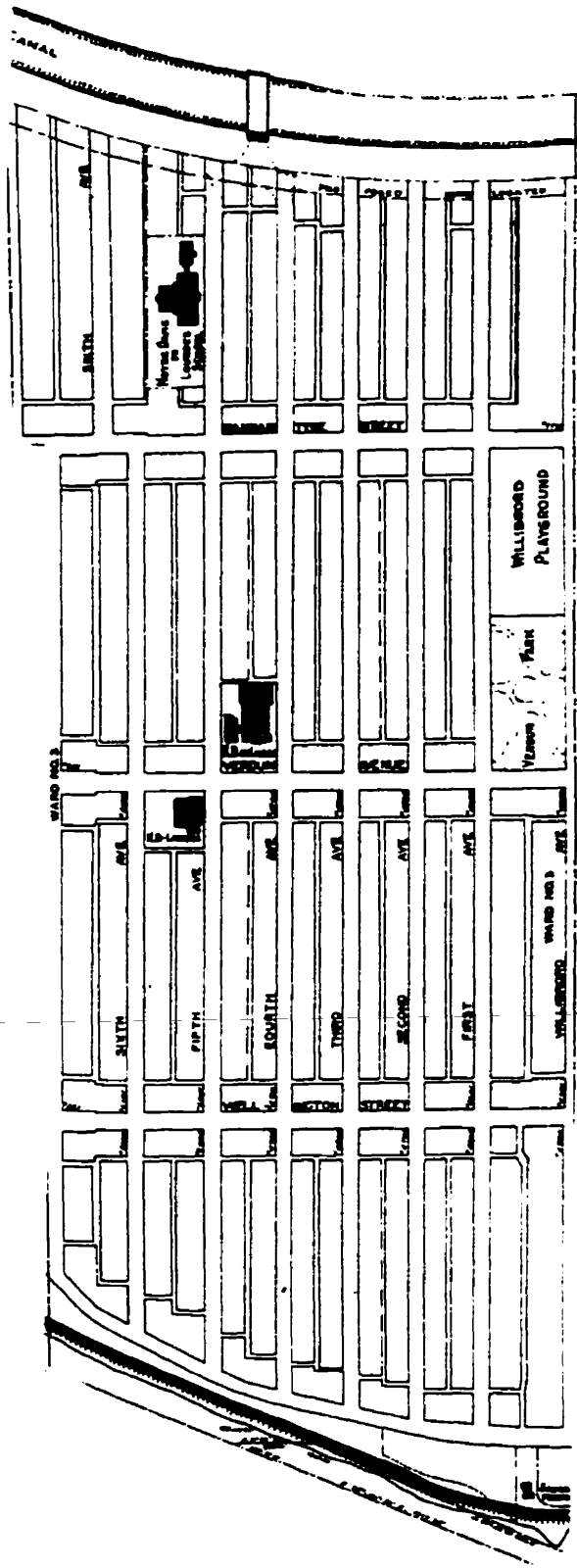
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Ward 1 Northeastern City Limits to Hickson Avenue

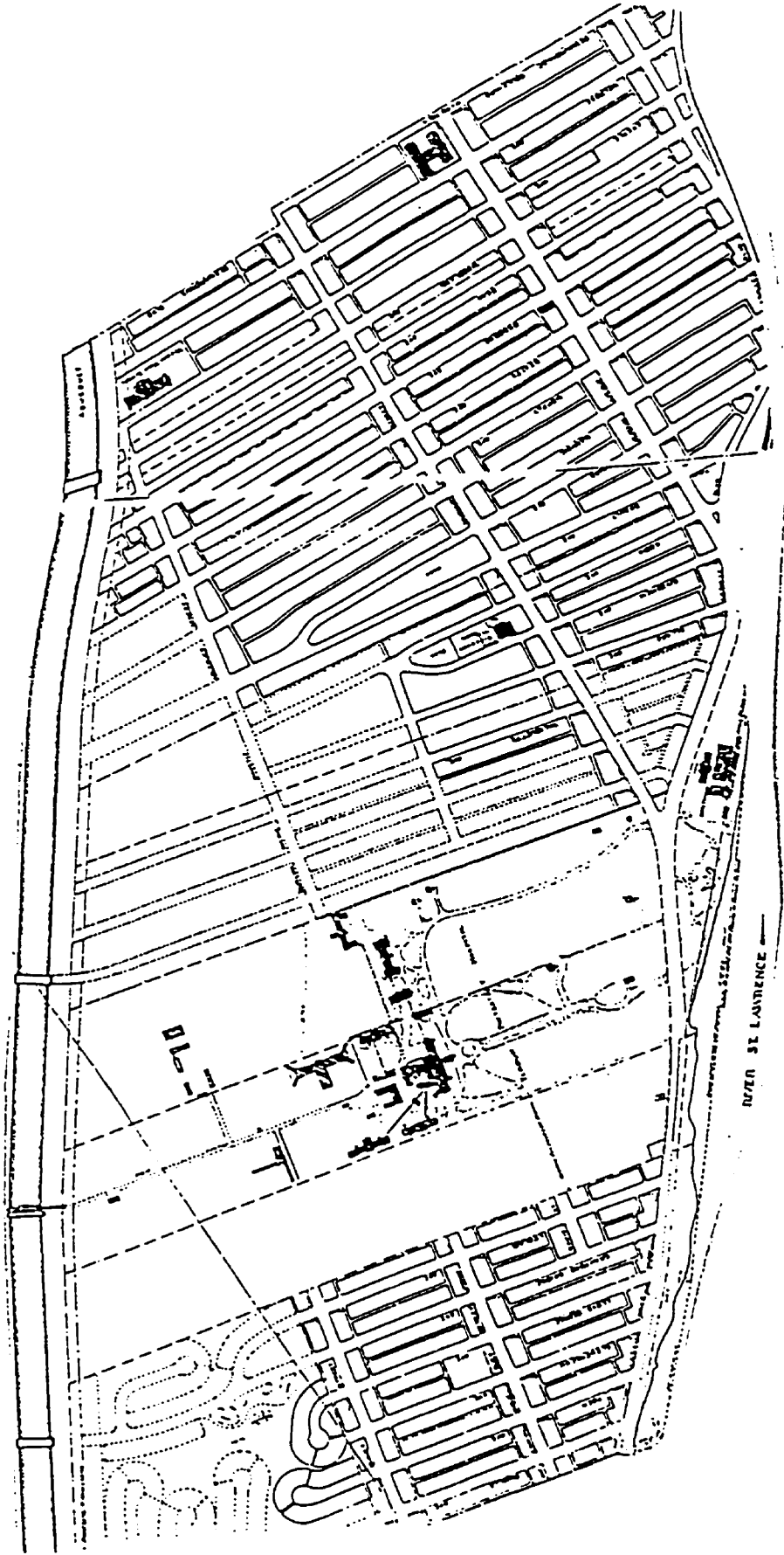




Ward 2 Hickson Avenue to Willibrord Avenue



Ward 3 Willibrord Avenue to Desmarchais Boulevard



Ward 4 Desmarchais Boulevard to Southwestern City Limits

The present war is everyone's war and every citizen is expected to do his share in bringing it to a successful conclusion.

Edward Wilson, Mayor of Verdun, 1940

I suppose you all heard over the air we were in France on the morning of the 19th. It is a morning I will never forget. I seen [sic] my buddies killed one after the other on all sides of me. We did what we went to do and that is the mane [sic] thing, and I can tell you all the men were tickled when they new [sic] where we were going, you never saw a happier bunch of men in all your life. There were quite a few boys from Verdun like myself and I am proude [sic] that some Verdun boys were in it."

Lance Corporal J. Flood, R.C.A.S.C.,
attached 10 Field Ambulance, R.C.A.M.C.

August 20, 1942

INTRODUCTION

In *Victory 1945: Canadians From War to Peace*, two of Canada's leading military historians, Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, write "[T]here is as yet no good published study of life in wartime Canada..."¹ One way of addressing this shortfall in the literature is to examine wartime conditions in a single Canadian community, one which can serve in several important respects as a microcosm of the wider national experience. The present work examines the effects of the Second World War from the perspective of Verdun, Québec, an urban, working-class and mixed-language community which borders Montreal. The purpose of this study is to illustrate how Verdun was affected by Canada's participation in the Second World War and to assess the military, industrial and civilian contribution of this community to the national war effort.

Verdun provides an ideal setting from which to explore the consequences of the war at the municipal, institutional, neighbourhood and individual levels. According to the 1941 Dominion census, Verdun had a population of over 67,000, making it the third-largest city in Québec and the thirteenth-largest in Canada. The city's labour force was composed mainly of skilled and unskilled industrial workers and clerical workers: most worked in Montreal. The city's population was 58% English speaking and 42% French speaking. Only four percent of Verdunites were of neither French nor British ancestry. Nearly one-third of Verdun's English-speakers were born in the British Isles, most having immigrated to Canada in the 1920s, many as children. Verdun's exceptional British character and its linguistic mix remain sub-themes in this study. This high-profile British presence defined Verdun and made the city something of an anomaly in Québec. Even Verdun's wartime mayor, Edward Wilson, was British born. One direct result of Verdun's unusual British character was to make the city an uncommonly "patriotic" community, in the sense that "patriotism" was defined as acting in the defence of British, and therefore Canadian, interests. Verdun boasted the highest voluntary enlistment rate in Canada for a

¹ Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *Victory 1945: Canadians From War to Peace*, (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 255.

municipality of its size: between 6300 and 7000 Verdunites were on active service during the war.

In some respects, Verdun was not a typical Canadian municipality. Verdun's population, geography, ethnicity, language, religion, economy and class structure gave it a unique wartime character. Verdun's war was not Regina's; Halifax's was not Verdun's. Verdun manifested distinct "home front" dynamics. Verdunites of both language groups exhibited an exceptionally strong sense of community identification and civic pride. The city's wartime mood and its social dynamics affected and were affected by this powerful feeling of local identity. Still, some of the particularities of wartime life in Verdun, such as the salvage collections or the Red Cross work, followed national trends. These common themes help provide insight into the wider Canadian home front experience.

This work adopts a community *approach* to the study of Canada's Second World War experience. It complements existing national studies.² A municipal study interprets the effects of national events and policies at a local level. Just as local history is sometimes criticized for a failure to provide a broader context, national studies neglect local conditions and communities. This study of Verdun is a grassroots examination of wartime Canada. It addresses the meaning of the war for individual Canadians while offering interpretations which have national applicability. Many important aspects of the war on the home front are given detailed treatment, such as the manner in which local

² Other sectoral approaches include Ruth Pierson's works on gender, *"They're Still Women After All": the Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986) and *Canadian Women and the Second World War*. (Canadian Historical Association booklet, 1983); André Laurendeau, *La crise de la conscription 1942*, (Montreal: *Les éditions du jour*, 1962) and Paul-André Comeau, *Le Bloc Populaire 1942-1948*, (Montreal: *Éditions Québec/Amérique*, 1982) employ a cultural and linguistic approach in viewing the war's impact on Québec. Ethnicity has been used as an approach in Norman Hillmer *et. al.*, eds., *On Guard for Thee: War, Ethnicity and the Canadian State, 1939-1945*, (Ottawa: The Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, Ministry of Supply and Services, 1988).

patriotic groups were organized and operated. Victory Loan campaigns conducted and civil protection arrangements put in place.³

This study will explain Verdunites' energetic collective response to the war by examining the city's ethnicity, demography, class structure and sense of community pride, which was itself intensified by citizens' identification with Verdun's increasingly impressive war record. In portraying Verdun at war, this work also must respond to certain basic questions. In what manner and to what degree did Verdunites participate in war-related activities on the home front? Which Verdunites enlisted and why did the city boast so high an enlistment rate? What were the effects of the war on family life, social relations and political behaviour? To what extent did the municipal government co-operate with federal authorities in the prosecution of the war? Were Verdun's social cleavages welded together during the war, the result of a shared "national experience"⁴, or were existing divisions merely shelved for the duration? Did social conflict manifest itself more sharply in wartime Verdun?

Many Canadian municipal biographies remain poor analytical tools. Nearly twenty years ago Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan Artibise, two of Canada's most prolific urban historians, noted that urban histories traditionally have been either "antiquarian venture[s] with genealogical overtones or historical boosterism".⁵ Detailing the minutiae of local

³ Previous surveys of Canada's war must out of necessity barely address these issues. Little insight has been offered so far into the actual organization of these undertakings at a local level. See for example W.A.B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhous, *Out of the Shadows*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1989).

⁴ Sidney Aster, ed., *The Second World War as a National Experience*, (Ottawa: The Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1981), p. 2, has described Canada's national war experience, as well as the experiences of other nations, as "integrative" and "consensus building".

⁵ A.F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter, eds., *The Usable Urban Past*, (Toronto: The Carleton Library, Macmillan, 1979), p. 2.

existence without interpreting its significance through a wider context results in fragmentary history. History from the top down has been described as being from "the general to the specific", whereas local studies should endeavour to move from "the specific to the general". In the words of another urban historian, perhaps the most useful micro approach is "to work from the general to the particular and back to the general again".⁶ Municipal history ought to link national processes to the people. Wherever feasible, therefore, it is intended that this case study of Verdun will serve a greater interpretive base. This work is an urban history, limited in terms of chronology and theme. It is about people, located in one place, reacting in a variety of ways to the exigencies of their Second World War experiences.⁷ It is about the sort of place Verdun was in the years 1939 to 1945 and about the sort of place Canada was.

This work also seeks to be more than a "single-factor" municipal study.⁸ Any urban study must be interdisciplinary and horizontal in approach: geography and history become intertwined; demography and sociology, economics and political science all infuse the historical investigation of any community.

National policies affecting such diverse wartime subjects as compulsory military service, industrial mobilization, the role of the state and electoral politics already have been dealt with in the existing literature.⁹ What concerns this work, though, is how these policies

⁶ Mark Walsh, "The Micro Approach: Municipal Records and Canadian Studies", *Canadian Issues*, the Association for Canadian Studies, Vol. 10, No. 4, 1988, p. 67.

⁷ Gilbert A. Stelter, "A Sense of Time and Place: The Historian's Approach to Canada's Urban Past", in A.F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter, eds., *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*. (Toronto: The Carleton Library, Macmillan, 1977), p. 423.

⁸ Stelter, "A Sense of Time and Place", pp. 425-427.

⁹ The best work on Ottawa's direction of the war is C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945*, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970). A comprehensive overview of national politics and policies during the war is J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government 1939-1945*.

and events affected the local community. For example, how did Verdunites, their social organizations and their municipal administration react to the National Resources Mobilization Act, to the perceived need to institute air raid precaution measures or to the 1942 conscription plebiscite? Wartime divisions existed in Verdun, though a prevailing sense of local identity and the need for social accommodation helped shape the common responses of many Verdunites. This consensual approach, such as mass participation in fund-raising ventures in support of Verdunites on active service, in turn partly came to define Verdun's wartime identity. The actions of Verdunites overseas were directly relevant to the community's self-perceptions. One Verdun native, fighter pilot George F. Beurling, achieved national and even international prominence in 1942 as a result of his exploits in the skies over Malta. Beurling's fame exerted a positive psychological effect on his hometown and helped focus Verdunites' sense of their community's significant military contributions.

This work is also an example of the "new" military history which has been practised in Canada within the last generation. More traditional Second World War operational histories, which continue to be published and which are of major historical significance, increasingly are being supplemented by social, economic, administrative and political histories which help to clarify other important aspects of Canada's wartime experience. At the same time, the present study, while focussing on the war's impact on a defined community, demonstrates the importance of situating domestic social-military history within a broader wartime context, including that of Canadian military operations. Neither social-military nor operational-military history is complete without some understanding of the other. This study might be described as a form of "*new new military history*".¹⁰

(Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975).

¹⁰ This term is used in David A. Charters, Marc Milner and J. Brent Wilson, eds., *Military History and the Military Profession*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1992), p. xv. See also in the same work the article by Don Higginbotham, "The New Military History: Its Practitioners and Their Practices", pp. 132-144. Richard Preston, "Canadian

Few existing Canadian studies focus specifically on Second World War municipal experiences. Jay White's excellent 1994 doctoral dissertation on wartime Halifax is concerned with "social change in the context of long-term urban development".¹¹ His work examines Halifax's wartime infrastructural and physical development; Haligonians themselves enter his study only obliquely. White realized that a Canadian wartime municipal history was long overdue and that Halifax was the logical place to start, especially for his kind of specialized study. Yet, some parts of White's work, such as housing and labour issues, have broader national implications. But since Halifax was virtually unique in wartime Canada in that it was on the oceanic frontlines, it must be disqualified from serving as a fully effective interpretive and comparative model for other wartime Canadian cities. The present work proposes to satisfy some of the broader requirements of a wartime community study and serve as an example from which meaningful national comparisons may be drawn.

Most Canadian municipal histories or community studies devote little space to the years of the Second World War.¹² Similarly, very little published Canadian military or social-military history focuses on the efforts of individual communities during the war. Jean Thibault has written a brief and flawed survey of wartime Drummondville. The local writer, Cuthbert Gunning, has written two short works on wartime North Bay. One is a

Military History: A Reinterpretation Challenge for the Eighties", *American Review of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1989, pp. 102-103, states Canadians have been writing a synthesis of social and operational history since the Second World War.

¹¹ Jay White, "Conscripted City: Halifax and the Second World War", Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1994, p. iii.

¹² A good survey of Halifax at war can be found in Thomas H. Raddall, *Halifax: Warden of the North*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1948). Belleville's war is adequately treated in Nick and Helma Mika, *Belleville: Portrait of a City*, (Belleville, Ontario: Mika Publishing, 1983). On the other hand, Donald Wetherell and Irene R.A. Kmet examine the development of nine towns in Alberta and manage to ignore the Second World War entirely. See their *Town Life: Main Street and the Evolution of Small Town Alberta 1880-1947*, (University of Alberta Press, 1995).

memoir which imparts virtually no information, not even anecdotal, about North Bay at war while the second deals with the army training camp and educational facility which were established in North Bay during the war. This latter work is unconcerned with the city's experiences as such. Phylis Bowman, local historian and Second World War veteran, has written two marvellously-illustrated booklets dealing with Prince Rupert during the Second World War. Yet, her *Second World War Memories* is not an organized municipal history and provides readers with only a few pages about wartime life in Prince Rupert. Her memoirs, *We Skirted the War*, offers a nominal roll of those men and women from Prince Rupert and environs who enlisted, but provides little of relevance to Prince Rupert's wartime history. A recent brief account of Red Deer, Alberta and its hinterland during the war is mainly concerned with local agricultural production and nearby British Commonwealth Air Training Plan installations.¹³

Douglas How has written an account of enlistments and casualties from Dorchester, New Brunswick. This work is not about Dorchester's organized war effort but is a moving review of the sense of loss the war brought to How's hometown. Donald Ripley's contribution, like Gunning's, is about wartime life in a military camp, this time Camp Aldershot in Kentville, Nova Scotia. Ripley's work is an episodic memoir of his childhood years in Kentville.¹⁴ Except for How, all these works were written by

¹³ Jean Thibault, *Drummondville à l'heure de la guerre 1939-1945*, (*La Société d'histoire de Drummondville*, 1994); Cuthbert Gunning, *North Bay: The War Years*, (North Bay, Ontario: privately printed, 1990) and also *North Bay's Fort Chippewa 1939-1945*, (North Bay, Ontario: privately printed, 1991); Phylis Bowman, *We Skirted the War*, (Prince Rupert, British Columbia: privately printed, 1975) and *Second World War Memories*, (Prince Rupert, British Columbia: privately printed, 1987); Michael Dawe, "Community in Transition: Red Deer in the Second World War", in Kenneth W. Tingley, ed., *For King and Country: Alberta in the Second World War*, (Edmonton: The Provincial Museum of Alberta, 1995).

¹⁴ Douglas How, *One Village, One War 1914-1945*, (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1995); Donald F. Ripley, *The Home Front: Wartime Life in Camp Aldershot and Kentville, Nova Scotia*, (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1991).

amateurs. In 1948 Gertrude Laing produced a superb account of the efficient coordinating committee which oversaw the wartime efforts of Winnipeg's voluntary organizations. But Laing's is hardly the study of a community at war.¹⁵

Almost nothing has been published about the City of Verdun and nothing has been published which covers the city's Second World War experience. No comprehensive history of the municipality exists and very few historians, academics, writers or novelists have ever mentioned the city in their works. A commissioned municipal history of Verdun was published in 1976. It is a hopelessly amateurish work.¹⁶ One academic treatment of Verdun is Suzanne Clavette's solid 1986 Masters thesis which explored the effects of the Great Depression in that city.¹⁷ Clavette has provided a wealth of valuable detail concerning social conditions and class conflict in Verdun on the eve of war. Over half a century earlier, Mary Davidson submitted a Masters thesis in sociology at McGill University mainly on the subject of British immigration to Verdun in the previous two decades.¹⁸ Lloyd Reynolds's important 1935 book, *The British Immigrant*¹⁹, incorporates much of Davidson's research and details some of Verdun's prewar social characteristics. The works of Davidson and Reynolds have been instrumental in establishing Verdun as an enclave of British-born, English-speaking Québécois. This community's collective response helped shape the history of Verdun during the war.

¹⁵ Gertrude Laing, *A Community Organizes for War*, (Winnipeg, 1948).

¹⁶ Julien Déziel, *History of Verdun 1665, 1876-1976*, (Verdun: The Centennial Committee, 1976). The text is largely made up of miscellaneous verbatim extracts from the minutes of city council. The years of the Second World War are treated in three uninformative, glib paragraphs.

¹⁷ Suzanne Clavette, "*Des bons aux chèques: aide aux chômeurs et crise des années 1930 à Verdun*". M.A. thesis. *Université du Québec à Montréal*, 1986.

¹⁸ Mary Davidson, "The Social Adjustment of British Immigrant Families in Verdun and Point St. Charles". M.A. thesis. McGill University, 1933.

¹⁹ Lloyd G. Reynolds, *The British Immigrant*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1935.

Despite the wartime presence of large and active branches, Verdun has been either ignored outright or referred to only in passing in the published general histories of national organizations such as the Royal Canadian Legion, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Salvation Army and the Knights of Columbus.²⁰ Ronald Rudin's survey of the history of English-speaking Québec and Brendan O'Donnell's bibliographic works on the same subject mention nothing on Verdun.²¹

The journalist Brian Nolan's biography of George Beurling²² virtually ignores the City of Verdun. Almost all a reader can glean about Beurling's hometown is that it was, as Nolan unfailingly refers to it, "working class". This book is about a Verdunite's war experiences; it is not about Verdun. The only Verdunites to publish wartime memoirs were Beurling and A. Robert Prouse, who was taken prisoner at Dieppe.²³ Beurling

²⁰ Clifford H. Bowering, *Service: The Story of the Canadian Legion*. (Ottawa: The Canadian Legion, 1960); James Hale, *Branching Out: The Story of the Royal Canadian Legion*. (Ottawa: The Royal Canadian Legion, 1995); Harold C. Cross, *One Hundred Years of Service with Youth: The Story of the Montreal Y.M.C.A.*, (Montreal: Southam Press, 1951); Alan M. Hurst, *The Canadian Y.M.C.A. in World War II*. (National War Services Committee of the National Council of the Y.M.C.A. of Canada. n.p., n.d. (1949?)); R.G. Moyles, *The Blood and Fire in Canada: A History of the Salvation Army in the Dominion 1882-1976*. (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1977); B. Poirier, *Histoire de la Chevalerie de Colomb*. (Montreal, 1943).

²¹ Ronald Rudin, *The Forgotten Québécois: A History of English-Speaking Quebec 1759-1980*. (Québec City: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1985); Brendan O'Donnell, *Printed Sources for the Study of English-Speaking Quebec: An Annotated Bibliography of Works Printed before 1980*, (Eastern Townships Research Centre Series No. 2, Bishop's University, 1985) and also *Sources for the Study of English-Speaking Quebec: An Annotated Bibliography of Works Printed Between 1980 and 1990*, (Eastern Townships Research Centre, Bishop's University, 1992).

²² Brian Nolan, *Hero: The Buzz Beurling Story*. (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1981).

²³ G.F. Beurling and Leslie Roberts, *Malta Spitfire: The Story of a Fighter Pilot*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1943); A. Robert Prouse, *Ticket to Hell*. (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1982).

barely mentions Verdun while Prouse ignores not only his hometown but his entire life before 1939.

Fortunately, some documentary evidence exists to support this paucity of published sources. The archival collection of the City of Verdun was extremely valuable, even if it was not organized in any systematic way. This collection yielded the essential correspondence, memoranda, reports, minutes of meetings held by various wartime bodies and miscellaneous other documents on which the core of this study has been based. Of outstanding historical value were the card files of the Mayor's Cigarette Fund for Verdun Soldiers Overseas. These made possible a comprehensive examination of voluntary enlistments from Verdun. The wartime minutes of meetings of the Verdun City Council and of its Executive Committee were useful but offered little beyond that which was available in archival sources. The National Archives of Canada, especially the records of the Departments of National Defence (RG 24), Munitions and Supply (RG 28) and National War Services (RG 44), were valuable sources for specific topics, such as the establishment of the Defence Industries Limited small arms ammunition plant in Verdun or the history of the Royal Canadian Navy frigate H.M.C.S. *Dunver*, which was named for the City of Verdun.

No manuscripts, booklets or commemorative publications have been issued by Verdun's local institutions which were of any significant use in helping understand the city's war experiences. Verdun's few (and mainly French-language) parish and school board histories gloss over or ignore the years of the Second World War. One exception is a commemorative booklet issued by the Chalmers United Church. The records of the Verdun Catholic School Commission, the Verdun Protestant Board of School Trustees and most churches, whether serving English- or French-speaking congregations, whether Catholic or Protestant, ranged from sketchy to non-existent. The Verdun branch (No. 4) of the Royal Canadian Legion lost all its wartime files and archives in a postwar fire. Compounding the problem was an equally devastating fire which swept through the

archives of the Legion's Québec Command headquarters in Montreal. It was also difficult to trace the records of the many social groups operating in Verdun during the Second World War but which have been inactive for 30 years or more.²⁴ Even the archives of the several war-era Verdun branches of *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste* were not located in *Les Archives National du Québec*. One of the best means of studying Verdun's community organizations was through the pages of the local newspapers, which proved an essential resource.

During the war Verdun possessed two weekly newspapers, *The Guardian*, published in English, and *The Messenger/Le Messenger*, which was bilingual. Both of these weeklies, but especially *The Guardian*, provided a comprehensive chronicle of events in Verdun and acted as a superb source from which to glean the texture of the city and its society. The vagaries of local public opinion and the specific details of many events are often only to be found in local newspapers. Moreover, newspapers are serial sources providing a comprehensive chronological record of events. Verdun's wartime newspapers constituted a bank of detailed information which existing archival sources were often unable to match. Boosterism frequently replaced objectivity in these newspapers' reporting, but even this provided valuable insight into contemporary self-perceptions in Verdun.²⁵

Unfortunately, copies of *The Messenger/Le Messenger* covering the years 1936 to 1942 were also lost in a postwar fire and these could not be found in any other repositories in Québec. The collection of *The Guardian* was complete. The French-language articles in

²⁴ Suzanne Clavette, "*Des bons aux chèques*", p. 6, also admitted that she encountered difficulty in locating sources on French-speaking social groups active in Verdun in the 1930s.

²⁵ For similar views on the value of newspaper sources see Wetherell and Kmet, *Town Life: Main Street and the Evolution of Small Town Alberta 1880-1947*, *op. cit.*, pp. 348-349; Marvin Schlegel, *Writing Your Community's War History*. (The American Association For State and Local History, Raleigh, North Carolina, Bulletin Volume 1, Number 11, October 1946), pp. 314-315, 321.

Le Messenger did not deal much with the war and most casualty information or military news of a personal or social nature focussed almost exclusively on the city's French-speaking community. But even casualties were not reported consistently. Most of this newspaper's French-language material pertained to matters of civic, religious or political importance.

The Guardian was considered Verdun's leading newspaper as well as a pillar of the English-speaking community. Its reporting of war-related affairs of local interest was extensive. It was conservative, sometimes even dour, in tone but seemed to represent the values and opinions current among Verdun's English speakers, particularly the British born. In 1944 *The Guardian* billed itself as "Canada's greatest, newsiest and best read home weekly".²⁶ Perhaps more to the point, the weekly also boasted that:

in *The Guardian*, as in no other newspaper, is reflected the life of this community - the doings of the council and of private citizens, of clubs - men's and women's - of churches, of schools, of love and marriage within our midst, of the coming and going of our fellow citizens - in a word *The Guardian* is a mirror of Verdun.²⁷

It was all this and more: *The Guardian* was an aggressively patriotic paper which helped galvanize Verdunites' domestic war effort.

The local harvest of wartime personal letters, documentary evidence or souvenirs and other memoir material was not bountiful, notwithstanding the author's placing of advertisements in the local weekly newspaper and selected journals as well as the periodic distribution of flyers and posters at appropriate locations in Verdun. The best

²⁶ *The Guardian*, January 20, 1944. So British and conservative was *The Guardian* that on March 22, 1945, it printed an editorial denouncing *The Maple Leaf*, the Canadian Army newspaper, for having dared to suggest that Canada should have its own distinctive flag with a Maple Leaf emblem. Ignoring the views of a large proportion of Canada's population, including many Verdunites, *The Guardian* felt the existing Red Ensign was "singularly appropriate to our history".

²⁷ *The Guardian*, February 3, 1944.

cache of servicemen's letters are held in the city archives. Verdunites serving overseas despatched some 500 cards and letters to City Hall in response to having received gifts of cigarettes from the Mayor's Cigarette Fund. This unique collection has yielded extremely valuable detail concerning the experiences of these men overseas and their strong identification with Verdun.

Oral history was easier to obtain than to use effectively. The information thus obtained on life in wartime Verdun varied considerably in scope and utility. Interviewing veterans was of limited value, since many were away from Verdun for most of the war. The oral history contained in this work is meant to reflect Verdun's wartime mood. Some select photographs appear throughout the narrative. The maps of Verdun included in this study will familiarize readers with the geography of Verdun and allow them to locate ward divisions and streets which are periodically mentioned in the text.

The narrative which follows is divided into nine chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the City of Verdun. It provides the critical historical and social preface to the war years and examines Verdun's pre-war political life and the nature of its municipal organization. Verdun is seen as an especially close-knit community whose sense of local pride and class identity formed the basis for the city's wartime response.

Chapter 2 contains a detailed examination of the remarkably high number of Verdun enlistments and the pride and fame this brought to the community. The statistical tables contained in this chapter demonstrate that Verdun's English-speaking, working-class, military-age male population enlisted virtually to its maximum potential. The highest-income neighbourhoods in Verdun provided the lowest rate of enlistments. This chapter illuminates Verdun's response to the national lionization of George Beurling, one of Canada's greatest heroes of the war.

Chapter 3 focusses on the municipal administration's role in helping organize Verdun's war effort. This chapter makes clear that on occasion the war was also used as an opportunity by the city to improve its own finances. The Mayor's Cigarette Fund enabled a broad cross-section of community-minded Verdunites to assist their friends and relatives serving overseas. While concerned with steering Verdun along a patriotic course, the mayor, Wilson, also had the best interests of the city (and perhaps his own political fortunes) clearly in mind.

The city also played an important role in the success of other wartime ventures such as civil protection or Victory Loan campaigns. These undertakings and others are treated in Chapter 4. The community's energetic responses to these initiatives demonstrated the city's strong local identity. The closer a cause was to providing direct assistance to members of the community at home or abroad the greater was Verdunites' support.

Chapter 5 examines the contributions to the war effort of the city's principal social and community groups, such as the Red Cross and the Canadian Legion, as well as local schools and churches. It illuminates the widespread degree of "home front" participation in the war, which crossed linguistic, religious, age and gender lines.

Chapter 6 deals with the establishment in Verdun of one of Canada's largest small-arms ammunition plants, a branch of Defence Industries Limited. The opening of this facility significantly improved the local economy and, as a result of postwar industrial reconversion, bequeathed a lasting economic and employment benefit to the community.

Chapter 7 concentrates on the social, familial and personal dislocation wrought by the war. Though many Verdunites benefitted from employment in war industries, the war also imposed strains and anxieties on many residents, often women. Verdun experienced a severe housing crisis which was exacerbated by latent class animosity. Juvenile crime

increased and Verdun was the scene of a violent social disturbance involving youths and servicemen.

Some of these social tensions found expression in electoral behaviour. Verdun's wartime elections at the federal, provincial and municipal levels are treated in Chapter 8. The war was a watershed for Verdun politics: formerly Conservative, the city became a Liberal stronghold. While Verdunites sometimes voted in language *blocs*, especially during municipal elections, it is important to note the city's remarkable degree of linguistic political harmony. No violence marred the wartime political scene in Verdun. With a strong blue-collar, British-born nucleus, Verdun was also fertile ground for the leftist views of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.

The ninth and final chapter brings to a close the story of Verdun's war and describes the demobilization and civil re-establishment of the city's servicepeople. Like the country as a whole, Verdun welcomed the postwar world with trepidation, especially with so high a percentage of discharged veterans among its population.

This work is intended to provide an innovative and useful addition to the literature of Canada's participation in the Second World War and to enhance existing knowledge of Canadian and Québec social and cultural dynamics existing at that time.

CHAPTER 1

THE CITY OF VERDUN

EARLY HISTORY TO 1914

The City of Verdun is located along the shore of the St. Lawrence River on the southwestern side of the Island of Montreal, a few kilometres northeast of the Lachine Rapids and only several kilometres below the site of Montreal's original settlement. In 1671, Major Zacharie Dupuis, acting commander of the garrison at Montreal and a well-known colonist, received a notable fief of 320 acres along this shoreline which he called "Verdun" in honour of Saverdun, his birthplace in southwestern France. His fief included much of the territory of present-day Verdun. Despite some settlement in the 17th and 18th centuries, the "Verdun" which Dupuis knew grew very little until the 19th century.

By 1825 there were probably no more than 50 families occupying this riverside location. As Verdun was situated on low-lying land, much of it marshy and easily flooded in springtime, this area was slow to develop as a farming community.¹ The completion of the Lachine Canal in 1825 effectively cut off from the remainder of the Island of Montreal the southwestern bulge of land which included what would become, from west to east, Lasalle, Verdun and the Montreal parishes and neighbourhoods of Ville Émard, Côte St. Paul and Point St. Charles.

In the mid-nineteenth century the City of Montreal's increasing water requirements prompted the digging of an aqueduct stretching from the St. Lawrence River at the western extremity of what later became the City of Lasalle and ending at a point near what later would become the northwestern city limits of Verdun not far from the Lachine Canal (on which Verdun has no frontage) as it crosses Atwater Avenue. Completed in 1856 this aqueduct further divided the territory lying between the Lachine Canal and the St. Lawrence River and formed a water boundary running along Verdun's northwestern

¹ Julien Déziel, *History of Verdun*, (Verdun: Centennial Committee, 1976), p. 10.

side, roughly parallel to the St. Lawrence which runs the entire length of Verdun's southeastern limit. Ville Émard and Côte St. Paul would develop across the aqueduct as non-contiguous neighbours of Verdun. An adjunct to the aqueduct known as the "tailrace", a water run-off ditch almost 10 metres wide, extended in a straight line from the waterworks station in the northeastern corner of Verdun directly to the St. Lawrence River, one and a half kilometres away. Consequently, by the time of its incorporation in 1876, Verdun had become a community hemmed in by water lines along most of its periphery. Fields, farms and woods stretched to the west. Alongside the tailrace, railway tracks and embankments created an additional physical eastern boundary with the industrial Montreal neighbourhood of Point St. Charles.

Despite Verdun's proximity to Montreal, a sense of remoteness and detachment grew in the tiny community, a feeling which would survive suburbanization and persist well into the twentieth century. Verdun's isolation prompted its approximately 200 rural inhabitants to seek formal recognition as a village separate from Montreal. On January 1, 1875 the village of La Rivière St. Pierre (named for a stream running through its territory) came into being. The next year, the name was changed to Verdun, and the municipality subsequently adopted 1876 as the year of its actual founding.²

The village developed in a progressively southwesterly direction as a residential and farming community. By the turn of the century Montreal's expansionist civic politicians and some members of its business community regularly called for the annexation of Verdun. Other small neighbouring municipalities were also the targets of Montreal's designs and many of these succumbed to the exertions of financial pressure. But

² Déziel, *History of Verdun*, pp. 65-66.

annexationist sentiments found few echoes in Verdun so long as the village provided the services demanded by its population and the municipal debt remained manageable.³

In a 1933 study of Verdun and Point St. Charles, Mary Davidson noted the sense of isolation existing in these communities. According to her:

...both areas remained impregnated with small-town attitudes until the postwar period of development. This past tradition of isolation still persists and is at the root of the antagonism expressed between Montrealers and citizens of these two communities.⁴

Davidson's work repeatedly indicates the existence of a deeply-rooted sense of local pride in Verdun. Verdun's isolation lent itself well to the development of community spirit and helped foster neighbourhood contacts and the growth of local institutions: self-sufficiency also helped Verdun to prosper.⁵

To maintain the tranquillity to which its citizens had grown accustomed, Verdun's municipal council, as a matter of policy, refused to grant permits for the building of licensed establishments, hotels or any industrial concerns, including tanneries, distilleries, slaughterhouses or any other installations potentially causing foul odours, noise and other

³ The threat to Verdun's municipal independence continued to exist spasmodically until 1921. That year the Montreal Metropolitan Commission, of which Verdun was a member, was established by the provincial legislature with the mandate of overseeing the finances of Montreal's smaller neighbours. Arthur J. Burgess, City Clerk, "*Cité de Verdun: la plus grande banlieu résidentielle de Montreal*", 15 mars 1962, unpagé typewritten report, in Box A-525, file 5, "*Histoire de Verdun*", City of Verdun Archives (hereinafter, CVA). Between 1905 and 1914 26 separate annexations by Montreal swallowed up 16 formerly independent municipalities. See Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*, (Montreal: Boréal, 1992), pp. 202-203 and 353-354.

⁴ Mary Davidson, "The Social Adjustment of British Immigrant Families in Verdun and Point St. Charles", M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1933, p. 13. The word "antagonism" seems a bit strong. None of the subjects alive at that time and interviewed for this study have corroborated that view.

⁵ Davidson, "The Social Adjustment of British Immigrant Families", p. 14.

discomforts to the population.⁶ Many of the small farms located in Verdun in the mid and late nineteenth century (often owned by successful Montreal entrepreneurs) were eventually broken down into smaller lots, a trend fuelled by local realty speculation at the turn of the century. The individual lots, located especially in eastern and east-central Verdun, were then sold for housing construction to accommodate developers as well as the thousands of potential tenants streaming into the Montreal area as a result of urbanization and immigration.⁷

In 1901, 25 years after the municipality had been founded, the population had increased to 1898 inhabitants. Verdun was elevated to the status of Town in 1907, and rapidly grew in population, attaining 6000 inhabitants that year. In 1911, the Dominion Census showed the population of Verdun to have doubled to 11,629. While the ethnic balance in the city at this time was closely split between French and English speakers, in the next few years the proportion of English-speaking residents increased significantly as a result of hundreds of British immigrant families settling in Verdun in search of cheap accommodations. In 1912 Verdun was incorporated as a City.

The early twentieth century phase of residential construction facilitated Verdun's transformation from a rural outpost of Montreal into a community of wage-earning families. Most of the new dwellings were modest two- and three-storey buildings each containing from four to six rented flats. They were erected in that part of east-end Verdun centred along and radiating from Wellington Street and Church Avenue, the commercial centre of the community. Shops and banks were also integrated into the construction boom. These businesses usually occupied the ground floor of residential

⁶ Déziel, p. 72.

⁷ Burgess, "*Cité de Verdun*", Box A-525, file 5, CVA; Déziel, p. 64.

buildings. Symbolic of Verdun's growing stature, a new city hall, also housing the police and fire departments, was built in 1908 on Church Avenue above Wellington Street.⁸

Verdun had no railway station, canal access or, before the 1920s, any significant means of public transit. The main point of traffic contact with adjacent neighbourhoods was along Wellington Street into Point St. Charles and across a bridge spanning the Aqueduct at Church Avenue, which led to Côte St. Paul. Public transit linking Verdun with Montreal was augmented in 1926 by bus service along Verdun Avenue to Atwater Avenue, across the bridge spanning the Lachine Canal there, and up Atwater to Ste. Catherine Street. This route took a mere 19 minutes at rush hour.⁹ Lasalle Boulevard, which wound its way along the riverbank, linked Verdun on its southwestern boundary to the community of Lasalle. The only other significant means of gaining access to Verdun was to land there from the river.¹⁰

Even before the end of the nineteenth century city officials recognized that if the city were to develop physically and attract a larger population, Verdun's notorious problem of annual springtime flooding would have to be solved. In 1895, work on the first riverside dyke was begun. This undertaking proved to be a burden for the small municipality, which struggled for the next thirty years to overcome the rising St. Lawrence River waters and to finance the project. Fears of flooding made Verdun less attractive for business investment or property development.

⁸ Burgess, "*Cité de Verdun*", Box A-525, file 5, CVA.

⁹ Davidson, p. 14.

¹⁰ Two boating clubs, the Verdun Motor Boat Club and the Grand Trunk Boating Club, had wharves in Verdun while two other wharves, one at the foot of Second Avenue in central Verdun and another in the west-end at the foot of Riverview Avenue (located in a section of the city barely inhabited until after the Great War) were able to accommodate light river traffic. A third boating club, the Verdun Yacht Club, was established in the 1930s.

THE GREAT WAR

The years 1914 to 1919 were pivotal ones for Verdun. Perhaps the onset of war had even greater meaning for its inhabitants than for many other Canadians since so many Verdunites were recent British immigrants. This was reflected in the startlingly high enlistment rate recorded among Verdun residents. The city also registered spectacular population growth, attaining perhaps 21,000 inhabitants by the end of 1918 and over 24,000 a year later.

Verdun City Council, during its first wartime meeting on August 10, 1914, like those in so many other cities across the Dominion, solemnly pledged its complete co-operation with the national war effort. After the council members unanimously agreed to hold the positions and pay the salaries of any municipal employees on active service, the meeting was adjourned with the singing of "*O Canada*", "*La Marseillaise*" and "*God Save the King*". The mayor, Joseph Allen, then led a procession of aldermen which "paraded throughout the principal streets of the city".¹¹

The men of Verdun were just as enthusiastic as their civic leaders, judging by the percentage who enlisted. Though no exact figure is available, most postwar press estimates put the number of Verdunites in uniform during the Great War at 4000. If this number is accurate, it translates into approximately 20% of the entire population of the city by war's end.¹² The Verdun branch (No. 4) of the Canadian Legion estimated in 1940 that during the Great War 2500 Verdunites served overseas while "a conservative

¹¹ City of Verdun, Council Minutes (hereinafter cited as Council Minutes), August 10, 1914; *La Presse*, August 11, 1914.

¹² *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 25, 1924 states 2500 Verdun mothers sent sons overseas while in its edition of October 6, 1924 it reproduces the figure of 4000.

estimate" of 500 others remained on duty in Canada.¹³ This seems a more measured assessment. Whichever of these figures is most accurate, it constituted an enormous percentage of the city's available manpower.

As the council minutes for the years 1914 to 1918 indicate, the City of Verdun agreed to almost all of the many requests for financial and material support made of the municipality by local and national war-related charitable groups and organizations. This support included substantial financial contributions to the Canadian Patriotic Fund and the Canadian Red Cross Society. In addition, the city established a fund to care for the impoverished families of Verdunites on active service. Verdun also granted militia units the use of the city hall gymnasium and other municipally-owned property for drilling and, at various times throughout the war, allowed several regiments the use of the city hall or municipal property to establish recruiting stations.

Partly because of this generous support, the war soon proved a drain on Verdun's resources. In January 1915, the mayor, Allen, noted in his annual report that the war had caused great uncertainty and dislocation in financial markets and that, accordingly, Verdun was "obliged to close down all work on capital account and cut down expenditures as much as possible in every department".¹⁴ Patriotism had its price, but the war could also prove profitable.

In February 1916, the British Munitions Company, a National Factory (forerunner to the Crown Corporations of the Second World War), requested of Verdun the permission to

¹³ Letter from the Verdun branch (No. 4) of the Canadian Legion to Verdun City Council, July 22, 1940, Box A-331, file 6, CVA; *The 1939 Anniversary Programme of the Verdun (No. 4) Branch of the British Empire Service League*, October 31, 1939, p. 9.

¹⁴ Council Minutes, January 11, 1915. The nation as a whole was slow to shrug off the effects of a serious downturn in the Canadian economy which lasted from 1913 until well into 1915.

erect a munitions plant producing time fuses, loaded with powder and fitted to 18-pounder artillery shells.¹⁵ Anxious to participate in the war effort, and to attract investment, the city allowed the company to build on a large vacant lot in east-end Verdun along River Street just above Wellington, on the city limits bordering Point St. Charles.¹⁶ British Munitions was Verdun's first significant industry. By agreement with the city, British Munitions was obliged to employ, as much as possible given the requirements for specialized workers, "Verdun labour in preference to outside labour".¹⁷ A later press account estimated that some 4000 people, most of them women and many of them Verdunites, found employment at British Munitions up to the time of the Armistice.¹⁸

By October 1916 the plant was in full operation producing 25,000 fuses daily with production later rising to between 30,000 and 40,000 fuses daily. By June 1918 over eight million fuses had been produced in Verdun, half of Canadian wartime fuse production.¹⁹ After this date, declining demand halted production and the site was sold the next year to Dominion Textiles. Business had been good and Verdun reaped its share of the nation-wide industrial boom.

Though it brought employment to Verdun, the war also imposed a social burden. In April 1919, J.A.A. Leclair, the mayor since 1917, recalled the family stress the war had caused in Verdun. Speaking before City Council, he stated that Verdun "has had to struggle

¹⁵ David Carnegie, *The History of Munitions Supply in Canada*, (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1925), pp. 76-81.

¹⁶ Council Minutes, March 13, 1916.

¹⁷ Council Minutes, June 26, 1916.

¹⁸ *The Guardian*, Special Supplement, May 23, 1946; Carnegie, *The History of Munitions Supply in Canada*, pp. 148-49.

¹⁹ Council Minutes, October 23, 1916; Carnegie, pp. 144-147.

against difficult financial, moral and social situations created through the state of war."²⁰ In addition to the bereavement suffered in the community as a result of the hundreds of casualties incurred by its men in uniform, the war led to hardship for many of the men's dependents. The city had good reason to welcome the cessation of hostilities.

Meanwhile, the burning wartime issue of conscription had elicited little debate at Verdun City Council meetings. Perhaps this was because the mayor and eight aldermen, five of whom from April 1917 were English speaking, were not necessarily opposed to the idea: no evidence exists that the French-speaking members of city council disapproved of the proposal. In January 1917 City Council unanimously sanctioned the actions of the federal government in issuing identity cards for national service registration and vowed to do all in its power to ensure that the citizens of Verdun completed and returned them to the proper authorities.²¹ Notwithstanding its national prominence, the subject of conscription was mentioned no more in the minutes of city council. On the other hand, when two federal ministers, Charles Doherty and C.C. Ballantyne, spoke at Verdun City Hall in defence of the Military Service Act, they were shouted down with cries of "Vive Laurier!". The ministers left the building under police protection while outside fighting broke out in the gathering crowd.²² Verdunites, like the country itself, were divided over the issue along linguistic and political lines.

Two events solidified the memory of the city's Great War patriotism and helped shape Verdunites' patriotic responses in the period 1939-1945. The postwar era for this staunchly British community began on an exciting note when the Prince of Wales visited Verdun on October 30, 1919 during his Canadian tour. During that visit, he granted Verdun the honour of flying his personal standard from the flagpole atop city hall in

²⁰ Council Minutes, April 22, 1919.

²¹ Council Minutes, January 8, 1917.

²² *La Presse*, December 13, 1917.

recognition of Verdun's record of having obtained the highest per capita enlistment rate of any city in the British Empire.²³ For Verdun this was the source of considerable pride, and the city's military record was often remarked upon in the interwar period. Local newspaper articles, political speeches and correspondence from City Hall and the local Legion branch often made reference to Verdun's enormous wartime contribution. The city's English-speaking community usually explained Verdun's notable participation rate by invoking the city's desire to serve the Empire. Indeed, a high percentage of enlistees were British born.

On October 5, 1924 another important civic ceremony took place in Verdun. The city's Great War cenotaph was unveiled in a small but prominent park located at the intersection of Lasalle Boulevard and Wellington Street near the northeastern city limits. Entitled simply, "*Vimy*" the monument was cast in bronze by the well-known Montreal sculptor, Coeur de lion McCarthy, who also cast the famous Great War memorial statue in the concourse of Montreal's Windsor Station.²⁴

The next day the unveiling ceremony was given impressive coverage in *The Montreal Daily Star*. In recognition of Verdun's Great War record, the former commander of the Canadian Corps, General Sir Arthur Currie, at that time Principal of McGill University, delivered the inaugural address. Every unit in Military District (M.D.) No. 4 was represented at this ceremony, which attracted an estimated 25,000 onlookers, including thousands of veterans and relatives of the fallen.²⁵ The number of Verdunites who lost

²³ The Prince's visit appears to have been rather hastily arranged. The possibility of his visit was not recorded in the minutes of city council until September 22, 1919. As late as October 27 it was still uncertain whether the visit would take place.

²⁴ Robert Shipley, *To Mark Our Place: A History of Canadian War Memorials*. (Toronto: NC Press, 1987), p. xx.

²⁵ *The Montreal Daily Star*, October 6, 1924. The name "Verdun" became famous worldwide during the Great War as a result of the successful and costly defence of the city and fortress of that name by the French. This famous siege and battle of Verdun also had the

their lives during the war is not recorded, though by May 1917 it was estimated to be several hundred.²⁶ The actual unveiling of the Union Jack shrouding the memorial was performed by Mrs. Jane Leavitt, Verdun's most celebrated Silver Cross mother, also called "the Mother of Verdun". She had immigrated with her family from London to Verdun in 1913 at which time the youngest of her nine children was 14 years old. Of five sons on active service, her three eldest were killed and a fourth was wounded and discharged.²⁷

During the Great War Verdun and Verdunites had set a standard of military service unequalled in the Empire. In the interwar period and during the Second World War this fact was common knowledge in Verdun and helped foster a strong sense of civic patriotism among that second consecutive generation of Verdunites to go to war. Verdun's British character during the Great War continued and the city's large veteran community spent 20 years perpetuating the ideals of loyalty, civic pride and service. Despite the hardship it engendered the Great War also allowed for population growth and industrial expansion while linguistic tension did not seem especially pronounced. A sense of optimism pervaded the community following the signing of the Armistice.

effect of inflecting the name of the Canadian city with a poignant additional meaning. Many people in Verdun and elsewhere long believed thereafter that the Canadian city had been named for the French one. Curiously, several times during the Great War, in official, war-related correspondence emanating from Verdun City Hall, it was erroneously stated that Verdun, Québec was named for Verdun, France. See for example Council Minutes, June 24, 1918.

²⁶ *La Presse*, May 11, 1917.

²⁷ *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 25 and October 6, 1924; *The 1939 Anniversary Programme of the Verdun (No. 4) Branch of the British Empire Service League*, October 31, 1939, p. 9. *The Guardian*, October 9, 1942, stated Mrs. Leavitt had three grandsons enlisted during the Second World War.

THE YEARS OF GROWTH

In the immediate postwar period Verdun welcomed home its demobilized soldiers. New dwellings were built to accommodate them as well as several thousand wartime civilian arrivals. As in the prewar years these brick structures were largely low-cost and low-rent rows of flats of the multi-family triplex and later duplex variety. Schools, parks, playgrounds, streets, sewers and other infrastructural requirements were also built as development moved in a steady southwesterly direction. Large swaths of open land beyond Willibrord Avenue and above Verdun Avenue gave way to newly-created neighbourhoods. Canada's immigration policy in the 1920s was restrictive to most but British migrants and many British newcomers found a ready and welcome support network in Verdun. The city soon took on the characteristics of a virtual boom town. Mary Davidson claimed in her 1933 study that half of Verdun had been built since the end of the war²⁸ and the city quickly earned a deserved reputation as Montreal's greatest "bedroom" community.

At the same time Verdun was also described as taking on a "patchwork" appearance.²⁹ Some streets were entirely of three-story triplexes others of duplexes or a mixture of both styles. The occasional, usually inexpensive, single-family dwellings were found in some older areas of east-end Verdun, as well as along the prime real estate on the waterfront. The triplexes were concentrated in central Verdun especially in long, unvarying avenues of flats, joined together until interrupted by perpendicular lanes which announced the next street intersection. Little sunlight filtered into these accommodations since windows existed only in the front and back and the flats were located on narrow streets.

²⁸ Davidson, p. 19.

²⁹ Davidson, pp. 21-22.

These most typical of Verdun structures were characterized in the front by winding, external wooden staircases of the sort for which the working-class districts of Montreal are renowned. Linked to the back of these dwellings were corrugated tin sheds with interior wooden staircases used to store wood, coal and personal belongings. These sheds, which proved great fire hazards, overlooked narrow lanes and, across these lanes, the back sheds belonging to flats having frontage on the next street. There were no yards accompanying these rows of flats, though a patch of land suitable for small gardens or simple recreational activity was available off the laneway to families occupying the ground-floor dwellings. Even smaller plots of land in the front of the flats existed for show purposes only. To make up for this lack of space the lanes themselves were used as the communal backyards of all those living in the flats adjoining them, and succeeding generations of Verdun families grew up in these surroundings.

This Verdun lifestyle fostered a sense of common identity and shared experience. People came to know each other and neighbourhood friendship networks developed which became a staple of Verdun life. The four to six rooms per flat were usually small and the existence of only one ventilation shaft for all six flats in a triplex allowed families little privacy, especially since these ventilation shafts, domed by skylights, adjoined each family's bathroom. Davidson described this common corridor as "as good a conductor of family quarrels as are the flimsy walls which separate the flats".³⁰

If Verdun's living accommodations were less than glamorous its public spaces could be spectacular and the city's natural riverside beauty defined the community and instilled it with pride. In 1926 the city constructed a handsome three-mile promenade on top of the riverfront dyke. Made of wide wooden floorboards, the promenade was flanked along the entire river side of the walkway by a linked series of stone pillars on which light standards were installed. Several band shelters were also built along the promenade and

³⁰ Davidson, p. 23.

the city extolled the sporting and recreational virtues of Verdun's magnificent riverscape. This "boardwalk", as it became known, was proudly claimed by City Hall to rival that of Atlantic City for length and the Dufferin Terrace in Québec City for the view. Civic boosters insisted Verdun was an ideal setting in which to raise children; and many young working-class couples were attracted to the city. Verdunites themselves believed their city attracted large numbers of new residents because of its low rents and cost of living as well as for its beautiful riverside location close to downtown Montreal.³¹

Following completion of the dyke-boardwalk project, Verdun's population growth, already increasing steadily from 1920, increased significantly. In the period 1921-1931, the population grew by an astonishing 143% to 60,745. Most of the gains occurred in the last five years of the decade. This made Verdun the third-largest city in the province and Canada's fastest-growing city.³² With a surface area of a mere 3.7 square kilometres, Verdun was easily the most densely populated city in Canada with an alarmingly high 1931 ratio of 27,240 inhabitants per square mile.³³ Suburbanization was a nation-wide phenomenon and the Montreal-area cities of Westmount, Outremont and St. Lambert also doubled their (considerably smaller) populations in this postwar decade. The City of Montreal's growth rate was less impressive and Verdun was the only part of the working-class southwestern Montreal area to grow in population during the interwar period.³⁴

³¹ *Verdun Directory 1929-1930*, p. 11, Box A-80, CVA.

³² 1941 Census, Volume II, p. 210.

³³ By 1941 this ratio had climbed to 30,201 inhabitants per square mile. See *Annuaire statistique de Québec*, 1940, p. 63 and 1941 Census, Volume II, pp. 9-10.

³⁴ John H. Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), pp. 99-100; Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal*, pp. 355-358.

A strong sense of pride and optimism pervaded Verdun. The city expanded into fringe areas of the city previously characterized by empty lots and fields. Buoyant Verdun, however, was on the verge of experiencing the nadir of its fortunes.

THE YEARS OF DEPRESSION

The causes and especially the effects of the Great Depression of 1929 to 1939 in Canada have been well documented.³⁵ Unemployment rose steadily in Canada from 1930, peaking nationally at 33% of the non-agricultural labour force in the winter of 1933 and remaining high for the rest of the decade.³⁶ Canada's least skilled workers in industry, construction and manufacturing were usually the first to lose their jobs or be chronically under-employed and to remain so for the longest periods of time. As Verdun was populated predominantly by families deriving their principal sources of income from wage work in nearby factories and transportation industries, or from clerical work in downtown Montreal, the city, like so many others, was devastated by this unprecedented economic crisis.

The metropolitan region of Montreal was one of the worst affected urban areas of the country. In February 1934, 240,000 residents of Montreal proper, or 28% of that city's population, were dependent on municipal relief payments. These figures do not include the families of those whose working hours or wages, or both, were slashed or those who were without the means of subsistence and yet remained ineligible for direct relief.³⁷

³⁵ For an overview of this Depression decade as it specifically effects Verdun, the only useful source is Suzanne Clavette, "*Des bons aux chèques: aide aux chômeurs et crise des années 1930 à Verdun*". M.A. thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1986. Some reliance has been placed on this work in preparing this section.

³⁶ Thompson with Seager, *Decades of Discord*, p. 215.

³⁷ Denyse Baillargeon, *Ménagères au temps de la crise*, (Montréal: Les éditions du remue-ménage, 1991), pp. 20-21.

The situation in Verdun, so dependent on the Montreal economy, was very similar. In the early 1930s Verdun was hit by unemployment on a par with other large Canadian urban centres and suffered a jobless rate approximating the national average of between 20% and 25% of the non-agricultural labour force. (Verdun consistently had a lower unemployment rate than its neighbour, Montreal.) In 1933 just under 30% of Verdun residents survived with municipal assistance. This number stabilized in the next several years at about 19% until 1937, in which year it declined even further.³⁸ But in the meantime, conditions remained harsh. By 1938 40% of unemployed Verdunites were unskilled, indicating that these persons were having the most difficulty finding and keeping jobs during the course of the decade.³⁹

While Verdun had granted some aid to desperate cases since late 1929, especially during winter months, in January 1932 the municipally-operated and financed Verdun Unemployment Relief Commission was established to handle the increasing number of applications for municipal relief assistance from impoverished families. Displaying a strong sense of community, the city prided itself in the fact that "this was the first independent unemployment relief commission in the Province, if not in the Dominion".⁴⁰

³⁸ Clavette, pp. 113-114; *The Guardian*, July 11, 1941; P.H. Lane, "Unemployment Relief 1929-1936", typewritten report of the Verdun Unemployment Relief Commission, 1936, p. 3, Box A-237, file 24, CVA. At the peak of the crisis in Verdun in March 1933, 14,823 Verdunites depended on direct relief payments totalling \$100,000 monthly. Others depended on public works assignments.

³⁹ Clavette, "*Des bons aux chèques*", pp. 111-116, 324 and 337.

⁴⁰ P.H. Lane, "Unemployment Relief 1929-1936", p. 1, Box A-237, file 24, CVA. Most of the recipients of municipal assistance at this time were Protestant families, since French- and English-speaking Catholic families continued to be referred to their parish St. Vincent de Paul Society which, even prior to the creation of the Commission, had enjoyed partial funding from the city for relief purposes, as had the Protestant Ministerial Association. In 1933 the city assumed centralized responsibility for allocating relief to all its needy residents, regardless of their religion.

As with other Canadian municipalities, the Verdun Relief Commission established a residency rule. To obtain relief, a family must have been resident in Verdun for at least the previous six months. Raised to a full year of residency in December 1934 and to two years in 1936, this was generous compared to Montreal's four years by 1938. Without these restrictions, the city feared a stampede of unemployed workers and their families from other municipalities. There was reason for concern. Verdun's well-organized relief system and comparatively lenient residency requirements made it an attractive destination for families down on their luck. In 1936 the city estimated that 40% of those on relief had moved to Verdun *after* 1930.⁴¹ This raises the possibility that Verdun's pre-Depression population was not as hard-hit as relief and unemployment statistics by themselves would imply.⁴²

The city's generous response to the plight of residents reinforced the sense of community prevalent in Verdun and constituted an example of the feeling of mutual aid which permeated Verdun society. In May 1933, after "considerable pressure" had been brought to bear against the budget-conscious provincial government to permit municipal shelter assistance, the City of Verdun assumed responsibility for part of the rents of the unemployed.⁴³ The city also distributed oil lamps to residents who had suffered an interruption in their power supply owing to non-payment of bills. Subsequently, the city provided allowances for the payment of electricity bills and even moving costs (usually if the destination was outside of Verdun) as well as for the purchase of extra milk, stoves,

⁴¹ Clavette, p. 185.

⁴² Nevertheless, overcrowding, under-nourishment and the financial inability to secure needed remedies led to a general deterioration in the health of the city's poor. For example, of 622 Protestant elementary school children examined by Verdun health officials between April 1932 and January 1933, 70% had some form of health problem while nearly 60% had dental problems requiring treatment. See Davidson, p. 94.

⁴³ Lane, p. 2.

furniture, mattresses and clothing.⁴⁴ These measures made Hervé Ferland, the populist mayor from 1933 to 1939, very popular among many of Verdun's poorest residents. The City of Verdun was proud of its relief organization and of the careful manner the payments were financed. In 1941 the general manager and chief financial administrator of the city, J.R. French, announced that since 1936 the entire relief effort had been managed by using traditional sources of revenue such as property taxes and license fees.⁴⁵ Few Canadian cities could boast as much.

While the unemployment rate had dropped noticeably by 1937, Verdun's thinner relief rolls were attributable to the city's policy of "hiring" relief recipients for public works projects. The city's public works program was one of the most extensive in Québec and Verdun's experience with this scheme was generally treated as the bench-mark against which other municipalities' programs were measured.⁴⁶ As early as 1930 the city sought to obtain tangible results from its relief expenditures. In return for an investment in the costs of building materials, supervision and the occasional hiring of some specialized labour, the city obtained the services of unemployed able-bodied Verdunites. Their willingness to work was a prerequisite for the continuation of their relief payments which, as work relief, were 20% higher than basic direct relief. In this way, large capital projects such as the building of the Verdun Auditorium (begun in September 1938) and the Natatorium swimming pool complex (completed in 1940), road work, an improved sewer system and the provision of municipal services such as snow removal and landscaping were undertaken at minimal cost.

⁴⁴ Baillargeon, *Ménagères*, pp. 200-201. See also Lane, p. 3. Verdun was proportionately far more generous in its relief allocations than was Montreal and Linteau, p. 379, has written that Verdun was one of the most generous municipalities in the country. Even in 1944, the city held a picnic for 1500 local children whose families could not afford a vacation. *The Montreal Daily Star*, August 24, 1944.

⁴⁵ *The Guardian*, February 21, 1941.

⁴⁶ See for example *The Montreal Daily Star*, May 4, 1940 in which several City of Montreal aldermen are quoted as wishing Montreal had followed Verdun's lead.

By April 1939 the worst of the Depression was over, although there were still 1625 heads of Verdun families on municipal relief rolls. The situation improved considerably in the course of the summer of 1939 as seasonal work linked to the opening of the shipping season and construction projects provided employment opportunities for Verdunites. By the end of May, the number of family heads receiving relief payments was down to 1352. A year later, there were still 1219 families on the rolls.⁴⁷ The Verdun Unemployment Commission wound up its business in July 1941 (only a few months after the provincial government discontinued its share of funding municipal direct relief) at which time only 130 Verdun heads of families were receiving relief from among a population in excess of 67,000.⁴⁸

Statistically, Verdun does not appear to have been as adversely affected as its working-class social structure might suggest. If Verdunites with memories of the Depression are unlikely to describe their experiences as miserable⁴⁹, it might be because those many who did suffer from its effects seem to have been reasonably well cared for by a farsighted municipal administration. But the widely shared experience of hard times in closely-knit Verdun solidified intra-community ties and helped shape the city's common responses during the trying years of the Second World War.

THE POLITICS OF PROTEST

Verdun's distinctive social character and experiences during the Depression shaped much of the city's political life in the 1930s. Local politics reflected community dynamics.

⁴⁷ *The Guardian*, June 9, 1939 and May 3, 1940; *The Montreal Daily Star*, May 4, 1940.

⁴⁸ *The Guardian*, July 11, 1941.

⁴⁹ None of the people interviewed for this study who grew up during the Depression were willing to characterize these years as worse than difficult and, even at that, they shared excellent memories of the 1930s. Tellingly, perhaps, none of them were older than 11 in 1929.

With its high unemployment rate and large population, which included a significant number of British-born industrial workers previously exposed to radical politics, Verdun was an ideal breeding ground for the politics of protest in the ideologically volatile 1930s. The Verdun Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (C.C.F.) Club, founded in July 1933, was the first branch of this nascent political movement established in Québec. Hervé Ferland was elected mayor that year under the banner of the C.C.F. Once the Communist Party of Canada had been suppressed in 1931, the Labour Progressive Party, the Canadian League Against War and Fascism, the Friends of the Soviet Union and the Canadian Labour Defence League all established sections in Verdun. Many French-speaking Verdun members of the Labour Defence League soon publicly denounced it when it became clear that it was a communist-front organization.⁵⁰

George S. Mooney, the social activist secretary of Verdun's Y.M.C.A. branch and an active C.C.F. member, organized political lectures at the local Y.M.C.A. delivered by well-known national figures such as J.S. Woodsworth, F.R. Scott, King Gordon, Eugene Forsey, Leonard Marsh and James Simpson, the C.C.F. mayor of Toronto.⁵¹ The Y.M.C.A. became a centre for the discussion of "profound subjects" and on Sunday afternoons throughout the Depression Mooney organized information sessions for the city's army of unemployed. He wielded considerable influence among the committed Left in Verdun during this difficult decade.⁵² The popularity of the Verdun C.C.F., almost wholly among English speakers, indicated the community's dissatisfaction with the reigning political and economic order.

⁵⁰ Clavette, pp. 51 and 61; Wendell MacLeod, et. al., *Bethune: The Montreal Years*, (Toronto: Lorimer, 1978), pp. 78 and 92.

⁵¹ Clavette, p. 51.

⁵² Interview with Gordon Galbraith, former Verdun C.C.F. activist, November 13, 1993. Eugene Forsey, in his *A Life on the Fringe*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 50, recalls Mooney's well-deserved popularity in Verdun and the great hopes held by the C.C.F. that he would be elected from Verdun in the 1935 federal election.

Several workers' organizations were formed which pressed all levels of government to improve the living conditions of Verdun's unemployed. The Verdun Workmen's Association and the Verdun Unemployed Association were the most radical groups, almost exclusively English-speaking. The Verdun Labour Union attracted more moderate, mainly unemployed English speakers and virtually all the French Canadian Verdunites who joined workmen's groups. Leaders of Verdun's French-speaking society generally denounced the perceived communist influences in the other two organizations. The well-established Verdun Workmen's Association maintained an office with a permanent staff as well as a regular presence at meetings of the Verdun City Council, especially in 1933 and 1934. It also enjoyed close ties with the local C.C.F. organization.⁵³

In July 1932, before the city instituted its comprehensive relief programs, the simmering social malaise boiled over in Verdun when a large gathering of some 2000 unemployed workers, demanding a more vigorous response to their plight on the part of municipal authorities, left their assembly point in Woodland Park, along the waterfront, and proceeded along Wellington Street to Church Avenue and up Church to the city hall, located at the corner of Evelyn Avenue. Members of the Verdun Police and Fire Department were ready for them, and fire hoses were turned on the crowd.⁵⁴ The times themselves were troubled and Verdun, ordinarily tightly-knit, could not escape the social and political pressures which several anxious years of dislocation had wrought.

⁵³ Clavette, pp. 59-61; Duarte Nuno Lopes, "The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Quebec, 1932-1950", M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1986, p. 14; Forsey, *A Life on the Fringe*, p. 53. Forsey wrote that in 1932 he "promptly" joined the C.C.F.'s only Montreal affiliate, the Verdun Labour Party.

⁵⁴ Interview with Joe Way September 21, 1993; Clavette pp. 57 and 59.

One of Canada's great protest elections, the October 1935 federal poll drew eleven candidates in Verdun, the largest number in any riding.⁵⁵ The front-runners were considered to be Mooney, representing the C.C.F., and Hervé Ferland, the colourful, sometimes controversial mayor who had been re-elected in April 1935, and who was running as an Independent candidate (though he later claimed to be running as the "Verdun Party" candidate). The Liberal candidate, Thomas Guerin, the son of a former mayor of Montreal, and the Conservative standard-bearer, former alderman Jules E. Wermenlinger, his party thoroughly discredited nation-wide, were considered secondary candidates by the local press. *The Guardian* clearly favoured Mooney, which is mildly surprising given the socialist stance espoused by his party and the conservative nature of that newspaper.⁵⁶

A record 70% of the Verdun electorate cast their ballots and, to the shock of most observers, the Tory candidate, Wermenlinger, local merchant and son of an Alsatian immigrant, won the close contest with 5602 votes; Mooney polled 4706 and Ferland 4214. Guerin finished in fifth place behind the Labour Party candidate.⁵⁷

The election clearly underlined Verdun's distinctive political culture. With 18.8% of the popular vote Mooney was by far the most successful of the three Montreal-area C.C.F. candidates.⁵⁸ A significant proportion of English-speaking voters chose the Tory candidate. That a French-speaking Conservative running in a Québec constituency containing a majority of English-speaking voters could win election at a time when his

⁵⁵ Thompson with Seager, p. 273.

⁵⁶ *The Guardian*, October 11, 1935.

⁵⁷ *Canadian Parliamentary Guide 1936*, p. 349.

⁵⁸ Michiel Horn, "Lost Causes: The League for Social Reconstruction and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Quebec in the 1930s and 1940s", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1984, p. 137.

party was being decimated nation-wide indicates the unyielding Tory loyalties and distinct political culture of large numbers of Verdun voters.

It was also surprising that Mooney did not poll more successfully among English-speaking voters, many of whom were unemployed or who were employed as industrial workers in nearby Point St. Charles. Many among the British immigrant community had been Old Country trade unionists who formed a ready pool of C.C.F. electoral support. Though Mooney clearly obtained some of their votes, many workers voted for the Labour Party, effectively splitting the English-speaking workers' vote and denying Mooney victory. Ferland was the candidate of choice for most French speakers. As it was, from 1935 to 1940 Verdun was represented in Parliament by an Opposition member.

Verdun remained a source of support for leftist causes throughout the 1930s. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), mainly English-speaking bodies of unemployed Verdun workers intermittently demonstrated on behalf of the Republican cause. This invited a French Canadian Catholic reaction, with the Knights of Columbus leading the charge. Ideology fuelled the existing divisions of religion and language. The Catholic groups petitioned City Hall to muzzle Republican sentiment in the city. The authorities responded that this issue was a federal matter and not within the jurisdiction of the municipality to regulate. Another issue which led to public outcry was a demonstration in Verdun in November 1937 organized by well-known Montreal lawyer and outspoken C.C.F. civil libertarian, R.L. Calder, to protest the infamous Padlock Law passed by the Duplessis government. This rally attracted 900 people.⁵⁹ Even before the outbreak of the Second World War, Verdun had established its anti-fascist credentials, though not without some opposition from conservative, generally Catholic and French-speaking elements in the city.

⁵⁹ Clavette, pp. 55-56.

A few Verdunites were also attracted to other forms of political protest. The screaming *Guardian* headline of April 15, 1938 announced "Nazi Demonstration Held in Verdun". The National Socialist Christian Party had established a Verdun branch. The party's leader, Adrien Arcand, had attended the rally, which took place in the Legion Hall on Verdun Avenue. The Legion apologetically claimed that they would never have rented their hall to this group had it known of the meeting's political purpose. The fascist group apparently had been operating in Verdun for one month, its members formerly associated with the St. Henri branch. But as the latter was a large section, a chapter was organized in Verdun to accommodate local members. The leader of the Verdun Nazis, Dr. Joseph Napoléon Fortin, who lived on Church Avenue in the east end, believed that the potential existed for a "formidable" organization in Verdun.⁶⁰

A further fascist meeting was held on May 11, 1938 at a hall on Wellington Street. The gathering attracted 250 listeners (though not all were Verdunites) and included an estimated 50-60 men wearing blue-shirt uniforms. Arcand was once again present and, when he denounced the alleged Jewish control of labour unions, about a dozen hecklers clashed with the fascists. Police intervened before the violence escalated.⁶¹ Some of those attending the rally were veterans and at least some were English-speaking Verdunites.⁶² No further mention is made in the pre-war or wartime local press of Arcand's fascists in Verdun.

Language played a strong role in Verdun politics and would continue to do so during the Second World War. English speakers, politically divided, were more prone to espouse

⁶⁰ *The Guardian*, April 22, 1938. Fortin never got the chance to find out: he was interned in June 1940 with Arcand and other Fascist leaders and not released from his Fredericton internment camp until October 1942. Box A-361, file "Enemy Aliens 1940-1942", CVA.

⁶¹ *The Guardian*, May 13, 1938.

⁶² Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf*. (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1978), pp. 118 and 129-130.

radical leftist causes. They formed the bulk of the population and made up a low proportion of Verdun's landlord, business and professional class. The city's political culture and behaviour was grounded on linguistic and class lines.

At the height of the Depression, an extremely contentious change was made in the structure of the municipal government. In 1932 and 1933 the influential and entirely French-speaking *La Ligue des Propriétaires de Verdun* fought to set up an Executive Committee of City Council to be comprised of four aldermen, one from each ward, elected directly by the city's landlords. The mayor would also be a member. The remaining four aldermen, one from each ward, would continue to be elected by all voters, as would the mayor. All nine officials would continue to sit as a Committee of the Whole. Effectively, landlords would exercise two votes every election.

The landlords' insistence on this change grew out of a desire to remove control of the city's finances from aldermen potentially championing the causes of the unemployed. Two-thirds of municipal revenue was collected in the form of property taxes and landlords objected to the city's tendency to spend municipal revenues on relief payments to large numbers of tenants, the majority of whom were English speaking.. The landlords succeeded in securing the support of the City Council, which requested provincial sanction to amend Verdun's municipal charter to create an Executive Committee. The Executive Committee was empowered to control budgetary allocations and all other matters pertaining to municipal finances. Verdun divided along class and language lines over this explosive issue.

Opposition in the community to the property owners' measure was strong, particularly on the part of English-speaking groups.⁶³ The Verdun Voters' League, the local branch of the Canadian Legion, the Verdun Workmen's Association and the Labour Progressive

⁶³ Clavette, p. 86, considers this issue the most controversial in Verdun during the 1930s.

Party all opposed this measure, as did the 1933 mayoral candidate and (at this time) C.C.F. supporter Hervé Ferland, Alderman Edward Wilson and Y.M.C.A. secretary George Mooney. A petition against the proposal contained the names of over 1000 Verdunites and was brought to Québec City by representatives of these groups. The arguments advanced against the initiative were that, as things already stood, only landowners could stand for election to the city council and that the Montreal Metropolitan Commission already oversaw the finances of area municipalities. Moreover, the premise that only a select group of landlords elected by their peers should control the city's budget seemed fundamentally undemocratic, as Wilson tirelessly pointed out. Intra-Verdun class conflict, opposing proprietors to the remainder of the tenant electorate, many of whom were jobless, was highlighted as never before.

The Québec Legislature passed the motion to alter Verdun's municipal charter on March 29, 1933, less than two weeks before the municipal elections in which populist candidate Hervé Ferland was elected mayor.⁶⁴ But there was little he could do about the situation since it was also stipulated in the charter amendment that it required two-thirds of council members to reject the Executive Committee's decisions. With five members of the nine-member civic administration (including the mayor) sitting in Verdun's 'upper chamber', overturning the Committee's decisions could only occur if the Committee itself contained two dissentient voices.⁶⁵

Language was an important issue in this matter. Most Verdun property owners were French speaking while most tenants, not to mention most of the financially-strapped unemployed, were English speaking. In Davidson's view opposition to the Executive Committee was based solely on ethno-linguistic, and not class lines. Verdun's English-

⁶⁴ This appears to indicate that the electorate was opposed to the change and that Ferland was supported by English-speaking voters.

⁶⁵ Clavette, pp. 86-88. The opportunistic Ferland would later reverse his stance on the matter and support the new arrangement.

speaking majority believed that the Executive Committee was a form of linguistic discrimination.⁶⁶ This view must be tempered by the fact that a large majority of Verdun residents from each language group were tenants. In 1931 88% of Verdun households were occupied by tenants. A difficult decade later the percentage of tenants in the city had risen to 90%.⁶⁷ From a total of nearly 3400 property owners, Clavette has estimated, conservatively, given the fact that only 24% of them were Protestant, that at least 60% were French Canadian and that, overall, 32.5% were non-resident. *La Ligue des Propriétaires de Verdun*, fluctuating between 100 and 200 members in the 1930s, was exclusively French-speaking.⁶⁸ All four members of the Executive Committee were French-speakers, which constituted a form of class distinction based on language. Heading into the war elements of Verdun society were divided along linguistic lines. The city's motto, "*E Viribus Duorum*" ("From the Strength of Both"), would be put to the test.

VERDUN SOCIETY IN 1939

One of the principal concerns of the present work is to determine the extent of Verdunites' contributions to the war effort, to examine them variously through the prisms of language, gender and class and to demonstrate some of the effects of the war on Verdun's social structure. Consequently, a brief sketch of the people of Verdun is required to place into proper perspective the events of the war as they affected that municipality. Verdunites' ethnicity is described in Table 1.1. Its religious affiliation is detailed in Table 1.2.

⁶⁶ Davidson, pp. 182-183.

⁶⁷ 1931 Census, Volume V, pp. 990-991 and 1941 Census, Volume V, pp. 106-107.

⁶⁸ Clavette, p. 89.

TABLE 1.1 ETHNIC ORIGIN OF VERDUNITES 1931 AND 1941⁶⁹

Origin	1931		1941	
		%		%
English	20342	33.5	21530	32.0
Scottish	8631	14.2	8263	12.3
Irish	5665	9.3	5966	8.9
other British	331	0.5	303	.4
total British	34969	57.5	36062	53.6
French	23277	38.3	28242	42.0
German	464	.8	376	.6
Scandinavian	356	.6	320	.5
Hebrew	344	.6	471	.7
Italian	204	.3	295	.5
other European	821	1.3	1136	1.7
Black	231	.4	215	.3
Asian	62	.1	78	.1
other/not stated	17	-	26	-
Total	60745	100.0	67349	100.0

⁶⁹ 1931 Census, Volume II, pp. 498-499; 1941 Census, Volume II, pp. 382 and 516.

TABLE 1.2 RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION IN VERDUN 1941⁷⁰

	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
Total Population	67349	100.0*
Roman Catholic	37225	55.2
Anglican	14056	20.8
United	6549	9.7
Presbyterian	5947	8.8
Baptist	1609	2.3
Lutheran	352	0.5
Salvation Army	126	0.2
Other Protestant	330	0.4
Total Protestant	28969	42.7
Jewish	442	0.7
Greek Orthodox	243	0.4
Other/not stated	470	0.7

* Figures add up to 99.7% due to rounding.

French Canadians were 97.6% Catholic while 74% of Verdun's Catholics were of French origin. The English made up 79% of Anglicans though only 51.6% of the English were Anglican (almost 17% being Catholics). The Irish were 62.4% Catholic but made up only 10% of the city's Catholic population. The Scots accounted for 61% of all Presbyterians though only 44% of Scots were Presbyterian, a further 20% being United and 15% Catholic.⁷¹

⁷⁰ 1941 Census, Volume II, p. 580 and Volume III, pp. 253-254.

⁷¹ 1941 Census, Volume IV, pp. 158-161.

Any discussion of Verdun society in the period 1939-1945 must recognize the British character of the city.⁷² During the war Verdun was home to the densest per capita concentration of British-born residents in the Montreal area and constituted a virtual bastion of British 'Old Country' values and allegiances. English-speakers, both Canadian and British born, including non-British ethnics, comprised nearly 60% of Verdun's population. As much as class, economic circumstance, individual response or family demography, Verdun's British character explains the city's remarkable record of military enlistments during the Second World War.

By 1914, bolstered by massive prewar immigration, perhaps 10,000 English speakers, a high percentage of whom were British born, lived in Verdun, which then had a growing population of approximately 15,000.⁷³ Although immigration to Canada from the British Isles and elsewhere slowed dramatically during the Great War, Verdun continued to increase in population as a result of internal migration and the city's location close to war industries. In 1919 the city numbered over 24,000.

The 1921 census indicates that the largest concentration of these British-born (including Irish) newcomers to Québec were artisans, at least semi-skilled workers. They worked in heavy industry, especially iron and steel (a Canada-wide trend for British immigrants).

⁷² Three 1933 Masters theses by researchers from McGill University's innovative Social Research Group, headed by Carl Dawson and Leonard Marsh, explored different aspects of the British immigrant experience in Montreal in the first decades of this century. These studies, Mary Davidson "The Social Adjustment of British Immigrant Families in Verdun and Point St. Charles"; Mary E. Ramsden, "Dependency Among British Immigrants in Montreal"; and Lloyd G. Reynolds, "Occupational Adjustment of the British Immigrant", formed the basis for Reynolds's 1935 volume, *The British Immigrant: His Social and Economic Adjustment in Canada*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1935). This work, as well as Davidson's, are essential in establishing Verdun as a city with a strong British character and identity in the years leading up to the Second World War.

⁷³ Lloyd G. Reynolds, *The British Immigrant*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1935), pp. 117-123; 1941 Census, Volume II, p. 734; Linteau, *Histoire de Montreal*, pp. 355 and 375.

and also in the construction and service industries. Most of the immigrants from the British Isles who eventually would settle in Verdun originated from such cities as London, Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Belfast and Dublin.⁷⁴

Verdun's population growth in the 1920s included for the first time a large influx of French speakers from elsewhere in the Montreal area and the province. Mary Davidson referred to this influx as "an unresisted invasion" which caused some anxiety in the British community.⁷⁵ French-Canadian families, being generally larger than those of British immigrants or English Canadians, occupied fewer households than their growing proportion of the population suggested. According to the 1941 census Verdun's French-Canadian families averaged 2.64 children versus an average of 1.95 for families of British origin.⁷⁶ Still, the surge in Verdun's population in the decade 1919-1929 was almost equally divided between French and English speakers.

About one quarter of the almost 30,000 interwar British immigrants to Montreal settled in Verdun.⁷⁷ The 1931 census indicates that 14,570 of Verdun's 60,745 inhabitants (24%) were born in the British Isles, perhaps two-thirds of whom had emigrated following the Great War.⁷⁸ The English made up 55.7% of the total, the Scots 34.5%, the Irish 8.3%

⁷⁴ Reynolds, *The British Immigrant*, pp. 77-80; Davidson, p. 48.

⁷⁵ Davidson, p. 28.

⁷⁶ 1941 Census, Volume V, pp. 478-479. French-Canadian population growth (and increasing local influence) was reflected in 1940 by the creation of a new French Catholic parish and the building of a new parish church as well as of a new French-language elementary school. *The Guardian*, June 14, 1940.

⁷⁷ Reynolds, p. 123 estimated the figure at one third, though the statistics cited in the 1941 Census, Volume II, p. 734 make this seem unlikely.

⁷⁸ In 1931, only 8.4% of the population of Montreal was born in the British Isles, down to 5.38% by 1941. *Annuaire du Canada*, 1943-1944, p. 123; Reynolds, p. 116.

and the Welsh 1.2%.⁷⁹ Table 1.3 shows the ethnic composition of Verdun's British-born population.

TABLE 1.3 ETHNICITY OF VERDUN'S BRITISH-BORN RESIDENTS⁸⁰

Place of Birth	1931		1941	
	total	%	total	%
England	8118	55.7	6436	57.2
Scotland	5032	34.5	3771	33.5
Ireland	1207	8.3	907	8.0
Wales	169	1.2	112	1.0
Lesser Isles	44	.3	32	.3
Total	14570	100.0	11258	100.0

The 1941 census did not reveal a significant alteration to the ethnic mix of Verdun's British Isles-born residents. What is significant is the drop in the proportion of the overall British population of the city. In 1941 16.7% of the population was born in the British Isles, a drop of 30% in a decade.⁸¹ Verdun was becoming increasingly Canadian born.

Chain migration led many British to Verdun where they found a comfortable atmosphere and a support network of cultural, social, fraternal and political organizations as well as local branches, or their equivalents, of familiar organizations such as churches or Old

⁷⁹ 1931 Census, Volume II, p. 758. Reynolds, p. 128 employs the category "British-born" as opposed to "British Isles" and therefore includes the 1194 Verdunites, including 977 Newfoundlanders, born in other British Dominions and possessions. As a result, his interpretation of the census data shows Verdun's population as being 25.9% British born.

⁸⁰ 1931 Census, Volume II, p. 758; 1941 Census Volume III, p. 398.

⁸¹ 1941 Census, Volume III, p. 398. The addition to the total of 1051 Verdunites born in other British possessions (including 879 Newfoundlanders) brings the ratio to 18.3%.

Country sporting associations. Verdun hosted more of these institutions than any other community in the Montreal area.⁸² However, while many financially stable and more socially established British families had moved to Verdun from Point St. Charles in the years before the Great War, during the interwar period some British Verdunites moved to another, decidedly more middle-class, English-speaking neighbourhood, *Notre-Dame-de-Grâce*.⁸³ According to Reynolds, then, Verdun was merely a way-station on the road to respectability in the English-speaking Montreal community. But in 1939 it was still a very British community.

Reynolds described the work and community relationship between British immigrants and French Canadians and reported that resentment and intolerance characterized many initial encounters. He also claimed that with the passage of time this ill will dissipated considerably.⁸⁴ His findings were based entirely on the views of British immigrants, whose opinions were biased by their occupational ascendancy within an English-language firm or as members of a neighbourhood in which they formed part of the predominant language group. French speakers in Verdun were more likely to recall some strains in their relations with English-speaking Canadians.⁸⁵

⁸² Reynolds, pp. 138-139.

⁸³ Reynolds, p. 124. A flow in the other direction was also discernable during the Great Depression, with many financially-strapped residents of N.D.G. moving to Verdun in search of cheaper accommodations. Reynolds, p. 129 n1.

⁸⁴ Reynolds, p. 100.

⁸⁵ Reynolds, p. 100, noted this as well. A clear pattern has emerged from interviewing individuals resident in Verdun during the 1930s and 1940s. French speakers routinely recall some tension and even animosity in their general relationships with English speakers. The latter, socially dominant at the time, generally recall this period as one of remarkable co-operation between the language groups. Sheila Graham, former singer and C.B.C. Radio personality, who grew up in Verdun in the 1940s, has noted the language-fuelled "fights and rivalry" which existed in Verdun. Graham to author, January 27, 1993. Verdunite Ken Slade believed that neighbourhood or block identification often mattered more among people than language, and that reports of linguistic tension in Verdun are exaggerated. Slade interview.

Few British immigrants bothered to learn French. The notion that Canada was a 'British' nation coupled with the apparent belief that French-speakers were being obdurate in their insistence on speaking their mother tongue, led to an ingrained view among British migrants that learning French was simply not necessary, an attitude reinforced by their employment experience.⁸⁶ According to Davidson:

The immigrant does not know that the Frenchman has an inalienable right to use his own language. The Britisher would demand that the French be required to speak the English language. Language difference is a barrier to neighbourly contacts between the French and the newly-arrived migrants, who may be forced by financial straits to settle among the French. It is also a barrier to amicable relations between French landlords and British tenants.⁸⁷

Economic competition and social conflict also divided the language groups. This seemed especially so with respect to the least skilled and lowest paying jobs. Reynolds reported British immigrants in Verdun as uttering such comments as "this province is no place for an Englishman" or "if I were starting all over again I should go to Toronto and not Montreal".⁸⁸

In Verdun in the 1930s and 1940s, it was common to hear English spoken with "broad" Old Country accents and to see displayed in many shops British-style food, furnishings and clothing. (There was a profusion of fish and chips shops, for example.) Davidson and Reynolds have noted that in the homes of British immigrants were to be found British newspapers and literature, photos of the Royal Family or British country scenes as well as souvenirs of distinctly British events and occurrences, such as mementos of various royal jubilees, sporting events or military service. British-born residents decorated their flats in

October 8, 1993.

⁸⁶ Montreal's English-speaking elite seemed to get by only speaking English. Reynolds, p. 107 n2.

⁸⁷ Davidson, p. 166.

⁸⁸ Reynolds, p. 180 n1.

a manner meant to recreate a familiar environment. Many of the newcomers never fully integrated into their new Canadian surroundings. Identification with Britain was still extremely close. In 1932, one-half of all British-immigrant families in Verdun received British newspapers.⁸⁹ Even Verdun's English-language weekly, *The Guardian*, devoted considerable space to British news events, personalities, sports scores and serialized fiction. Throughout the summer of 1939 *The Guardian* regularly published a front-page photo of British military or industrial preparations for war. When war came, these exceptionally close ties with the Mother Country induced a strong patriotic response from Verdun's British community.

This Old Country cultural insulation slowed the immigrants' assimilation into English-Canadian society. Not only were there in Verdun well-established fraternal groups such as the Sons of Scotland or the Sons of England but, more specifically, there existed associations representing immigrants from the regions of Lancashire or Yorkshire, and even those from such cities as Liverpool and Bristol.⁹⁰ Reynolds noted that the British and English-speaking Canadians in Verdun did not mix as well as might have been expected. One possible reason was the English Canadians' resentment of the British sense of superiority. Reynolds reported that the English Canadians sometimes ostracized and excluded the immigrants.⁹¹ The implications of these intra-ethnic tensions is difficult to assess. Many of Verdun's Canadian-born English speakers were themselves offspring of British immigrants and while this generational difference might have led to some

⁸⁹ Reynolds, pp. 207-208 and 212 n2; Davidson, pp. 55ff.

⁹⁰ *The Guardian*, February 6, 1942.

⁹¹ Reynolds, pp. 210-211.

friction⁹², it seems Verdun's English-speaking community remained cohesive. In 1931, of 42,526 Canadian-born Verdunites (from a total population of 60,745), 7,959 were offspring of British-born parents while 4,176 others were born of at least one British parent. If one subtracts from the total Canadian-born population those 23,277 Verdunites of French origin (only 353 over the age of ten of whom spoke English as a mother tongue), then 63% of the remainder, including those of non-British origin, had at least one British-born parent.⁹³ The children of British immigrant parents (or of at least one British-born parent), whether themselves born overseas or in Canada, generally were socialized in a family atmosphere identifying with British institutions and traditions.⁹⁴

Many of Verdun's male British-born residents who had emigrated prior to 1914 had served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the Great War while many of the British adults who had arrived after 1920 had served with the Imperial Forces. While their reasons for migrating to Canada might have included disillusionment with the war and with Britain itself, so many maintained close ties to their homeland that loyalty to the British Empire remained strong among them. In fact, as Reynolds implied, their sense of being British was in most cases strengthened by their immigrant experience. These British ways manifested themselves more obviously in wartime when the links between

⁹² There is also some evidence from the interwar period which suggests "real difficulty" in families where the parents were British born and the children Canadian. In his study of juvenile delinquency in Point St. Charles, H.R. Ross has noted that "the conventions and standards of the old land when applied to the children meet with opposition and rebellion". H.R. Ross, "Juvenile Delinquency in Montreal", M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1932, p. 85.

⁹³ 1931 Census, Volume IV, pp. 369 and 1140. No distinction is made between British born and those actually born in the British Isles, so that the number of Canadian offspring whose parents were born in the British Isles is slightly less than the available statistics suggest. Virtually all French Canadians in Verdun were Canadian born. In recent interviews, long-time English-speaking residents of Verdun recalled no friction whatever between British and Canadian-born English speakers.

⁹⁴ No doubt few Canadian cities emulated Verdun's decision in 1941 to decorate all municipal buildings for a full week in honour of St. George's Day, April 23. Council Minutes, April 21, 1941.

British-born Canadians and beleaguered Britain were emphasized as never before. The call to arms in 1939 found the blood links still powerful.

Rivalry also existed among the different nationalities which made up Verdun's colony of British-born residents. Unlike other areas in Montreal, such as east-end Maisonneuve, where the English, Scots and Irish had joined the same social groups on the basis of a common language, some of Verdun's fraternal lodges and other associations were made up of a single British national group sometimes further segregated by religion. Each national grouping was well established in Verdun and seemed prone to clannishness in many social activities such as marriage or worship, though no defined neighbourhood divisions within Verdun developed to separate them.⁹⁵ Nearly two-thirds of the Irish were further divided from most of the other English speakers by religion and since schools, hospitals and charitable organizations were operated along religious lines, the differences in social organization and outlook could sometimes be significant.

In 1941 nearly 60% of Verdun's 67,349 inhabitants were English-speaking with approximately 30% (12,309) of these (equalling 18.28% of the entire population) actually having been born in the British Isles or in British possessions. This number included the wartime mayor, Edward Wilson and the city clerk, Arthur Burgess. With so many of its residents born in the British Isles, Verdun was very much an anomaly in wartime Québec: indeed, no other city in the province boasted as high a percentage of British-born citizens among its general population and few Canadian cities could match these proportions.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Davidson, p. 46.

⁹⁶ *Annuaire du Canada 1943-1944*, p. 123. Only Victoria (31.37%), Vancouver (26.33%), Calgary (21.94%), Hamilton (21.13%) and Toronto (20.72%) are listed as having higher proportions of British-born residents than Verdun. The figure for Westmount was 15.55% based on a population of 26,047.

In September 1939 the British character of Verdun allowed for a personal, widespread and immediate identification on the part of the English-speaking population of that city with the cause of Britain. Especially in the early stages of the conflict this translated into a community-wide patriotic response which was organized with the provision of aid to Britain in mind. Many among the British born, notably Wilson and Burgess, assumed leadership positions in Verdun's war effort. In 1939 'patriotism' in Verdun was defined as lending support to Britain. Subsequently, however, as the war widened and grew in intensity, Verdunites mobilized on behalf of Canada and their community and lent their support primarily to local causes. In doing so they demonstrated the closeness of their community and their attachment to local identity.

CLASS AND COMMUNITY

While Verdunites were divided culturally, a strong common bond of place and community lay as much claim to their loyalties as ethnic, linguistic and religious identities. Verdunites of all backgrounds still identified strongly with their home town. Hervé Ferland, the mayor from 1933 to 1939, described the ambiance in Verdun as "*une mentalité toute spéciale*." He meant that Verdunites viewed themselves as proudly different from other Montreal-area communities.⁹⁷ This positive self-perception encouraged a city-wide shared response during the Second World War and established Verdun as an important centre of local initiatives in support of the war effort and especially in aid of Verdunites on active service.

⁹⁷ Hervé Ferland, *Sensationnel assassinat au Natatorium de Verdun*, (Montreal: privately printed, n.d., probably 1946), p. 4.

Examining the notions of class⁹⁸ and civic identity in a community provides insight into the motivations and actions of its citizens. Carl Dawson, McGill University sociologist and social researcher, believed that natural areas "represent the class structure of the metropolis"⁹⁹, that social classes tended to be represented by identifiable natural boundaries which shielded them from each other. A clear link existed between Verdunites' sense of community and their sense of class. This was reinforced by both internal and external views of Verdun. While a social hierarchy existed even within working-class Verdun, Verdunites themselves shared within their city's natural area a set of common identities and institutions as well as a strong self-perception of community culture. Working-class consciousness constituted a badge of identification worn by many of that city's inhabitants, especially those of long residency.

Perhaps it is closer to the truth to refer to Verdunites as a distinct social group as opposed to merely members of a class. Canadian sociologist John Porter defined members of social groups as having a shared sense of identity and common purpose.¹⁰⁰ For example, many Verdunites were employed at the C.N. shops in Point St. Charles and a form of kinship existed among them which did not extend to co-workers from other parts of

⁹⁸ It is not the intention here to launch into a lengthy discussion of class, class conflict, social elites or the theoretical underpinnings of these themes and their definitions. John Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Power in Canada*, (University of Toronto Press, 1965), is still a valuable framework for this sort of analysis.

⁹⁹ Carl A. Dawson, "City Planning and our North American Heritage". *Housing and Community Planning*, lecture series given at the McGill University School of Architecture, 1944, p. 150.

¹⁰⁰ Porter, *Vertical Mosaic*, p. 10

Montreal. This was even true if the Verdunites did not know each other prior to meeting on the job. A mutual sense of community identity were all the introductions required.¹⁰¹

Since the beginning of the century Verdun had been populated mainly by wage-earning families living in working-class housing. But many of the workers were tradesmen, skilled or semi-skilled. Verdunites as a whole were among the top wage earners of the Montreal-area working class. This implies the existence of a strong notion of working-class culture and independent-minded Verdun retained an internalized belief that a higher standard of living existed there than in many other Montreal neighbourhoods. But what defined this standard of living was more than just skill level and family income. Verdun was far newer, cleaner and contained fewer of the obvious social ills which afflicted Montreal's poorer industrial neighbourhoods such as nearby Point St. Charles or St. Henri.¹⁰² This was not the common perception of Verdun in the minds of most Montrealers (with the exception of those inhabiting its southwestern working-class neighbourhoods) and Verdunites themselves were aware that their city did not attract an upwardly mobile middle class exercising managerial or professional functions. Whatever boasts the city could offer therefore seemed that much more impressive.

In 1943, the economist O.J. Firestone defined a slum dwelling as one in obvious need of repair or lacking a common amenity, such as a flush toilet, or which did not meet existing safety or health standards. Utilizing data drawn from the 1941 census, Firestone

¹⁰¹ Interview with Wilson Dornan, September 21, 1993. Another Verdunite, Joseph Way, mentioned the Verdun "accent" which was common in the 1940s. He claimed that while in the navy during the war, he could tell immediately if a speaker was from Verdun and he was rarely wrong. Interview with Joseph Way, November 15, 1992.

¹⁰² Gabrielle Roy, in *The Tin Flute*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969, first published in 1945), p. 274, makes this clear in describing her main character's flirtation with the idea of moving to Verdun: "Giddy with pride and envy, she thought of a house for rent on the Boulevard LaSalle... Why not? she said to herself. We have the money now. We're not obliged to live in Saint Henri anymore."

calculated that in Canada's major cities there existed approximately 125,000 substandard and slum dwellings. Hull proved the worst slum area in Canada with 32% of dwellings fitting the description. Montreal and Toronto both contained about 13% while well-to-do Outremont contained only 8%. Verdun had the lowest percentage in the entire country with but 7% of its dwellings considered slums, and this despite the fact Verdun was Canada's runaway leader in terms of rented dwellings (90.3%) and population density.¹⁰³ Verdunites knew their city was special and certainly knew it better than other Montrealers.

Working-class neighbourhood distinctiveness was what many non-Verdunites noted about Verdun. It seemed almost automatic to add the adjective "working-class" to any mention of Verdun in the Montreal press and hence was propagated the simplistic view that Verdun was home only to people of modest means and limited social mobility. For example, in the space of one week in 1941, *The Gazette* reminded readers that Verdun was "practically devoid of wealthy citizens", while *The Montreal Daily Star* noted, "there are very few wealthy people in Verdun".¹⁰⁴ External perceptions helped determine Verdun's class status. As John Porter noted, "class becomes real as people experience it."¹⁰⁵ and the experience was sometimes externally induced. Aileen Ross, in her 1941 study of Montreal's social elites as seen through the membership and activities of the Junior League (English-speaking debutantes) and *La Ligue de la jeunesse feminine* (similar though less exclusive), notes that "it could never happen that an English-speaking

¹⁰³ O.J. Firestone, "Measurement of Housing Needs, Supply and Post War Requirements", *Housing and Community Planning*, lecture series given at the McGill University School of Architecture, 1944, pp. 113 and 116-117.

¹⁰⁴ *The Gazette*, August 9, 1941; *The Montreal Daily Star*, August 16, 1941.

¹⁰⁵ Porter, p. 12.

girl could join the Junior League were she living in Verdun".¹⁰⁶ But no matter: Verdunites were working class and proud to be.

Of course there was intra-class conflict in Verdun which defied an outsider's monolithic view of the community.¹⁰⁷ This stratification had a residential and neighbourhood basis and can best be described as dividing the more affluent English-speaking west end from the French-speaking east end. Even though most of Verdun's landlords and shop-owners were French speaking, class remained defined as much by language as by income. The oldest and shabbiest parts of Verdun were considered overwhelmingly French speaking while the newer, less congested areas of Verdun were felt to be the preserve of the city's English-speaking population. Davidson wrote of Verdun's British immigrants: "The more poorly situated family is forced to live in the older, cheaper residential section of Verdun, mingling with the French...As the family progresses in economic and social status, it moves...[and] becomes separated from the French."¹⁰⁸ Her one-sided interpretation implies it was not the quality of life, as determined by immediate physical surroundings, but rather the proximity to sizeable elements of the French-speaking population which defined the social success or failure of the British immigrant family. Perception was not always mirrored in reality. Though most west-end residents were indeed English speaking, many other English speakers lived in Verdun's east end. Some French speakers

¹⁰⁶ Aileen Ross, "The French and English Social Elites of Montreal", M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1941, pp. 52-53.

¹⁰⁷ Davidson, p. 209, also noted a form of Old World class-consciousness which was transferred to Verdun by its British immigrant population.

¹⁰⁸ Davidson, p. 50.

could also be found in some numbers in Crawford Park, Verdun's most westerly and most prosperous section, beyond the grounds of the Verdun Protestant Hospital.¹⁰⁹

But even in Verdun class rivalry could be linked to income, housing and property. During the Second World War, for example, the property owners residing on First Avenue above Bannantyne, which was a recently-built section of that street containing modest single-family dwellings, sought to have the name of their section of the street changed to differentiate it from the shabbier part of First Avenue made up of triplexes.¹¹⁰ In 1943, *The Guardian* published a letter from "A Group of Electors of Ward No. 1" who decried the lack of attention their east-end section of the city received from City Hall, apparently too busy pandering to the needs of large west-end Ward 4. Readers were reminded of the plight of Ward 1's disadvantaged children.¹¹¹

As the notion of a Montreal 'metropolitan community' began to take form in the first decade or two of the twentieth century, the concept of a satellite locale existing independently from a nearby metropolis grew increasingly invalid. The rise of motor vehicles as a form of personal and commercial transportation, the extension of public transit systems, and other factors such as the availability of radios and telephones in the

¹⁰⁹ The language map Davidson provided on p. 25 of her study shows very clearly that, overall, no neat division between the languages existed in Verdun. Founded in 1886, the Verdun Protestant Hospital, a psychiatric institution, was located in the far west end of Verdun on a tract of land (totalling 11% of municipal territory) which stretched the entire breadth of the city from the waterfront along Lasalle Boulevard in the southeast all the way to the Aqueduct in the northwest. The Montreal-wide saying that a person 'was going to Verdun' or 'ready for Verdun' meant ominously that the person in question was destined for, or might have been a candidate for, incarceration in a mental asylum. In Mordecai Richler's novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, (Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 223, Duddy's friend, Hersh, tells him that a former teacher has cracked up. "He's in Verdun", he tells Duddy, without need of further explanation. This could not have improved outsiders' perceptions of Verdun.

¹¹⁰ Council Minutes, May 26, 1941.

¹¹¹ *The Guardian*, April 2, 1943.

home, led to a more wide-ranging view of community, to the overarching sense that separate districts still belonged to a larger, linked urban collective, and that even these belonged to wider national or international networks. This made natural boundaries, either municipal or neighbourhood, less socially meaningful.¹¹² Although strong economic and employment links between the adjoining municipalities of Verdun and Montreal had long existed, by the time of the Second World War Verdun still retained identifiable differences in living accommodations, local culture and political responses.

Verdun survived its shrinking sense of geographic isolation through the continued existence of a sense of local community, much of it based in class perception. Municipal boundaries continued to matter in the lives of Verdunites: the city's independence was more than purely administrative. Verdun still relied on the wider Montreal infrastructure for health services (especially for English-speaking Protestants), higher education, shopping and recreation, though some of these needs could also be satisfied locally. Local recreational, social and infrastructural services and institutions remained important and these helped define Verdunites' sense of local attachment and identity. A senior executive with the Montreal Tramways Commission wrote in 1944 that Verdun was, simply, a "more or less self-contained community".¹¹³

In 1948 the political sociologist, Leo Zakuta, defined a "natural area" as "a specialized and differentiated part of the community in its selection of population types, in its performance of particular functions in the community and in its separation from other

¹¹² For a contemporary discussion of this see Leo Zakuta, "The Natural Areas of the Montreal Metropolitan Community with Special Reference to the Central Area", M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1948, pp. 10-13. When away from the Montreal area, for example, Verdunites usually identified themselves as Montrealers and were normally considered as such.

¹¹³ D.E. Blair, Vice-President and General Manager of the Montreal Tramways Commission, "Traffic, Transportation and Terminal Facilities", *Housing and Community Planning*, McGill University, Montreal, 1944, p. 63.

areas by distinguishable barriers" such as rivers, canals, railway tracks or large parcels of vacant or wooded land.¹¹⁴ Ethnicity, housing, occupation and income were all relevant to the definition. The boundaries of a natural area were clear and physically defined. According to Zakuta "local self-consciousness" and a shared sense of history were also important defining factors. These united members of the community and formed a barrier to outside influence. Verdun possessed these physical, social and psychological boundaries. Zakuta labelled Verdun one of the strongest natural areas in the Montreal area at that time.¹¹⁵

Verdunites were proud of their city.¹¹⁶ In a strikingly self-assured tone, *The Guardian*, spoke for many when it stated:

Verdun...is the most unusual agglomeration in the Province of Quebec and, as a matter of fact, in the entire Dominion, if not on the North American Continent. No city or town is more imbued with the true spirit of "community". Verdun...does not take any particular interest in what occurs in its immediate vicinity. It is "Verdun" and "Verdun" exclusively.¹¹⁷

While this newspaper clearly relished its role as a community leader and booster, this extract nevertheless denotes a commonly-held local self-perception. The bilingual *Le Messenger* printed a letter which showed that Verdun pride crossed linguistic barriers. In

¹¹⁴ Zakuta, "Natural Areas", p. 46.

¹¹⁵ Zakuta, pp. 47-48. One Verdunite has noted that the surrounding districts of Ville-Émard, Côte-St-Paul and Point St. Charles were merely districts of Montreal as opposed to their own municipalities, a situation which contributed to Verdunites community pride. Interview with Wilson Dornan, September 21, 1993.

¹¹⁶ Sheila Graham, wrote that "though we lived in what was considered a blue collar community, I always was aware that we had opportunities in Verdun that many other young people in Québec didn't share. I think it was far-thinking of our mayor and aldermen of the time to build such wonderful things as the Natatorium, where I learned to swim...and the Auditorium, where we watched the hockey games and danced to the great bands." Graham to author, January 27, 1993.

¹¹⁷ *The Guardian*, October 12, 1944.

response to a Montrealer who had described Verdun as "*un petit village*". the anonymous. irate writer claimed in his rebuttal that "*vous n'avez jamais mis les pieds dans Verdun alors c'est ce qui explique que vous voulez nous faire vivre dans un petit village... venez visiter notre coquette et propre ville de Verdun...*".¹¹⁸

Civic pride doubtless induced some Verdunites to enlist during the war while enlistment and overseas service increased many Verdunites' sense of hometown pride. Dozens of soldiers' letters home laud Verdun in very strong terms. In 1941 Trooper F. H. Colligan wrote from Britain a note of appreciation to City Hall in response to receiving a carton of cigarettes courtesy of the Mayor's Cigarette Fund for Verdun Soldiers Overseas:

These tokens from our fellow citizens serve well to remind us that our home is not just our relatives. but the people around them and the atmosphere of the town in which they live...[O]ur civic pride increases immeasurably. After the job is over I feel sure we will make better citizens for this appreciation of our home town.¹¹⁹

Similarly, signalman B.C. Palmquist. Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. wrote in 1942:

I have met quite a few Verdun men here and we are all of the same opinion...that it took this war to make us realize that Verdun is the grandest City in the world and please keep it that way until we return.¹²⁰

Despite its modest face, and taking into account a measure of soldiers' homesickness. Verdun instilled pride in its citizens and induced them to descriptive superlatives. The war years would enhance these widely-held local views.

¹¹⁸ *Le Messenger*, April 13, 1944.

¹¹⁹ Trooper F.H. Colligan to the Mayor's Cigarette Fund, April [no date] 1941, Box A-333, CVA.

¹²⁰ Palmquist to the Mayor's Cigarette Fund, February 1, 1942, Box A-333, CVA.

VERDUN ON THE EVE OF WAR

In May and June 1939 King George VI and Queen Elizabeth toured Canada. Their visit to the senior Dominion on the eve of war was a resounding success. Canadians from coast to coast and from all walks of life showered the Royal Couple with affection. The entire country appeared to be seized by imperial sentiment. Public figures and ordinary Canadians, groups and associations, corporations and communities vied for royal attention.¹²¹ The British City of Verdun was no exception.

In November 1938, upon hearing of the Royal Couple's intention to visit Canada the following spring, Verdun City Council unanimously invited the King and Queen to visit the city. Though the national committee charged with the royal arrangements was not yet in place, Verdun's city clerk, Arthur Burgess, despatched a letter to Fernand Rinfret, the Secretary of State, to put Verdun's invitation on record. *The Guardian's* headline of November 18, 1938 reflected the city's confidence: "King and Queen May Visit Verdun". The accompanying article recalled Verdun's manpower contribution during the Great War, declaring that Verdun had a claim on a visit from Their Majesties greater than perhaps "any other city in the Dominion". The newspaper then reminded readers of the other notables who had visited the city over the years. The list included the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VIII), Lord Tweedsmuir, Baron Byng, Lord Allenby, and Sir Douglas Haig.

When the schedule for the Royal Visit to Canada was announced in January 1939, Verdunites were disappointed. Their Majesties' visit to Montreal would be very brief and no time could be spared for them to visit Verdun. On May 18 the King and Queen arrived in Montreal, an event *The Guardian* reported with a large banner headline in red ink. Verdun organized its own parade and fireworks display on the evening of their stay

¹²¹ See Tom MacDonnell. *Daylight Upon Magic: The Royal Tour of Canada 1939*. Macmillan, Toronto, 1989.

in Montreal and Verdun's streets were festooned with bunting and flags in their honour. As *The Guardian* put it, the "cup of fealty was found to be overbrimming".¹²² This assertion would soon be put to the test.

As the summer of 1939 wore on, the drift to war appeared unmistakable. Canadians had seen this before. Despite the recent Royal Visit this time there was no rush to embrace the sacrifices occasionally demanded by imperial loyalty. On the 25th anniversary of Britain's declaration of war on August 4, 1914, *The Guardian* reminded readers that some 4000 men from Verdun had seen service during the Great War but expressed the hope that another war might yet be averted.¹²³

As a whole, Canada entered the Second World War with resignation. Many Canadians who recalled the terrible bloodletting of the trenches hoped the Canadian contribution might be economic or especially in air power, which was thought at the time to be less costly in terms of lives. There was no re-occurrence of the near euphoria which greeted

¹²² *The Guardian*, May 19, 1939. This enthusiasm extended to teenagers: "Our King and Emperor...is...the wise and capable leader of the greatest nation in the world". read the dedication to the Royal Couple in the 1939 Verdun High School *Annual*, p. 6. The *Annuals* of Verdun High School covering the years 1939-1945 are located in La Salle Canadiana, Verdun Cultural Centre, Verdun. The civic celebrations held in Verdun cost \$1581.72. The City of Westmount despatched a cheque in the amount of \$144.00 "in appreciation of the services rendered by [the] Police of Verdun to [the] City of Westmount during the Royal Procession through that City." Executive Committee of Verdun City Council [hereinafter cited as Executive Committee], Minutes, May 29, 1939. It must have been bittersweet to Verdun's city fathers to have helped the Montreal area's wealthiest English-speaking city receive its king and emperor without having obtained royal acknowledgement of its own working-class and even more British city.

¹²³ *The Guardian*, August 4, 1939. A year earlier, during the Czech crisis which resulted in the Munich Agreement, *The Guardian*, September 30, 1938, noted that "the spirit that caused Verdun to send more men overseas during the war, proportionately speaking, than any other Canadian town, is still very much alive today in this city with the French war name."

the call to arms in 1914.¹²⁴ In its last pre-war edition, September 1, 1939, *The Guardian* made few references to the upcoming war. Employers were requested to co-operate with the authorities in protecting vital installations and citizens were informed that social group and community activities would take place only "provided war [has] not begun". Notwithstanding the muted enthusiasm, Verdunites had already begun enlisting.

Verdun's English-speaking youth had noticed the approach to war. The *Annals* of Verdun High School (V.H.S.), a Protestant school, which were published each spring, reflected an interest in the European situation. Apprehensive essays focussed on aerial bombing and one was entitled "Could War Destroy Modern Civilization?". In an article on "Leadership", one student stated that "Men like *Der Fuehrer* and *Il Duce* show us how much leadership is needed, but it is not the kind of leadership essential to the well-being of a nation." There was also a moving essay on the futility and tragedy of war.¹²⁵ Despite the war scare produced by the Czechoslovakian crisis during the autumn of their graduating year, only one student professed his desire to join the military, and this was specifically Britain's Royal Air Force, not the Royal Canadian Air Force.¹²⁶ The 86 students of the Class of 1940 began their final year of high school in the fall of 1939, just as the war erupted. Perhaps surprisingly, only one of the 40 males listed as graduating that year stated it as his intention to enlist. Archibald Boyce Cameron aspired to be an "Air Force Commander". Instead Flight-Sergeant Cameron was killed in action in 1944.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ W.A.B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhous, *Out of the Shadows*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 24-25.

¹²⁵ Verdun High School, *Annual*, 1939, pp. 20, 25-26 and 32.

¹²⁶ Verdun High School, *Annual*, 1939, pp. 19-39.

¹²⁷ Verdun High School, *Annals*, 1940 and 1945.

Verdun entered the Second World War as a municipality with a distinct character whose inhabitants shared a strong sense of community identity. The nature of densely-populated Verdun's urban development, the class and ethnic composition of its residents, the city's impressive record during the Great War and its shared experience during the Depression cemented its self-perception as a unique place, one of which Verdunites were proud. These characteristics facilitated Verdun's united and robust wartime social and military responses.



The Verdun Natatorium c. 1945
Note Verdun's famed Boardwalk in background.
(Courtesy William Weintraub)



Edward Wilson, Mayor of Verdun, 1939-1960
(City of Verdun Archives)



Joseph R. French, City Manager, 1933-1964
(City of Verdun Archives)



Arthur Burgess, City Clerk. 1929-1962
(City of Verdun Archives)

CHAPTER 2¹

VERDUNITES IN UNIFORM

Only in wartime did Verdun take on an obvious military demeanour. No armoury had ever existed within its boundaries, despite a long-standing local interest in having one raised. No regiment commanded the allegiance of its citizenry or carried the city's name into battle. Except for local branches of several veterans' organizations, an impressive Great War memorial and two large German cannons presented to the city in 1919 as war trophies², Verdun was without signs of permanent military association. Even when the Auditorium was converted into a Reserve Army barracks and training centre in 1941³, the military profile in the community remained relatively low. Verdun's remarkable enlistment record during the Second World War owed little to any local visible reminders of war.

Appearances, however, were deceptive. For, whenever the opportunities arose, Verdunites displayed interest in military matters and fervently supported patriotic and veterans' causes. Sometimes the city hosted Montreal-area regiments' activities such as parades, banquets or sporting events. The Ypres Day parade provided an annual local display of military ceremony and tradition. Moreover, many Verdunites were members of the Non-Permanent Active Militia (N.P.A.M.) and belonged to such Montreal units as the Royal Highland Regiment of Canada (the Black Watch), the Royal Montreal Regiment (R.M.R.), the 17th Duke of York, Royal Canadian Hussars, the Victoria Rifles of Canada and various artillery regiments, as well as other units and corps.

¹ This chapter formed the basis of a paper presented by the author at the meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Brock University, May 31, 1996.

² Like most Canadian municipalities with large war trophies, Verdun donated these cannons to its local salvage committee in 1942.

³ See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the military presence in Verdun.

In September 1939 war overtook Canada and Verdunites responded like Canadians everywhere, with resignation, determination and by enlisting. In late August and early September, many Montreal-area N.P.A.M. units were mobilized, some to protect vital installations such as canals, rail bridges and power plants. Many of the men engaged in these duties were Verdunites. "In one [unnamed] regiment alone, a large one," boasted *The Guardian*, "more than half the members are Verdun residents." Many among Verdun's unemployed men enlisted. On September 14, 1939 *The Montreal Daily Star*, quoting a Verdun City Hall press release, noted that "just as in the last war, Verdun can boast...the highest percentage of men enrolled in the army, at least among the unemployed". Of Verdun's 1300 persons on relief, 153 had enrolled by that date, including 150 married men. (The city did not grant relief to single men under 40.)

Unemployment alone could not explain Canadians' or Verdunites' responses to a call to arms. The General Advisory Committee on Demobilization and Rehabilitation determined that of a sample base of 347,900 Canadians on active service as of June 30, 1942, no less than 85% of them "left gainful employment to enlist". Only about 10% were categorized as unemployed.⁴ While offering the opinion that "unemployment was a form of conscription", the Canadian military historians W.A.B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhous have noted that more than half the men of the First Canadian Division, which proceeded overseas in December 1939, were drawn from the ranks of the Permanent Force or the N.P.A.M.⁵ Yet, the view has persisted that the men of this first contingent enlisted primarily to escape the dole.

⁴ General Advisory Committee on Demobilization and Rehabilitation, "Statistical Analysis of Discharges from Armed Forces of Canada 3-9-39 to 31-3-42", MG 27, Volume 61, file 527-62 (3), National Archives of Canada (hereinafter NAC). I am indebted to Professor Terry Copp for this information.

⁵ W.A.B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhous, *Out of the Shadows*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 36.

In her study of unemployment in Verdun during the Depression, Suzanne Clavette has reinforced the notion that joblessness in Verdun declined drastically in 1941 owing to enlistment. R.B. Joan Adams, a Verdun social activist and head of the wartime Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps (W.V.R.C.), also attributed Verdun's high enlistment rate to unemployment and local financial hardship. In her opinion, patriotism and ethnic ties to Britain were secondary factors.⁶ These views are only partially correct. A Verdun veteran, Joseph Way, who joined the R.C.N.V.R. in September 1939, has insisted that most Verdunites he knew who enlisted, including himself, quit jobs to enter military service.⁷ This is corroborated by information gleaned from *The Guardian* which often noted residents' enlistments and briefly elaborated on their employment backgrounds. It is incontestable that unemployment played some role in the early enlistment of Verdunites, but men continued to enlist in large numbers after unemployment in Canada had virtually disappeared. As with all Canadian volunteers, their reasons for enlistment were many, varied, sometimes complex and defy strict categorization.

Less than one week after Canada's entry into the war, the City of Verdun and *The Guardian* were already claiming the highest enlistment rate in Canada for a city Verdun's size. This unconfirmed and likely exaggerated perception remained strong in Verdun throughout the war. Press accounts in Verdun and Montreal routinely conveyed this opinion and Verdunites spent the next six years living up to the claim.⁸ In the period

⁶ Clavette, "*Des bons au chèques*", p. 117; interview with R.B. Joan Adams, October 6, 1993.

⁷ Interviews with Joseph Way, November 15, 1992 and September 21, 1993.

⁸ *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 14, 1939; *The Guardian*, September 22, 1939. *The Montreal Daily Star*, August 16, 1941 repeated this claim more or less as a fact and in a postwar accounting, *The Guardian*, October 31, 1946, stated that "according to available information", Verdun again led the country in the percentage of enlistments. Certain English-speaking Montreal-area cities and neighbourhoods, such as Westmount, Point St. Charles and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (N.D.G.), also produced large numbers of enlistments, but none ever achieved the local status which Verdun claimed.

1939-1945 over 6300 Verdunites, including more than 150 women, served in the armed forces.⁹ Hundreds of others - the exact number is not known - were on General Service (G.S.) in Canada, responded to the call for home defence duties under the provisions of the 1940 National Resources Mobilization Act (N.R.M.A.) or served as volunteer members of the Reserve Army in Canada. Verdun's contribution was impressive nationally, especially in a Québec context.¹⁰

The enlistment statistics tabulated in this chapter were drawn from thousands of individual file cards which constituted the mailing list of the Mayor's Cigarette Fund for Verdun Soldiers Overseas (M.C.F.).¹¹ The information recorded on these cards normally included an enlistee's name, rank, serial number and last home address before enlistment. The fund's files sometimes contained additional information such as the name of next-of-kin, whether the individual was killed or taken prisoner or whether shipments of cigarettes were to be discontinued due to discharge or return to Canada. Although the actual military mailing addresses were not listed it has been possible to establish which services, and often which regiments and units, the enlistees' joined according to their coded service numbers.

The 6316 names drawn from these cards are of men and women who served overseas at some point between the inauguration of the M.C.F. in December 1940 and the summer of 1945. These Verdunites form the basis of the social-military analysis offered below. It is clear that not all Verdunites serving overseas were listed, since the necessary information had to be furnished to the Fund by relatives or friends. Verdunites who had served

⁹ For statistical purposes, a Verdunite is someone who resided in Verdun at the time of his or her enlistment.

¹⁰ Jean-Yves Gravel, "Le Québec Militaire, 1939-1945", in Jean-Yves Gravel, ed., *Le Québec et la Guerre*, (Montréal: Boréal, 1974), pp. 78ff.

¹¹ These cards are located in Box A-536, CVA. The Mayor's Cigarette Fund is discussed in Chapter 3.

overseas but were discharged or returned to Canada before December 1940 or who served only in Canada were not included. The figure of 6316 Verdunites on active service overseas therefore is the minimum for which a cohesive body of evidence exists.¹² The final figure of Verdunites having served anywhere, at any time, during the war would certainly exceed 7000.¹³ This would represent between 9% and 10% of the total population.¹⁴ If the 1941 census figure of 67,349 is used as the basis for Verdun's wartime population, and given that about one in 11 Canadians were in uniform during the

¹² *The Guardian*, October 31, 1946, citing the 1945 municipal census as its source, claimed over 6500 Verdunites had been in uniform. Since 1943, local censuses specifically questioned residents on military service. (The manuscript censuses no longer exist.) If this estimate is reasonably accurate, then the figure of 6316 used to determine a social profile of Verdunites in uniform represents some 97% of the contemporary accounting of Verdunites known to have been on active service. This is sufficient to elaborate accurate trends from the statistics. A "Summary of Enlistments" to March 31, 1945 prepared in June 1945 by the Department of Veterans' Affairs has tabulated voluntary enlistments by service according to municipality, county or census districts. Because in many cases enlistment figures for outlying districts were consolidated into a regional or municipal total, it is difficult to obtain a reliable or exact statistic for each Canadian municipality listed. (For example, despite the figures provided it seems unlikely that 21% of Cornwall's population as shown in the 1941 Census was on General Service.) The figure cited for Verdun is 6465 not including N.R.M.A. men, the Canadian Women's Army Corps (C.W.A.C.) or the Women's Division of the Royal Canadian Air Force (R.C.A.F. - W.D.) which according to the M.C.F. combined for at least another 388 service people making a total of 6853. The "Summary" was provided courtesy of the Laurier Centre for Military, Strategic and Disarmament Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University.

¹³ No accurate Verdun Honour Roll was compiled at the end of the war. In 1944, fully 43% of men on strength of the Canadian Army (Active) were stationed in Canada or "Adjacent Territories", nearly one third of whom were on N.R.M.A. service. Some of these men were undoubtedly Verdunites. E.L.M. Burns, *Manpower in the Canadian Army*, (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company Limited, 1956), p. 13.

¹⁴ One American historian of wartime communities has claimed that, in U.S. communities, an average of 12.5% of the population was in uniform. Of course, the U.S. imposed universal military service for males. Marvin Schlegel, *Writing Your Community's War History*, (Raleigh, North Carolina: The American Association For State and Local History, Bulletin Volume 1, Number 11, October 1946), p. 310.

course of the war, then Verdun's equivalent proportion would be approximately 6123 people. This figure was easily exceeded, by perhaps 15%.

By the end of 1945 Verdun's population was estimated to be 74,000 (including those in military service), of whom no less than 42%, and by this time probably as many as 44%, were French speakers. Most of the increase was due to natural growth or made up of families moving into Verdun during the war. Many of these new families were French speakers employed in military or related industries. The ages, gender and occupations of many of the new arrivals meant that they would not have significantly increased the size of Verdun's available manpower pool. Table 2.1 shows the overseas enlistment figures for Verdun by service and language. Table 2.2 shows the enlistment percentages by service and language. Table 2.3 shows the service distribution percentage for each language group.¹⁵

These statistics tell the basic story of Verdunites' overseas war service and, indeed, war service in general. Two-thirds served in all branches of the Canadian Active Service Force (C.A.S.F.) (later renamed the Canadian Army (Active)), a figure which closely approximated the national average, while the navy and air force divided the remainder among themselves with naval service being slightly more popular. Verdun was especially over-represented in the navy, with 17% of the city's uniformed total being sailors versus a figure of 10% nationally. Verdun's 1055 men and women in the navy represented slightly over 1% of Canadian naval personnel while the city's population, according to the 1941

¹⁵ One must proceed with caution in determining individuals' linguistic background on the basis of family names alone. Still, this method results in reasonably accurate ethnic identification. Less than 1% of the 6316 names appearing on the mailing list of the M.C.F. could not be comfortably assigned to one of the two main language groups. If available, additional information, such as the given names of parents and siblings, school attended, place of employment, street address and birthplace facilitated the task. Very few names were of neither French nor British ancestry.

**TABLE 2.1 VERDUNITES SERVING OVERSEAS
BY SERVICE AND LANGUAGE, 1940-1945**

	A R M Y	N R M A	C W A C	N A V Y	W R C N S	M E R M A R	R C A F	R C A F W D	R A F	M I S C	T O T A L
ENG.	3247	23	69	896	35	17	775	40	7	17	5126
FR.	646	247	6	123	1	1	162	3	1	1	1190
TOTAL	3893	270	75	1019	36	18	937	43	8	18	6316

**TABLE 2.2 VERDUNITES SERVING OVERSEAS,
PERCENTAGE BY SERVICE AND LANGUAGE, 1940-1945**

	ARMY ¹	%	NAVY ²	%	RCAF ³	%	TOTAL ⁴	%
TOTAL	4238	67.1	1072	17.0	988	15.7	6298	100.0
ENG.	3339	78.8	948	88.4	822	83.2	5109	81.1
FRE.	899	21.2	124	11.6	166	16.8	1189	18.9

¹ Includes N.R.M.A. and C.W.A.C.

² Includes W.R.C.N.S. and Merchant Marine

³ Includes R.C.A.F. - W.D. and R.A.F.

⁴ Does not include 17 English speakers and one French speaker listed as miscellaneous

**TABLE 2.3 VERDUNITES OVERSEAS 1940-1945,
SERVICE DISTRIBUTION BY LANGUAGE**

	ARMY	NAVY	RCAF	MISC	TOTAL
ENGLISH	65.2	18.5	16	.3	100%
FRENCH	75.6	10.4	13.9	.1	100%

census. represented only .58% of the nation's population.¹⁶

The nearly 16% of active service Verdunites who were in the Royal Canadian Air Force (R.C.A.F.) was well below the 24% of uniformed Canadians who belonged to that service. A few Verdunites also served in the fighting forces of Britain, including the Royal Marines. Most Verdunites on British service were members of the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.) and several were already serving in that service when war broke out. A handful of Verdunites also found their way into the American military while dozens of others plied the seas as merchant seamen.

Proportionately, French speakers were more likely to join the army and least likely to join the Royal Canadian Navy (R.C.N.). This was in keeping with national trends, which reflected French speakers' lack of attraction for the particularly unilingual R.C.A.F. and R.C.N. Overall, 81% of Verdunites overseas were English-speaking.

¹⁶ In a preliminary study of the social background of the R.C.N. during the war, the naval historian David Zimmerman has concluded that only nine percent of non-officer naval personnel were born in Québec and that only 10.5% were Québec residents at the time of their enlistment. Zimmerman's data indicates even lower percentages for officers. These figures, based on a random sample of 1179 cases, suggest that perhaps 10% of Québec sailors were Verdunites. See David Zimmerman, "The Social Background of the Wartime Navy: Some Statistical Data". Michael Hadley, *et. al.*, eds., *A Nation's Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity*. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), pp. 261-263.

Men originally conscripted under the N.R.M.A. constituted 4.27% of Verdunites overseas. Of the 270 Verdun men known to have been called under the N.R.M.A., and who either subsequently volunteered for General Service, served as N.R.M.A. garrison troops outside of Canada, such as in Newfoundland or elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere or, later in the war, were sent overseas, 91.5% were French speakers. Of all English speakers known to have proceeded overseas, 99.6% were volunteers, as opposed to 80% of French speakers. One French-speaking Verdun conscript, Driver René Bisson, R.C.O.C., was conscripted in July 1943 at the age of 19. After his initial training he 'went active' and proceeded overseas to join a reinforcement unit. It is likely that most of Verdun's known conscripts were voluntarily on active service overseas, following the same route as Driver Bisson.¹⁷ A slightly greater proportion of French-speaking Verdunites served overseas than was the case generally with French Canadians conscripted and on general service. Overall, 18.9% of Verdunites overseas were French Canadians, roughly equivalent to the proportion of French speakers among armed forces personnel serving both at home and overseas.¹⁸ Examined another way, 4.2% of all French-speaking Verdunites were in uniform, compared to roughly the same proportion of French-speaking Canadians. Of English-speaking Verdunites, 13.1% were in uniform, compared to about 10% of English-speaking Canadians.

In the army, Verdunites were well represented in the combat arms, Infantry, Artillery and Armour, as well as in the Engineers, Service Corps, Signal Corps, Medical Corps and

¹⁷ Interview with René Bisson, July 21, 1994. This soldier noted the difficulty for many French-speaking Canadians in being in an English-speaking environment in the army. For N.R.M.A. data, see Burns, *Manpower in the Canadian Army*, p. 121.

¹⁸ The oft-quoted figure of 19% French speakers in the military includes non-Québec French speakers. Gravel, "Le Québec Militaire, 1939-1945", *op. cit.*, p. 84; for more detail on French speakers' enlistments see Serge Bernier and Jean Pariseau, *Les Canadiens français et le bilinguisme dans les Forces armées canadiennes. Tome 1 1763-1969: le spectre d'une armée bicephale*. (Ottawa: Service historique de la Défense nationale, 1987), pp. 129-140; C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970), pp. 420-424, 590.

Ordnance Corps. Smaller corps such as Forestry, Provost, Dental, Postal and others also attracted Verdunites. In short, Verdunites were to be found in all branches and in many individual units of the army, including some raised outside the Montreal area. Verdun conscripts served in home defence establishments across Canada and Newfoundland. Some served in the 6th Infantry Division stationed in British Columbia, others saw duty in coastal defence units of the Royal Canadian Artillery (R.C.A.) in Nova Scotia or Newfoundland. Verdunites served everywhere Canadian (or British) arms were deployed overseas, including the Middle East and Far East. In 1945, one soldier, Sergeant L. Taylor, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps (R.C.A.M.C.), wrote from Holland:

One is constantly bumping into Verdun boys over here. They are everywhere, they are in the front lines, building roads, manning artillery, driving tanks, flying overhead and bringing the vital supplies in by boat.¹⁹

The evidence conclusively supports Taylor's observations.

According to the 1941 census, Verdun had 33,243 male residents. Table 2.4 shows the age and ethnic distribution of Verdun males. Table 2.5 shows the distribution ratio of Verdun males by age and ethnicity. Table 2.6, details the ratio of Verdun males according to age and ethnicity expressed as a percentage of their respective totals. In 1941 58% of Verdun residents were English speaking and 42% French speaking.

Using the formula of total enlistees over total male population aged 15 to 34, Verdun's enlistment ratio was 6316/12,221, or 51.7%. The data indicates that while a disproportionate number of Verdun's French speakers were under 15 years of age in 1941, it also shows a disproportionate number of English speakers over the age of 45. Therefore, a balance in the relative proportion of youth and men aged 15 to 34 existed among both language groups. For French speakers, 37.3% of males were of this age

¹⁹ Taylor to the M.C.F., January 14, 1945, Box A-348, CVA.

TABLE 2.4 AGE AND ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION OF VERDUN MALES, 1941²⁰

AGE	0-14	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45+	TOTAL
BRIT.	4260	1560	1533	3472	2791	4207	17823
FRENCH	4152	1363	1249	2544	1965	2548	13821
OTHER	369	118	117	265	306	424	1599
TOTAL	8781	3041	2899	6281 ¹	5062 ²	7179	33243

¹ Broken down into 3191 aged 25-29 and 3090 aged 30-34. No breakdown according to ethnicity was provided for these specific age groups in the 1941 census.

² Of whom 2778 overall were aged 35 to 39.

TABLE 2.5 AGE AND ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION RATIO OF VERDUN MALES, 1941

	0-14	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45+	over-all
BRIT.	48.5	51.3	52.9	55.3	55.1	58.6	53.6
FRENCH	47.3	44.8	43.1	40.5	38.8	35.5	41.6
OTHER	4.2	3.9	4.0	4.2	6.1	5.9	4.8
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 2.6 DISTRIBUTION RATIO OF VERDUN MALES BY AGE AND ETHNICITY AS A PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL, 1941

	0-14	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45+	TOTAL
BRIT.	23.9	8.8	8.6	19.4	15.7	23.6	100.0
FRE.	30.0	9.9	9.0	18.4	14.2	18.4	99.9 ¹
OTHER	23.1	7.4	7.4	16.5	19.1	26.5	100.0

¹ Figure does not add up to 100% due to rounding.

²⁰ All data for Tables 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 is drawn from the 1941 Census, Volume II, pp. 256-257 and Volume III, p. 198.

group while for English speakers (including non-British ethnics) the figure was 36.8%. Using the formula of total enlistees by language over total male population aged 15 to 34 by language, the following ratios are obtained: 1190/5156 French speakers (23%) and 5126/6565 English speakers (78%).²¹ Recognizing that enlistees also came from the population older than 34 and that 15- and 16-year olds in 1941 reached military service ages before the war was over, the figures indicate that English-speaking Verdunites enlisted in numbers approximately 3.4 times greater than did the relative proportion of French speakers. Taking into account those who were medically unfit, those who were engaged in specialized industrial labour and those who, for other factors, were prevented from enlisting, the ratio of available English speakers enlisted is nearly *as high as would be possible* under the circumstances.

If a wartime ratio of enlistments had occurred equivalent to the overall linguistic balance existing among males aged 15-34 in 1941 Verdun, then approximately 42% of Verdunites in uniform would have been French speaking (the exact percentage of all French speakers living in Verdun). As indicated, the actual figure was 18.9%. Given the large number of French-speakers under 14 years of age, it is probable that family considerations inhibited a larger proportion of eligible French speakers from enlisting than was the case with English speakers.

The English-speaking enlistment trend was especially pronounced in the first two years of the war. Few French-speaking Verdunites were on active service overseas even as late as December 1941 according to the nominal roll established by the Mayor's Cigarette

²¹ 1941 Census, Volume III, p. 198. For Verdun as a whole, the proportion drops to 42.1% if males aged 35 to 39 are also included. With an average age of 45 among residents, Verdun was tied with Sherbrooke for second-youngest city in Canada, behind only Sudbury. 1941 Census, Volume IX, p. 46. Burns, pp. 145-147 notes that 17.5% of Canadian males aged 14 to 64 up to May 1945 served in the armed forces. These ages are those of the standard working-age population.

Fund.²² In December 1940 and December 1941, *The Guardian* published honour rolls of Verdunites on active service, to "again...show the World the Loyalty Verdun is noted for."²³ The names had been solicited from servicemen's relatives and friends through the medium of this newspaper and since readers were mainly English speaking, it is not surprising that few French names appeared. However, as the M.C.F. was publicized in French in *Le Messager* as well as elsewhere in the city, and that, by 1941, compilation of *The Guardian's* honour roll benefitted from the files of the M.C.F. (then one year in operation) the absence of French names from the list indicates that relatively few French-speaking Verdunites enlisted early in the war.

Of 1790 names appearing on *The Guardian's* 1941 list, only 111 (6.2%) appeared to be French speakers.²⁴ It was not until 1942 that French-speaking Québécois enlisted in greater numbers. By the end of the war the ratio of French speakers from Verdun overseas was triple the earlier figure of 6.2%. The reasons for this are difficult to establish, though it can be conjectured that continued Axis successes well into 1942 (and the perceived threat to Canadian territory which these signalled), the entry of the United States into the war and the mobilization and maintenance of some French-speaking regiments were all contributing factors.²⁵ Still, with a strong war economy and easy employment opportunities, enlisting clearly was not the only option available for Canadians willing to aid the war effort.

²² Box A-333, CVA contains nominal roll material for the period 1940-1941.

²³ *The Guardian*, November 15, 1940.

²⁴ *The Guardian*, December 19, 1941. Of 871 men on active service listed by this newspaper a year earlier, on December 20, 1940, 22 were French speakers, a mere 2.5%.

²⁵ A contemporary source, A. Davidson Dunton, in his introduction to Elizabeth Armstrong's, *French Canadian Opinion on the War, January 1940 - June 1941*. (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1942), p. v, believed that the U.S. entry into the war "broadened the thinking of many French Canadians about the world-wide issues involving Canada". This led to wider support and increased enlistments on the part of French speakers.

By January 1941, 2000 Verdunites were in uniform, rising to over 2900 by the end of 1941. According to the municipal census, in December 1943, the total number of Verdunites on active service in Canada or overseas was 4942, distributed among the services in proportions similar to the final ratios noted in Table 2.3.²⁶ Nearly four out of every five Verdunites who entered military service during the Second World War did so by 1943.

Surviving church honour rolls illustrate the remarkable enlistment rate of Verdun's English-speaking population. In November 1939 St. Willibrord's, an English Catholic parish, numbered 2292 families, of which only 450 lived in heavily populated Ward 4, that area of Verdun lying to the west of Desmarchais Boulevard. Ward 4 was not only overwhelmingly English speaking, but was also overwhelmingly Protestant. By April 1944 the number of English Catholic families in Verdun had climbed to 2700. This number represented approximately 10,000 people.²⁷ The overall enlistment statistics of St. Willibrord's Parish are impressive; by 1943 it was believed to be the Canadian Catholic leader in voluntary enlistments. About 12% of the parish's population enlisted, comparable to the congregations of the Protestant churches.²⁸ Verdun's Irish Catholics joined up in comparable ratios to Protestants. Their strong commitment to the war suggests they responded more to a sense of community identity than to the call of history.

Using St. Willibrord's honour rolls as well as newspaper accounts, it is possible to sketch the rate of enlistments from the parish by service. While not fully representative of Verdun's English-speaking enlistees (particularly since most parishioners lived in lower-income Wards 1, 2 and 3), this parish's high enlistment rate shows that, like the overall

²⁶ *The Guardian*, December 20, 1940 and February 17, 1944; Clavette, "Des bons au chères", p. 117.

²⁷ *The Guardian*, November 24, 1939 and April 27, 1944.

²⁸ *The Guardian*, July 2, 1943; *The Messenger*, November 8, 1945.

trend, nearly two-thirds of those who eventually joined had done so by June 1943. In the case of the army, half had joined by June 1942. This parish was heavily over-represented in the navy. A study of the family names of Verdunites in naval service shows many were of Irish ancestry. Many were Catholics of St. Willibrord's and, with less than 15% of the city's population, this parish supplied 26% of Verdun's naval enlistments. Table 2.7 provides the full enlistment detail.

The Protestant churches' honour rolls bear testimony to the even higher enlistment rate of Verdun's Protestant population. The Chalmers United Church congregation averaged 907 people in the years 1939-1945 and nearly 200 of these were in uniform at some point during the war.²⁹ This is more than 20% of the congregation, a figure which constitutes an excessively high proportion of able-bodied, military-age males. St. Clement's, on Wellington Street and Gordon Avenue, was by far the largest Anglican parish in Québec. At the beginning of 1939 it boasted a congregation of 1432 families totalling 4564 persons. By early 1945 this had risen to an estimated 5000 people made up of 1500 families.³⁰ St. Clement's congregation yielded 640 enlistees, about 13% of the total. Of an average parish register of roughly 3350 people, 418 members of the Ward 4 Anglican parish of St. John the Divine enlisted. This also constituted about 13% of the parish population.³¹

²⁹ Minutes of the 41st to the 47th Annual Congregational Meetings 1940-1946. Minutes of Congregational Meetings, Book 2, Chalmers United Church, Verdun.

³⁰ *Proceedings* of the 86th Annual Synod of the Diocese of Montreal, April 24-27, 1945, pp. 128-130, archives of the Church of St. John the Divine, Verdun.

³¹ St. Clement's Anglican Church Honour Roll, located in St. Clement's, Verdun; Honour Roll of St. John The Divine Anglican Church, Verdun.

**TABLE 2.7 ENLISTMENTS FROM ST. WILLIBRORD'S PARISH
(CUMULATIVE)³²**

	JUNE 42	JUNE 43	OCT 43	JUNE 44	NOV 44	JUNE 45
ARMY	338	507	543	597	641	680
NAVY	82	144	161	198	246	274
RCAF	77	139	152	179	194	199
MER MAR	5	6	9	12	19	21
VET. GD	4	5	6	6	6	6
WOMEN ¹	-	13	16	18	25	25
TOTAL	506	814	887	1010	1131	1205

¹ This category was not further broken down by service.

The five French-language parishes in Verdun offered no comparable records of military service. In September 1944, *Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde* Parish, stretching westward from Osborne Avenue in Ward 4 to the city limits, counted 607 families totalling approximately 2400 people. The parish claimed but 24 men on active service, even though at least 111 French speakers from Ward 4 served overseas.³³

The military historian Terry Copp argues that English-speaking Québécois were "subject to the same influences which shaped the [wartime] response" of other English Canadians.³⁴ All evidence suggests this was the case among English-speaking Verdunites. Verdun enlistments followed a pattern roughly linked to the government's

³² St. Willibrord Parish Honour Rolls, provided courtesy of Mr. Stewart Carson, Verdun: *The Guardian*, October 29, 1943 and November 9, 1944.

³³ *Album Souvenir Jubilé d'or, Paroisse Notre-Dame-de-la Garde, 1944-1994*, (Verdun, 1994), p. 23.

³⁴ Terry Copp, *The Brigade*, (Stoney Creek, Ontario: Fortress Publications, 1992), p. 9.

evolving policies regarding the expansion and role of the Canadian military as well as the armed forces' ability to absorb large numbers of recruits. While enlistments nationwide were very high in September 1939, numbers tapered off noticeably thereafter. Serious Allied defeats in the spring and early summer of 1940 and again in the spring of 1941 saw a reversal in this trend. News of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 further stimulated Canadian enlistments³⁵ from both principal language groups.

There were significant impediments to recruitment for French-speaking Canadians, especially those who were unilingual. There were few emotional ties to France and none to Britain and, partly as a result, a different sense of military urgency seemed to prevail in the French-speaking community than in the English.³⁶ More than half of French-speaking Canadians who voluntarily joined the army during the war served in English-speaking regiments and units. Many army units or corps professing a need for English-language technical skills, such as the Engineers or Armoured Corps, were reluctant to accept unilingual or nearly unilingual French-speaking recruits. For a French speaker to join the army usually meant joining one of the four French-language infantry units or the single artillery regiment made up mainly of French speakers. A few other minor units and detachments were also French speaking.

Language training was not at first available in the armed forces and does not seem to have been pressed with great determination when it became available. French speakers were

³⁵ Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, p. 599.

³⁶ For a review of French-speaking sentiment during the war, see André Laurendeau, *La crise de la conscription 1942. Les éditions du jour*. Montréal. 1962 and Paul-André Comeau, *Le Bloc Populaire 1942-1948. Éditions Québec/Amérique*. Montréal. 1982; Gravel, *Le Québec et la Guerre, op. cit.*, provides a concise indictment of the military's language policy, especially early in the war. See also Douglas and Greenhous, *Out of the Shadows*, pp. 239-241; Bernier and Pariseau, *Les canadiens-français et le bilinguisme, op. cit.*, and K.H.B. Gallant, "The Development of the Canadian Army as a Unilingual Institution in a Bilingual State". M.A. thesis. McGill University. 1968.

normally expected to learn English at the same time as they learned their trades. On some military bases, speaking French was expressly forbidden.³⁷ Public knowledge of this situation discouraged recruitment among French speakers. As for the other services, the R.C.N. had no French-language units and no interest in creating any: until 1943 unilingual French speakers were rejected for naval service almost out of hand and those who were enrolled thereafter had virtually no chance of advancement beyond menial positions such as shipboard stewards or shore-based support personnel requiring minimal training.³⁸ The English-language educational and technical qualifications required early in the war by the R.C.A.F. disallowed entry for many French speakers (and many English-speakers as well).³⁹ For example, in January 1940 the R.C.A.F. sought unskilled men for "general duties" such as mess help and batmen. French speakers about 30 years old with a knowledge of English seemed ideal, according to the R.C.A.F. A full-time recruiting centre was not opened in Montreal by the R.C.A.F. until the summer of 1941.⁴⁰

English speakers' propensity for enlistment did not infect Verdun's French speakers with the same enthusiasm. It is moot as to how many French-speaking Verdunites wanted to join the military but felt unwelcome or uncomfortable doing so. The linguistic reasons for not joining fuelled the social pressure to remain a civilian. The fictional works of Gabrielle Roy and Roger Lemelin, set in wartime Montreal and Québec City, respectively, clearly demonstrate the degree to which social barriers inhibited enlistment

³⁷ Gravel, pp. 86-92 and 97; Gallant, "The Development of the Canadian Army as a Unilingual Institution in a Bilingual State", pp. 78-79, 133. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, pp. 420-424, provides a cursory and uncritical treatment of D.N.D.'s attempts at accommodating French speakers.

³⁸ Gravel, pp. 93-94.

³⁹ Douglas and Greenhous, pp. 240-241.

⁴⁰ *The Montreal Daily Star*, January 5, 1940. In 1944, only 7.8% of R.C.A.F. personnel were French speakers while the figure was only 2.9% for R.C.A.F. officers. Gravel, pp. 95, 98-99.

during the Second World War even among those French speakers seemingly inclined to join.⁴¹ In Verdun, too, French speakers seemed disadvantaged by the enlistment process. In April 1941, the 3rd Division (R) R.C.A.S.C. opened a "Recruiting Depot" on Wellington Street under an English-only sign⁴², re-inforcing the army's image as an English-only institution. Even in 1942 half the recruiting officers in M.D. 4 were unilingual English speakers.⁴³

According to the 1941 census only 329 of Verdun's French-speaking military-age males aged 15 to 34 reported themselves as unilingual.⁴⁴ While not all who declared an ability to speak English could do so with fluency, their self-perception of fluency in English suggests that language was not an insurmountable barrier to enlistment. Nevertheless, this does not address the point that French speakers often could not train or work in their own language. The existence of lingering resentment over the military's language policies which might have discouraged French-speaking Verdunites from enlisting is more difficult to qualify. But volunteering was not only about language. One French-speaking Verdunite on naval service during the war, Léopold Lefort, has recalled that he was motivated to enlist at 18 years of age out of patriotism and that two of his French-speaking friends did so for the same reasons.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Gabrielle Roy, *Bonheur d'occasion*. Société des Éditions Pascale, 1945; Roger Lemelin, *Les Plouffes*. Beauchemin, Québec, 1948.

⁴² *The Guardian*, April 18, 1941. One wartime resident of Verdun has suggested that French speakers who had grown up with English speakers and who, perforce, spoke some English were more likely to enlist. Interview with Wilson Dornan, September 21, 1993. The same was probably true among Verdunites growing up in mixed-language families.

⁴³ Gravel, p. 85.

⁴⁴ 1941 Census, Volume III, p. 550. Thirty-two percent of French speakers in Verdun defined themselves as unilingual. Many were under 14 (not yet having experienced any significant exposure to English) and many were female.

⁴⁵ Telephone interview with Léopold Lefort, November 23, 1995. Clavette has shown that before 1939 a lower relative proportion of French speakers than English speakers applied for

Verdun's substantial military-age population proved attractive to units mobilized from the cities of Montreal and Westmount, which recruited in Verdun to fill out their complements. The Royal Montreal Regiment (headquartered in Westmount) established a temporary recruiting centre at the corner of Wellington Street and Church Avenue, Verdun's busiest intersection. The R.M.R. was especially popular with Verdunites: nearly 100 served in the regiment when it sailed for Britain in December 1939. The 5th (Westmount) Field Battery, R.C.A. also recruited a large numbers of Verdunites among its authorized strength of 280 men.⁴⁶ Given the class and educational differences between the two cities, it was hardly surprising that the patterns existing in the workplace were repeated in military service: large numbers of English-speaking Verdun private soldiers and non-commissioned officers were led by officers from Westmount or N.D.G. The many Verdun members of the Black Watch, too, were led by a class of men drawn from Montreal's wealthiest and most influential English-speaking families.⁴⁷ The 17th Duke of York, Royal Canadian Hussars, from Montreal, attracted as many Verdunites as did the R.M.R. or the Black Watch. The Canadian Grenadier Guards of Montreal was also a popular regiment with Verdunites.

At the outset of war, several other artillery and infantry regiments, including the Royal Canadian Regiment, which had a detachment in St. Jean, sent their mobile recruiting stations to Verdun.⁴⁸ One indication of Verdunites' initial rush to enlist is the profusion of Verdun residents found in some of the earliest Montreal-area units to mobilize and which were attached to the First and Second Divisions. In addition to the infantry

unemployment relief in Verdun. Though it does not automatically follow that a smaller proportion of French-speaking employable men were in fact unemployed, her findings suggest the possibility that fewer French speakers than English speakers in Verdun might have felt the need to enlist for purely economic reasons.

⁴⁶ *The Guardian*, September 15, 1939 and December 20, 1940.

⁴⁷ Copp, *The Brigade. op. cit.*, pp. 9 and 12.

⁴⁸ *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 8, 1939.

regiments noted earlier, the 7th Medium Battery, R.C.A., the 4th Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers (R.C.E.), and the 9th Field Ambulance, R.C.A.M.C. possessed large and recognizable Verdun components for the remainder of the war.⁴⁹

One service to which relatively few Verdunites gained entry early in the war was the R.C.A.F. It took time for this service to expand and educational requirements, as well as the need to produce various official documents and reference letters, were at first so stringently applied that interested Verdunites were commonly turned away. It was no coincidence that the high-income and generally well-educated Westmount population supported its own R.C.A.F. reserve fighter squadron, No. 115 (City of Westmount). Verdun members of the Canadian Legion recall few R.C.A.F. veterans joining their branch following the war.⁵⁰ Greater numbers of Verdunites joined the R.C.A.F. from 1942 onward, during a period of air force expansion and after a relaxation of the educational entry requirements. But the perception of the R.C.A.F. as an elitist service continued throughout the war. While educational requirements were not high for the non-commissioned ranks of the navy, it is difficult to explain fully Verdunites' preference for naval service. Perhaps Verdun's riverside location and the existence of several boating clubs facilitated the choice for many young Verdunites. It is also possible that the reputation of the Royal Navy was strongly imbued among Verdun's British-born population and their offspring.

Why did Verdunites enlist in such large numbers? Ethnicity was obviously a factor, as was a sense of local identity and community spirit; there was also a conscious desire to

⁴⁹ List of Units Mobilized in Montreal that Served Overseas During the Second World War, 140.045 (D3), Directorate of History and Heritage, N.D.H.Q. I am indebted to Mr. Ken Reynolds for this information. See also *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 4, September 18 and September 21, 1939.

⁵⁰ Joseph Way, a naval veteran, expressed surprise when reminded nearly 1000 Verdunites saw service in the air force. Interview of November 15, 1992.

match the city's commonly-known and proud Great War enlistment record. Joseph Way believed most Verdunites joined because they felt a shared sense of civic pride and duty and that adventure-seeking or even patriotism were secondary motivations. The reasons lay closer to home. Verdunites just enlisted, as they were expected to: for Way it has remained that simple.⁵¹ One former student at Verdun High School during the war has recalled:

My Dad served with the Black Watch during the First World War...My brother served with the same regiment in World War II...I don't think there was a girl in my class who didn't have a brother, father or some relative or boyfriend in the service...Many of them were from families like our own, that had a tradition of fighting for their country. It also became the norm, and if one didn't go, I'm sure there was a sort of stigma attached.⁵²

Among English speakers in Verdun, perhaps more so than in most Canadian communities, military service was a widespread family experience and tradition to be emulated. Enlisting was considered the proper thing to do. Deeper political reasons

⁵¹ Interview with Joseph Way, September 21, 1993. There were numerous Verdun examples of four, five and even six family members on active service. Many of these families lived in Ward 3 in central Verdun. About 10 French-speaking families also each had four or more members in uniform, sometimes a mix of volunteers and conscripts. The Tremblay family from First Avenue had five sons on active service. In 1942, one Verdun woman, not atypical, noted that two brothers, four cousins, an uncle and two brothers-in-law were on active service in the army, while her husband and another brother-in-law were in the R.C.A.F. Of these 11 men, nine were Verdunites and four were overseas at that time, a fifth having returned from overseas. "We are quite proud of this, of course", she wrote. Violet Hartley to M.C.F., November 2, 1942, Box A-340, CVA.

⁵² Sheila Graham to author, January 27, 1993. However, any enlistment pressure which existed either privately or publicly does not appear to have taken on the characteristics of 'shaming' or cajoling, as occurred in Canada during the Great War. Another Verdunite, Gordon Galbraith, was unable for medical reasons to enter the armed services. He does not recall ever being questioned regarding his not being in uniform. Interview of November 13, 1993.

apparently did not much influence most young men. They simply joined up and did not often provide or leave any detailed rationale to explain their decision.⁵³

The letters sent to the Mayor's Cigarette Fund by overseas Verdunites demonstrate that the men perceived the Second World War as much as Verdun's struggle as it was Canada's. Private J. Flood, R.C.A.M.C., wrote from England in 1941. "we are over here to help smash Hitler and all he stands for...I am proud that Verdun has shown the world that her menfolk have the fighting blood in their veins..."⁵⁴ Another soldier wrote:

where I am situated there are quite a few boys from Verdun (needless to say I believe that Verdun's percentage of enlistments will be on top as in the last affair) and every one of them is feeling the same way as I am. `that it is wonderful to have come from a City and to be trying to do our bit for a City and Country that shows the spirit the way VERDUN is doing.
[original emphasis]⁵⁵

Verdunites' sense of local identity, like Canadian identity, seemed to have increased *after* enlisting.

Establishing Verdunites' places of residence upon enlistment adds a class dimension to Verdunites' active service. Even though Verdun was working-class, intra-class dynamics existed within the city, usually based on place of residence. Moreover, language generally determined the choice of neighbourhoods. Among the English-speaking community, a co-relation seemed to exist between class (in Verdun terms) and propensity for military service, with the city's better-off neighbourhood supplying far less than its share of volunteers.

⁵³ This point is also made by Douglas How, *One Village, One War*, (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1995), p. 160.

⁵⁴ Flood to M.C.F., November 30, 1941, Box A-333, CVA.

⁵⁵ Staff Sergeant R.M. Thomas, Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (R.C.A.S.C.), to M.C.F., no date, April 1941, Box A-333, CVA.

Table 2.8 shows the populations of Verdun's electoral wards for the years 1941 to 1943 and provides an estimate of the linguistic balance in each ward in 1943. All wards cut across the city from the river in the southeast to the Aqueduct in the northwest. In 1943 the limits of the three easternmost wards were extended westward in a largely unsuccessful attempt to correct the ever-growing population imbalance in densely-settled Ward 4. This makes statistical comparisons between wards in the years before and after 1943 slightly inaccurate and no adjustment for this is reflected in Table 2.8.

Consequently, the most meaningful statistics are those from 1943. Ward 1 ran from the northeastern limits of Verdun to Hickson Avenue. Ward 2 ran from Hickson to Willibrord Avenue. Ward 3 ran from Willibrord to Desmarchais Boulevard. Ward 4 ran from Desmarchais to the southwestern limits of the city. Each ward included residents living on main streets, such as Wellington or Verdun Avenue, which cut across all four wards.

The oldest neighbourhoods in Verdun were Wards 1 and 2 and many Verdunites considered them the poorest; at least two-thirds of their residents were French speaking. Ward 3 was only slightly better-off and its population was about evenly split between French and English speakers. Despite the existence of some older streets in its eastern extremities, Ward 4 was the newest and contained the highest income-earners. In 1943 this ward contained 55% of Verdun's population, more than 75% of whom were English speakers. Wards 1 and 2 combined to make up 34% of the city's total. Ward 3 was by far the smallest in terms of population, with but 11% of residents, and consisted of only seven densely populated streets, Willibrord Avenue plus the six numbered avenues, First Avenue through Sixth Avenue. These streets were almost entirely made up of unyielding rows of three-storey, six-family tenement houses.

TABLE 2.8 POPULATION DISTRIBUTION OF VERDUN BY ELECTORAL WARD AND BY LANGUAGE (ESTIMATED)⁵⁶

	WARD 1	WARD 2	WARD 3	WARD 4	TOTAL ¹
1941 ²	7748	15743	7533	34988	66012
1942	7814	15751	7528	36533	67626
1943	8297	16920	8106	40248	73571
% ENG	35	35	45	75	58
% FRE ³	65	65	55	25	42

¹ Figures for municipal census slightly different than for federal census.

² Figures for each year are as of December 31. These are the only years for which figures broken down this way are available.

³ Estimated in *The Guardian*, April 2, 1943 and based on names of those registered to vote in that month's municipal election. It would appear Ward 2 was more than 65% French speaking, while Ward 3 was more evenly split than indicated. The 25% estimate for French speakers in Ward 4 also seems too high.

Using the home addresses of enlistees provided on the file cards kept by the Mayor's Cigarette Fund, it has been possible to determine the enlistees' home wards. In 94% of cases (5959/6316) the file cards noted a home address. Table 2.9 shows the distribution of Verdunites overseas by service, language and place of residence. The enlistment statistics from Ward 3 are astounding. No less than 38% of Verdun enlistees (whose addresses are known) originated from this small ward, three and a half times the proportion of this ward's population in the city as a whole. Since Ward 3 had a population of only 8106 as of December 31, 1943, and allowing for some very minor growth in population before the end of the war, the 2237 men and women on active

⁵⁶ Figures are derived from published municipal census results. *The Guardian*, May 15, 1942, January 15, 1943, April 2, 1943 and February 17, 1944.

**TABLE 2.9 VERDUNITES SERVING OVERSEAS
BY SERVICE, LANGUAGE AND PLACE OF RESIDENCE, 1940-1945**

	A R M Y	N R M A	C W A C	N A V Y	W R C N S	R C A F	R C A F W D	M I S C ¹	T O T A L
WARD 1 (E)	381	7	11	95	7	62	3	3	569
WARD 1 (F)	184	86	2	19	-	48	1	-	340
sub-total	565	93	13	114	7	110	4	3	909
WARD 2 (E)	453	7	9	111	3	83	2	3	671
WARD 2 (F)	192	98	2	28	1	40	1	-	362
sub-total	645	105	11	139	4	123	3	3	1033
WARD 3 (E)	1259	3	28	358	11	236	13	19	1927
WARD 3 (F)	171	46	2	47	-	43	-	1	310
sub-total	1430	49	30	405	11	279	13	20	2237
WARD 4 (E)	931	5	17	298	13	369	21	15	1669
WARD 4 (F)	60	9	-	20	-	21	1	-	111
sub-total	991	14	17	318	13	390	22	15	1780
UNKNOWN (E)	223	1	4	34	1	25	1	1	290
UNKNOWN (F)	39	8	-	9	-	10	-	1	67
TOTAL	3893	270	75	1019	36	937	43	43	6316

¹ Includes 17 merchant seamen, the total for whom is far too low in the M.C.F. mailing list. St. Willibrord Parish alone reported 21 merchant seamen in service during the war. In 1948, there were still 30 merchant seamen from Verdun in that occupation who had seen service during the war. Their average age was 23 in 1948 while seven and possibly nine were French speakers. RG 46, Vol 1282, "Survey of Seamen's Registry 1948 - War Service". NAC.

service from Ward 3 constituted 27.6% of the entire population of the ward.⁵⁷ Even more imbalanced is the linguistic make up of Ward 3's service population. English speakers accounted for 86% of the total. If *The Guardian's* April 1943 estimate is accepted, that Ward 3 residents were at least 45% English speaking, totalling approximately 3648 people, then the English-speaking enlistment rate from this working-class ward was an astonishing 53% of the *entire* English-speaking population, including women, children and the aged. This virtually impossible situation suggests that the ward was about 50% English speaking (if not more), which would reduce the enlistment rate to a maximum of 46%, still exceedingly high. These 1875 English-speaking men comprise very nearly 100% of medically-fit, military-age, English-speaking men living in Ward 3. These seven streets, plus those portions of the main arteries, Lasalle Boulevard, Wellington Street, Verdun Avenue and Bannantyne Avenue, which cut across Ward 3, must surely represent one of the densest concentration of enlistees for a neighbourhood of its population size anywhere in Canada. French speakers from this ward also enlisted in greater relative numbers than from any other ward in the city.

Figures for the other wards pale in comparison, especially those of Ward 4, whose 1780 men and women overseas represented only 4.4% of the ward's 40248 residents and 30% of overseas enlistees for whom an address is known. The 1033 enlistees from Ward 2 only amount to 6.1% of the 16920 residents (17% of enlistees) while the 909 from Ward 1 translate into a respectable 11% of locals (15% of enlistees). For English-speaking enlistees only, approximately 19.6% of the total population from Ward 1, 11.3% from Ward 2 and a mere 5.5% from Ward 4 were in uniform.

⁵⁷ According to the December 31, 1945 municipal census the population of Verdun was 74,087, an increase of only 516 over the 1943 figure. Most newcomers were attracted to Ward 4. According to the city clerk, Arthur Burgess, the ward population figures for December 1943 *included* those men and women in the armed forces. This seems to confirm the population of Ward 3 as barely more than 8100. Burgess to J.C. Gray, Wartime Housing Limited, February 2, 1945, Box A-331, file 3, CVA. But it is difficult to escape the conclusion that this figure is too low or that the estimate of English-speakers living there was too low.

It is difficult to explain the low enlistment rate from Ward 4. That newer ward conceivably housed more financially-established Verdun families, many of long residency in Verdun, possibly making the median age in Ward 4 greater than in the other wards. The higher income and educational backgrounds in this ward suggests a greater level of white-collar or skilled workers, perhaps a less forthcoming pool of potential recruits. Despite this, Ward 4 was the leader by a wide margin in R.C.A.F. enlistments, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of overall enlistments by ward. Of all men and women from Verdun in the R.C.A.F. for whom a home address is known, 43% originated from Ward 4. Of all English speakers in that service, 49% were from Ward 4. A disproportionately high number of Ward 4 residents in the R.C.A.F. lived in the tiny Crawford Park neighbourhood of Verdun, near the southwestern city limits. This was the newest, most English speaking and highest average income neighbourhood in Verdun.

The statistics indicate that poorer Verdunites enlisted in greater proportion than those somewhat better off and that the latter were more likely to join the R.C.A.F. than either of the other services. Among N.R.M.A. men, 77% of French speakers and 64% of English speakers lived in the poorest neighbourhoods, indicating that compulsion, like voluntarism, had some links to class background and neighbourhood affiliation, notwithstanding language. Verdun's military service record, therefore, was partly reflective of its internal social stratification.

Of French speakers in the armed forces, for whom an address is known, fully 62.5% lived in easternmost Wards 1 and 2 (702/1123). Even though an estimated two-thirds of the population was French speaking, English-speaking service people from these two wards outnumbered French speakers nearly two to one.

The preponderance of Ward 3 men in the army and navy, and a correspondingly low ratio of men in the air force, indicates a generally lower educational level among men of this ward than among men of Ward 4, where R.C.A.F. recruitment even surpassed that of the

navy. Unemployment in 1939 was almost certainly proportionately higher in Ward 3 than in Ward 4, which might have induced some enlistment. By 1941, however, wartime industrial expansion had provided thousands of employment opportunities in Montreal, Verdun and nearby municipalities. In 1941, the average annual earning of a family head in Verdun was \$1331, whereas in Montreal it was \$1267. For Verdun this translated into nearly \$26.00 a week in a city where the average monthly rent was \$21.00, second-lowest to Hull in Canada for cities over 30,000 inhabitants.⁵⁸ On average, even though Ward 3 was not economically advantaged by Verdun standards, most families were reasonably financially secure by 1942. In any event, limited family economies could not alone explain the residents' inclination to enlist in massive numbers. If it were this simple, then Wards 1 and 2 should have been equally affected.

Recruitment from Ward 3 was high in some measure because of the kind of neighbourhood it was. One Ward 3 serviceman's recollections exemplify the social environment and motivations of many young Verdunite recruits. Doug Whyte joined the R.C.A.F. in 1943 at the age of 18. He lived with his family on First Avenue. Whyte was a member of a close-knit group of 12 English-speaking friends ("a gang"), nine of whom were Protestants while three belonged to St. Willibrord's Parish. They were all from Ward 3 and played organized sports together. This was a form of neighbourhood social arrangement common to thousands of Verdun youth. According to Whyte, most of the teenagers in this gang had some military experience through various cadet corps memberships. Eleven members of the group enlisted.⁵⁹ Whyte felt most Verdunites were extremely conscious of the war, if for no other reason than that most had at least one family member on active service or with military experience. In the 1930s Whyte's father was a member of the Victoria Rifles of Canada and Whyte sometimes accompanied him

⁵⁸ 1941 Census, Volume 9, pp. 85 and 98.

⁵⁹ Whyte believed the twelfth member was rejected as medically unfit. Peer pressure might have influenced these young men's decisions and the decisions of hundreds of others.

to training sessions at the regimental armoury.⁶⁰ Whyte's socialization before and during the war reinforced his strong local spirit and community culture. These social patterns and military traditions furthered the enlistment process in Verdun, especially from congested, closely-knit Ward 3.

Only 5.5% of Verdunites on active service overseas were officers, largely owing to the low educational levels among Verdun servicemen. The 1941 census shows that considerably more residents of Westmount than Verdun, both as proportions of their respective populations and absolutely, completed high school and obtained higher education. Low average education levels dictated that only a small fraction of Verdunites in uniform obtained commissions. For example, for the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (R.C.N.V.R.), so popular with Verdunites, completion of senior matriculation (which followed Grade 12) was the minimum requirement for officers.⁶¹

Table 2.10 shows the number of Verdun officers by service and language, and Table 2.11 shows the ward distribution of officers by service and language. Half of all officers were in the R.C.A.F., the service which contained the highest percentage of officers, while 53% of all officers originated from Ward 4. Ward 3 provided 25% of Verdun's officers, as well as providing 38% of all overseas Verdunites. Only 3.8% of enlistees from Wards 1, 2 and 3 combined were officers, while for Ward 4 the figure was 10.4%.

Twenty-two percent of all officers were French speaking while 35% of army officers were. These figures are far higher than the corresponding ones for French-speaking enlistees as a proportion of total Verdun enlistees. On the other hand, Verdun produced

⁶⁰ Interview with Doug Whyte, January 21, 1994.

⁶¹ 1941 Census, Volume II, p. 800. The data provided by Zimmerman, "The Social Background of the Wartime Navy", in Hadley, *et. al.*, eds., *A Nation's Navy, op. cit.*, p. 272, indicates that 71% of R.C.N.V.R. officers attended university.

**TABLE 2.10 VERDUN COMMISSIONED OFFICERS¹ OVERSEAS
BY SERVICE AND LANGUAGE, 1940-1945**

	TOTAL OFFICERS	%	TOTAL ENGLISH	%	TOTAL FRENCH	%
ARMY	155 ²	44.5	101	65.2	54	34.8
NAVY	21 ³	6.0	20	95.2	1	4.8
RCAF	170 ⁴	48.9	149	87.6	21	12.4
MISC	2	0.6	2	100.0	-	-
TOTAL	348 ⁵	100.0	272	78.2	76	21.8

¹ Excludes warrant officers

² Includes two officer cadets, two C.W.A.C. and two Nursing Sisters

³ Includes R.C.N., R.C.N.R., R.C.N.V.R.

⁴ Includes two R.A.F.

⁵ The highest-ranking Verdunite was Colonel Percy John Philpott, born in England in 1897 and much decorated during the Great War. But, as he only settled in Verdun in 1940, in which year he rejoined the army, he barely qualifies as a Verdunite. *The Guardian*, February 28, 1946. There was also a wing commander, a squadron leader, a naval commander and several majors.

only a single French-speaking naval officer.⁶² Jean-Yves Gravel, who has studied French-speaking enlistment in Canada during the war, has cited a wartime D.N.D. report noting that French-speaking Canadian officers were young, bilingual and well educated.⁶³

⁶² Zimmerman's preliminary analysis suggests that very few French-Canadian officers were on naval service. While about 15% of R.C.N.V.R. officers resided in Québec upon enlistment, 40% of these were born outside of Canada, usually in the British Isles. He also notes that few of the Catholic officers born in Québec were "unquestionably French Canadian". Zimmerman, "The Social Background of the Wartime Navy", *op. cit.*, pp. 262-266.

⁶³ Gravel, p. 90.

**TABLE 2.11 VERDUN COMMISSIONED OFFICERS OVERSEAS
BY SERVICE, LANGUAGE AND
PLACE OF RESIDENCE, 1940-1945**

	ARMY ¹	NAVY ²	RCAF ³	MISC.	TOTAL
WARD 1 (E)	7	1	6	-	14
WARD 1 (F)	14	-	7	-	21
sub-total	21	1	13	-	35
WARD 2 (E)	5	5	6	-	16
WARD 2 (F)	13	1	4	-	18
sub-total	18	6	10	-	34
WARD 3 (E)	19	4	43	1	67
WARD 3 (F)	15	-	4	-	19
sub-total	34	4	47	1	86
WARD 4 (E)	68	10	91	1	170
WARD 4 (F)	10	-	6	-	16
sub-total	78	10	97	1	186
UNKNOWN (E)	2	-	3	-	5
UNKNOWN (F)	2	-	-	-	2
TOTAL	155	21	170	2	348

¹ Includes two C.W.A.C. and two Nursing Sisters

² Includes R.C.N., R.C.N.R., R.C.N.V.R.

³ Includes two R.A.F.

There is no reason to suppose this was not also generally the case with Verdun's French-speaking officers, one of whom even served with the Toronto Scottish Regiment.⁶⁴

Some Verdunites' enlistment experiences put the city's military contribution into more concrete terms. Doug Whyte had formerly been an air cadet with Verdun High School's No. 69 Squadron. At the time of his enlistment in the R.C.A.F. in 1943 Whyte was employed by the C.N.R. One of his parents was born in Scotland and the other was Canadian-born of Scottish parents. They had always encouraged the military life, though his mother was "a little up tight" about his enlistment. One of Whyte's principal reasons for joining up was that it was considered the "thing to do" and he "couldn't wait" to get into the R.C.A.F., a process which his cadet training facilitated. An additional rather unusual incentive to join the R.C.A.F. was provided by the fact his 40-year old father had joined the air force in 1941 as a service policeman.⁶⁵ His father's enlistment had come as "a complete surprise" to his family, though his wife supported his decision. Once overseas, Whyte actually served with his father for a time in Britain and even out-ranked him. But he spent most of the war with an R.A.F. Coastal Command squadron.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ In comparison, it appears roughly half of the 2443 men and women serving from Westmount, which in 1941 had a population of 26,000, were officers and a disproportionately high number of these served in the R.C.A.F. University education was still very much the domain of the financially privileged in the late 1930s and early 1940s. City of Westmount, Annual Report, 1945, p. 1. The City of Westmount very efficiently and diligently maintained an Honour Roll during the war. The 2443 known Westmount service people amounted to an identical 9.4% of that city's population as the (at least) 6316 Verdun enlistees amounted to for Verdun's population. However, Verdun housed approximately 2.6 times more people than Westmount, putting Verdun in a different statistical category. Forty-two percent of Verdun's population was French speaking compared to Westmount's 15%. A higher percentage of Verdun's English speakers were on active service than Westmount's.

⁶⁵ There were a dozen or more examples of Verdun fathers and sons and/or daughters serving during the war.

⁶⁶ Interview with Doug Whyte, January 21, 1994.

Sydney Ashford always had been interested in naval matters and in 1938, at the age of 13, he joined the sea cadets. In 1939 he was a drummer in the sea cadet band which welcomed the King and Queen to Montreal's Windsor Station. Even at an early age he noted that "the military spirit was ingrained in me", partly because his family was patriotic. He lived in Ward 2 and both his parents were Catholics born in the British Isles. He followed the naval war news very closely. He enlisted in 1942. His first choice was the R.C.N.V.R. But when that service could only offer him a place on a waiting list, he sought to join the air force, but was told he lacked the necessary background in mathematics. Finally he joined the army and eventually found his way into the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals (R.C.C.S.). For Ashford, being on active service was more important than being in any particular service. He served in Britain and Europe. Like Whyte, one of his reasons for enlisting was simply that it was the thing to do. He recalled many 17 and 18-year old Verdunites volunteering.⁶⁷

In 1938 Joseph Way attempted to join the Naval Reserves (H.M.C.S. *Donnacona*) but no recruits were then being accepted. His real interest was in going to sea, not necessarily to war. On September 4, 1939 he enlisted in the R.C.N.V.R. Patriotism was not a significant factor in his decision. Both his parents were Canadian born. He lived in Ward 2 and was among the first of all his friends to enlist; most eventually joined the army. Way was trained in Montreal for the first few months of his service and lived at home. He served aboard seven different ships during the war, most based in Halifax, and obtained more home leave while in the Navy than was usually available to men in other services.

The pre-war experiences of all three of these men underscore the influence of a military service tradition among Verdun's English-speaking community.

⁶⁷ Interview with Sydney Ashford, January 12, 1993.

Verdun's women also served, but their known numbers are small. Verdun's women served in a variety of other ways, however, especially through their participation in the Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps on a para-military basis.⁶⁸ A total of 154 Verdun women are known to have enlisted, of whom only 10 were French speaking. Overall, these 154 women represented 2.44% of Verdunites on active service overseas. But since relatively few Canadian women served overseas (perhaps no more than 9000 of the 50,000 (including nurses) on active service) it is perhaps not all that surprising that the files of the Mayor's Cigarette Fund would list so few.⁶⁹

The Canadian Women's Army Corps opened a recruitment centre in the Verdun City Hall in October 1942. Results were disappointing, however, and three weeks later it closed. The recruiting officer for M.D. 4 explained to Edward Wilson that "the population in your City, due to war activities, has by now been well drained".⁷⁰ In August 1943, a recruiting centre for the C.W.A.C. was opened on Wellington Street. To mark the opening, *The Guardian* published a full-page recruitment advertisement sponsored by local politicians as well as French- and English-speaking merchants. "Verdun's Bugle Call to Women", read the headline. Prospective recruits were told that the C.W.A.C. allowed women the opportunity to "Serve Shoulder to Shoulder with Your Fighting Men"⁷¹, though this rarely happened.

In 1943, the head of the Verdun W.V.R.C., Joan Adams, joined the C.W.A.C. At least seven other members of the W.V.R.C. had preceded her into this service. Despite

⁶⁸ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the W.V.R.C.

⁶⁹ Jean Bruce, *Back the Attack!*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1995), pp. vii, 38, 75 and 94. A few women listed by the M.C.F. never served overseas, as was the case with R.B. Joan Adams. One woman, Margaret McGill, died in London on active service with the C.W.A.C.

⁷⁰ Major Walter H. Scott, District Recruiting Officer, to Wilson, November 4, 1942, Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

⁷¹ *The Guardian*, August 20, 1943.

Adams's desire to go overseas, she was shunted to Ste. Anne de Bellevue to instruct C.W.A.C. recruits in secretarial and clerical work. This continued a well-established pattern of women's social and civilian employment roles being replicated in uniform. Adams was so displeased at being forced to assume her civilian vocation while on active service that she resigned in 1944. Moreover, uniformed women were sometimes smeared as sexual thrill-seekers and likely carriers of venereal disease. Only seven percent of Canadians felt a woman's most effective wartime contribution would be to enlist.⁷² This did not encourage recruiting.

In addition to the Active Army and the N.R.M.A. army, Canada also organized a Reserve Army (formerly the N.P.A.M.) made up of volunteer men under 18 or between 40 and 50 years of age, or men who for medical reasons or because they provided services deemed essential to the war effort were unable to be considered for the Active Army. Many Verdunites served in the Reserve Army in units such as the Victoria Rifles of Canada or *Le Régiment de Joliette* or in reserve units of other branches of the army.

When the 3rd Division (R) R.C.A.S.C. established a recruitment centre on Wellington Street in April 1941, in anticipation of relocating its units to the Verdun Auditorium, it focused its recruitment on Verdun "skilled tradesmen". Many among Verdun's working class population were experienced drivers, mechanics, fitters, welders, painters and metalsmiths, all occupations available in the Reserve R.C.A.S.C.⁷³ Part-time soldiering.

⁷² Adams interviews, October 6 and November 8, 1993; *The Guardian*, March 20, 1942; Geneviève Auger and Raymonde Lamothe, *De la poêle à frire à la ligne de feu: la vie quotidienne des québécoises pendant la guerre '39-'45*, (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1981), pp. 171-174; see also Ruth R. Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womenhood*, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1986.; Bruce, *Back the Attack!*, *op. cit.*; and Carolyn Gossage, *Greatcoats and Glamour Boots*, Dundurn Press, Toronto, 1991.

⁷³ *The Guardian*, April 18, 1941.

however, had only a limited appeal with Verdunites, whose response was insufficient to bring the Verdun-based units up to full strength.

In September 1941 a reported 500 men of the 2nd Battalion (R), Canadian Grenadier Guards marched through Verdun in aid of a recruitment effort. But the display only yielded 64 recruits, some "so young that they could only be employed as buglers". This disappointingly small number translated into the sum of \$10.00 per recruit in advertising expenses. Despite the city's already outstanding enlistment record, more seemed to be expected of Verdun.⁷⁴ In 1942 the Reserve Army launched a major drive for 10,000 recruits from the Montreal area and Verdun's congested neighbourhoods were considered fertile ground for recruitment. Wilson strongly supported the aims of the Reserve Army and officially involved the city in the campaign. Recruitment booths were set up across the city, including in all public buildings. Reserve Army promotional material stressed that members would not be posted overseas. While several hundred Verdunites served in the wartime Reserve Army, the results of this particular recruitment drive were disappointing, not only in Verdun but across the Island of Montreal.⁷⁵

In June 1943 the C.W.A.C., the Black Watch and the Veterans' Guard set up a large summer recruitment tent in Woodland Park.⁷⁶ On June 22 a Black Watch parade was held in Verdun which included motorized units displaying machine guns and anti-tank

⁷⁴ Colonel A. Fortescue Duguid, *History of the Canadian Grenadier Guards 1760-1964*, (Montreal: The Gazette Printing Company, 1965), pp. 359-360; *The Guardian*, October 3, 1941.

⁷⁵ *The Guardian*, June 18 and June 26, 1942, February 17, 1944 and March 1, 1945; City Council Minutes, June 23, 1942. Poor recruitment was part of a national trend and the very value of the Reserve Army was questioned following the war. Burns, *Manpower in the Canadian Army*, pp. 136-140.

⁷⁶ Council Minutes, June 8, 1943. Throughout the war, dozens of Verdunites served in the Veterans' Guard, a military organization made up of Great War veterans employed in various guard and training duties as well as auxiliary services.

guns. Wilson then spoke to a crowd at Woodland Park, encouraging their enlistment in this famous regiment. He was followed by Alderman Gérard Tétrault, an active member of *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste*, and no political ally of Wilson's, who addressed the gathering in French and urged enlistment in the regiment. This was an odd speech for Tétrault to make when it is considered that French-language infantry units at this time had few reinforcements in the training stream and that French Canadians joining the Black Watch would have had to work in English. *The Guardian* reminded readers that the Black Watch "has had specially close associations with Verdun both in this and the last war". Black Watch recruiting officers appealed to young Verdunites to follow in their fathers' Great War footsteps by joining the regiment. Colonel Paul P. Hutchison, hoping to attract recruits for the Black Watch Reserve battalions, told the crowd that "Verdun has never let the Black Watch down...we are certain Verdun will again answer our call." Many Verdunites already had; yet only 35 recruits were found on this occasion.⁷⁷ The city had been thoroughly combed for active service volunteers and the Reserve Army did not prove as attractive as the recruiters had hoped.

Every major Canadian military engagement, naval action or bombing mission seemed to include Verdunites, which furthered civic pride. After the war, Arthur Burgess wrote that "the Montreal daily newspapers bore eloquent testimony, with an almost embarrassing frequency, to the exploits of Verdun's sons on land, air and sea, in promotions and

⁷⁷ *The Guardian*, June 11, June 18 and June 25, 1943. Colonel Paul P. Hutchison, *Canada's Black Watch: The First Hundred Years*, (Montreal: The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment of Canada), 1962), p. 216. Many Verdunites were killed, wounded or taken prisoner in the course of their service with the Black Watch, which suffered the heaviest casualty toll of any Canadian infantry regiment during the war. Of the over 850 men of the First Battalion who left Canadian shores in 1940, only nine returned with the unit in late 1945 (other survivors having returned in earlier drafts). The senior man was Company Sergeant Major W.F.L. Frost, of Sixth Avenue in Verdun. *The Messenger*, November 22, 1945; *The Guardian*, November 1, 1945.

honours and, unfortunately, in casualties."⁷⁸ Sergeant L.G. Taylor, R.C.A.M.C., wrote from Holland in 1945 that:

it would be a good thing if we had an infantry Battalion, a squadron and a destroyer named after Verdun and composed of Verdunites. The percentage of Verdun men is, as we all know, quite heavy in Montreal units and we do know, to our sorrow, that many a family has suffered the loss of a loved one in Verdun.⁷⁹

Some Verdunites gained fame during the Second World War. Most became known only in Verdun and its neighbouring districts: a handful gained national prominence and one achieved the status of an international celebrity. Local military 'heroes' had a significant impact on Verdun's community spirit. They came to embody the wartime service and sacrifice for which the city had become renowned. Their widely-publicized military achievements had the effect of stimulating Verdunites' interest in the war and perhaps inducing them to increased involvement in the local war effort.

One of the first examples of a Verdun 'hero' was Able Seaman Mike Scullion, a well-known amateur boxer from east-end Verdun. While serving aboard the destroyer H.M.C.S. *Assiniboine* in August 1942, Scullion earned a Mentioned-in-Despatches for his key role in disabling the German submarine *U-210* during a dramatic engagement in the North Atlantic. Canadian newspapers published photos of Scullion in Halifax being congratulated for his deeds by Rear-Admiral L.W. Murray. In October 1942 Scullion returned to Verdun on leave and spoke to students at his former school, St. Willibrord

⁷⁸ Burgess, "*Verdun: La Plus Grande Banlieue Residentielle de Montreal*", Box A-237, file 12, CVA. One Verdunite, Stewart Carson, maintained a scrapbook of press clippings dealing with Verdunites' activities overseas. The scrapbook, still in Carson's possession, strongly endorses Burgess's views. *The Guardian*, March 1, 1945, stated without much exaggeration that "there are few homes in Verdun [without] at least one of its members in the Allied fighting forces or [which have] not already been bereaved through the loss of a dear one in this war." Many British-born residents had relatives on British service as well as Canadian.

⁷⁹ Taylor to M.C.F., January 14, 1945, Box A-348, CVA.

High, where, according to *The Guardian*, he "received thunderous applause" and "his words were followed with undivided attention."⁸⁰ Scullion had shown the country, and Verdunites themselves, what a Verdunite could do. Every local hero's act of military prowess increased Verdun's confidence and self-perception as a particularly patriotic community.

But Scullion's status in Verdun as a local hero was quickly eclipsed by the actions of one who would become perhaps Canada's best-known military figure of the war: Pilot Officer George F. Beurling. The outlines of Beurling's remarkable service career as a Spitfire pilot are already known.⁸¹ What has gone unreported is the effect of Beurling's career on his hometown's morale and the sense of pride his fame instilled among all Verdunites.

Beurling was born in 1921 in east-end Verdun where he grew up. He had always been interested in aviation and learned to fly when he was 14. At the outbreak of war he attempted to enlist in the R.C.A.F. but, despite his impressive flying record, he was denied entrance owing to his failure to meet the minimum educational requirements. Disappointed, in 1940 he joined the R.A.F. as an aircraftsman.

Beurling soon proved himself a natural fighter pilot. In the spring of 1942, as a Sergeant-Pilot, he registered his first two confirmed 'kills' during fighter sweeps over the French coast. In June 1942, he was transferred to Malta. In two weeks in July 1942, Beurling downed an astonishing 16 enemy aircraft, including two in ten seconds. Before he was shot down and wounded on October 14, 1942, Beurling had destroyed 27 aircraft over

⁸⁰ *The Guardian*, September 25 and October 9, 1942. Joseph Way also served aboard *Assiniboine* at the time of this action and knew Scullion well. Way was very proud of his fellow Verdunite's deeds that day.

⁸¹ See George F. Beurling and Leslie Roberts. *Malta Spitfire: The Story of a Fighter Pilot*. Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1943; Brian Nolan. *Hero: The Buzz Beurling Story*. Lester and Orpen Dennys, Toronto, 1981.

Malta, probably destroyed nine others and damaged three more. Allied fortunes in the Mediterranean and North Africa had ebbed dangerously during the summer of 1942 and Beurling's exploits constituted an outstanding Allied success story which received international press attention. He was dubbed "The Knight of Malta", promoted to Pilot Officer and decorated with the Distinguished Service Order, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Distinguished Flying Medal and Bar.⁸² Beurling, only 21 years old, was celebrated as Canada's greatest war hero. He was described by Canadian war correspondent Lionel Shapiro in November 1942 as "the 'hottest' individual in the war so far as London is concerned. And, it goes without saying, as far as Verdun, Quebec, is concerned." *The Montreal Star* dubbed Beurling the "Verdun Ace" and "Verdun's hero".⁸³ He was a national celebrity and he belonged to Verdun.

Closer to home, in the late summer and fall of 1942 *The Guardian* published gushing news items about Beurling. Not surprisingly the local press allotted impressive first-page coverage to "Verdun's pride" and its "most famous son" sometimes featuring admiring commentary from Beurling's family, acquaintances or local public officials. In late October 1942 information was received from the Air Ministry that Beurling had been awarded the Distinguished Service Order and that he would soon return to Canada (at Ottawa's request). Excitement gripped Verdun in anticipation of his homecoming. Doug Whyte recalled that one "could not carry on a conversation [at] that time unless it was

⁸² Beurling was variously nick-named "Buzz" or "Screwball". In the winter of 1943 he undertook a cross-Canada tour to promote the sale of war bonds and transferred to the R.C.A.F. in September 1943. He shot down two more German aircraft before the end of 1943, bringing his final wartime score to 31 1/3 aircraft destroyed. By the time of his discharge in 1944, he had attained the rank of flight lieutenant. Beurling was killed in an airplane crash in Rome in 1948.

⁸³ Shapiro's article appeared in *The Gazette* (Montreal), November 9, 1942; *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 4, 1942. Beurling's roots in Verdun were frequently mentioned in articles about him appearing in the metropolitan press.

about the fact that Beurling...Verdun's hero was coming home."⁸⁴ The 21-year old flier had shown the world Verdun's mettle.

Beurling's fame was used extensively in Verdun to promote the war and war-related home-front activities. When the Verdun Civilian Protection Committee planned an impressive demonstration of its Air Raid Precaution and rescue skills in November 1942, its slogan was, "We won't let Beurling down on the Home Front." Advertisements in *The Guardian* for the demonstration appeared beneath large photos of Beurling, with the accompanying text: "The Hero of Malta is doing more than his bit overseas! Shall we be ready on the Homefront to protect our homes - his home?"⁸⁵ Several major Montreal department stores, such as Eaton's and Henry Morgan and Co., used Beurling's name or likeness in their newspaper advertisements.⁸⁶

Within the celebratory context of Allied victory at El Alamein and the Allied invasion of North Africa, on November 9 Beurling and his family were warmly greeted in Ottawa by the prime minister, Mackenzie King. Photos of the meeting appeared in many Canadian newspapers the next day. Despite this national exposure, Beurling's fame seemed to be jealously guarded by hometown residents. *The Star* reported that some Verdunites felt it

⁸⁴ *The Guardian*, October 23, 1942; interview with Doug Whyte, January 21, 1994; Nolan, *Hero*, p. 73. Montrealer Mary Peate wrote in a draft manuscript of her book, *Girl in a Sloppy Joe Sweater: Life on the Canadian Home Front During World War Two*, Optimum Publishing, Montréal, 1988, that some Verdun boys she met as a teenager during the war bragged about Beurling for the entire duration of a long streetcar ride. Information provided courtesy of Mary Peate. Beurling's investiture at Buckingham Palace in May 1943 drew such a large crowd that traffic around the palace was snarled for hours. *The Guardian*, May 28, 1943; *The Messenger*, May 27, 1943.

⁸⁵ *The Guardian*, October 30, 1942.

⁸⁶ *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 10, 1942.

would have been more appropriate for the local hero to be fêted in Verdun before proceeding to Ottawa.⁸⁷ But they would not have long to wait.

On the evening of November 10, Beurling arrived in Verdun in a motorcade which wound its way through crowd-lined streets from Montreal's Windsor Hotel, where he had given a news conference and where thousands of well-wishers had congregated throughout the course of the day. The City of Verdun, the R.C.A.F. (Beurling was not yet a member) and the National War Finance Committee co-operated to honour Beurling in a lavish and nationally-publicized ceremony at the Verdun Auditorium attended by over 6000 enthusiastic Verdunites of all backgrounds.⁸⁸ High-ranking military dignitaries from the R.C.A.F., R.A.F. and M.D. 4 were in attendance, as were Verdun's political and social elite. The Auditorium was decorated with flags and bunting and an immense portrait of Beurling was suspended from the ceiling. A large and elaborate stage accommodated the dignitaries, including members of Beurling's family. On this stage, amidst phalanxes of honour guards drawn from all three services, stood a throne-like dais where Beurling sat. Wilson formally welcomed him home and expressed the city's pride in his achievements. Further speeches were made and demonstrations of precision drill were performed in his honour. The C.B.C. broadcast the entire spectacle live, coast to coast.⁸⁹ Among the Verdun air cadets performing drill that evening was 17-year old Doug Whyte, who recalled that "the whole building shook" when Beurling entered the

⁸⁷ *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 5 and November 10, 1942.

⁸⁸ The mayor, Wilson, became heavily involved in organizing this event and the city's share of the cost for its staging was over \$800.00. Executive Committee Minutes, November 9, 1942.

⁸⁹ *The Guardian*, November 13, 1942.

Auditorium.⁹⁰ No one who was there ever forgot the sensation of civic pride which made the evening so special for Verdunites.

The whole country was watching and the fighter ace's homecoming was thoroughly covered in the Montreal press. *The Star* devoted two-thirds of a page to Beurling's welcome in Verdun. The "delirious" crowd was described as the greatest in Canadian history ever assembled to welcome home a single war hero.⁹¹ *La Presse* commented approvingly on the reception provided Beurling and noted the "*magnifique esprit de la Ville de Verdun qui a toujours contribué sans compter à l'Emprunt de la victoire et qui a fourni un imposant contingent de militaires à nos forces armées*". Air Commodore Albert de Niverville, noting Verdun's outstanding enlistment record in both world wars stated that "*il ne pourrait se trouver d'endroit plus approprié que Verdun pour le recevoir.*"⁹²

When Beurling's time to speak came, he appeared nervous in front of the wildly cheering crowd. He laconically told his fellow Verdunites, "This is no place for me...I'm a fighter pilot." With this, Beurling "brought the house down".⁹³ The Verdun *Guardian*, which issued a special "extra edition" to cover this momentous local event, proclaimed without exaggeration that "never in the history of this city has any man or woman, no matter what might have been their achievement, received such an ovation". Indeed, Beurling's brief

⁹⁰ Interview with Doug Whyte, January 21, 1994. Whyte was very proud of Verdun's R.A.F. war hero, especially since a good deal of inter-city and inter-service rivalry existed among the different cadet corps in the Montreal area. Beurling's exploits stimulated R.C.A.F. enlistments from Verdun and encouraged recruitment in Verdun High School's air cadet squadron.

⁹¹ *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 11, 1942.

⁹² *La Presse*, November 11, 1942.

⁹³ *The Guardian*, November 13, 1942. It has been more difficult to obtain contemporary Verdun French-language reactions to Beurling's homecoming since copies of *Le Messager* for this period were lost in a postwar fire.

four-minute speech was interrupted on nine separate occasions by the frenzied crowd. On behalf of the city, Wilson presented Beurling with a portrait of the Verdun hero. Two weeks later the City of Verdun named an undeveloped street in its western extremity Beurling Avenue.⁹⁴

Like Scullion before him, Beurling returned to his former school, Verdun High School, to discuss his war experiences with the students. "He had his youthful audience either in roars of laughter or gasping with horror", reported *The Guardian* in April 1943. Beurling was treated like a *matinée* idol by the teenagers, who mobbed around him seeking autographs and a chance for a quick word with the famous aviator. *The Gazette* noted that the boys in attendance "watched him with hero worship pouring out of their eyes." One boy present, John Buck, remembered that he and his classmates "idolized" Beurling and that they were "spellbound" when he spoke to them. A girl in the class recalled that there was at least some apprehension connected with Beurling's visit, for it signalled that the "winds of war had blown through our classroom": as Beurling was only several years older than the students, some of these might have reflected that his harrowing experiences might some day become their own.⁹⁵

Canadian servicemen overseas also derived pride and encouragement from Beurling's military achievements; none more so than Verdunites. Driver George J. Weeks, R.C.A.S.C., wrote the M.C.F. from Britain in 1943 that "we Verdun boys over here will carry the Glory of Verdun in our minds, when the time comes, the same as Beurling did at Malta. That's the same spirit we all have." Lance Bombardier J.F. Cruick, R.C.A., wrote

⁹⁴ Council Minutes, November 23, 1942.

⁹⁵ *The Guardian*, April 9 and April 16, 1943; *The Gazette*, April 3, 1943; Verdun High School, *Annual*, 1943, pp. 45 and 51; interview with John Buck, March 19, 1996; Laurel S. Buck to the author, August 22, 1995.

approvingly that Beurling ""certainly has put the home town in the news lately" and all Verdunites could be grateful for that.⁹⁶

It is difficult to estimate the bond Beurling felt for his hometown. His teenage years were devoted to flying lessons outside of Verdun. He quit school early and moved out of Verdun for the first time when he was 17 years old: he never lived there permanently again. He had few friends in Verdun and there is no evidence that his allegiances to his hometown were especially strong. Perhaps tellingly, he only mentioned Verdun two or three times in passing in his 1943 book, *Malta Spitfire*, which he co-authored with Leslie Roberts. On the other hand, there was definitely something of Verdun in him. The early part of his book, especially, shows him to have been very class-conscious and the product of an unpretentious social environment.⁹⁷

The Guardian proclaimed Beurling's spectacular return the "outstanding feature" of the year 1942 in Verdun.⁹⁸ As the epitome of Verdunites' impressive enlistment and fighting record and as a symbol of the involvement of the community in the war effort, Beurling's homecoming proved to be the highlight of Verdun's war.

Verdunites frequently served together or met each other while overseas, particularly in Britain, and often expressed pleasure that they were amongst one another. One wrote "there are a lot of Verdun boys in my unit...They make the 16th Field Company, R.C.E., a

⁹⁶ Weeks to M.C.F., June 24, 1943; Cruick to M.C.F., no date, 1943, Box A-340, CVA. When another Verdun flier, Henry Malkin, D.F.C. and Bar, a Halifax bomber pilot, gained prominence later in the war, *The Guardian* contented itself with referring to him as "a second Beurling". Malkin, who enlisted as an aircraftsman, was promoted to the rank of wing commander in March 1944 and served as one of Verdun's top-ranking officers during the war. *The Guardian*, May 7, 1943 and March 9, 1944.

⁹⁷ Beurling and Roberts, *Malta Spitfire*, pp. 4-12 and 96-97.

⁹⁸ *The Guardian*, December 30, 1942.

unit to be really proud of and a man proud to belong to Verdun." L.G. Taylor stated, "I meet Verdunites over here nearly every day. We compose a good percent[age] of our unit [9 Field Ambulance, R.C.A.M.C.], and...other units are the same." Sergeant C. Adams of the 17th Duke of York, Royal Canadian Hussars, wrote from Britain in 1942 that, "anywhere a fellow goes over here he bumps into a Verdunite." Private C.G. Robertson wrote near the end of the war: "I am now in Belgium and have also been in Holland and intend to be in Germany before this clam bake comes to an end. I have met many Verdun boys. In fact my unit is just full of them, so I am not entirely among strangers."⁹⁹ These men's letters indicate pride for Verdun, for its contribution and, on a more personal level, for their own roles.

Driver Kenneth Slade, R.C.A.S.C., who enlisted in the Reserve Army in June 1940 and went active in September 1940 suggested that one should not exaggerate the degree of home-town links among overseas Verdunites. Perhaps owing to the large number of them to be found in Britain, Slade felt "it wasn't [that] tight. Nobody was going to fight for the other guy just because he came from Verdun. But you were always proud to meet someone from Verdun. I think you could borrow money from someone from Verdun...if you didn't have a nickel to your name." Joseph Way noted that even though he can recall Verdunites serving aboard most of the ships of which he was a crewman, he felt no particular sense of kinship toward them. Aboard ship, loyalty was applied first and foremost to the men's trade groups and messdecks.¹⁰⁰ The regimental system itself develops unit cohesion partly by de-emphasizing previous roots and backgrounds and by rallying men around a new common bond, that of the regimental family. For many,

⁹⁹ Sergeant J. Dunster, R.C.E., to M.C.F., December 17, 1941; Taylor to M.C.F., April 4, 1941, Box A-333; Adams to M.C.F., no date, 1942, Box A-339; Private Robertson, R.C.A.S.C., to M.C.F., April 8, 1945, Box A-348, CVA.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Kenneth Slade, October 6, 1993; interview with Joseph Way, September 21, 1993.

loyalty began and ended within the regimental or other unit structure. Once enlisted there were more pulls on a serviceman's allegiance than those of community identity.

But the views of Slade and Way are exceptional; most serving Verdunites insisted *at the time* that Verdun kinship and local loyalty were more meaningful than this. Sapper F. Gibbons, R.C.E., wrote that "coming from Verdun is quite a bond between the boys over here and no matter where you go and what arm of the Services you meet, the chances are that you will find somebody from Verdun." Trooper F.G. Beer stated in a letter from Britain in late 1944, "although in a comparatively strange land I feel at home, largely because so many Verdun boys are either here or have at one time been on duty on this tight little Island." Sapper H.H. White wrote in 1942. "...it is over two years since I left good old Verdun, but I have my Verdun friends here with me so we get along pretty well."¹⁰¹ It is clear from these letters that, despite the acquisition of service or unit identities and loyalties, the sense of community which Verdunites shared continued to exert a powerful grip on them overseas.¹⁰²

Mail, gifts and news from home were also very important to these men. One Verdunite wrote in 1942.

You have no idea how anxiously we await news from Home...when the report gets around that there is mail in, the poor post-man doesn't know

¹⁰¹ Gibbons to M.C.F., December 14, 1941, Box A-333; Beer to M.C.F., December 16, 1944, Box A-348; White to M.C.F., January 25, 1942, Box A-333, CVA. Many Verdunites expressed community kinship in letters to the M.C.F. when they thanked the fund on behalf of *all* Verdunites overseas. In 1941, Corporal W.A. Horsely of No. 1 Fighter Squadron (later 401 Squadron), R.C.A.F., wrote a warm note of appreciation on behalf of all Verdunites in his squadron, insisting that they "all...feel the same way even if they don't write." No date, 1941, Box A-333, CVA.

¹⁰² In Earle Birney's satirical novel, *Turvey*, about the misadventures of the title character, a private soldier in the Canadian Army during the Second World War, two soldiers ignore Turvey because they were "in deep reminiscences; they had discovered they were from the same home town." See the paperback edition published by McClelland and Stewart, 1963, p. 229.

whether he is coming or going, standing up or sitting down, everyone pesters the poor fellow...[He] has to have more patience than Job as well as being an angel in khaki to break the news gently that there is no dice.¹⁰³

Trooper E. Elder, 14th Canadian Armoured Regiment (The Calgary Regiment), wrote from Italy in 1944: "There is a large number of Verdunites in this battle zone. I often run into a bunch here and there and the main subject of conversation is Verdun...how we all wish we were there now."¹⁰⁴ Many men mentioned the importance of reading the Verdun newspapers overseas, especially *The Guardian*. Their sense of isolation was reduced by reading news of familiar places, institutions and people, even if the news was several weeks old. No overseas Verdunite could fail to notice the coverage they received in the ever-patriotic *Guardian*. Leading Stoker E.J. Pyndus, serving aboard the corvette H.M.C.S. *Cobourg*, wrote to the M.C.F. from St. John's, Newfoundland that,

My mother often sends me Guardians...it's a wonderful paper with all the home news in it. It's quite monotonous at times at sea and it's sure enjoyable to pick up a Guardian and read all about the news at home.¹⁰⁵

To his pleasant surprise, Lieutenant Commander Woods, commanding officer of H.M.C.S. *Dunver*, and a Verdunite, saw copies of *The Guardian* in Salvation Army canteens in London, Liverpool and Londonderry.¹⁰⁶ Like the newspapers of other large Canadian cities, Verdun's main English-language newspaper could be found wherever there were Verdunites, which was throughout the British Isles at this time. In 1943 Gunner R.H. Smith, 7/5 Medium Regiment, R.C.A., wrote: "our battery is made up 50 percent of Verdunites, the other 50 percent from Montreal. On our wall in the stores is a

¹⁰³ Private F. Read, R.C.A.M.C., to M.C.F., January 17, 1942, Box A-333, CVA.

¹⁰⁴ Elder to M.C.F., August 1, 1944, Box A-348, CVA.

¹⁰⁵ Pyndus to M.C.F., no date, late 1944, Box A-348.

¹⁰⁶ *The Guardian*, June 15, 1944.

double page of the "Guardian" with the honor roll of Verdun boys serving overseas."¹⁰⁷
Verdunites took their community pride with them overseas.

Some men fought homesickness. Many letters refer to an urgent desire to return home to family, friends and familiar surroundings. Few had a better claim to long for Verdun than Signalman B. C. Palmquist, who wrote in 1942:

I can say with all sincerity (sic) that the day I walk along Wellington Street again will be the happiest day I have ever experienced. No one by any stretch of the imagination can picture what it is like to be away from a wife and six adorable children, until they have experienced it. Naturally we have our moments of home-sickness and feel really upset, then we ask ourselves is it all worth it[?] Of course we snap out of it and know deep in our hearts that we have to finish the biggest job of all our careers. I am sure that the results will be well worth the misery and heart aches we have had to suffer.¹⁰⁸

In 1941 Private Fred Wray, R.C.A.S.C., was honoured by a conversation with King George VI while the King was on an inspection tour of Canadian units in Britain. The young Verdunite was obviously proud of his hometown and perhaps missed it, too, for *The Guardian* quoted Wray as writing in a letter home that the King

...asked me where I came from and I told him Verdun and he said 'Oh yes, that is the city I wanted to see on my visit, but was unable to.' He asked me...how I liked it over here. I told him it was alright but that I liked Verdun better.¹⁰⁹

Private L. Brunet, a stretcher-bearer with *Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal*, longed for home and his wife and child. Still, he was fervently proud of Verdun and hoped that "*avant de quitter l'Europe nous planteront une croix en mémoire des soldats de Verdun*". He

¹⁰⁷ Smith to M.C.F., June 19, 1943, Box A-340, CVA. In late 1942, individuals could no longer ship newspapers overseas, though the publishers could on a subscription basis. *The Guardian*, November 20, 1942.

¹⁰⁸ Palmquist to M.C.F., September 13, 1942, Box A-339, CVA.

¹⁰⁹ *The Guardian*, May 2, 1941.

signed his 1941 letter, "*Un soldat de Verdun*". Corporal W.A. Kitching claimed "Wellington Street would look like paradise to a lot of the Verdun boys".¹¹⁰

Coming as they did from a compact city with a strong sense of local culture, and reinforced by the knowledge that their hometown apparently led the nation in enlistments, Verdunites on active service overseas felt a fraternal tie towards each other and enjoyed a common bond which linked them to their hometown. And in the throes of war, they found comfort in this.

Divorced from its purely local relevance, the body of evidence Verdunites have bequeathed in their letters home express the attitudes and concerns of Canada's Second World War generation. The men longed for their homes and Verdun came to symbolize everything that was good and proper in life. Many letters sent from Britain showed the writers to be anxious, restless and plagued by monotony. This ended once action had been joined in Europe but, even then, there was the recognition of a difficult and burdensome job to do, made endurable by a vicarious contact with home, either through fellow townspeople or the hometown newspapers.

By the end of the war, the participation level of Verdun's men of military service age was very high, and near its maximum for English-speaking Verdunites. Verdunites in uniform crossed linguistic, religious, class, age and gender lines. Still, in keeping with the composition of the city's population, most Verdunites serving overseas were English-speaking. More than one third lived in Ward 3, which contained only 11% of residents. The highest-income neighbourhoods produced the lowest proportion of enlistments, though the highest proportion of officers. The enlistment rates for Verdun's French-speaking population was no less than the overall French-speaking proportion of the armed

¹¹⁰ Brunet to M.C.F., April 2, 1941, Box A-333; Kitching to M.C.F., no date, 1942, Box A-339, CVA. It has not been possible using available evidence to determine the date of enlistment, age and marital status of Verdunites on active service.

forces. Most French speakers who enlisted did so from 1942 onward while most English speakers in uniform had joined by 1943. If "national sacrifice is the sum of individual sacrifice", as E.L.M. Burns wrote after the war¹¹¹, then Verdun's contribution in terms of manpower, especially from its English-speaking population, was of national significance. With five times its 1914 population, Verdun was far more important to the Canadian war effort during the Second World War than it had been in the earlier conflict. Verdunites' local identity, nurtured at home and sustained under more difficult conditions overseas, provided a thread to which they all could cling. The morale benefits obtained facilitated their prosecution of the war and assisted them along the long road to victory.

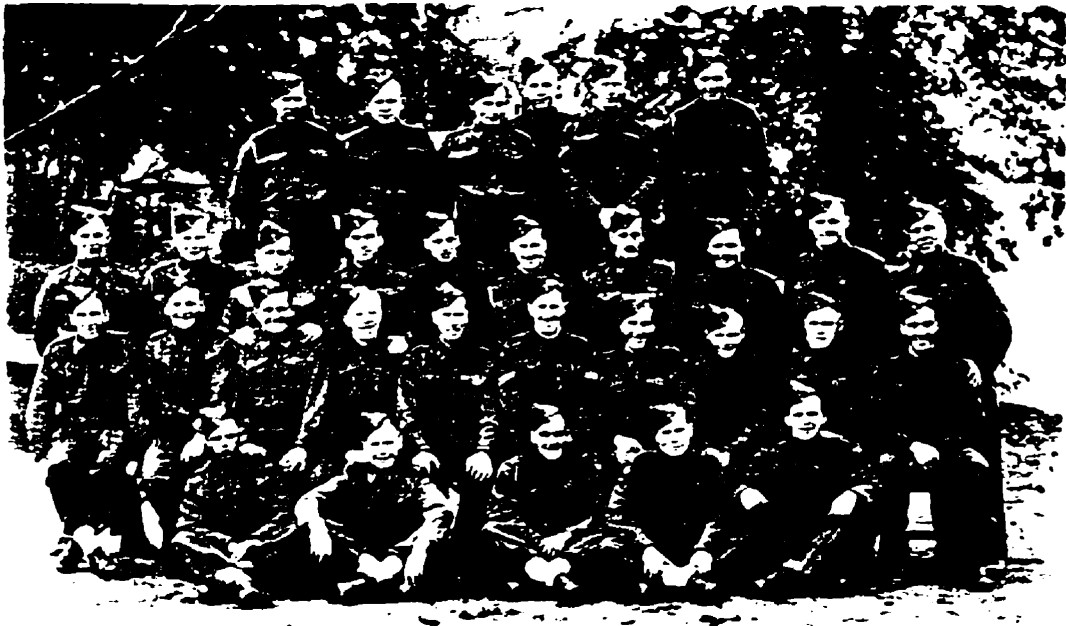
¹¹¹ Burns, p. 4.



Gunner J.K. Rankin, 5th Field Regiment, R.C.A.
A Verdunite "somewhere in England"
February 1941



Despatch riders. Headquarters Company, Royal Montreal Regiment
England, April 1941
Private E.G. Evans, top right, and Lance Corporal H.J. Smith, bottom right,
were among the many Verdunites serving with this unit.



"The Verdun Gang"
1st Medium Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery
England, probably 1941
The Verdun members of this unit sent this postcard
to friends and family back home.
(Courtesy Joe Way)



A family of soldiers from Ward 3.
From the left, Thomas Snow, Robert Snow, Bernice Snow, Ted Snow,
Archie Bain and unidentified friend.
Second Avenue, Ward 3, April 1941
(Courtesy Paul Moreau)



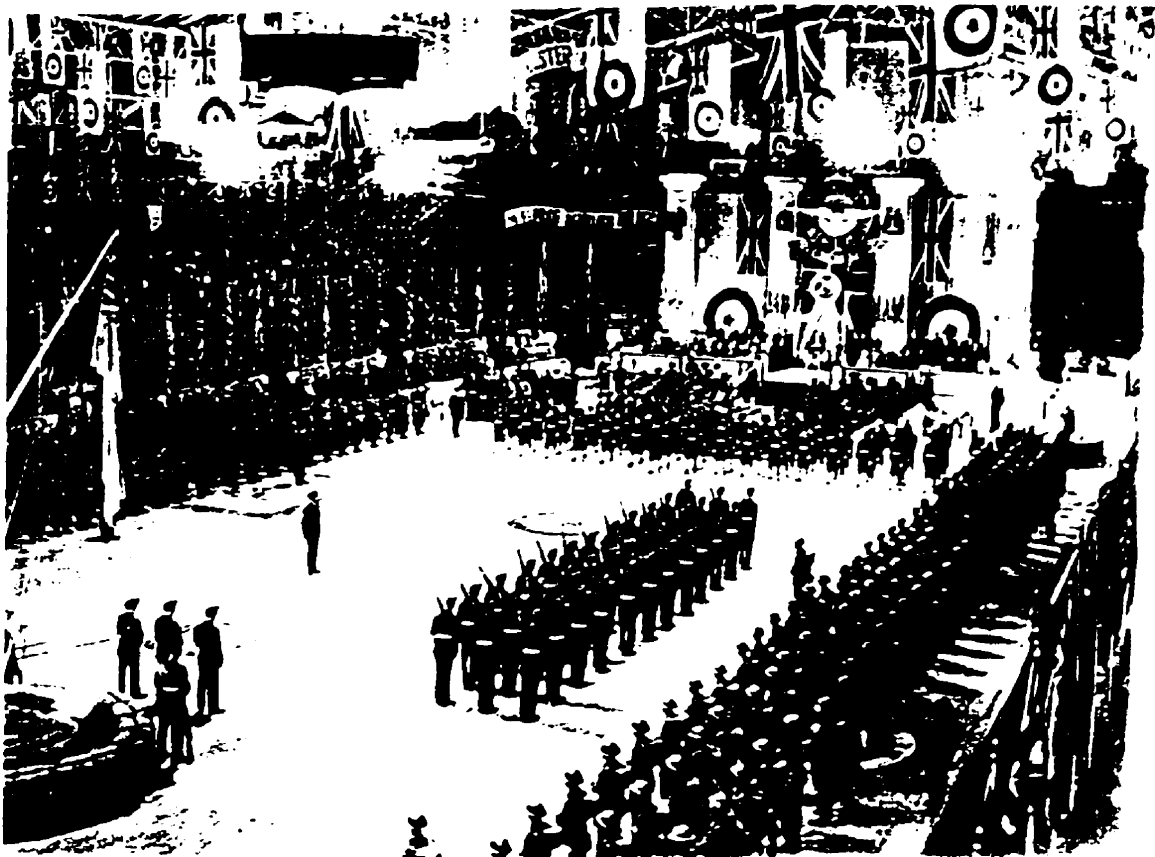
Private Herbert J. Priest-Brown, R.C.A.S.C.

August, 1941

A Verdunite from Second Avenue, Ward 3.

Woodland Park in background.

(Courtesy Ruth Priest-Brown)



Flying Officer George F. Beurling's homecoming
Verdun Auditorium
November 10, 1942
(City of Verdun Archives)



Mayor Edward Wilson Presents Beurling with
a portrait of the fighter ace
November 10, 1942
(City of Verdun Archives)



Flying Officer George F. "Buzz" Beurling. D.S.O., D.F.C., D.F.M. and Bar
(City of Verdun Archives)

The pipes and drums of the Canadian Women's Army Corps.
Recruiting drive, Woodland Park
June 1943
(City of Verdun Archives)



CHAPTER 3 CITY HALL GOES TO WAR

The City of Verdun played a leading role in organizing the local war effort. Verdun's elected and non-elected officials frequently undertook activity in support of the war and co-operated with military authorities on a variety of issues. Occasionally, the war was used as an opportunity by the city to improve its own finances. Municipally-organized fund-raising ventures, such as the Mayor's Cigarette Fund, allowed Verdunites to support their friends and kin overseas. The city also assisted various patriotic organizations active in the municipality. The mayor, Wilson, had the best interests of the nation *and* Verdun (and perhaps his own political fortunes) in mind in adopting so firm a patriotic stance.

On April 3, 1939, Edward Wilson, a 57-year old, British-born alderman, defeated the colourful incumbent mayor, Hervé Ferland. The two men had developed an antagonistic and bitter relationship and the election had divided the electorate mainly along linguistic lines. Of the 517 Verdunites who signed Wilson's nomination papers, only 22 had French surnames.¹ In a pre-election advertisement in *The Guardian* Wilson assured French-speaking voters that he would be "everybody's mayor without distinction of class, race or religion."² His bilingual message was aimed at the large French-Canadian minority in Verdun as well as at Verdun's landlords, most of whom were French speaking and whose control of the city's Executive Committee Wilson had opposed from its inception in 1933. Wilson's promise suggests social divisions in the community of which the electorate might especially have been reminded at election time.

Of the eight aldermen elected along with Wilson, the two representing west-end Ward 4 were English speaking while the six elected from Wards 1, 2 and 3, which combined

¹ *The Guardian*, March 24, 1939.

² *The Guardian*, March 31, 1939.

contained less than half Verdun's population, were French speaking. This pattern was repeated with only minor variations in subsequent municipal elections held in 1941, 1943 and 1945. Most of the aldermen elected throughout this period, save one or perhaps two French speakers per council, sided with Wilson on most issues, even while sitting on the Executive Committee. Wilson and the French-speaking aldermen had been united in their dislike for Ferland and his free-spending ways. This solidarity continued after Wilson's election to the mayoralty and greatly facilitated his ability to engage the city in wartime activities. As a whole, Verdun's city councils, despite their linguistic imbalances, generally acted on wartime issues as representatives of Verdun's war-minded English-speaking majority.

Born into a working-class family in Burnley, Lancashire in 1882, Edward Wilson was of mixed Anglo-Scottish parentage. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had immigrated to Canada in 1910, settling first in Montreal and finally in Verdun in 1917. Before being elected mayor, Wilson had represented Ward 4 from 1931 to 1933 and again from 1935 to 1939. Throughout this period and during the war he owned and managed a wholesale egg and poultry business which he operated from Montreal's Bonsecours Market. Wilson, who always wore a trademark bow-tie in public, spoke passable French, was an avid gardener, lawn-bowler and reader of English literature. Ever concerned with civil liberties and the conditions of the working class, he became a member of the C.C.F. He was a Mason, a member of the Anglican Church and lived in a modest detached home on Woodland Avenue in the west-central part of the city.³

³ It is not clear exactly what sort of education Wilson obtained. His father died when he was seven years old and at the age of ten Wilson worked as a newspaper salesman and went to school half-days. At the age of 13 he started working full time in a cotton mill and according to his own later recollection, "went to school at nights taking shorthand and bookkeeping and a variety of subjects" until he was 20. *The Guardian*, January 27, 1960 and May 24, 1945.

Edward Wilson was a busy mayor. During the war, apart from his business and mayoral duties, he directed or participated in numerous patriotic and war-related organizations and fundraising campaigns, large and small. He held executive positions in the Verdun branch of the Red Cross, the Civilian Protection Committee, the Mayor's Cigarette Fund, the Verdun Salvage Committee and the Salvation Army, among others. He was also chairman of the Verdun Protestant Board of School Trustees, represented Verdun on the Montreal Metropolitan Commission and was a director of the Quebec Union of Municipalities.⁴ Wilson served as mayor well into the postwar period.

In addition to Wilson, the indefatigable city clerk, Arthur Burgess, the city manager, J.R. French, and several other ranking municipal officials, including the police director, the city engineer and the head of public works, became heavily involved in war charities and patriotic causes. Burgess was born in Welsall, near Birmingham, England in 1889. He arrived in Canada in 1910 and found employment with the Canadian Pacific Railway. At first residing in Montreal, he settled in Verdun in 1911. In 1922, he married a Verdun woman originally from Yorkshire. They lived on one of Verdun's more fashionable streets, Beatty Avenue, in the city's west end. Burgess was an outstanding cricketer and one of the founders of the Verdun 500 Swimming and Social Club and was also a "recognized authority" on the history of Verdun.⁵ Burgess began his duties as clerk of the City of Verdun in 1929 and remained in that function for the next 33 years.

Joseph Rienzo French, a bilingual French-Canadian bachelor, became the city manager in 1933. He was born in 1898 in Valleyfield, southwest of Montreal. City manager systems of civic government were new to Canada and Verdun was one of the first municipalities

⁴ Box A-198, file 32, "Mayor Edward Wilson", CVA.

⁵ *The Messenger*, February 10, 1949; *The Guardian*, September 27, 1945. Most of the short histories of the City of Verdun in the city archives bear Burgess's signature. He was particularly conscientious about detailing Verdun's military and civil contributions to the war effort.

in the country to adopt this administrative structure. French, Verdun's top non-elected official, was responsible for the overall administration of the city and acted as the city's chief financial officer. City Council decided policy while French, and the various department heads he oversaw, executed the policy. He remained city manager for nearly three decades.⁶

The solidly entrenched positions of Wilson, Burgess, French and the other administrators, combined with the essential unity of their views, shaped Verdun's responses to the war. They led or attended various wartime groups' committee meetings, organized municipal resources in aid of patriotic causes and, often, simply added the prestige of their presence to special war-related events in Verdun. Though some of their efforts were not, strictly speaking, officially those of the City of Verdun, most of their war activities were predicated on the authority of their positions in the municipal hierarchy. The involvement of these men in patriotic undertakings implied the official sanction of the municipal administration.

With a British-born mayor and a British-born city clerk, the administration of the City of Verdun was as favourably disposed towards assisting in the war effort as were many of its residents, whether English or French speaking. No serious disagreements took place in council over the principle of co-operation with Ottawa on military matters or over the city's contribution in some material or financial way to the cause of the war. The authorities were able to commit the resources of Verdun, the majority of whose land-holding rate payers were French speaking and Catholic, without protest in support of the war effort. Wilson's views predominated in the council chamber and expressed those of

⁶ Box A-198, file 32, CVA. Despite his position, French's role in the community was discreet. Neither *The Guardian* nor historical files in municipal archives divulged much about his personal life. The city manager system co-ordinated and centralized municipal services and expenditures and provided a strong sense of administrative continuity. See Thomas J. Plunkett, *Municipal Organization in Canada*, (Montreal: The Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities, 1955), pp. 26-33.

Verdun's English-speaking and French-speaking communities. Political opposition to measures supporting the vigorous prosecution of the war, as occurred in some Québec municipalities, would have been difficult under these circumstances. There is no evidence to suggest that anti-war sentiment existed on city council but, if it did, it was only occasional and muted.

Verdun's official involvement in the homefront war had many facets. Few assemblies of patriotic-minded citizens or even the smallest fund-raising venture took place without some form of co-operation from the city. City Hall opened its facilities to many local groups involved in war work. Meeting rooms, parks or playgrounds were almost invariably made available free of charge. The city provided administrative, material or financial support to many activities. Sometimes aid consisted of granting permits to groups wishing to assemble or canvass on behalf of a war charity. On a larger scale, in 1941 the city placed the municipal Auditorium at the disposal of the Department of National Defence (D.N.D.) for the duration of the war. The city's commitment was present in virtually all Verdun's patriotic undertakings.

The city dealt with such issues as enemy aliens, the imposition of a curfew and the support of Verdunites serving overseas through the creation of the city-administered and extremely popular Mayor's Cigarette Fund. Similarly, the city played a leading role in providing comforts to crewmen serving aboard H.M.C.S. *Dunver*, "Verdun's own frigate".

ENEMY ALIENS, A CURFEW AND NATIONAL REGISTRATION

Even before Canada's declaration of war against Germany, on September 10, 1939, Wilson and Verdun's chief of police, Alfred Dubeau, had contacted the R.C.M.P. and the Quebec Provincial Police for information "in connection with...taking every precaution to safeguard public property and public utilities from damage during the present war crisis

as well as for the maintenance of public order."⁷ Wilson had ordered the posting of guards at public buildings and along the Aqueduct which formed the city's northwest limits.⁸ Spies, traitors and saboteurs were widely believed to be active in Canada. Even though there were few strategic facilities in Verdun, upon the outbreak of war the city hired 12 new police officers, ten of whom were on the job within a week.⁹

The City of Verdun continued to provide relief payments to men enlisting or N.P.A.M. men called out for emergency "anti-sabotage service" until such time as they had received their first service pay.¹⁰ The city not only encouraged a patriotic popular response to the war but welcomed the accompanying diminution in relief expenditures. Verdun municipal employees enlisting were awarded two weeks salary and promised their jobs back upon demobilization.¹¹

⁷ Council Minutes, September 7, 1939.

⁸ The cities of Westmount and Outremont acted similarly. *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 5, 1939.

⁹ However, at the same time 19 policemen and firemen were discharged as unsatisfactorily having performed their duties. Security was enhanced by the quality not the quantity of the gendarmes. Council Minutes, September 11, 1939 and *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 12 and September 18, 1939. At the end of October, a special guard on wartime duties at the little-used Dominion Textiles plant in east-end Verdun shot and slightly wounded a suspicious loiterer who refused repeated calls to halt. *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 1, 1939.

¹⁰ This was a generous policy compared to the City of Montreal, which cut off aid as soon as a man was mobilized for internal security duties. *The Guardian*, September 1, 1939; City Council Minutes, August 31 and September 7, 1939.

¹¹ On the day Canada declared war, Burgess wrote to the King's Printer for two copies in English of *Regulations Regarding the Defence of Canada* (at 25 cents each). Executive Committee Minutes, August 31, 1939; Council Minutes, September 7 and September 18, 1939; *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 1, 1939; Box A-331, file 6 "Guerre 1939-43". CVA.

In the late spring of 1940, the rapidly deteriorating military situation in France heightened Canadians' fears of "Fifth Column" activity. In May 1940, Verdun's branch of the Canadian Corps Association (C.C.A.) announced that it had prepared a "blacklist" of suspected Nazi sympathizers and warned that C.C.A. members would be on the alert against disloyal utterances on the part of citizens. Verdun's C.C.A. branch also requested that area municipalities discharge all known pacifists or communists on their payrolls and reminded them that Canadians of German origin had to be watched closely. There were, however, very few residents of German ethnicity in Verdun. Despite this, a speaker at the Verdun United Church also warned the faithful about the danger of Fifth Column activity in Verdun.¹²

This vigilante mood was also reflected at the municipal level. On May 27, 1940, Verdun City Council unanimously passed the following resolution:

Verdun hereby offers...to the Department of National Defence its full cooperation towards the prevention of subversive propaganda against the state in this time of stress, when the loyal support of every true Canadian is required for the prosecution of the war.¹³

The Minister of National Defence, Norman Rogers, re-assured the city that steps had been taken to curtail the potentially harmful activities of enemy aliens, but did not rule out

¹² *The Montreal Daily Star*, May 23, 1940. In September 1939 Herman Schmid, a German national, who lived with his wife and teen-aged son on Fifth Avenue, was interned. Mrs. Schmid obtained municipal relief payments (paid by Ottawa) from November 1939 to February 1940. Gino Martellani of east-end Regina Avenue was interned in June 1940, obliging his wife and two sons, aged six and two, to obtain municipal relief for the next four months. *Rapport re assistance aux familles d'ennemis internés*, City Clerk's Office, City of Verdun, November 12, 1940, Box A-361, file "Enemy Aliens 1940-1942", CVA.

¹³ Not every Québec municipality was so patriotic. Drummondville municipal council passed a resolution firmly denouncing Canadian participation in the war. Jean Thibault, *Drummondville à l'heure de la guerre 1939-1945*, (*La Société d'histoire de Drummondville*, 1994), p. 8.

accepting Verdun's rather vague offer of assistance. Meanwhile, Wilson took "the initiative" in instilling greater vigilance in the Verdun Police Force.¹⁴

Two weeks following Italy's declaration of war on June 10, the Executive Committee rescinded the right of a man of Italian origin, M. Miniucci, to operate a restaurant at the city-operated swimming pool, the Natatorium.¹⁵ The only grounds for this action seemed to be the man's ethnicity. Nevertheless, for unexplained reasons, Miniucci was allowed to operate another concession at the Verdun Auditorium without protest from the community, a situation which changed only when the Auditorium was taken over by D.N.D. a year later. When the restaurateur sought compensation for his loss of business and Ottawa refused his request, the City of Verdun paid him \$600.00 which it insisted it was not obliged to do.¹⁶ This denouement suggests that the city realized it had acted rashly in denying him his business at the Natatorium. More than this, it also suggests that Verdunites did not feel threatened by nor vindictive towards residents of enemy alien origin. Community self-confidence and cohesion allowed for a distinction to be made in Verdun between legitimate security threats and the ordinary actions of citizens.

According to the 1941 Census there were only 376 German and 295 Italian ethnics living in Verdun, combining for less than one-tenth of one percent of residents.¹⁷ The absence of persons of enemy-alien origin limited intra-community ethnic conflict. Nevertheless, soon after Italy's entry into the war, some local Italian merchants complained of a slander campaign being mounted against them. It is not clear who was behind this, but there is

¹⁴ Norman Rogers to Arthur Burgess, June 6, 1940, Box A-331, file 6, CVA: *The Guardian*, May 31, 1940.

¹⁵ *The Guardian*, June 14 and June 28, 1940; Executive Committee Minutes, June 25, 1940.

¹⁶ Executive Committee Minutes, August 12 and August 19, 1941.

¹⁷ The 1931 Census figures were 464 Germans and 204 Italians.

some evidence that the merchants were labelled as Fifth Columnists by their business competitors.¹⁸ Ethnic animosity could be manufactured for local personal gain.

But these incidents had occurred at a particularly bleak period in the fortunes of the Allies. Possibly as a result of the city's and local groups' precautions, Verdunites' fears of sabotage or propaganda campaigns remained unexpressed for the remainder of war. No attacks of any kind were reported on enemy alien minorities in Verdun nor did the city support the several subsequent petitions it received from various groups requesting a curtailment of the liberties of enemy aliens.¹⁹ Verdun had reacted with concern, perhaps even on occasion with prejudice and paranoia, only when Allied fortunes were waning. Otherwise, no backlash was directed against citizens of enemy alien origin.

¹⁸ *The Guardian*, June 14, 1940.

¹⁹ Council Minutes, June 25, 1940; Box A-331, file 6, CVA. It was a different story regarding refugee resettlement, however. In January 1944 Verdun City Council adopted, by a vote of 7-1, a resolution suggested in a circular letter from *La Ligue Nationale*, a French-Canadian nationalist group, calling on the federal government to abandon its plans to admit European refugees to Canada. A copy of the resolution, already prepared by *La Ligue Nationale*, was signed by Wilson and Burgess and despatched to federal and provincial ministers and local parliamentarians. This rather surprising move on the part of the city was supported by *La Société St-Jean-Baptiste* as well as by Maurice Duplessis, then leader of the opposition. Verdun's M.P., Paul-Émile Côté, a Liberal backbencher, approved the city council's decision, though he later backed off following a meeting with T.A. Crerar, the responsible minister. The United Jewish Refugee and War Relief Agencies, named in the preamble to *La Ligue's* resolution protested to the City of Verdun that the municipality had been misled. Outraged at the city's callous decision, Father Ernest Reed, rector of St. John The Divine Anglican Church, Wilson's place of worship, wrote a letter published in *The Guardian* describing the resolution as "most regrettable" and not displaying "Christian charity". *La Ligue Nationale* to city council, January 13, 1944; Council Minutes, January 24, 1944; circular letter from *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal* to city council, February 5, 1944; The United Jewish Refugee and War Relief Agencies to city council, undated, (early February 1944); Côté to city council, February 23 and March 7, 1944; Duplessis to city council, March 21, 1944, Box A-331, file 7, CVA; *The Guardian*, February 10, 1944.

In March 1941 Verdun's Civilian Protection Committee (C.P.C.) engaged in a training operation on the streets of Verdun which prompted a question in the House of Commons. Planning for the day when their services might be required in a manhunt for saboteurs or suspected Fifth Columnists (a far more important role than Air Raid Precautions in the organization's first year of operation), 100 members of the Verdun C.P.C. blocked the seven road entrances to Verdun, stopped traffic and asked all motorists to produce their N.R.M.A. registration cards. This operation was praised in *The Guardian* as the first of its kind in Canada. In the course of this experiment, 1612 vehicles were stopped containing over 3000 passengers. Only four motorists were found to be without identification of any sort while 85 others were without their registration cards. Their names were promptly turned over to the R.C.M.P. for investigation.²⁰ Nevertheless, over 97% of citizens were found to be carrying proper wartime identification.

Some viewed these proceedings with misgivings. On March 20, 1941 M.J. Coldwell, of the C.C.F., rose in the House of Commons and asked the Justice Minister, Ernest Lapointe, "under whose authority did the Verdun Civilian Protection Committee...stop cars and demand registration certificates or [driver's] licenses?" Coldwell also wanted to know whether it was "the policy of the department to allow local groups to arrange check-ups of this nature?" Lapointe had no answers and suggested the questions stand for a later response. A week later when the questions were re-read, no replies were forthcoming and nothing more was heard of the matter in the House.²¹

Coldwell's concern was that of a civil libertarian. He worried about the blurring of the Verdun C.P.C.'s responsibilities with those of more formally constituted authorities. Early on in its existence this group had taken on the self-appointed function of tracking and reporting to the police chief "any rumours or statements of a subversive character

²⁰ *The Guardian*, March 7, 1941.

²¹ House of Commons, *Debates*, March 20 and March 27, 1941.

coming to the attention of any [C.P.C.] member".²² A danger to civil liberty might have occurred in Verdun as a result of the actions of this semi-official group, which was potentially unable to differentiate between subversive activity and legitimate wartime dissent. In that worrying summer of 1940, Verdun suddenly had a profusion of "loyal" eyes and ears monitoring its population for signs of Fifth Columnist behaviour.

In December 1941 Wilson, more cautious this time, wrote in advance to J.T. Thorson, Minister of National War Services, responsible for the enforcement of N.R.M.A. provisions, and also to J. Gordon Ross, the provincial C.P.C. chairman, seeking their opinions on the advisability of the Verdun C.P.C. re-enacting its registration card check. He asked Ross "whether or not we are exceeding our powers of authority".²³ Ross's reply is not known but Wilson's desire to use the C.P.C. for these spot checks demonstrates his concerns about public safety and the need for wartime public vigilance. It was not until 1942, by which time Britain appeared safe from invasion and German attacks on Canada seemed very unlikely, that the C.P.C.'s search for subversives was put in abeyance.

As the war progressed, the perceived threat was not from Fifth Columnists or enemy agents, but rather from home-grown juvenile delinquents.²⁴ In 1935, at the height of the Depression, *La ligue des Propriétaires de Verdun*, a French-Canadian landlords' association, had presented City Hall with a 2000-name petition requesting the adoption of a curfew by-law. The property owners believed that the large number of Verdun unemployed youth and the difficult economic conditions in the city had led to a rash of

²² C.P.C. Minutes, July 31, 1940, Box A-258, file 4, CVA. This was first discussed at the C.P.C.'s second meeting held June 21, 1940, Box A-322, file 3, CVA.

²³ Wilson to Ross, December 12, 1941; Wilson to J.T. Thorson, December 12, 1941, Box A-322, file 3-A, CVA.

²⁴ Wartime juvenile delinquency is addressed in Chapter 7.

vandalism and petty theft. They feared more property damage unless the city acted to curtail the movements of juveniles.²⁵ The unpopular issue was eventually dropped.

The war served as a convenient opportunity for local property owners to once again seek a curfew. In January 1940, mounting vandalism, which seemed unrelated to the war or political issues, caught the attention of *La ligue's* 200 members and for the next five years, this group sought a municipal curfew beginning at 9 p.m. for juveniles less than 16 years old.²⁶ City Council, however, seemed in no hurry to settle this matter and Wilson did not consider it pressing. Wilson and *La ligue* had never seen eye to eye and with no serious crisis of juvenile crime at hand, the mayor only consented to the matter being studied by the municipal solicitor.

For the next several years the landowners occasionally petitioned City Hall for a curfew and, in support of their campaign, noted that many Quebec municipalities including Montreal (September 1942), Lachine, Lasalle, St-Jérôme and Valleyfield had imposed wartime curfews.²⁷ But despite continuing pressure from the landlords whom they represented, successive councils remained reluctant to press the matter, which did not seem popular with the electorate. According to Arthur Burgess, another reason was that City Council "has on many occasions discussed this question and has always decided against it contending that it is primarily a matter for parents to regulate in their own homes".²⁸

²⁵ The petition is contained in Box A-772, CVA.

²⁶ *The Guardian*, January 5, 1940.

²⁷ Council Minutes, April 27, 1943.

²⁸ Burgess to Mrs. Ingham, Verdun Women's Club, November 25, 1942, Box A-772, CVA.

Notwithstanding this, a weakened version of the curfew, coming into force later at night, was finally approved in council April 30, 1945, a mere week before the end of the European war.²⁹ Wilson had been opposed to the end. Hardly a wartime measure, the curfew came into force May 15, 1945. By this point the issue seemed not to matter and press reaction was minimal. The wartime rise in the incidence of juvenile delinquency had acted as the stimulus, even pretext, for a municipal debate about a local social problem. While the curfew issue predated the war, discussions of imposing one were accelerated and made legitimate by it. Certain groups of Verdunites were not averse to using the extraordinary conditions created by the war as an excuse to promote their own agendas.

The City of Verdun had to confront the issue of national mobilization for home defence and the inconveniences this limited form of conscription caused the city. Although Wilson did what he could to co-operate with federal authorities, this sensitive issue elicited considerable debate in City Council. In June 1940 Ottawa passed the National Resources Mobilization Act which called for an inventory of the nation's human resources. National registration took place August 19-21, 1940. All Canadians sixteen years of age and over were required to register with the government and obtain a national identity card which had to be kept with them at all times. This card was necessary in order to secure employment, vote or engage in other activities requiring official identification. Single men and childless widowers between the ages of 21 and 45 registered under the provisions of the act were liable to military mobilization for home defence.³⁰

²⁹ Council Minutes, April 23 and April 30, 1945.

³⁰ For the particulars of the N.R.M.A., see Jack Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977) and E.L.M. Burns, *Manpower in the Canadian Army 1939-1945* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1956).

Nearly 50,000 Verdunites were required to register with federal authorities. Registration facilities were established in each of Verdun's four wards. Verdun's two chief registrars were drawn from each of Verdun's French- and English-language communities.³¹ The registration process went smoothly despite the call of Montreal's mayor, Camillien Houde, to ignore the government order, a move which resulted in his arrest and internment. Thirteen boards were established across Canada to review requests for exemption or postponement from N.R.M.A. service. One of the three members of Montreal's exemption board was Dr. Charles Barr, Chief Warden of Verdun's Civilian Protection Committee, and a Liberal Party organizer in Verdun. Men engaged in farm labour or in essential civil or industrial work were eligible for exemptions, as were men with valid personal reasons, including conscientious objection. Each case was reviewed on its merits. Nationally, exemptions or postponements were granted in 89% of the cases.³²

At a Verdun City Council meeting in September 1942, a rare disagreement on war policy arose over whether Verdun policemen and firemen should obtain the support of the city in applying for N.R.M.A. service exemptions. Wilson and Alderman Robert Scurrah opposed exemptions from service for these men. The other council members, all French speaking, felt they should be given byes, arguing that these men were engaged in essential service to the city and community. They also reminded the mayor of the high cost of recruiting and training new members for the police and fire department.³³ This was an important motivation for attempting to defer the military service of these municipal employees. Several aldermen suggested that patriotism sometimes cost the City of Verdun too much. For them, local issues superseded national ones, even in wartime.

³¹ *The Guardian*, August 9 and August 23, 1940.

³² *The Guardian*, August 23, 1940; Burns, *Manpower in the Canadian Army*, p. 126. Barr had a son serving in the R.C.A.F. at the time. He was killed in action in 1942.

³³ *The Guardian*, September 11, 1942.

The city council divided along language lines on this issue with the result that, despite Wilson's and Scurrah's vehement protests, Burgess was authorized by council to contact city employees who had been called to duty and notify them that, if they desired, the city would request that they be released from service. The aldermen were anxious to secure the return of the city's trained security and civil defence personnel and some of the men were appreciative of the opportunity to return to their civilian occupations.³⁴ The Executive Committee approached the Department of National War Services (D.N.W.S.) to obtain a blanket exemption for the city's policemen and firemen. The authorities refused though it hardly mattered since 34 of 38 Verdun policemen and firemen obtained exemptions between 1942 and 1944.

The Executive Committee's moves were contrary to Wilson's strong desire to assist the national war effort, in this case even over the interests of his own city. The majority of city council members were less zealous to sacrifice the city's interests.³⁵ Yet, the actions of Verdun City Council in seeking to exempt specialized municipal employees from home defence duties should not be interpreted as 'unpatriotic'. The aldermen were not necessarily opposed to national mobilization nor to the prosecution of the war: as

³⁴ Council Minutes, September 8, 1942; Arthur Burgess to the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Army training base at Petawawa, May 10, 1943; Burgess to Private Paul Perrault, Petawawa, May 11, 1943 and reply May 16, 1943; Sergeant Roger Dulude to Burgess, May 17, 1943, Box A-331, file 1, CVA. City officials were alarmed to learn that three of its policemen were found to be medically unfit for military duty and released. Executive Committee Minutes, February 22 and April 14, 1943.

³⁵ "Employees on Military Service", December 29, 1942, "*Exemptions du service militaire des policiers et pompiers de Verdun*", October 1944, and miscellaneous correspondence, Box A-331, file 1, CVA. All whose deferral was sought by the city were French speakers. See miscellaneous exchange of correspondence from September 1942 to January 1944 between the City of Verdun, D.N.D., and the Department of National War Services, Box A-331, file 1, CVA. The police and fire services employed 100 men. Once hostilities ended, the city council unanimously requested the earliest possible discharge of all Verdun policemen and firemen on N.R.M.A. or General Service. Council Minutes, May 14, 1945; Burgess to A. MacNamara, Deputy Minister of Labour, National Selective Service, June 8, 1945, Box A-331, file 1, CVA.

responsible municipal officials, they looked to public safety first. For them, patriotism began at home, not overseas. Wilson and Scurrah, on the other hand, represented the view that all other matters should be subordinated to the national war effort; anything less would be a lesser form of patriotism. On this issue, 'British' Verdun did not get its way.

THE VERDUN AUDITORIUM AS ARMOURY

The City of Verdun more closely identified itself with the war effort by attracting the military into the community. Ever supportive of the war, Wilson's administration also was able to derive financial advantage from the resulting arrangement with Ottawa. But as the end of the war approached, Verdunites grew increasingly resentful of the military 'occupation' of their city's best and newest sports facility, the Verdun Auditorium.

Within two weeks of Canada's declaration of war, authorities from Military District No. 4 considered using the Verdun Auditorium as the possible site of a barracks, armoury or other defence facility. A military delegation visited the site in September and shortly thereafter the Department of Public Works invited the City of Verdun to consider leasing this large, municipally-owned, riverside arena for military purposes. *The Guardian* welcomed the potential presence of a military unit but reminded Verdunites that if the Auditorium were occupied all plans for its use by local hockey teams would "go by the boards".³⁶

The Executive Committee, which controlled municipal finances, proposed a rental fee of \$2500 per month, for at least six months, with renewal at the discretion of the federal government.³⁷ By the time of the official opening of the arena on November 28, 1939, however, D.N.D. had not leased the Auditorium and the building was used for hockey

³⁶ *The Guardian*, September 22, 1939.

³⁷ Executive Committee Minutes, September 18 and September 25, 1939.

games and figure skating. The issue was shelved for the time being.³⁸ At a council meeting held June 25, 1940, the City of Verdun once again offered the federal government use of the Auditorium in aid of the war effort. In a sombre mood as a result of the recent severe Allied setbacks in Europe, Wilson stated simply: "we have offered all the property which the City of Verdun has to the government".³⁹

Alderman Robert Scurrah, whose overt patriotism on council was rivalled only by the mayor's, proposed that the city offer the Auditorium to the military for the duration of the war for the nominal fee of one dollar per annum. The Executive Committee agreed to this on July 2. The profit motive apparent in the council's dealings with D.N.D. the previous autumn seemed to have been replaced by the desire to assist in the prosecution of the war. Verdun offered Ottawa the "unrestricted use" of the Auditorium and its surrounding land "for any military or defence purpose which [the government] may desire". Perhaps Ottawa took too long to mull over the offer; three weeks later the city suddenly reversed itself and offered the Auditorium at an unspecified "reasonable price".⁴⁰ These conflicting signals from the Executive Committee suggest some confusion in that body over whether or not to charge Ottawa. The federal government had the money to pay for the building and Verdun certainly could have used some of it. By leasing the Auditorium Verdun would help the war effort and at the same time use the war to its own advantage.

³⁸ *The Guardian*, November 24, 1939; *The Messenger*, June 19, 1990, special supplement, "50e anniversaire de l'Auditorium de Verdun".

³⁹ Quoted in *The Guardian*, June 28, 1940. City Council had made the same offer May 27.

⁴⁰ Council Minutes, June 25, July 2, July 9, and July 23, 1940; Burgess to Paul-Émile Côté, M.P., July 25, 1940, Box A-331, file 6, CVA. In 1940 the City also offered free use of the municipal swimming complex, the Natatorium, to any member of the armed forces. Wilson to Brigadier-General J.P. Archambault, District Officer Commanding (D.O.C.), M.D. 4, July 18, 1940; Burgess to Lt.-Col. E.J. Nantel, Auxiliary Services Officer, M.D. 4, July 24, 1940, CVA.

In October 1940 an officer from M.D. 4 requested the city to establish a "definite price, if any" for the rental of the Auditorium. The Executive Committee, soberly re-assessing the remunerative potential of the deal, recommended to Council the rate of \$18,000 for the first year and \$12,000 for subsequent years. The first-year rate included the cost of compensating sporting and entertainment groups which had contracted to use the venue in the forthcoming season.⁴¹ The unselfishness displayed that summer by the Executive Committee gave way in somewhat less unnerving conditions to a more hard-edged business sense. Profit and patriotism proved easy bedfellows and there was little dissent in the council chamber.

And yet D.N.D. hesitated. Thereupon Scurrah again proposed leasing the building to the government for one dollar plus maintenance costs and City Council hastily agreed, perhaps before Ottawa went looking elsewhere.⁴² With this arrangement, the city would not derive profit, but would not incur any losses either. This might have been the idea all along. Even though the city earned \$8000 in revenue from hockey alone in the 1939-1940 season it ran an overall deficit for operating the Auditorium of \$15,300 in 1940 and there were no indications 1941 would offer much improvement.⁴³ It was an expensive building to operate and with the civic administration devoted to producing balanced budgets, if not budget surpluses, the large expenses incurred might have been a factor in the city's willingness, even eagerness, to turn the facility over to the military authorities. Whatever the motives, municipal offers of co-operation with D.N.D. were always couched in patriotic terms.

⁴¹ Council Minutes, October 21, 1940. The irate Verdun Red Devils Hockey Club sought \$6750 for losses actual and anticipated.

⁴² Council Minutes, January 27, 1941.

⁴³ J.R. French, "Statement Showing Revenue at Auditorium from Hockey Leagues, November 14, 1939 to April 4, 1940", April 10, 1940, Box A-330, file 4 and "Statement of Revenue and Expenditures for the Municipal Auditorium, for Year Ended December 31, 1940", March 24, 1941, Box A-330, file 8. CVA.

In April 1941, the mayor offered D.N.D. the facility for the duration of the war plus an additional six months following the cessation of hostilities for the nominal sum of one dollar "as [Verdun's] contribution to the national cause". The final deal retained its financial advantages for the city. According to the agreement, Ottawa assumed all the building's operating and maintenance costs, paid the \$7500 per annum interest on a sinking fund used to finance the Auditorium, paid \$1434 per annum owed in insurance and other premiums as well as the cost of any structural modifications or repairs undertaken during the period of occupancy. Upon termination of the lease, the building was to be restored to its original state, "reasonable wear and tear excepted". The Auditorium was closed on July 23, 1941 to await its new military tenants.⁴⁴

Verdun shrewdly obtained a military presence as well as a reliable tenant which ensured that the Auditorium would not operate at a loss during the war. Verdun City Council united within it the causes of patriotism and fiscal restraint. The city hedged its bet by playing the patriotic game, and broke even.

In the fall of 1941, Reserve Army units from M.D. 4 moved into the Auditorium for training. These included the 3rd Division (R) Royal Canadian Army Service Corps and the 16th (R) Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers. The R.C.A.S.C. had relocated to Verdun from its inadequate barracks on St. Antoine Street.⁴⁵ From the beginning these units made a conscious attempt to integrate themselves into their host community. The

⁴⁴ Council Minutes, April 29, July 2 and July 22, 1941. The Auditorium was still occasionally used for various public war-related events, such as Victory Loan rallies and other patriotic causes. In Drummondville, city council's opposition to the war evaporated in the face of wartime opportunities for economic gain. Jean Thibault, *Drummondville à l'heure de la guerre 1939-1945*, (La Société d'histoire de Drummondville, 1994), p. 17. North Bay's property owners were also delighted to rent to the federal government. Cuthbert Gunning, *North Bay's Fort Chippewa 1939-1945*, (North Bay, Ontario: privately printed, 1991), p. 7.

⁴⁵ *Le Canada*, August 14, 1941. Other R.C.A.S.C. and R.C.E. units and detachments would also make use of the Auditorium before war's end.

Engineers, for example, directed their recruitment efforts to Verdun residents, claiming their unit offered "an opportunity for Verdun to have its own unit in the Reserve Army".⁴⁶ The R.C.A.S.C. employed the same strategy. One banner front-page headline in *The Guardian* proclaimed: "R.C.A.S.C. Appeals for Volunteers". Below it ran "an open letter to the men of Verdun" which read in part:

Montreal is a Class A military objective - a Leningrad of the western world. **And you live in it** [original emphasis]. Your family lives in it. Your business is here. Does anyone think Nazi Germany would not make another Warsaw of Montreal if she were able? Does anyone doubt that she has secret agents planning against Montreal at this very moment? That is the "Why" of the Reserve Army. That is why Verdun's own unit, the R.C.A.S.C., is building up a strong and vitally important branch of the Reserve Army.⁴⁷

The headquarters of the unit was referred to as the "Verdun Auditorium Armoury". Anxious to co-operate, the mayor despatched letters to 104 Verdun men between 40 and 50 years of age and drawn almost equally from both language groups. Wilson invited these men, deemed suitable for service in the Reserve Army, to attend a meeting at City Hall "to discuss an important matter of national defence".⁴⁸ The number of invitees who actually attended this meeting has not been recorded.

The Saturday night following the mayor's Reserve Army appeals, the Service Corps invited the community to a dance in its new home. This was a notable success as an estimated 2800 people attended.⁴⁹ Officers and men stationed at the Auditorium frequently participated in social events staged by local patriotic groups such as the Legion

⁴⁶ *The Guardian*, November 14, 1941.

⁴⁷ *The Guardian*, November 14, 1941.

⁴⁸ Among the names were a dozen prominent citizens, including several former aldermen, merchants and men active in social groups. Circular letter, November 14, 1941, Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

⁴⁹ *The Guardian*, November 28, 1941; letter from 3rd (R) Division, R.C.A.S.C. to City Hall, October 27, 1941, Box A-330, file 8, CVA.

and the Red Cross. Others took part in local sports and competitions, musicals, entertainments and various fundraising events. In May 1942 the Royal Canadian Air Force established a temporary presence in the Auditorium, when 300 airmen were sent there for training.⁵⁰

The troops quartered in Verdun were good citizens. In October 1942 the Police Director, Alfred Dubeau, stated that the city had had "no trouble whatever with the troops. I wish [to] stress that point. There may be a little bit too [much] merriment and singing at times, but we have no serious trouble."⁵¹ No fighting or trouble-making on the part of the servicemen were reported in Verdun's press during the war. This was not always the case in Canadian communities hosting large numbers of service personnel, where social friction and even violence sometimes developed between civilians and servicemen.⁵² Moreover, the influx of hundreds of soldiers and airmen into the community could not but have helped local businesses. Since Verdun possessed no licensed establishments, its location next to a larger metropolis seemed to satisfy the recreational needs of most of the men, not all of whom were permanently stationed in Verdun.

Despite the seemingly good character of the men, not everyone in Verdun was pleased with the military's presence. Municipal employees assigned to the Auditorium who had been "dispensed with" were the first to resent the arrival of the Reserve Army.⁵³ As the war progressed, the most determined opponents of the loss of the Auditorium were local hockey teams, figure skating clubs and other sports teams, drawn from both language groups. After only two seasons of play in the highly-praised 5000-seat structure, many

⁵⁰ *The Guardian*, May 1, 1942.

⁵¹ Quoted in *The Guardian*, October 30, 1942.

⁵² Gunning, *Fort Chippewa, op. cit.*, pp. 72-73 and Thibault, *Drummondville, op. cit.*, pp. 119-126 describe such problems.

⁵³ *The Guardian*, July 25, 1941.

Verdun teams were forced to revert to outdoor skating facilities. They experienced difficulty reconciling their recreational aspirations with the needs of the military (or with the city's fiscal strategies). While only representing a minority of residents, these critics were unable to maintain their patriotic enthusiasm indefinitely, especially on matters which inconvenienced them.

Some Verdunites became convinced that the Reserve Army was making too little use of the building. In November 1943, after a prolonged period of quiet disgruntlement from sporting circles, the former mayor Hervé Ferland, then an alderman, presented a motion in council that Verdun should request D.N.D. to permit hockey teams to use the Auditorium in winter. The situation had begun to annoy other aldermen and their constituents and had become a minor political issue: Ferland's motion was given unanimous consent. Ottawa refused to share the Auditorium, however, stating that this would interfere with ongoing military training. A further inquiry by Wilson was also rejected by Ottawa in September 1944.⁵⁴

Wilson had been a strong supporter of the Reserve Army in Verdun, and in 1941 had played a key role in attracting the military to his city. Though he never publicly criticized the Reserve Army, by 1944 his support for the military presence at the Auditorium appeared to waver in proportion to the negative effect the continued occupation of the arena exerted on the morale of the community. As both mayor and practical patriot, Wilson saw that it was not in the best interest of his city to be denied the use of the Auditorium nor in the interest of the war effort to allow Verdunites to harbour misgivings about the military. As the issue picked up momentum in the winter of 1944-45, he knew

⁵⁴ Council Minutes, November 22, 1943 and January 24, 1944; Box A-330, file 4, "Hockey", CVA.

it could also do him electoral harm. Municipal finances were in much better condition in 1944.⁵⁵ The city wanted its arena back.

By 1945 a growing chorus of Verdunites questioned the value of the leasing arrangement. After V-E Day, softball teams voiced their grievance with the Reserve Army for ruining their playing field in Lafrance Park, adjacent to the Auditorium. It had been converted into a parking lot for heavy trucks, jeeps and assorted other military vehicles.⁵⁶ With the war over, local interests publicly asserted themselves over national ones, even though local interests had also been a consideration in attracting the military to Verdun.

By September 1945, with the Pacific War over and hockey season about to begin, City Hall sought to regain control of the Auditorium as quickly as possible to reap rental income from the many sporting and entertainment groups clamouring to use the rink. But the Reserve Army was not ready to break camp. The Auditorium was expected to be useful in the demobilization period. Pressure mounted in Verdun for the return of the building. One columnist in *The Guardian* questioned indignantly why local teams were being denied the privilege of Verdun's facilities when the war was over. The city reminded Ottawa that as hostilities had officially ended on September 2, 1945, the lease on the Auditorium expired on March 2, 1946 and the City of Verdun expected full compliance with the stipulations of the lease.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Municipal statistics published in *The Guardian*, May 18, 1944 showed the city to have recorded a budget surplus of over \$16,000 in the previous fiscal year all the while reducing the bonded debt by \$350,000.

⁵⁶ *The Guardian*, June 21, 1945; Box A-258, file 1-3, CVA.

⁵⁷ "Roving Reporter". *The Guardian*, September 13, 1945; Council Minutes, September 24, 1945. Fears of juvenile crime might have played some role in municipal authorities' desire to have the building returned as soon as possible. City Hall believed that the increased availability of recreational facilities would lessen the likelihood of local delinquency and D.N.D.'s continued occupation of the Auditorium seemed unhelpful in this regard. See Chapter 7.

In February 1946, Wilson and two aldermen went to Ottawa, partly at the suggestion of Paul-Émile Côté, Verdun's Liberal M.P., in the hope of obtaining a timely termination of the lease. But D.N.D. replied that it simply would not be ready to give up the building until September 1, 1946.⁵⁸ The city had no alternative but to wait and bid "Verdun's own" Reserve Army good riddance; the relationship between D.N.D. and the city had soured noticeably since the cessation of hostilities. The pride patriotic Verdun took in welcoming the military did not outlast the war and Wilson exerted what pressure he could in the best interests of his community. His patriotic credentials remained untarnished, however.

Verdun had sought a military presence as well as the wartime status which would accompany it. This had been motivated by both patriotic and financial concerns. Civic politicians were united in their desire to unload the Auditorium's debts for the duration of the war. Peacetime, and even earlier, brought with it declining enthusiasm for the connection between Verdun and the military. The municipality's social and community interests were not always well served by the Reserve Army's use of the Auditorium and the early goodwill Verdunites offered the military changed to chagrin once Allied fortunes improved and the under-use of the facility became well publicized. A broad consensus existed in Verdun that the links should be severed. The patriotic sentiments of the city on this issue, on official and popular levels, did not extend beyond V-E Day.

THE MAYOR'S CIGARETTE FUND

The Mayor's Cigarette Fund was a permanent wartime symbol of Verdun patriotism. In December 1940 the City of Verdun created the "Mayor's Cigarette Fund for Verdun Soldiers Overseas", Verdun's most popular war charity. The M.C.F. raised funds to purchase cigarettes for despatch twice yearly to Verdunites on active service overseas.

⁵⁸ Council Minutes, February 11, February 18, March 11 and April 1, 1946.

This fund, more than any other local patriotic charity, expressed the community's commitment to the war and particularly Verdunites' role in it. Edward Wilson, head of the fund, lent his name and the prestige of his office and allowed the city to manage the charitable donations of thousands of Verdun citizens. The Mayor's Cigarette Fund was Verdun's most inclusive community-wide fund-raising campaign, open to and benefitting citizens from all linguistic, religious and class backgrounds. The only prerequisites were that the recipients be Verdunites and posted overseas.

Cigarettes were probably the most popular "comfort" craved by overseas servicemen. Families, friends, employers, church groups and voluntary organizations sent them regularly. A huge national fundraising organization, the Buckshee Fund, was established to provide soldiers with cigarettes. But Verdun's fund was different: Verdun was the only Canadian municipality of its size to organize a permanent fund-raising campaign on behalf of its citizens serving overseas. Every dollar raised went towards the purchase of cigarettes for a local serviceman and in a tight community like Verdun this proved a strong incentive for donating.⁵⁹

Wilson, French and Burgess administered the fund and its official treasurer was the city's chief accountant, L.J. Grondin.⁶⁰ For most of the war, René Patenaude, the mayor's secretary, organized and administered the fund. The work of compiling and updating the mailing lists and arranging for the cigarette shipments with several tobacco firms was described as a "gigantic task...the magnitude of which cannot easily be realized." Patenaude maintained a file-card index of all recipients into which he entered men's ranks, units and addresses. Few overhead costs were incurred by the M.C.F., as all work

⁵⁹ Wilson's fund followed a precedent: during the First World War Verdun had established the Verdun Overseas Tobacco Fund. Council Minutes, April 25 and May 8, 1916.

⁶⁰ Register of War Charities Organizations, RG 44, Volume 70, NAC.

was done by volunteers or city employees.⁶¹ To become a recipient of the fund, a serviceman's relative or friend had to despatch to City Hall one of the registration coupons which were published weekly in the local press.

From March 1940 tobacco companies and the federal government facilitated the shipping of cigarettes. A special rate of one dollar, post-paid, for a carton of 300 cigarettes was offered to anyone sending cigarettes or tobacco to a member of the armed forces serving overseas. Federal and provincial duties were waived. All orders were placed directly with the tobacco companies, which ensured that orders were filled and despatched to intended recipients.⁶²

Just before Christmas 1940 the very active Verdun unit of the para-military Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps organized a "tag day", one of the most effective ways of obtaining donations. This event yielded over \$600.00.⁶³ The W.V.R.C. worked tirelessly on behalf of the cigarette fund. They held major tag days every October from 1941 to 1944 and organized special events to contribute to the M.C.F.'s coffers. *The Guardian* supported these initiatives and printed registration coupons, reports on the fund's affairs

⁶¹ *The Guardian*, August 24, 1944.

⁶² *The Montreal Daily Star*, March 4, 1940. Paul Fussell, documenting the similar American practice of cheaply despatching cigarettes to overseas servicemen, has noted that tobacco manufacturers assured themselves of steady orders by advertising the great morale value of their products. Purchasing cigarettes became an act of patriotism, and it was no less so in Canada. According to Fussell, a Second World War veteran, "anyone in the services who did not smoke cigarettes was looked on as a freak". Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*, (Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 144-145.

⁶³ *The Guardian*, December 30, 1941. The "taggers" would solicit money from passers-by and, if a donation was forthcoming, pin a strip of paper (the "tag") in the form of a cigarette on the donor's lapel.

and thank-you letters written by Verdunites overseas. The M.C.F. was the best-publicized fund in the community.⁶⁴

In March 1941, the first shipment of 691 cartons of cigarettes left for Britain. Included in each package was a note from City Hall which read in part, "This gesture reflects the admiration and gratitude we feel towards you." This reminder was no doubt sincere, but including it did no harm to Wilson's standing in the community.⁶⁵ In the next few years Verdun's remarkable enlistment rate dramatically swelled the files of the M.C.F. and made constant fundraising imperative.

The fund was extremely popular in Verdun; no amount was too small and no group or individual was above contributing. Individuals, social groups, institutions and the municipality itself organized collections, canvassing activities and benefit events for the M.C.F. Every dollar raised purchased a carton for one man or, later, one woman.⁶⁶ Both federal and provincial entertainment taxes were waived for shows, acts, films or other performances staged for a registered war charity, which the M.C.F. officially became in October 1941.⁶⁷ Owing to the M.C.F.'s clear local affiliation, it soon rivalled the Red Cross in popularity among Verdun's war charities. A major M.C.F. tag day in October

⁶⁴ Verdun's bilingual newspaper, *The Messenger/Le Messager*, also ran M.C.F. registration coupons, though surviving coupons in municipal archives indicate the families of Verdun's overseas servicemen were overwhelmingly English-speaking and read *The Guardian*.

⁶⁵ Box A-348, file "1944-45", CVA. The substantial electoral dividends of the M.C.F. for Wilson are discussed in Chapter 8.

⁶⁶ Canada formed women's divisions to the three armed services only in 1941 and 1942.

⁶⁷ Register of War Charities Organizations, RG 44, Volume 70, NAC; Box A-322, file 1, CVA.

1941 was hailed by *The Guardian* as "one of the most important events of the year". In 1941 the fund obtained more donations than the Red Cross.⁶⁸

Few patriotic causes in Verdun were more satisfying to support than the Mayor's Cigarette Fund and this includes the Buckshee Fund, of which the beneficiaries were essentially anonymous. On October 7, 1944 Verdun High School's Air Cadets, acting as M.C.F. "taggers", took up strategic locations in the city. *The Guardian* lauded the local character of the M.C.F.:

The appeal is not an ordinary one. It is one that is made in the personal name of sons, husbands, brothers, sisters and other relatives of scores of people in the city. None...would hesitate to hand over the price of the...cigarettes if those boys and girls were to meet them on the street and ask them for the smokes. Those boys and girls are unable to do so, they are engaged in a grim, bloody business...⁶⁹

This approach worked; the Air Cadets raised \$850.00 and, added to donations made by social organizations and businesses, made the M.C.F.'s net take over \$1700 on this day alone.⁷⁰

Verdunites' support for the M.C.F. crossed linguistic, ethnic, religious, class, gender, occupational and age barriers. The idea of supplying Verdun men and women with comforts bought by Verdunites themselves struck a responsive chord in the community. The M.C.F. enabled Verdunites to help their own. It was not only about the war effort; it was about assisting members of the community. The city itself donated \$200.00 to the fund's first year of operations.⁷¹ Almost every social and community group in Verdun, it seems, supported the M.C.F. at some point during the war. For example, in December

⁶⁸ *The Guardian*, October 10 and October 24, 1941. The Red Cross's and other social groups' war efforts are described in Chapter 5.

⁶⁹ *The Guardian*, October 5, 1944.

⁷⁰ *The Guardian*, October 12, 1944.

⁷¹ Executive Committee Minutes, February 24, 1941.

1941, the Verdun Women's Club gave \$50.00, the Verdun Horticultural Society parted with \$12.50, while the Verdun Motor Boat Club donated \$15.00.⁷² In April 1942, the Verdun United Church Ladies Basketball team held a benefit game in aid of the M.C.F., while Catholic St. Willibrord's Parish organized a boxing tournament which yielded \$100.00 for the fund. An evening's proceeds from the Verdun Dance Pavilion yielded \$329.00 for the fund.⁷³ Even the orchestra played for free. Verdun's Canadian Legion and Canadian Corps Association branches were regular and generous contributors. The Army and Navy Veterans in Canada, of which the provincial president was a Verdunite, was also a donor. So too was the Verdun branch of the Red Cross, which itself canvassed the city for funds and of which Mayor Wilson was the nominal chairman. Small groups such as the Verdun Choral and Dramatic Society, the Verdun Sisterhood and the Verdun Lawn Bowling Club did what they could. The Verdun Operatic Society offered the comparatively huge sum of \$175.00 in May 1945.

In 1942 St. Willibrord's inaugurated its own cigarette fund for parishioners overseas which was supported by the proceeds of various public church socials. But Verdun's overseas Protestants or French speakers were not forgotten either. "Realizing that many of our friends...are not of our faith or language", wrote the parish priest, Father E.J. Lapointe, "we are...doing something for 'Their Boys'". Accordingly, over \$60.00 was diverted to the M.C.F. in a gesture typical of Verdun's wartime community spirit.⁷⁴ Local movie theatres occasionally turned over a day's proceeds⁷⁵ and other businesses and

⁷² *The Guardian*, December 30, 1941.

⁷³ *The Guardian*, August 13 and September 10, 1943.

⁷⁴ Lapointe to Wilson, September 25, 1943, Box A-348, correspondence file, CVA.

⁷⁵ For example, on Christmas Day 1943 the 1500 patrons of the Verdun Palace Theatre, which showed the Hollywood film *Captains of the Clouds*, depicting Canada's British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, all directly contributed to the cigarette fund. The day's receipts of \$414.00 were turned over to City Hall. B.A. Garson, Wellington Theatre Ltd., to Wilson, December 28, 1943, Box A-348, file "1944-45", CVA.

employees' groups contributed, including the war workers from Defence Industries Limited, located in east-end Verdun.⁷⁶ Sometimes groups not linked to Verdun supported the fund. *L'Association des Vétérans de Guerre de la Police du District de Montréal* sent a gift of \$50.00 in 1944.⁷⁷ Imperial Tobacco, a not disinterested player, also set up impressive displays (and collection boxes) for the fund in the lobbies of movie theatres in Verdun and *Notre-Dame-de-Grâce*.

Many French-speaking groups in Verdun contributed as well, though few seemed to do so before 1943. *La Ligue des Propriétaires de Verdun*, *Le Club de Raquetteurs LaFontaine*, *L'Ordre des Filles d'Isabelle* and *Le Cercle Ste-Jeanne-d'Arc* all donated. *La Société St-Jean-Baptiste*, *Paroisse Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix* section, from east-end Verdun, contributed \$50.00 in October 1944, notwithstanding the brewing conscription crisis or the decision by the *Société St-Jean-Baptiste* headquarters in Montreal to desist from contributing to patriotic charities. Verdun's *Société* remained devoted to the causes of Verdunites at war. By 1944, many French speakers living in the central and eastern neighbourhoods of the city were regular contributors to the fund. Most notables from the French-speaking community, especially politicians, merchants and professionals, responded positively to City Hall's solicitations for donations.⁷⁸ The M.C.F. was not about language; it was about community.

Verdunites would occasionally provide items to raffle in aid of the fund. One woman made and sold shopping bags throughout the war and by March 1945 had raised the impressive total of \$260.00. School groups and Boy Scouts also aided the M.C.F.

⁷⁶ R.R. Buchanan, Personnel Superintendent, Verdun Works, Defence Industries Limited, to Wilson, October 13, 1942, Box A-322, CVA. This war plant rarely allowed canvassing and made an "exception" for the M.C.F.

⁷⁷ Information pertaining to group and individual donations is found in Box A-348, general correspondence file, and Box A-322, file 1, CVA.

⁷⁸ Box A-322, file 1; Box A-348, correspondence file, CVA.

Moreover, every summer from 1941 children were granted permits to set up candy or lemonade stands on city streets or to hold neighbourhood concerts to benefit the fund. Some children sold or raffled their toys to buy cigarettes for the troops. Surviving lists of the names of the dozens of youngsters involved in these activities show them all, except two, to have been English speaking. One girl, Jean Tarr, who led a small "Victory Club" which met every week in Verdun's west-end neighbourhood of Crawford Park, wrote the mayor in October 1943.

Four of us girls are making letter racks, brooches, etc. etc. and we are going to sell them and give the money to some war fund. We were wondering if you could send us a permit to sell these things. We are between the ages of thirteen and fourteen.⁷⁹

Wilson suggested the cigarette fund as a worthy recipient of their fundraising and, within a month, a cheque arrived at City Hall in the amount of \$5.00. At this grass-roots level and in this manner was money raised.

Wilson sent encouraging letters of appreciation to the children organizing these undertakings. In 1942 he wrote one girl,

I am sure that your parents must feel very proud of you and I want you to know that we are all very glad indeed to have the help of such splendid little workers. It must make you feel very pleased to realize that you have had a part in sending cigarettes to our Verdun soldiers, and to our sailors and airmen too, who are now on the other side of the ocean.⁸⁰

The ideals and spirit of the cigarette fund spread throughout the entire community and allowed citizens to participate in the national war effort. Verdunites of all backgrounds united behind the principle of helping their fellow citizens overseas and, indirectly, helped facilitate their prosecution of the war.

⁷⁹ Jean Tarr to Wilson, October 1943 and November 10, 1943 and Wilson to Tarr, October 9, 1943, Box A-348, correspondence file, CVA.

⁸⁰ Wilson to Maureen Flannery, May 27, 1942, Box A-348, correspondence file, CVA.

Within a year of the creation of the fund, M.C.F. files contained the names of 1233 men who had received a carton of cigarettes in time for Christmas 1941.⁸¹ Although more Verdunites than this number were overseas, the M.C.F. was dependent entirely on the enlistees' families or friends to register them for the fund. As a result, some Verdunites were excluded; others stationed in Canada were ineligible for the tax-exempted cigarettes. By the summer of 1944 over \$10,000 had been raised and 2.8 million cigarettes despatched to approximately 2400 men and women overseas. Despite the growing number of recipients, the M.C.F. was never short of cash. Over 1.5 million cigarettes were sent in 1944 alone. In January 1945, over 3000 Verdunites were registered with the fund. The M.C.F. sent 3.7 million cigarettes overseas during the war.⁸²

Hundreds of letters and cards of acknowledgement were received at City Hall following each shipment. Many of the replies evoked the same sentiment: pride in coming from Verdun, a city which so strongly supported its overseas servicemen. The gifts were valuable ones in cigarette-deprived Britain and helped alleviate in some small way the stressful conditions experienced at the front. Tobacco products were often used as currency by the men and extraordinary security precautions were observed to guard the overseas depots established by such groups as the Canadian Legion or the Buckshee Fund.⁸³ Some servicemen, on leave, discharged or home for compassionate or other reasons, even visited City Hall to thank the mayor personally for the city's generosity.

The words of Verdun's servicemen speak for themselves. One note was from Trooper W. Gibson, 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers), who wrote following some difficult fighting in Normandy: "a fellow smokes a terrific number of

⁸¹ *The Guardian*, December 19 and December 30, 1941.

⁸² Mayor's Cigarette Fund, press release January 10, 1945, Box A-322, file 1; *The Guardian*, August 24, 1944, January 18, 1945 and October 31, 1946.

⁸³ J. Herbert Hodgins, *et. al.*, *Women at War*, (Toronto: Maclean's Publishing, 1943), p. 50.

cigarettes when in action in a tank - it helps relieve his nerves."⁸⁴ What the fund meant to Verdunites overseas could not have been expressed in a more straightforward manner. Another soldier put his thoughts in simple verse:

When the road is hot and weary
and it's 10 minutes for a smoke
with cigarettes at a premium
and a sapper that is broke
13 more days to pay day
and the post man brings a gift
thanks a million friends
for giving a guy a lift.⁸⁵

One soldier called the cigarettes "a gift from the Gods". Private W.D. MacDonald, Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps (R.C.O.C.), who signed his lengthy letter "a Verdun Defender", admitted "when we have plenty of smokes things in general are much easier to bear, but to be without a fag seems to darken the outlook on most everything".⁸⁶ One soldier stationed in Britain wrote:

Not only are the cigarettes welcome because of the high cost of tobacco in this country, and (strictly between ourselves) the superiority of Canadian 'smokes', but also because they are a great reminder that those back home are thinking of us as we of them.⁸⁷

But perhaps the most poignant letter of thanks was written on August 20, 1942, by a soldier who, the day before, had survived the carnage on the beach at Dieppe. Lance Corporal J. Flood, R.C.A.S.C., wrote:

⁸⁴ Trooper W. Gibson to M.C.F., August 25, 1944, Box A-348, file "1944-45", CVA.

⁸⁵ Company Sergeant Major H.P. Charters, M.M., R.C.E., to M.C.F., postmarked January 15, 1944, Box A-348, CVA.

⁸⁶ Sergeant Russell Canavan, 17th Duke of York, Royal Canadian Hussars, to M.C.F., no date, 1942; Private W.D. MacDonald to M.C.F., July 6, 1941, Box A-333, CVA. The cigarettes did not please all recipients. Trooper Lorne Barnewall, a scout leader in Verdun, wrote that he disliked "the Army habits one gets into...I don't like drinking, smoking and carousing around.", Box A-348, file "*Fonds cigarettes du maire*", CVA.

⁸⁷ Signalman W.E. Payne, R.C.C.S. to M.C.F., September 3, 1942, Box A-339, CVA.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for the three hundred cigarettes which I received tonight and I can tell you, Sir, [they] were a wonderful thing to get after coming back from our first taste of real war...I suppose you all heard over the air we were in France on the morning of the 19th. It is a morning I will never forget. I seen (sic) my buddies killed one after the other on all sides of me. We did what we went to do and that is the mane (sic) thing, and I can tell you all the men were tickled when they new (sic) they were going. You never saw a happier bunch of men in all your life. There were quite a few boys from Verdun like myself and I am proude (sic) some Verdun boys were in it.⁸⁸

Verdunites in German prisoner-of-war camps were also remembered by the fund.⁸⁹

Thanks to the efforts of City Hall, life was made a little brighter for thousands of Verdunites struggling with stress, anxiety and fear.

Private W.J. Breidon, R.C.A.S.C., wrote: "There is nothing that cheers us boys up more than receiving mail from home, especially cigarettes". Sergeant George Cobb, R.C.O.C., whose unit contained a large number of Verdunites recalled that "it was a password in our unit, 'Have one on the Mayor.' I honestly hope the surrounding municipalities of Verdun follow your example." Gunner Jack Holt, R.C.A., remarked "we have a few other chaps here from around Montreal and they often wish they could get some smokes from their city". Petty Officer Frank Harris, R.C.N.V.R., serving aboard the destroyer H.M.C.S. *St. Clair*, stated simply: "It makes one proud to be able to say, "I come from Verdun."⁹⁰ One soldier bragged

⁸⁸ Lance Corporal J. Flood, R.C.A.S.C., attached 10th Field Ambulance, to M.C.F., August 20, 1942, Box A-339, CVA.

⁸⁹ Wilson's son-in-law, Warrant Officer Alex Stevenson, R.C.A.F., a Verdunite, was posted missing and presumed dead for some time until word was received that he had been taken prisoner by the Germans. He was the recipient of cigarettes, nominally from his father-in-law. *The Messenger*, July 19, 1945.

⁹⁰ Private W.J. Breidon to M.C.F., December 5, 1941; Sergeant George Cobb to M.C.F., February 20, 1942; Petty Officer Frank D. Harris to M.C.F., no date, 1942, Box A-333, CVA; Gunner J.S. Holt to M.C.F., no date, 1942, Box A-339, CVA.

"whenever I rec[eive] cigarettes from you I show (and share [with]) the boys, and say, "Now there's the kind [of] town you should come from." And that always calls for an argument. But they always admit Verdun must have something.⁹¹

Most Verdunites overseas agreed. "I have met quite a few Verdun men here". wrote another. "and we are all of the same opinion...that Verdun is the grandest City in the world and please keep it that way until we return".⁹² "A Verdunite in India" wrote to say he was "very proud to tell anybody down here what a wonderful city we have no matter how far from it I may be".⁹³

Other soldiers writing to the M.C.F. claimed more comfort from the knowledge they were not forgotten by their community than from the cigarettes themselves. One grateful airman wrote

Words seem so inexpensive...when you... put them against actions of kindness such as this, but when we realize that our folks at home are behind us, doing things to help make things easier - well it puts more heart into the job we've set out to do and we swing into it with grim precision.⁹⁴

The cigarettes were symbolic of the sense of community and kinship which existed among Verdunites in general and civilian and uniformed Verdunites in particular. Many soldiers agreed it was typical of their hometown to have initiated and responded so generously to the M.C.F. Their bonds to Verdun and Verdun's to the war were reinforced by the fund.

⁹¹ Guardsman A. Stoddart, 21st Canadian Armoured Regiment (The Governor General's Foot Guards), to M.C.F., October 24, 1944, Box A-348, file "1944-45". CVA.

⁹² Signalman B.C. Palmquist, R.C.C.S., February 1, 1942, Box A-333, CVA.

⁹³ Leading Aircraftsman J. R. Blain, R.C.A.F., to M.C.F., February 18, 1945, Box A-348, CVA.

⁹⁴ Corporal J. Aldridge, R.C.A.F., to M.C.F., no date, early 1942, Box A-333, CVA.

The M.C.F. was also occasionally used by overseas Verdunites as a convenient conduit of information as well as a source of further favour. Gunner L.S. Blampied sent along two snapshots of the English gravesite of a fellow Verdunite, Sergeant F.J.E. Jennings, who was "killed due to enemy action". Blampied requested that the photos be turned over to Jennings's mother.⁹⁵ Some Verdunites used the fund to reach their own families. *The Guardian* published a letter from one man who complained he had received no letters from his family in a long time.⁹⁶ The newspaper insisted it was the patriotic duty of all Verdunites to correspond with family members in the military. Readers no doubt understood that failure to do so might result in an embarrassing letter from a son or husband appearing in the local press. "I haven't heard from my home for quite a while", wrote another soldier. "I would appreciate it if you [would] check on this and tell them I am anxious to hear from them."⁹⁷ Yet another asked the M.C.F. to prompt his parents to write him as he had not heard a word in five months despite repeated letters on his part.⁹⁸ Overall, however, very few Verdunites complained of neglect in their letters to the fund.

Some soldiers, while not forgotten, received few gifts from home, often because their families were impoverished. For these men, the M.C.F. made an even greater difference. One Verdun women in difficult financial circumstances wrote a grateful letter to City Hall:

As I am a widow with my only son overseas. I am indeed grateful for your kindness in sending cigarettes to [him]. Forty dollars per month pension [Dependents' Allowance], and the little bit of work I can do, does not give

⁹⁵ Gunner L.S. Blampied to M.C.F., no date, 1941, Box A-333, file "A", CVA.

⁹⁶ *The Guardian*, October 16, 1942. The letter dated August 22, 1942 was from Corporal J.W. Brazill, Royal Montreal Regiment; Box A-339, CVA.

⁹⁷ Lance Corporal George Shutter, Canadian Provost Corps, to M.C.F., September 29, 1942, Box A-339, CVA.

⁹⁸ Private Marcel Sarrasin, R.C.A.S.C., to M.C.F., October 25, 1944, file "1944-45", Box A-348, CVA.

me much chance to send him a lot. So I am indeed thankful for anything that is sent to him.⁹⁹

Another woman wrote the mayor on behalf of her brother, explaining that she was "the only one he has to send him any little luxuries...so you see he won't have many things sent to him other than what I send him from time to time".¹⁰⁰ Following the fund's inaugural shipment, Sergeant Leslie Frost, of the Black Watch, noted that the families of many Verdunites could not afford to send gifts. He wrote:

We Verdunites who are over here so far from dear old Verdun were all taken by surprise at receiving these smokes and I don't mind telling you that there [were] many envious glances in our direction from those chaps who unfortunately were not from Verdun. I think the chaps who were most surprised were the ones who for financial reasons never get anything from home. They feel now that at least they have something to boast about.¹⁰¹

Everyone in Verdun knew that their contributions to the city's communal fund helped relatives, friends and neighbours on active service overseas.

Many Verdun soldiers had little money overseas and certainly appreciated their hometown's gesture. Lance-Corporal Jack Cape, Canadian Provost Corps, wrote that "smoking in [Britain] at the present time is too expensive for a private soldier".¹⁰² Private Raymond Brodeur, *Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal*, was also clear about this. He informed the fund that cigarettes were very expensive and "*ceci est la plus grosse part où va notre*

⁹⁹ Mrs. L.R. Brown to M.C.F., October 24, 1942, Box A-339, file "Requests for 4th Shipment of Cigarettes Overseas", CVA.

¹⁰⁰ Mrs. E. J. Senior to M.C.F., October 18, 1942, Box A-339, file "Requests for 4th Shipment of Cigarettes Overseas", CVA.

¹⁰¹ Sergeant Leslie Frost to M.C.F., April 6, 1941, Box A-333, CVA.

¹⁰² Lance-Corporal Jack Cape to M.C.F., no date, 1942, Box A-339, CVA.

salair". He did not forget to mention that "*Vous avez fait grand plaisir à l'un des vôtres en service actif, pour la patrie...*"¹⁰³

The cigarette fund became well known outside Verdun and enhanced the city's growing reputation as a patriotic community. In early 1942, George Mooney, formerly the executive secretary of the Verdun branch of the Y.M.C.A., wrote an article in the journal of the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities lauding the M.C.F. Mooney, who as an executive of the Federation was in a good position to know, believed that Verdun's ongoing municipal fund was a Canadian first. Verdun made the most of the publicity the M.C.F. generated and proudly proclaimed itself the only Canadian city caring for its citizens in uniform in this manner.¹⁰⁴ Overseas men's letters took up the theme. Private Ernest Meilleur, *Royal 22ième Régiment*, wrote:

*Vous êtes la seule ville dans la grande métropole de Montréal pour avoir fait ce geste généreux. Je suis fier d'appartenir à une ville si noble qui sait se souvenir de ses citoyens.*¹⁰⁵

A year later another soldier wrote "so far as I know, no other city has looked after there [sic] fellows overseas as well as our city."¹⁰⁶ A supervisor of the Y.M.C.A.'s overseas war services also singled out the fund for special praise.

Organizations and groups such as yours are doing a splendid job toward Canada's War Effort. It may not seem much to you but to we men who are dealing with the moral[e] of the Canadian Forces Overseas, it certainly is a

¹⁰³ Private Raymond Brodeur to M.C.F., March 3, 1941, Box A-333, CVA. While 20% of the cigarette recipients were French speaking, very few letters were received at City Hall written in French. Some were written in English by French speakers.

¹⁰⁴ *The Guardian*, January 16, 1942: "Tag Day for Mayor's Cigarette Fund", press release, October 22, 1942, Box A-322, file 1, CVA.

¹⁰⁵ Private Ernest Meilleur to M.C.F., March 5, 1942, Box A-333, CVA.

¹⁰⁶ Gunner Richard H. Smith, R.C.A., to M.C.F., June 19, 1943, Box A-340, CVA.

wonderful job. It is to organizations such as yours that the Canadian people will turn their thanks when this war is over.¹⁰⁷

The fund was appreciated by citizens in Verdun as well as by overseas service people. Knowledge that the conditions and morale of their relatives and friends were improved through the activities of the fund comforted the families left behind. The M.C.F. also allowed them, through a shared sense of participation in its success, to feel part of a wider community experience.

In October 1945 the M.C.F. was renewed as a war charity, but its fundraising activities were nearly at an end. The remaining cash on hand was used to purchase cigarettes for distribution to Verdunites in Montreal-area military hospitals.¹⁰⁸ The Mayor's Cigarette Fund ceased operations on December 31, 1946 and was officially terminated as a war charity on February 7, 1947.¹⁰⁹ But the effects of the war carried on long after the fighting had stopped and Canadian war charities had been dissolved. As late as Christmas 1949 the City of Verdun purchased 50 cigarettes for each of the 65 Verdunites still suffering in veterans' hospitals. Edward Wilson and Arthur Burgess personally delivered the gifts.¹¹⁰

Verdun's cigarette fund could only have originated and been so strongly supported in a community with a well-established sense of local identity and community spirit. The

¹⁰⁷ J.A. Callahan, Supervisor, Canadian Y.M.C.A. Overseas, to M.C.F., July 21, 1943, Box A-340, CVA.

¹⁰⁸ René Patenaude, Secretary, M.C.F., to George Pifher, Director of Voluntary and Auxiliary Services, Department of National War Services, October 19, 1945, Box A-348, CVA; *The Guardian*, October 3, 1946.

¹⁰⁹ Leon Trebert, Registrar, War Charities Act, War Charities Division, Department of National Health and Welfare, to Burgess, February 7, 1947, Box A-322, file 1, CVA.

¹¹⁰ Council Minutes, December 13, 1949 and M.T. Chisholm, Receptionist (for Medical Superintendent), to Burgess, January 12, 1950, Box A-322, file 1, CVA.

fund was supported by all Verdunites, from the contributions of children to the mayor's office. The M.C.F. contributed to a common feeling of wartime co-operation among French and English speakers and united them in a shared view of local and national patriotism. At the local grassroots level, so clearly represented by the M.C.F., Verdun's war was based in community cooperation, not competition. Moreover, it cemented ties between Verdunites on the home front and war front. That Wilson was the symbol of the fund was appropriate and entirely in keeping with his concern for his citizens. He was always willing to support a patriotic or charitable cause, and did not hesitate to employ the apparatus of the city administration to these ends. The Mayor's Cigarette Fund was also a means of increasing his personal popularity and improving his chances of electoral success. Wilson did what he could to assist the war effort and was equally willing to allow Verdun's war effort to promote him politically.

H.M.C.S. *DUNVER*: "VERDUN'S OWN FRIGATE"

In November 1941, Verdun's M.P., Paul-Émile Côté, wrote to Angus L. Macdonald, Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, to inquire about the possibility of naming a warship of the expanding Royal Canadian Navy (R.C.N.) in honour of the City of Verdun. Côté's initiative had been at the request of municipal officials. Macdonald responded that, as there was already a ship named *Verdun* in commission with the Royal Navy (R.N.), of which service the R.C.N. was virtually an integral part, it would be impossible to christen a Canadian ship "Verdun".¹¹¹ In September 1942, however, Naval Service Headquarters (N.S.H.Q.) informed Wilson that "in view of the importance of your City in the Dominion of Canada", the navy had decided to name for the City of Verdun one of its new class of anti-submarine frigates then under construction.

¹¹¹ Reference to Côté's letter of November 13, 1941 is made in a press release from the Directorate of Naval Information published in *Le Devoir* (Montreal), May 11, 1943. The destroyer H.M.S. *Verdun* was named for the Great War battle, not the Canadian city.

Reminded of the impossibility of using the name "Verdun". Wilson was asked to despatch three alternative names of "local significance" to N.S.H.Q.¹¹²

Wilson, a shrewd and successful wartime consensus builder, was anxious to involve the entire community in every local patriotic undertaking. Consequently he initiated a city-wide contest to select the three names requested by N.S.H.Q. Organized by the city and administered by *The Guardian*, the contest offered a first prize of \$5.00 and was open to all Verdunites "irrespective of national origin, religious belief, sex or age"¹¹³, wording which suggests Wilson's desire to unite Verdunites across linguistic lines. Just before the contest was announced, one Verdun woman, Mrs. S. Pierce, wrote the mayor that:

The news this week of the new Minesweeper "Westmount", with a Westmount Officer in command, has prompted me to suggest to you that a similar honour bestowed on Verdun would be a fitting tribute to the patriotism and gallantry of the many men and boys who have gone from our City to serve at sea.¹¹⁴

The fact that smaller, but well-known, nearby municipalities were making headlines in this manner encouraged Verdunites to seek equal publicity for their city's patriotic efforts and military exploits. Moreover, the day before Pierce wrote her letter, news was released that a Verdun sailor, Able Seaman Michael Scullion, of the destroyer H.M.C.S. *Assiniboine*, had fired the shell which fatally crippled a German submarine during a lengthy running battle in the North Atlantic. Scullion's name was on everyone's lips in

¹¹² Paymaster Lieutenant Commander Robert Pennington, Secretary, Naval Board, to Wilson, September 10, 1942, Box A-331, file 7. "*Guerre 1939-1948 et H.M.C.S. Dunver*", CVA. A similar situation occurred at almost exactly the same time in Edmonton, for which city a ship could not be named due to the similarity in names with Edmundston, the name of a ship already in service with the R.C.N. See Bruce Ibsen, "A Name if Necessary, But Not Necessarily a Name: Why there was no H.M.C.S. Edmonton", in Kenneth W. Tingley, ed., *For King and Country: Alberta in the Second World War*, (Edmonton: The Provincial Museum of Alberta, 1995), pp. 139-141. During the war several hundred Canadian warships were named for Canadian communities, large and small.

¹¹³ *The Guardian*, September 25, 1942.

¹¹⁴ Mrs. S. Pierce to Wilson, September 20, 1942, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

Verdun and the city's huge contribution to the ranks of the R.C.N. was highlighted as never before.

The mayor's attempt to involve both linguistic communities in choosing the warship's name failed. The vast majority of the over 150 contest submissions came from English-speaking Verdunites, which is hardly surprising given *The Guardian's* management of the contest. Despite this the contest had popular appeal. Nearly two-thirds of respondents were female, and only a handful were from children. Citizens living in all parts of Verdun participated and many mentioned they were members of St. Willibrord's Parish, which had a large number of men on naval service. Quite a few forwarded the name of Scullion, a fellow parishioner. Entrants often had relatives on active service, explaining in part the greater appeal of the contest to English speakers. Many of the contest participants mentioned Verdun's patriotic zeal and their views that all Verdunites were united behind the war effort. Most suggestions for the name of the new warship were English or English-sounding words and phrases. The few French speakers who entered the contest wrote their letters in English. The city selected as its first choice "Beurling", in honour of the Verdun fighter ace who had gained fame that summer in the skies over Malta. The second choice was "Crawford", the surname of one of Verdun's founders, and the third suggestion was "Dunver", which was simply the interposition of the two syllables in the word "Verdun". These preferences were forwarded to N.S.H.Q. in November.¹¹⁵

In April 1943 Macdonald responded that the Navy wished to name the new class of frigates for cities and towns; the names of individuals could not be considered. As a

¹¹⁵ "Competition to name a Canadian Warship in Honor of Verdun", (list of contest results); Wilson to Pennington, November 3, 1942. Box A-331, file 7, CVA. All correspondence is located in this file. Loss through fire of *Le Messenger* has made it impossible to verify if the contest was advertised in French. No evidence in the city archives suggests that it was.

result "Dunver" was the only suitable name of the three submitted.¹¹⁶ The Navy's choice, however, generated the linguistic controversy Wilson had tried to avoid.

The name "Dunver" appeared imprecise and offended several leading French-language groups in the city. *La Ligue des Propriétaires de Verdun*, a thorn in the mayor's side on a number of issues during the war, complained that "Dunver" was "*un mot quelconque qui ne dit rien à personne*" and that the city was "*en train de nous couvrir de ridicule*".¹¹⁷ *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Section Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix*, Verdun, despatched an irate and colourfully-written letter to City Hall. Members of the *Société* were "*opposés énergiquement à ce travestissement aussi ridicule que déshonorant*". This group's executive committee founded its arguments against the name "Dunver" on the grounds that it was an English word which shrouded Verdun's substantial French character. In its view:

Les citoyens de notre municipalité...n'ont jamais eu à rougir dans le passé du nom de Verdun, un nom bien français:...c'est irriter dans sa juste fierté une partie de la population:...ce serait par là [se moquer] des compatriotes de sang français:...ce serait stupidement effacer un nom français:...ce serait contribuer à perpétrer une grossière absurdité:...que le choix de ce nom ne rencontre l'assentiment que d'une infime partie de la population si l'on en juge par le concours organisé par le Guardian:...le Conseil municipal de Verdun ont péché par omission.

Il est donc proposé et unanimement résolu que...la Société S. Jean-Baptiste protestent de toute la force de leur patriotisme contre une telle appellation qu'ils considèrent comme injurieuse, et demandent avec énergie que l'on veuille bien baptiser la dite frégate du nom de "Cité de Verdun" et que l'on fasse cesser immédiatement cette farce grotesque...¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Macdonald to Wilson, April 10, 1943, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

¹¹⁷ J.B.O. Saint-Laurent, *Secrétaire, La Ligue des Propriétaires de Verdun*, to Burgess, May 7, 1943, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

¹¹⁸ Georges Boivin, *Secrétaire, Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Section Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix*, to Burgess, May 31, 1943, Box A-331, file 7, CVA. The *Société's* suggestion was itself a unilingual name.

Excerpts from this angry resolution were published in *Le Messenger*, although relatively little of the linguistic dispute which followed found its way into the local press. The controversy even elicited an opinion from *L'Action catholique* in Québec City, which wrote the City of Verdun to protest that the selection of this name "*défigure un nom purement français*" and that Verdun was "*une ville canadienne-française*".¹¹⁹

The naming of Verdun's warship had become a delicate political and linguistic issue. The controversy generated in Montreal and Québec City by the choice of the name "Dunver" persuaded Ottawa, in co-operation with Verdun civic authorities, to issue a public clarification on the matter. In May 1943, a detailed description of the naming process appeared in *Le Devoir* in an attempt to mollify critics.¹²⁰ It was made clear that "Dunver" was not intended as an English-only word. Nevertheless, the confusion continued throughout the summer.

Most statements and letters written in opposition to the selection of the name "Dunver" demonstrated a complete lack of knowledge regarding the process by which R.C.N. ships were christened. For example, *La Ligue des Propriétaires* claimed they had no proof another ship carried Verdun's name and that this reason was "*banale*" in any event.¹²¹ What was not stated in correspondence from City Hall or in press releases which addressed the issue, and what did not seem to be known amongst the general population, was that the R.C.N., for all intent and purposes, was under the direct operational control of the Royal Navy. Ships' names had to be different since confusion might arise in communications to and between fleet units. If this simple technical rationale, as well as

¹¹⁹ G.H. Dagneau, *L'Action catholique*, to the City of Verdun, April 21, 1943, Box A-331, file 7, CVA; *Le Messenger*, June 10, 1943.

¹²⁰ *Le Devoir*, May 11, 1943 and Burgess's marginal notations on a clipping of this article, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

¹²¹ Saint-Laurent to Burgess, May 7, 1943, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

the nature of the links existing between the R.C.N. and the R.N., had been clarified earlier. some of the linguistic controversy which developed might have been avoided.

Municipal officials seemed confused. The city wanted a name acceptable to both language groups and asked Côté to intervene with N.S.H.Q. to have the word "Verdun" incorporated into the name of the new warship, which had already been officially named *Dunver*. In June, in response to Côté's question, Macdonald defended the government's role in the naming of the frigate, a role which he claimed had been "criticized in certain newspapers...because we were unwilling to give the name of the city of Verdun to a ship". According to the minister, "there is absolutely no truth in that story." Macdonald agreed, however, that if either "City of Verdun" or "Ville de Verdun" were deemed operationally suitable, one of those names would be selected instead.¹²²

Notwithstanding the controversy, on June 29, 1943, *Dunver's* commanding officer (C.O.), Lieutenant Commander William Woods, Royal Canadian Naval Reserve (R.C.N.R.), a Verdunite, in company with his French-speaking Executive Officer, Lieutenant André Marcil, R.C.N.V.R., were warmly received at City Hall.¹²³ Meanwhile, the city worked behind the scenes to arrange for a change in the name of their ship.

In response to repeated requests from the city, on September 9, 1943, N.S.H.Q. ordered that the name *Dunver* be changed to an awkward-sounding "Verdun of Canada" or

¹²² House of Commons, *Debates*, June 9-10, 1943. Macdonald, devoting considerable attention to this potentially embarrassing situation, wrote Côté on July 21 suggesting the name "Ville de Verdun", as had been done with "Ville de Québec". Côté replied that the unilingualism of this name might make it unacceptable to a large number of his English-speaking constituents. Côté to Macdonald, July 24, 1943. Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

¹²³ Photograph of the event with caption, Box A-242, file 35, CVA; "*Livre d'Or des Visiteurs, Ville de Verdun*". In addition to *Westmount*, mentioned above, the frigate *Beacon Hill*, named for Victoria, also had in command a citizen from its namesake community. This was not necessarily the design of N.S.H.Q., however. Rick James, "The West Coast's Very Own Frigate", *Argonauta*, Volume 11, No. 1, January 1994, p. 18.

"Verdun Canada". This was a mere two days before the ship's scheduled commissioning date. *Dunver's* officers, however, balked at the order, citing as their principal reason that "crests, plate and stationery have already been prepared at great expense". Moreover, superstitious crewmen did not want the name of their ship changed. Macdonald rescinded the order; Verdun's frigate would remain *Dunver*. The delicate matter ended there and no further outcry was recorded from local French-speaking groups.¹²⁴

The power of linguistic symbolism, typified by the "Dunver" naming affair, mobilized Verdun's French-speaking elite and illustrated the existence of local polarization on some war-related issues. But since *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste* was not contesting the decision to name a ship in Verdun's honour, only the form the name would take, their vociferous response had more to do with their own perceived role in the community as language watchdogs than in criticizing Verdun's war effort. Moreover, there is no evidence that the opposition to the ship's name represented the grassroots views of most French-Canadian Verdunites.

The frigate's crew paid scant attention to the naming imbroglio. One rating has recalled that while "most of the crew were aware of the origin of the name...at that time everyone was more interested in the ship itself and the job to be done."¹²⁵ Moreover, "officers and

¹²⁴ J.D. Prentice, Acting Captain, Captain (D) Halifax, to Rear-Admiral James Murray, Commander-in-Chief, Canadian Northwest Atlantic, October 7, 1943, RG 24, Volume 11,555, file N.S. D. 4-29-0, NAC; N.S.H.Q. to Naval-Officer-in-Charge (N.O.I.C.) Quebec, 09/2017; N.O.I.C. Quebec to N.S.H.Q. 10/1623; N.S.H.Q. to N.O.I.C. Quebec 11/1717, RG 24, Volume 5836, file NS8000 - 381/12, NAC. *Dunver's* naming situation was far from unique in the R.C.N. during the war. Several other Canadian towns and cities, for a variety of reasons, were also represented by frigates otherwise named: for example, *Beacon Hill* (Victoria), *Kokanee* (Nelson), *Capilano* (North Vancouver), *Chebogue* (Yarmouth) and *Waskesiu* (Prince Albert). James, "The West Coast's Very Own Frigate", pp. 18-19. However, *Dunver* was the only ship to be named through the interposition of letters or syllables.

¹²⁵ Robert Bruce to author, March 1994.

senior ratings made everyone aware of how [the] name came about [as a] moral booster" and the crew seemed "very proud" to represent Verdun. On the other hand another rating aboard *Dunver* has stated "I don't think "Dunver" inspired as much pride as "Verdun" would have, or any other city with its proper name."¹²⁶

The 300-foot, 1445-ton frigate was officially commissioned into the R.C.N. in Québec City on September 11, 1943. Wilson had hoped to have the commissioning ceremony moved to Montreal and the event called 'Verdun Day'. "so that as many of our people as wish to attend may see 'their own frigate'". The Navy could not agree, citing the delay this would have entailed in sending the ship on operations, the expense involved in moving the ship as well as the fact that this kind of precedent had to be avoided.¹²⁷ Still, N.S.H.Q. took pains to note "the excellent contribution of men Verdun has made to the Naval Service...[and] the fine spirit of co-operation that each of your citizens has shown from time to time in improving the morale of our Officers and men".¹²⁸

In April 1943, before the naming of *Dunver* had become a language issue, Macdonald had invited the city of Verdun, or voluntary groups to "adopt" *Dunver* by despatching comforts to the men serving aboard. He noted that adoption by a community "has been found to be very advantageous in keeping up the morale of ships' crews".¹²⁹ Verdun's

¹²⁶ A. Keith Givens to author, June 1994; Albert Jackson to author, June 1994; Clifford Biggar to author, June 1994.

¹²⁷ The wealthy City of Westmount, however, was able to arrange for just such a day for the minesweeper named in its honour the year before. Captain J.E. Oland, N.O.I.C., Montreal, to Paymaster Commander Joseph Jeffrey, Secretary, Naval Board, August 27, 1943, RG 24, Volume 5836, file NS8000 - 381/12, NAC.

¹²⁸ Wilson to Oland, August 24, 1943; Jeffrey to Wilson September 9, 1943, Box A-331, file 7, CVA. Wilson, using data obtained from the files of the Mayor's Cigarette Fund, estimated that 800 Verdunites were on active naval service at that time, a high proportion from any city.

¹²⁹ Macdonald to Wilson, April 10, 1943, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps was the first group to respond to City Hall's solicitations for assistance in adopting the frigate and its crew. The already busy W.V.R.C. described itself as "very interested" and by June 1943 had begun "knitting for the men".¹³⁰ The experience of various I.O.D.E. chapters across Canada in adopting ships was that "the interest created by this contact is very great and the civilian group becomes very concerned for the welfare of the men and learn[s] a great deal of the hardships which have to be endured to safeguard the life-lines of our Empire."¹³¹ Adopting a ship seemed as important for hometown morale and community spirit as it was beneficial for the ship's crew members.

The first letter sent to Wilson from *Dunver*, on September 13, 1943, stated that "[t]he officers and men are unanimously proud to man this ship that carries Verdun's name to sea and wish to express their gratitude for the interest and kindness that you and your citizens have shown them."¹³² Less than two weeks later, the C.O., Lieutenant Commander Woods, and his Executive Officer, Lieutenant Marcil, were the guests of honour at a large dance and reception held in Verdun. Local politicians from all levels of government, municipal officials and prominent citizens attended the dance as did officers from the W.V.R.C. The latter group was the principal organizer of the event and collected the proceeds from the evening to purchase comforts for the crewmen of "Verdun's Own Frigate". Wilson provided Woods with a framed portrait of the King for the officers' wardroom as well as the promise of immediate delivery of 40,000 cigarettes purchased by the Mayor's Cigarette Fund for distribution to the 130 crew members. The

¹³⁰ Captain Helen Curwood, Acting Commandant, W.V.R.C., to Burgess, June 21, 1943, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

¹³¹ Mrs. H.S. Angus, National War Service Convenor, Toronto, to Mrs. R.M. Buchanan, Provincial War Service Convenor, Saskatoon, March 15, 1943, MG 28 I 17, Volume 23, file 1, "Adoption of Ships", NAC.

¹³² Lieutenant André Marcil, for Lieutenant Commander Woods, to Wilson, September 13, 1943, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

city also contributed \$100.00 for the purchase of other amenities.¹³³ The evening was so well attended and such a success that Woods told the gathering, "this is one of the very great days of my life...[A]s a citizen of Verdun [I] feel proud to live in such a truly loyal and patriotic community."¹³⁴

This was only the beginning of the city's role in channelling comforts to *Dunver*. The navy suggested despatching playing cards, cribbage boards, magazine subscriptions, radios and batteries, electric toasters and irons. But the most commonly sent items were cigarettes, clothing, toiletries, sweets, razor blades, gramophones and sporting equipment.¹³⁵ Verdunites sent many of these things and more, all paid for by local collections and donations. A further shipment of 40,000 cigarettes was sent just before Christmas 1943. As a reminder of its sponsorship, the city presented *Dunver* with an official crest of the City of Verdun for display aboard ship.¹³⁶

In the fall of 1943, Burgess attempted without success to find suppliers for such scarce consumer items as irons and a washing machine which the city sought to send to *Dunver*.

¹³³ "Re: Verdun Frigate Reception at Wood Hall Friday 24th September 1943". Box A-331, file 7, CVA; *The Guardian*, September 17 and October 1, 1943; Executive Committee Minutes, September 14, 1943.

¹³⁴ Quoted in *The Guardian*, October 1, 1943. Born into a seafaring family in Liverpool in 1899, Woods was a Great War veteran and master of merchant vessels in the interwar period. He moved to Verdun in 1930. *The Guardian*, June 15, 1944. Woods was awarded an O.B.E. in the King's New Year's Honour List in January 1944, an award which brought great pride to Verdun. *The Guardian*, January 6 and January 13, 1944; Burgess to Woods, January 19, 1944, Box A-242, file 35, CVA.

¹³⁵ Lieutenant Gordon K. Daley, Directorate of Special Services, N.S.H.Q., to Mrs. H.S. Angus, I.O.D.E., May 19, 1943, MG 28 I 17, Volume 23, file 1, "Adoption of Ships", NAC.

¹³⁶ "List of articles sent to the crew of H.M.C.S. *Dunver* since the adoption of this ship by the citizens of the City of Verdun", March 17, 1945, Box A-331, file 7, CVA; Wilson to Woods, September 24, 1943 and René Patenaude, Secretary, M.C.F., to Woods, December 21, 1943, Box A-348, CVA.

The intervention of the Naval-Officer-in-Charge, Quebec was required to locate a washing machine in October, but irons were impossible to procure. In April 1944 a second washing machine was ordered for the ship and Burgess wrote Woods "nothing would be too much trouble for us".¹³⁷ The W.V.R.C. raised the nearly \$300.00 necessary to pay for the washing machines. In September 1944 a piano paid for jointly by the W.V.R.C. and the Verdun Salvage Committee was sent to *Dunver*.¹³⁸ While the city did not directly pay for many of these goods, it organized or facilitated organization of sponsorship activities and acted as the official clearing house for *Dunver*-related correspondence and information. Crewmen also viewed City Hall as the official point of contact with the community.

At the end of 1944, the frigate's new commander, Lieutenant William Davenport, who had officially succeeded Woods in August 1944, wrote both Wilson and Burgess to inquire about the possibility of obtaining a 16mm film projector for *Dunver*, an expensive item. Despite previous fundraising by the W.V.R.C., however, there were insufficient funds available to provide for this request. No permanent fundraising campaign, such as existed for the Mayor's Cigarette Fund, had been established for *Dunver*. The existence of two funds would have created competition with one another for Verdunites' charity.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Captain L.J.M. Gauvreau, R.C.N., N.O.I.C. Quebec, to Burgess, October 8, 1943; Burgess to Woods, April 18, 1944, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

¹³⁸ Wilson to Lieutenant William Davenport, C.O., *Dunver*, September 6, 1944 and reply, November 29, 1944, Box A-331, file 7, CVA. Davenport visited Verdun in September 1944 and again in January 1945 while Lieutenant Marcil visited in November 1944 during a Victory Loan campaign. Marcil's presence on this occasion demonstrated the strong identification which had developed between the ship and the city, between the home front and the battle front. Few inland cities had occasion to host the officers of their namesake communities as often as did Verdun. The City of Victoria also provided *Beacon Hill* with two washing machines and a piano and was even able to procure for its ship some toasters and irons. James, "The West Coast's Very Own Frigate", p. 18.

¹³⁹ In 1945 the city established a Special Fund for *Dunver*. Following the ship's decommissioning, the remaining \$211.00 was turned over to the M.C.F. Council Minutes, October 21, 1946.

In response to Davenport's pre-Christmas appeal, the mayor approached a selected number of Verdun community groups and merchants for patriotic donations of about \$25.00 each. By the end of January 1945 a new \$600.00 film projector had been ordered by the city for despatch to *Dunver*. Merchants remained one of Verdun's few sources of substantial and ready funding. Civic-minded community leaders often met requests for speedy wartime charity. It was difficult for them to refuse a public request for \$25.00 from the mayor's office.¹⁴⁰

The sailors appreciated the gifts. Former crewman Walter Finlay recalled that:

we knew the citizens were thinking of "their ship" and trying to make the crew happy. [The] washing machine was a big thing and it had lots of 'washing time'. Smokes, woolen goods and candy bars were always nice to receive.

A shipmate remembered that the washing machine was "very nearly lost its first day at sea" as crewmen "forgot to lash it down".¹⁴¹

On one occasion, two Verdunites stationed in Halifax visited *Dunver* and benefitting from the crew's gratitude. In July 1944 Wren Jean Nugent, Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (W.R.C.N.S.), wrote her mother that she had boarded the frigate several times, once with fellow Verdunite Wren Violet Drummond. She said:

¹⁴⁰ The money for the projector was provided by groups such as the Legion, the Imperial Corps of Frontiersmen, the Verdun Community Club, the St. Willibrord's Social Club, the Verdun Voters' League and the Lion's Club as well as merchants such as J.P. Dupuis Ltd., Steinberg's Wholesale Groceries and the Troy Laundry and Dyeing Company. The projector was not actually received aboard ship until April 5, with the first movie shown two days later. Acting Commander St. Clair Balfour, R.C.N.V.R., to Wilson, April 7, 1945, Box A-331, file 7, CVA; *The Messenger*, December 21, 1944; *The Guardian*, December 21, 1944; *The Gazette*, January 23, 1945; Burgess to J.R. French, February 6, 1945, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

¹⁴¹ Walter Finlay to author, April 1994; John Croal to author, April 1994.

I was on the "hometown ship" [and]...treated like a queen. Lieutenant Pearce showed me about the ship a little and then I met a home boy who finished the tour with me. I chatted with a few of the boys and officers and had supper with them...

Verdun has contributed a rug to the officers' wardroom and a washing machine which is a godsend for everyone. The boys want irons, and the officers request a phonograph-radio...They also expressed the hope they might get a piano in due time.

I was requested to give this information to the "Guardian" so that citizens will know that the officers and ratings of their namesake ship really appreciate what is being done for them and that they like the ship very much.¹⁴²

Information for this study on life aboard *Dunver* was obtained from thirteen former crewmen, none of whom was from Verdun. All were aware that their ship was named in honour of the City of Verdun and eight recalled with appreciation gifts and comforts sent to the ship by the city. They were unanimous in describing *Dunver* as a "happy ship", one to be proud of.¹⁴³

Dunver's involvement in naval operations elicited considerable interest in Verdun. Burgess wrote N.S.H.Q. in 1944 seeking information on *Dunver* which might be suitable for local dissemination, only to be advised that no details could be released publicly.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Jean Nugent to Mrs. Bella Nugent, no date cited, quoted in *The Guardian*, July 27, 1944.

¹⁴³ The thirteen respondents who answered a questionnaire regarding their service in *Dunver* were St. Clair Balfour, Clifford Biggar, Robert Bruce, C.C. Chapman, John Croal, Frank Dion, Walter Finlay, A. Keith Givens, Albert Jackson, D.P. Keller, Walter Mitham, Harry Speed and D.C. Walsh. Three other men sent photos only: Douglas Earish, Gordon Hill and E.L. Taylor. Keller wrote to the author on June 12, 1994 that "I was on board from September 11, 1943 to May 30, 1945 and as the manager of the ships canteen I met most everyone and recall the crew as happy." Of the ten correspondents who actually served under Lt. Cdr. Woods, all had fond memories of his stint as commander and remember him as an able captain.

¹⁴⁴ Lieutenant Commander Scott Fyfe, for Director of Naval Information, to Burgess, February 10, 1945, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

"Little has been heard about the frigate "Dunver" since the day she was commissioned...". wrote *The Guardian* in October 1944. The ship was hardly inactive, however. That month news was released that *Dunver* had led the escort group which shepherded the largest convoy of the war, totalling 167 ships, to Britain in July 1944. "Verdun has been honored by the choice of the "Dunver" as "flag ship" of the covering naval force". crowed *The Guardian*, even though the selection of *Dunver* for this mission had nothing whatever to do with Verdun.¹⁴⁵ In February 1945 *Dunver* shared the credit with another warship and a Coastal Command aircraft for the sinking of the German submarine *U-484* in September 1944. "The City of Verdun has cause for rejoicing today", wrote *The Montreal Daily Star*, while *The Guardian* gushed out the news on the front page of its next edition.¹⁴⁶ Every favourable reference to *Dunver* in the press brought pride to Verdun. Copies of *The Guardian's* reports of these incidents found their way to the ship and were proudly posted on bulletin boards. The crew were well aware that their actions were keenly followed in Verdun.¹⁴⁷

Curiously, there existed a widespread misconception that Verdunites made up the majority of *Dunver's* crew and this fallacy was often repeated in the Verdun and Montreal press. As early as October 1943, *The Gazette* reported that "most" of the crew were Verdunites. "Many of the officers, non-commissioned officers and members of the crew serving under Lt. Comm. Woods are residents of Verdun", echoed *The Guardian* in early 1944. *The Guardian* routinely re-iterated this erroneous information throughout the war. *The Montreal Daily Star* claimed in 1945 that the crew of *Dunver*, were "all Verdun and

¹⁴⁵ *The Guardian*, October 26, 1944.

¹⁴⁶ Royal Canadian Navy Press Release, February 12, 1945, Box A-331, file 7, CVA: *The Montreal Daily Star*, February 13, 1945; *The Guardian*, February 15, 1945. The press and population of Red Deer, Alberta also keenly followed the service of their namesake ship, a Bangor-class minesweeper, even though no residents served aboard. See Michael Dawe, "Community in Transition: Red Deer in the Second World War", in Tingley, ed., *For King and Country*, p. 126.

¹⁴⁷ Clifford Biggar to author, July 1994.

Montreal men". As late as March 1946, *The Messenger* recalled "a very large part of...Dunver's crew were men from this City".¹⁴⁸ In reality, apart from Woods, there were rarely more than about half a dozen ratings and petty officers from Verdun aboard, though there were also a number of Montrealers.¹⁴⁹ The belief that the frigate was crewed by Verdunites helps explain some of the pride felt in the city whenever *Dunver* was reported as having successfully taken part in operations. The generalized belief in the city was that fellow Verdunites were nearly entirely responsible for the ship's war record. Perhaps the fact so many Verdunites were in the navy facilitated this view.

On January 23, 1946 *Dunver* was paid off and sold for scrap. The ship's bell was presented to the city in an official ceremony in December 1946.¹⁵⁰ In addition to its role in helping win the Battle of the Atlantic, *Dunver* served a useful home-front role as a wartime symbol around which all Verdunites could rally in common cause.

The City of Verdun was at war; Wilson, no less than his fellow citizens and the groups to which they belonged, made sure of that. While the involvement of the city entailed certain burdens to rate-payers and additional work for city employees, it also brought tangible benefits to Verdun. The war reduced the number of men on the dole and enabled the city to transfer the control and costs of the Auditorium to Ottawa. Moreover, it was the Department of National Defence which incurred the disenchantment of Verdunites for seemingly overstaying its welcome, not City Hall. The Mayor's Cigarette Fund brought

¹⁴⁸ *The Gazette*, October 25, 1943; *The Guardian*, January 6, 1944; *The Montreal Daily Star*, February 13, 1945; *The Messenger*, March 7, 1946. Eight of thirteen former crewmen were nevertheless able to recall and name shipmates originally from Verdun.

¹⁴⁹ One crewman recalled that the reason life aboard *Dunver* was so pleasant was the "diversity of backgrounds and hometowns in Canada and Newfoundland" of the crew. Walter Mitham to author, May 1994.

¹⁵⁰ *The Messenger*, December 12, 1946; *The Gazette* December 12, 1946. As of 1997 the bell was hanging in the Verdun branch of the Royal Canadian Legion.

renown to Verdun and enhanced the city's reputation with its own citizens and with its neighbours. It helped bridge divisions in the community and conveniently acted as a magnet for the patriotic energy of hundreds of Verdunites from all backgrounds. The city's creation of the fund helped sensitize the population to the war and to the fact Verdun's contribution in manpower was significant even on a national scale. The role of the city in assuming some organizational and fund-raising responsibility for the welfare of the crew of *Dunver*, at first commanded by a Verdunite, illustrated that City Hall's war effort extended beyond helping only Verdunites on active service overseas. Heightening the visibility of *Dunver* and its exploits in the community brought the war home to many Verdunites and, like the cigarette fund, enabled a wide cross-section of the population to participate in some measure in the pursuit of victory.

Language played a role in all of the above issues. What is remarkable, however, is the extent of linguistic unity prevailing in Verdun during the war. Sometimes support for the war masked the pursuit of a hidden agenda. Whispering campaigns against local business people of Italian ethnicity had more to do with economic competition than a sudden patriotic response against Fifth Columnists. The notion of profitable patriotism united the city council in its quest for a military tenant for the Auditorium. And when the community felt it was time for the military to break camp, both English- and French-language groups united in their efforts to terminate the lease. Even the proprietors' obviously self-interested demand for a curfew was sometimes couched in patriotic language. The war allowed the city and some groups active within it to achieve specific goals and thereby lend the mantle of unity to the city's considerable war effort. Still, French speakers and English speakers jointly participated in fund-raising ventures and no protests were heard in Verdun against municipal expenditures or efforts in support of the war or Verdunites' role in it.



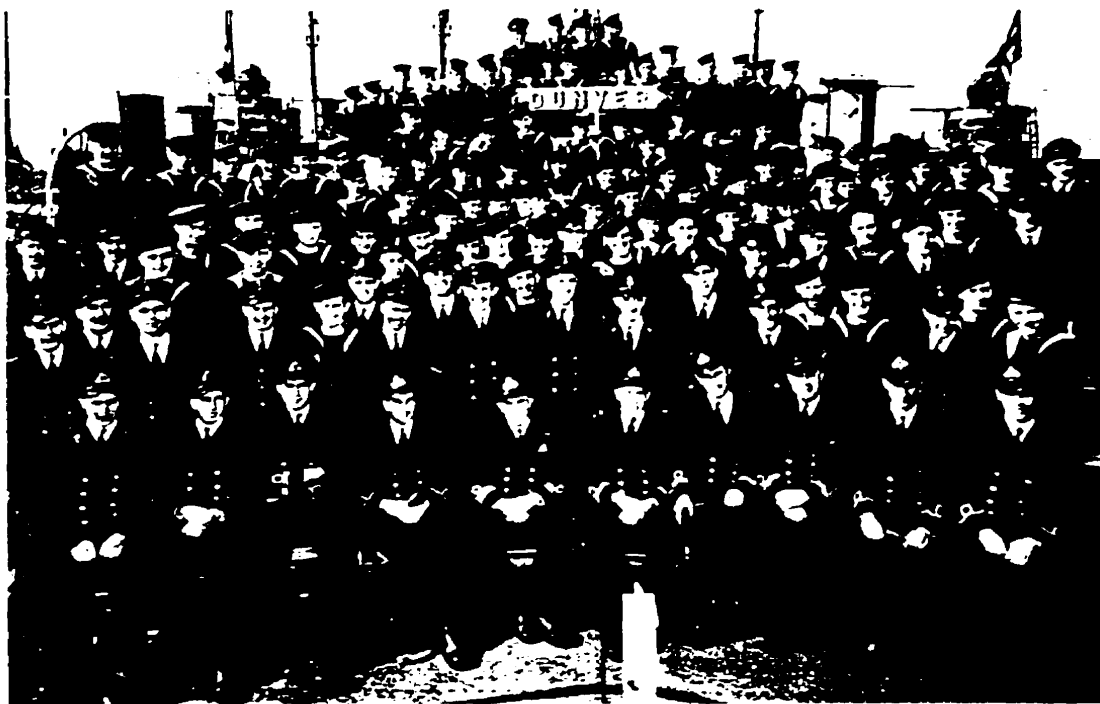
A display for the Mayor's Cigarette Fund in the lobby of the Fifth Avenue Theatre in Verdun. The display was donated by Imperial Tobacco. Standing are theatre managers; seated are members of the Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps collecting for the fund. Their husbands were overseas.

May 1944

(City of Verdun Archives)



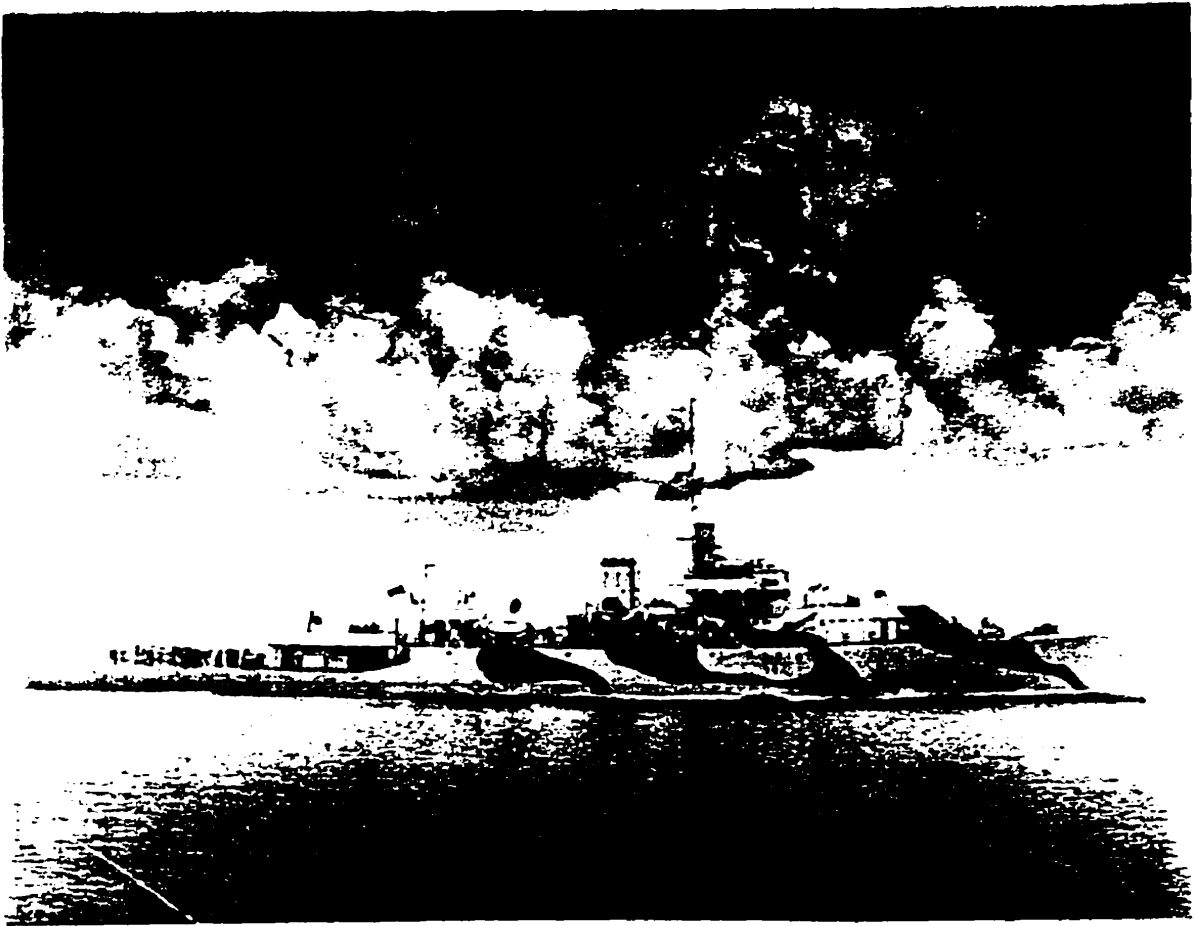
Mrs. Robertson, a local fun-raiser for the Mayor's Cigarette Fund,
presenting a cheque to Wilson. Note photo of *Dunver* under glass on Wilson's desk.
May 1944
(City of Verdun Archives)



Officers and crew of H.M.C.S. *Dunver*
River-class frigate named for City of Verdun
September 1943
(Courtesy Walter Finlay)



Signing the Golden Book of the City of Verdun in the Mayor's Office.
From left, Wilson, Lieutenant Commander William Woods, C.O. of *Dunver*,
Lieutenant André Marcil, Executive Officer, June 1943.
Woods was a Verdunite.
(City of Verdun Archives)



H.M.C.S. *Dunver*
(City of Verdun Archives)

CHAPTER 4

THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSE

Certain wartime activities, especially government sponsored or sanctioned events or campaigns, embraced the entire population of Verdun and allowed citizens to participate indirectly in the prosecution of the war. Civil protection exercises, salvage collections and Victory Loan campaigns touched almost every Verdun household. In all these undertakings the city acted in an important and sometimes essential auxiliary capacity.

The Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps lacked the wider social influence of other organizations or events such as civil protection, salvage campaigns or bond drives. But the women of the W.V.R.C. added a special dimension to the city's wartime life. They performed many war-related tasks and contributed to other local groups' effectiveness and success.

The role played by the W.V.R.C in the community and the manner in which civil defence, salvage operations and Victory Loan campaigns were organized offer insight into Verdunites' wartime social organization. Citizens' participation in these activities and other special wartime events and demonstrations highlight the extent of community co-operation and the commonality of purpose with which Verdunites responded to the war.

Wartime patriotism in Verdun could be local in origin and nature, applied to wider national causes or, as in the case of many among Verdun's British-born population, motivated by the tribulations of Britain. However defined, patriotic expression during the war was the result of Verdunites' community-mindedness. The people's responses benefitted Verdun and ultimately the nation.

THE WOMEN'S VOLUNTEER RESERVE CORPS

Ruth Pierson and others have documented the contributions of Canadian women during the Second World War.¹ From 1941 onward, approximately fifty thousand women served in their own services: the Canadian Women's Army Corps, the Royal Canadian Air Force - Women's Division, the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service and as nursing sisters attached mainly to the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps (R.C.A.M.C.). Women performed vital service in Canada's defence industries, with perhaps 250,000 directly engaged in war work at some point during the conflict, while hundreds of thousands of others laboured indirectly in support of the war, including work as agricultural labourers. Thousands of women of all ages worked as volunteers and fund-raisers for charitable causes.

A less quantifiable contribution was the enormous personal and familial responsibilities assumed by Canadian women, many of whom, as a result of their husbands' or other family members' enlistments, suddenly were thrust into the positions of heads of single-parent families or who, perhaps for the first time in their lives, were obliged to finance and administer the affairs of their families.

The public profile of women increased during the war. Women and women's groups debated national issues such as daycare, wage equity and consumer price controls. Most of these issues remained identified with traditional gender-defined roles. One home front group of service-minded women which has received comparatively little attention is the Québec-based Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps. In Verdun, these women's activities ranged from fund-raising to training as civil protection auxiliaries.

¹ Ruth R. Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All"*, *op. cit.*; Ruth R. Pierson, *Canadian Women and the Second World War*, (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association Booklet 37, 1983); Carolyn Gossage, *Greatcoats and Glamour Boots*, *op. cit.*; Auger and Lamothe, *De la poêle à frire à la ligne de feu: la vie quotidienne des québécoises pendant la guerre '39-'45*, *op. cit.*

Established in June 1940 by an enthusiastic and large group of Westmount women, the W.V.R.C. was a civilian organization whose primary goal was to train women in certain essential services, some of which were well outside their established gender roles, and produce a ready cadre of useful volunteer workers devoted to the war effort. Their training included courses in first aid and motor mechanics as well as compulsory military drill. The uniformed, volunteer members of the W.V.R.C., nicknamed the "Beavers", adhered to a rank structure and generally acted in co-operation with government agencies or other groups organizing such ventures as Victory Loan campaigns, ration booklet distribution or recruitment drives. A principal activity of the W.V.R.C. was fundraising on behalf of many patriotic causes or charitable organizations, such as the Canadian Red Cross, H.M.C.S. *Dunver*, the "Wings for Britain" Fund or the Queen's Canadian Fund, in aid of British victims of German bombing.

In July 1940, a group of women in Verdun established a chapter of the W.V.R.C., though the larger Westmount group acted as the headquarters of the organization.² By August, the Verdun W.V.R.C. numbered 161 members and already had organized courses in first aid and motor mechanics.³ The women were required to purchase uniforms, replete with "VERDUN" shoulder flashes. On March 22, 1941 the Verdun group selected as their Senior Commandant, Miss R. B. Joan Adams. She was 40 years old and originally from

² For a good discussion of Canadian women's paramilitary groups, see Jean Bruce, *Back the Attack!*, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-35. That the Verdun unit was merely a branch of the Westmount parent organization did not sit well with some of the Verdun women. Events reached a climax in March 1941, when Mrs. Pauline McKibbin, at the helm of the Verdun W.V.R.C., sought to sever ties with the Westmount group and create an independent Verdun organization. She failed and relinquished her command. There is no firm evidence to suggest this dispute resulted from class antagonisms between Verdun and Westmount women. W.V.R.C., Minutes of Meeting, March 17, 1941; McKibbin to City of Verdun, March 19, 1941 and Arthur Burgess's marginal notation of March 21, 1941, Box A-330, file 5, CVA; *The Guardian*, March 21, 1941.

³ *The Guardian*, July 26, 1940; *The Gazette*, April 26, 1941; other information in Box A-331, file 7, "Guerre 1939-48", CVA.

Cornwall, Ontario. Adams moved to Verdun in the 1920s and quickly developed a reputation as a feminist and social activist. She was also the founder and principal of the Canadian Commercial College and had made a name for herself in Verdun as an Independent candidate in the March 1940 federal election.⁴

Joan Adams increased the status and improved the image of the Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps. She did not view the unit's role as merely one of fundraising on behalf of the Mayor's Cigarette Fund or for other charities. Adams felt that assisting British civilians and providing auxiliary military services at home were the primary roles of the organization. As a result, W.V.R.C. women patrolled streets during civil protection exercises and assumed at least some of the social authority denied them out of uniform. They paraded as a military unit and drilled in the basement of Verdun High School under the supervision of the Black Watch. Adams soon earned the nickname "the Little Colonel", and subsequently admitted to being "aggressive" in the pursuit of her goals.⁵

This vigour did not go unnoticed. The Montreal press reported that the "Verdun unit is taking drill seriously. If and when the Government has need of women, there will be hundreds of physically fit and well-trained recruits in this unit alone. The 'men' are taking driving lessons and they have a large mechanics class as well."⁶ In April 1941, *The Montreal Daily Star* also published an extremely laudatory article concerning the Verdun W.V.R.C. The article stated that

big business could in many cases take a lesson in efficiency and co-operation from this closely-knit voluntary unit headed by [that]...incredibly persevering and patriotic personality, Commandant Joan Adams.

⁴ See Chapter 8.

⁵ Interview with R.B. Joan Adams, November 8, 1993; Colonel Paul P. Hutchison, *Canada's Black Watch: The First Hundred Years, op. cit.*, p. 196.

⁶ Unidentified Montreal newspaper article, probably April 1941, copied from the personal files of R.B. Joan Adams.

Throughout the years many stories will no doubt be told of the heroic efforts made by the women to help Canada in her task, but undoubtedly the daily work now being performed by the W.V.R.C. in Verdun will be one of the most interesting and dramatic - although just a handful of women the work they are doing could make any triple size organization proud...[T]hey are few in number but the work they do makes thousands happy.⁷

This article put the membership of the Verdun W.V.R.C. at 120, which is a marked decline from the unit's total of 161 the previous August. Though its goal was to number 400, by the summer of 1941 the Verdun W.V.R.C. mustered only 187 members.⁸ The low participation rate by these working-class Verdun women was partly due to the expense of purchasing uniforms. Adams later recalled that many Verdun members had little money and could not purchase uniforms without at least some assistance.⁹ The increased availability of war work also diminished the time available for voluntary work. Moreover, if the organization in any way reflected social elitism, as the existence of the Westmount headquarters suggests, the W.V.R.C., like the I.O.D.E., would not have been as attractive to Verdun women as it was for Westmount women. The strength of the W.V.R.C. in Westmount, with less than half of Verdun's population at the time, indicates its attractiveness to middle- and upper-class women.¹⁰

⁷ *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 10, 1941.

⁸ *The Guardian*, August 23, 1940 and August 22, 1941.

⁹ Interview with R.B. Joan Adams, November 8, 1993. Uniforms were compulsory: "either you wore the uniform as a soldier or you didn't", recalled Adams. Despite the membership statistics mentioned in the press, Adams also claimed that the Verdun W.V.R.C. was one of the largest in the Montreal area. With 99 women comprising a full company, she recalled that, at one point, her unit boasted nearly three companies in its battalion.

¹⁰ In April 1941 W.V.R.C. membership was 1500 in the Montreal area, including the parent branch in Westmount and others in Verdun, Montreal, Pointe Claire and Lachine. Units were also established in Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. *The Gazette*, April 26, 1941; *The Montreal Daily Star*, June 1, 1941. Para-military women's groups were organized in several other provinces and most, like the W.V.R.C., petitioned Ottawa for some sort of formal recognition as participants in the war effort. Gossage, *Greatcoats and Glamour Boots*, pp. 24-25.

An analysis of the given and family names of some W.V.R.C. members, occasionally mentioned in the local press, suggests the presence of some members of French ancestry. Years later Adams could not remember any French-Canadian women in the Verdun W.V.R.C. She believed social and political pressures prevented their more active participation. Yet, it seems that the W.V.R.C. contained at least some French-speaking women, though they probably would have been bilingual. The Verdun unit's penchant for assisting markedly British causes or organizations, such as the Queen's Canadian Fund or the British Women's Voluntary Services, provided relatively little incentive for French-speaking Verdunites to join the organization, especially when voluntary war work of a more local or national nature was easily available. For Verdun's French-Canadian population, patriotism was expressed closer to home.

In the fall of 1941 the Department of National War Services organized a national Women's Voluntary Services Division which co-ordinated the activities of women's volunteer and auxiliary work groups. Ottawa encouraged organizations like the W.V.R.C. to assist in the war effort on a local basis while adhering to federal guidelines administered by local or regional Women's Voluntary Services offices.¹¹ The W.V.R.C. therefore formed part of a wider network of women's voluntary services engaged in similar work. Ottawa never elevated the Women's Voluntary Services to the status of official Auxiliary Service as were the Y.M.C.A., the Red Cross, the Canadian Legion and the Knights of Columbus.

Many of the first women to go on active service when the military established women's branches in each of the services came from the ranks of the over 7000 Canadian women who had volunteered for duty in para-military organizations like the W.V.R.C.¹² Ottawa

¹¹ Pierson, *Canadian Women and the Second World War*, Canadian Historical Association Booklet No. 37, p. 16.

¹² Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, p. 265 n41, has estimated that by March 1943, nearly two years following the creation of the Canadian Women's Army Corps,

looked to these civilian groups to form a nucleus of trained and drilled women for its new formations, which was the reason for these groups' establishment in the first place. Joan Adams believed that the W.V.R.C. proved to the military authorities that women could act as valuable, fully-fledged members of the military community. The women of the W.V.R.C. were different, seemingly more official and professional than the female volunteers knitting for the Red Cross or canvassing for war charities. By the spring of 1942, at least seven Verdun women had traded in their W.V.R.C. uniforms for the real thing. Others would follow.¹³

Though a 1942 article in *The Guardian* estimated that most W.V.R.C. women were wage earners, with perhaps 80% of these employed in munitions work, Adams has recalled that many of the women were not regularly employed.¹⁴ She claimed most of the women were approximately 35-40 years of age and joined the W.V.R.C. for patriotic reasons or because they had relatives and friends serving in the military. For these women, membership in the W.V.R.C. seemed a way to support their men in uniform and did not necessarily reflect a desire to promote women's work as equivalent to that of men. A simple poem written in September 1941 by a Verdunite serving in the W.V.R.C. illustrates one member's views regarding gender identification as well as of patriotic motivation.

approximately 90 women's paramilitary groups totalling over 7100 members existed in Canada.

¹³ *The Guardian*, March 20, 1942; interview with R.B. Joan Adams, November 8, 1993. Nevertheless, Pierson has shown that much of the work assigned these women in uniform mirrored that found in the traditional female occupational sphere. A good deal of W.V.R.C. work remained traditional and gender-based, perhaps no activity more so than the ongoing clothing collection campaign for British victims of war. Clothing was gathered, cleaned, mended and packed, often late into the night by the women of the W.V.R.C. Interview with R.B. Joan Adams, November 8, 1993.

¹⁴ *The Guardian*, July 10, 1942; interview with R.B. Joan Adams, November 8, 1993.

The W.V.R.C.

We are a group of happy workers
In the service of the Corps.
We keep our shoulders to the wheel
To guard our treasured shore.

We have grown from just a handful
To an army that is strong.
And we keep the ball arolling.
To help our boys along.

Sometimes we're rather weary
But we must go on parade
Then A.R.P. with the C.P.C..
Home Nursing and First Aid.

Then too we must go tagging
And we do it gladly too.
Cause this means more cigarettes
To the Boys, from you.

We most of us wear uniforms
The popular Air Force blue
To which we pledge our best respect
In everything we do.

We remember we're just women
And not as strong as men.
But big enough to hold the fort
'Til they come home again.

We are just a bunch of women
Not out expecting praise.
But raising dollars where we can
To shorten Hitler's days.

We can't be out there fighting
 In that land across the sea.
 But we can do our bit right here
 In the fight for Liberty.

Then when this war is over
 And the boys come marching back
 They'll hear us sing, Long Live the King
 God Bless the Union Jack.¹⁵

The author, Private Linstead, joined the W.V.R.C. out of patriotic fervour and a willing desire to serve as an auxiliary to the men of her community, and not as a woman striving to highlight the potential wartime contribution of her sex.

Adams, however, perhaps an anomaly in her own organization, strongly affirmed the principle that the W.V.R.C. demonstrated the utility of women in activities outside their gendered sphere. In a 1942 address before the N.D.G. Women's Club held in Victoria Hall, Westmount, Adams, a consistent defender of women's rights, emphasized the importance of raising the consciousness of women regarding their crucial role in wartime society. She described her own uphill battle to have W.V.R.C. women in Verdun assert themselves as leaders in their community. She claimed many of these Verdun women were unused to participating in and being identified with a socially prominent women's organization. The women required instruction and encouragement regarding their functions in the W.V.R.C. and in the community at large.¹⁶ By January 1942 the Verdun

¹⁵ *The Guardian*, October 3, 1941.

¹⁶ Unidentified Montreal newspaper, October 1942, copied from the personal files of R.B. Joan Adams. In an earlier speech to the women of Chalmers United Church, she insisted women engaged in war work or patriotic causes were "Canada's shock force". Adams, however, was not immune from emphasizing gender differences as opposed to gender equality. In a May 1942 speech to the Verdun Sisterhood, she repeated the male-inspired view that females made excellent industrial labourers because they were more dexterous than men, more docile and less prone to monotony. Moreover, she insisted that any family dislocation linked to increased female wage work be attributed to the war itself and not to

unit provided its members with courses in signalling and Morse code, unusual training for civilian women.¹⁷ But it is difficult to assess whether the practical experience and social confidence deriving from membership in the W.V.R.C. translated into a lasting sense of female social consciousness. Wartime was an exceptional situation demanding increased social responses from both men and women. Verdun women's self-perceptions do not appear to have been especially affected by their donning of uniforms or acting as auxiliaries to male-dominated activities.

Verdun society was not particularly conducive to female assertiveness. Mary Davidson, in her study of Verdun in the early 1930s, remarked on the patriarchal organization and strict gender-role definition existing in Verdun's numerous British-immigrant families.¹⁸ By the standards of a later generation, outright gender defamation appeared regularly in the pages of *The Guardian* during the war. Fillers at the end of columns, 'jokes' or anecdotes routinely disparaged or ridiculed women. One October 1942 'gag' headline read "How to Shoot Your Girlfriend", and was really about photography techniques. The same month the newspaper ran a series of short editorial vignettes entitled "Thoughts on Women". One read, "So many bare female legs seen on the streets these days are so pale, hairy, lumpy, bruised, scarred or shapeless that the male pedestrian has no trouble keeping his mind on his business." In October 1945 the sight of three female army lieutenants in uniform on the Verdun Boardwalk impressed *The Guardian's* "Roving Reporter", but only because of the way their uniforms fit their bodies, not because of the ability, authority or professionalism their jobs implied.¹⁹ Examples of this sort of attitude

women's abdication of their social responsibilities. To avoid any such difficulties, she offered the government the following advice: "give our women homes, destroy the slums, and they will seek employment within the home and never desire to leave it." *The Guardian*, May 15, 1942.

¹⁷ *The Messenger*, no date, January 1942, from the personal files of R.B. Joan Adams.

¹⁸ Davidson, "Social Adjustment" *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁹ *The Guardian*, October 16 and October 23, 1942; October 11, 1945.

abound in this newspaper and must be considered representative both of the times themselves and also to some extent of the views of the reading audience. The Verdun W.V.R.C.'s important wartime contributions remained firmly within the context of male social primacy and the assumed temporary nature of its members' social standing and even of the organization itself.

In its first two years of hurried existence, the W.V.R.C. boasted an impressive list of accomplishments which included numerous tag days and fundraising events, assistance in War Savings, salvage and blood drives, the offering of courses in first aid and other militarily useful subjects. They also acted as essential auxiliaries during civil defence exercises, which broke another gender-defined barrier. Unlike Britain, in Canada it was at first widely held by civil defence organizations that neighbourhood civil protection wardens should be males. But women's success as wardens enabled them to assume the social authority of male civil defence workers.²⁰

As the Canadian war effort accelerated and the war itself increased in complexity, the W.V.R.C. became less visible in Verdun. When its high-profile Senior Commandant, Joan Adams, left to join the C.W.A.C. in 1943, the W.V.R.C. lost its most energetic leader. The local group's status was adversely affected by her departure and, as the military situation improved, enthusiasm for the organization waned. By 1943, the local press paid them diminishing attention, partly owing to the existence of so many other war charities and patriotic organizations. The group's work in adopting H.M.C.S. *Dunver*, however, kept them in the public eye. Though still strongly symbolic of women's efforts, the W.V.R.C. increasingly took on the role of an auxiliary to men's organizations such as the Civilian Protection Committee. In the last two years of the war the shrinking Verdun W.V.R.C. continued to provide valuable assistance to Canadians serving overseas, either directly or indirectly, by contributing to other organizations. Little material assistance

²⁰ Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 89. See Appendix A for a list of W.V.R.C. activities.

was ever offered the W.V.R.C. by the government and Adams later credited the tireless efforts of its members for the success of the organization. As their counterparts in Britain were described, these women "were the human mortar which was filled in between the bricks of officialdom".²¹

The Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps wound up its activities not long after the cessation of hostilities. During their service, the women's contributions helped make a difference to the lives of many service people and civilians overseas and brought renown to Verdun throughout the Montreal area.

THE VERDUN CIVILIAN PROTECTION COMMITTEE

Few thought in September 1939 that Canadian territory would be seriously threatened by enemy action. The fall of France and the widespread belief that Britain faced imminent invasion drastically altered this perception. If Britain were invaded, or if the Germans merely acquired air bases in the North Atlantic (in Iceland, Greenland or the Azores), Canada would be suddenly thrust into the front lines of a war then going extremely badly. As it was, the distance from the nearest German air base in Norway to Winnipeg, following a polar route, was 5700 kilometres. But as Germany had no operational aircraft carriers and given the limited range of the *Luftwaffe's* fleet of bombers, which would have had to be specially fitted with additional fuel tanks for the journey, a one-way trip would have been the inevitable outcome of any planned German raid on Canada.²²

²¹ Charles Graves, *Women in Green: The Story of the W.V.S.* (London: Heinemann, 1948), pp. 45-46. Interviews with R.B. Joan Adams, October 6 and November 8, 1993.

²² A Red Cross booklet published in 1942 included a chapter on Air Raid Precautions (A.R.P.) in which it was stated that the distance from German-occupied Norway to Canada was less than some missions then flown by the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.). *Emergencies in War*, p. 68, Box A-331, file 5 "Canadian Red Cross - General", CVA.

Cities on the east coast, however, clearly had the most cause for concern. As early as September 3, 1939, the day Britain declared war, Saint John, already having established a civil defence organization, held a blackout exercise. Three blackout drills took place by mid October. Halifax, too, had had a trial blackout by this time but, by the end of November, this city had relaxed its lighting restrictions, "settling down to a quiet watchfulness". German surface naval attacks on east coast ports were considered unlikely given the threat they faced from land-based aircraft as well as the strength and disposition of the British fleet. By 1941 though, the submarine menace in Canada's Atlantic waters had developed. Even in British Columbia, Civilian Protection Committee groups had been established by September 10 in Vancouver, Victoria and Richmond.²³

While maintaining an umbrella Air Raid Precaution (A.R.P.) organization, Ottawa granted provinces the authority to form their own civil defence establishments to coordinate the services of municipally-organized C.P.C. groups. On December 12, 1939, Québec passed an order-in-council creating a provincial C.P.C. Though they were not compelled to do so, municipalities were empowered under this order-in-council to organize C.P.C. units and appoint neighbourhood wardens to administer its functions. Montreal began preparing in October 1939 and sought to recruit 2000 Great War veterans as A.R.P. wardens.²⁴

Even in the threatening summer of 1940 the likelihood of German air attack upon Canada was remote. But only with hindsight do we know that this situation was to remain constant for the remainder of the war and that the threat would disappear well before the

²³ *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 5, September 11, October 13 and November 30, 1939. See also Jay White, "Conscripted City: Halifax and the Second World War", Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1994, p. 131. White notes that, including all who assisted in all capacities, 6000 Haligonians performed C.P.C. duties during the war.

²⁴ *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 6 and October 21, 1939; *The Guardian*, October 3, 1941. As early as September 5, 1939, the Sherbrooke City Council discussed the possibility of imposing a partial blackout.

end of hostilities. Eastern Canadian C.P.C. organizations remained apprehensive and took A.R.P. preparations seriously. C.P.C. members were encouraged in their diligence by dire pronouncements from Ottawa. No matter how difficult to countenance, Canadians organized for the day when the Dominion might be the target of German air raids.

In early June 1940, prominent Verdun citizens, acting on their own initiative and in co-operation with local veterans' groups decided to set up a Civilian Protection Committee. That month Edward Wilson chaired the first meeting of the Verdun C.P.C. at the city hall. Those attending included aldermen, municipal officials, including the police director, Alfred Dubeau, business and community leaders, a protestant clergyman, representatives from veterans' groups and, by special invitation, the provincial C.P.C. chairman, J. Gordon Ross, K.C., of Québec City, as well as Charles Barnes, chairman of the C.P.C. for the Montreal area. Ross reminded the Verdun meeting that the C.P.C. was governed by the provisions of the Defence of Canada Regulations and designed primarily to assist the Police and Fire Departments and other constituted authorities in the protection of civilians from enemy air attack, sabotage or subversive propaganda.²⁵ Given the rampant fears of possible Fifth Column activity, the C.P.C.'s earliest objective was to act as a watchdog and to shore up shaken civilian morale. For the remainder of the war, regular meetings of the C.P.C., held at the city hall, would include only the dozen or so leaders of the organization, from the chief warden down to district wardens, as well as appropriate municipal officials. The members of the Verdun C.P.C., especially in the first two years of the group's existence, undertook their tasks within an uncertain military context and with the belief that their skills might one day prove critically important.

C.P.C. members were to be unarmed volunteers over 40 years of age whose equipment was to be supplied by the federal government. All Verdun C.P.C. wardens later received

²⁵ C.P.C., Minutes of Meeting, June 19, 1940, Box A-258, file 4, CVA.

photo-identity cards and were fingerprinted. They subsequently were obliged to take oaths as law officers acting under "war orders".²⁶ The city engineer, Henry Hadley, a Great War veteran, prepared a map dividing the city into eight C.P.C. districts. Each was numbered in ascending order, northeast to southwest, and stretched from the riverfront to the Aqueduct. Each district was further sub-divided into ten zones. With a captain expected to lead ten-man detachments in each zone, Hadley's plan required 800 volunteer wardens, a number far in excess of the 500 Barnes had suggested as a minimum. The most important immediate challenge confronting the C.P.C., therefore, was to recruit volunteers.²⁷

A C.P.C. press release asked citizens "to maintain a tradition of public service unexcelled by any other city, especially in the defence of their country."²⁸ Wilson believed that volunteers should be "kindly disposed, polite and courteous...in good health, possess a good character, coolness, initiative, sound judgement, and a good reputation."²⁹ This was a tall order. Joining the C.P.C. seemed an ideal solution for middle-aged men seeking an outlet for their patriotism, especially those British born whose mother country was being raided relentlessly by August 1940. A large number of British-born men past the age of military service resided in Verdun, many of them veterans. According to the 1941 census, 6205 Verdun men aged 35 to 64 were of British ancestry. Nearly two-thirds of them had been born in the British Isles or in overseas British possessions, such as

²⁶ C.P.C. Minutes, October 25, 1940, Box A-258, file 4, CVA; *The Guardian*, January 16, 1942. The question of equipment was scarcely settled even a year later.

²⁷ C.P.C. Minutes, June 25, 1940, Box A-258, file 4, CVA.

²⁸ Issued following the C.P.C. meeting of June 25, 1940, Box A-322, file 3-A, "C.P.C. - General", CVA.

²⁹ Circular letter from Wilson to Verdun clergy, June 28, 1940, Box A-276, file 2, "*Comité Protection Civile Verdun - Correspondence*". Wilson's words were borrowed from Charles Barnes.

Newfoundland. Many future members of the C.P.C. belonged to local veterans' groups such as the Canadian Corps Association or the Canadian Legion.³⁰

By July 5, the paltry total of 70 Verdun men had registered for service as wardens, and from amongst these were selected the C.P.C.'s eight district wardens and eight deputy district wardens. These 16 top wardens were chosen partly because of their places of residence, since all wardens were required to live in their respective districts. The organizers preferred that wardens have previous military experience or membership in a "Civic Organization, Club, [or] Society". Two character references were also demanded.³¹ Men of a certain social stature in the community were especially solicited, since they would command more authority among the population. The wardens and their deputies were charged with recruiting in their own districts and of appointing zone captains.

Although the wardens were under the nominal command of the police director, Dubeau, real organizational control of the C.P.C. belonged to Charles H. Barr, a well-known local dentist and bilingual Liberal party organizer who was the Verdun group's Chief Warden. His two deputies were drawn from each language group. Initially, three of the four east-end districts received French-speaking district wardens with English-speaking deputy wardens, whereas in the west-end districts, three of four district wardens were English speaking, two of whom had English-speaking deputies as well. Six of eight districts, therefore, were led by two men each of whom represented one language group. In total, 10 of 16 officers appointed that summer were English speakers. By February 1941, only

³⁰ 1941 Census, Volume III, pp. 76, 198 and 398; Charles Moyce, Secretary, Canadian Corps Association, Section No. 1, Verdun to Burgess, September 10, 1942. Though the minimum age for joining the C.P.C. was set at 40, a high proportion of Verdunites aged 35 to 39 in 1941 would attain this age before the C.P.C. was disbanded in 1945.

³¹ C.P.C. registration form, Box A-322, file 3, CVA.

the leadership of District 8, the westernmost, remained entirely English-speaking.³² Though the rank-and-file wardens of the C.P.C. contained French speakers roughly in proportion to their numbers in the population, the leadership remained mainly English speaking throughout the war. By the end of July 1940, the C.P.C. reported 445 men on strength, still below the minimum authorized complement.³³

A large C.P.C. meeting was held at the Verdun Auditorium in late August 1940, at which time the Battle of Britain was raging and the outcome remained uncertain. Six hundred "grim-faced Verdun men", most of whom were members of the C.P.C., assembled to hear an address by Barnes, who re-affirmed the perceived *raison d'être* of the organization: the need to combat the threat from Fifth Columnists and saboteurs. The provincial C.P.C. Chairman, J. Gordon Ross, preaching to the converted, also reminded the audience of the real possibility of air raids.³⁴ The seriousness with which Verdun's A.R.P. was organized at this stage of the war seems to have had more to do with apprehensions concerning Britain's safety than with existing threats to Canada or Verdun. Whether or not they were motivated by a realistic assessment of the likelihood of air raids, Verdunites prepared for them anyway. The Verdun C.P.C.'s volunteer A.R.P. wardens trained in fire-fighting and first-aid work. By October 1940, 275 Verdun men (171 English-speaking and 104 French-speaking) had signed on for the first-aid courses offered by the St. John Ambulance, while 122 had reported for duty as members of the volunteer fire brigade, to

³² C.P.C. Minutes, July 5, 1940, Box A-258, file 4, CVA. For the February 1941 statistics, Box A-276, file 2, CVA. The number of French-speaking district wardens fluctuated by one or two in 1942 and 1943. Verdun C.P.C. list of officers, December 30, 1942, Box A-322, file 3-A, CVA; *The Guardian*, June 25, 1943.

³³ C.P.C. Minutes, July 31, 1940, Box A-258, file 4, CVA. The growing Verdun contingent of the C.P.C. was part of a larger Québec-wide network of 28,000 people enrolled in A.R.P. activities by November 1940. Auger and Lamothe, p. 107.

³⁴ *The Guardian*, August 30, 1940.

be trained by city firemen.³⁵ Linguistically, A.R.P. was a shared experience, linking men (and later women) in common concern for the security of their city.

Though the original eight-district division remained in place for the C.P.C. organization, for the specific A.R.P. network, Verdun was divided into five districts, each with an emergency shelter station located in a school. Only the westernmost and mainly English-speaking two C.P.C. districts (largest in area though least densely populated) had their own designated A.R.P. ambulance posts/casualty clearing stations: the other six C.P.C. districts were doubled up into three heavily-populated A.R.P. areas with one shelter designated for each. By October 1940, each district warden was required to identify five or six buildings in his area suitable as shelters. City Hall was designated C.P.C. Headquarters and the A.R.P. Control Centre, while the Verdun General Hospital stockpiled first-aid equipment for C.P.C. use.³⁶

In April 1941 the five A.R.P. zones replaced the eight original district divisions.³⁷ Consolidation between general C.P.C. districts and A.R.P. districts made for a tighter organization and required fewer overall wardens. It proved a little too tight, in fact. The westernmost district included the expanse of the Verdun Protestant Hospital, which cut off the small but growing Crawford Park area of Verdun from the remainder of the municipality. In 1942, owing to the belief that it was not adequately protected by existing A.R.P. arrangements, the mainly English-speaking neighbourhood organized its own

³⁵ C.P.C. Minutes, October 25, 1940, Box A-258, file 4, CVA. Some of the volunteer firemen also might be included in the number enrolled in the first-aid course. The city agreed to loan 75 rubber coats and 100 pairs of rubber boots for use by the C.P.C. volunteer firemen.

³⁶ C.P.C. Minutes, July 31 and October 25, 1940, Box A-258, file 4, CVA; *The Guardian*, October 3, 1941; *Centre Hospitalier de Verdun 1932-1982* (booklet), Box A-242, file 12, CVA.

³⁷ Report on "Organization and Activities" of the Verdun C.P.C., June 17, 1941, Box A-276, file 2, CVA.

A.R.P. district, bringing the number of districts to six.³⁸ By July 1943 a seventh district in the densely-populated central-east area, centred on Willibrord Street, had been carved out of Districts 2 and 3. Altogether Verdun had designated 38 protective Air Raid Posts from which zone captains and other wardens operated.³⁹

In January 1942, Barr reported to Wilson on the strength of the Verdun C.P.C. The report shows that the number of wardens fluctuated significantly from year to year. Barr claimed that the Verdun C.P.C. could count on the services of 350 wardens, over 100 members of the increasingly-important Women's Auxiliary, all qualified in first aid, 35 fire wardens, 50 members of the W.V.R.C., 200 Boy Scouts equally divided among the five casualty clearing stations and 28 members of the St. John Ambulance. Moreover, during an emergency 180 civic employees would be made available for demolition duties while the largest coal and wood dealership in Verdun, the firm of J.P. Dupuis, had volunteered the services of its 225 male employees in the event of need.⁴⁰ The C.P.C. proper probably did not exceed 500-600 members at any time during the war.

In December 1945 *The Messenger* printed the names by district of those former C.P.C. men who attended a ceremony given in their honour at the Verdun Legion. This list permits the creation of a preliminary and partial breakdown of the wardens by language group from east to west, though it is clear that family names alone are not a conclusive indicator of an individual's language. Table 4.1 shows that the linguistic composition of the C.P.C. was in rough proportion to the balance existing among the general population. The war and the perceived threat of enemy attack had prompted an inclusive response from the community, not a divisive one.

³⁸ C.P.C. Press Release, September 23, 1942, Box A-322, file 3-A, CVA.

³⁹ *The Messenger*, July 29, 1943; *The Guardian*, January 16, 1942.

⁴⁰ Barr to Wilson, January 9, 1942, Box A-276, file 2, CVA.

In early January 1942, provincial C.P.C. headquarters required all municipalities with C.P.C. organizations to form official committees responsible for A.R.P. and other emergency measures. This was designed to institutionalize the local groups and provide them with some permanent leadership. Standardized C.P.C. procedures and instructions were distributed province-wide. Accordingly, Verdun appointed its mayor as chairman of the committee and other leading civil servants to appropriate positions of authority. For example, the City Health Inspector was named Director of Medical Services, the City Engineer the Director of Vital Services, the Police Director was named Director of Police and Fire Services and so on. This also followed an established national pattern.⁴¹ Within a month, however, the city returned to Chief Warden Barr the effective

TABLE 4.1. LANGUAGE OF C.P.C. WARDENS BY DISTRICT, 1945

<u>District</u>	<u>French Speakers</u>	<u>English Speakers</u>	<u>Undetermined</u>	<u>Total</u>
One	39	3	2	44
Two	4	9	2	15
Seven*	4	5	1	10
Three	14	6	1	21
Four	1	20	1	22
Five	1	27	1	29
Six	6	40	3	49
Totals	69	110	11	190 ⁴²

* Created later in the war and encompassing former parts of Districts 2 and 3.

⁴¹ Executive Committee Minutes, January 19, 1942; C.A. Curtis, "War-time Problems of Local Government", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 9, No. 3, August 1943, p. 397.

⁴² *The Messenger*, December 13, 1945.

control of the C.P.C. The city's committee was altered to include all C.P.C. district wardens and Barr was allowed to take over from the mayor as chairman. Wilson continued to act only in a supervisory capacity "by virtue of his office".⁴³ The mayor and the entire city administration were already sufficiently immersed in other war-related work.

Wilson had always offered the full support of the city to the C.P.C., including financial aid, and relations between the C.P.C. and the City of Verdun were very amicable.⁴⁴ In May 1942 \$2270 was turned over to the C.P.C. by the municipally-operated Verdun Salvage Committee. In Wilson's words, this donation was to be used for "the purchase of necessary equipment for the wonderful work" performed by the C.P.C.⁴⁵ This was a questionable destination for so large a sum of hard-earned money at a time when the threat of air attack was considered unlikely and fears of Fifth Column activity had abated in eastern Canada. On the other hand, funding for the C.P.C. still obtained a broad consensus in Verdun.

Following the entry of Japan into the war in December 1941, the federal government designated all Canadian coastal areas as risk Category A, designated the most vulnerable in the country. The Montreal area - encompassing Verdun - was considered a Category B zone, still under "Definite Risk" of air attack.⁴⁶ Though many thousands of miles from the nearest German or Japanese military installation, Verdun took no chances. The city's

⁴³ City Council Minutes, January 19 and February 2, 1942.

⁴⁴ *The Guardian*, August 30, 1940; Executive Committee Minutes, August 12, 1941.

⁴⁵ Wilson to Barr, May 30, 1942, Box A-276, file 2; Box A-322, file 3-A, CVA.

⁴⁶ By March 1942, however, the Montreal area was stated to be in Category C, "slight risk". Only that part of Québec west to Sorel remained in category B. *The Montreal Daily Star*, March 3, 1942. As late as November 1943, however, the federal government categorized Montreal as still within the risk zone. *The Guardian*, November 11, 1943; Box A-322, file 3, CVA.

Executive Committee prepared a plan to ensure an effective emergency administration in the event of an air raid. J.R. French defined the roles and allocated the services of all municipal departments and patriotic groups active in A.R.P. exercises. The onset of the Pacific War worried City Hall.

The C.P.C. groups, as well as the municipalities underwriting them, were unhappy with the level of federal government financial assistance they obtained. In November 1940, just prior to an impressive C.P.C. parade in Verdun, the Québec executive of the C.P.C. demanded that Ottawa immediately fund the costs incurred by the C.P.C. to meet its obligations. Wilson, too, sought federal aid. At a meeting of the Union of Québec Municipalities he had proposed a petition to the federal government to cover C.P.C. operating costs because, in his opinion, A.R.P. was Ottawa's responsibility and not that of the municipalities.⁴⁷ Verdun extended every possible support to the C.P.C. but the city's enthusiasm for A.R.P. matched its own self-interest and, even at that, as the threat of air attack receded, the cost of the investment began to rankle.

In October 1940 Verdun City Council allotted \$500.00 towards the purchase of uniforms for the C.P.C., an expenditure described in the municipal budget as "additional police and fire protection".⁴⁸ Two hundred uniforms described by Barr as a "one-piece belted khaki uniform which snaps in closely at the ankles" were ordered at \$2.50 each. Wedge caps completed the outfit.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, a year later, Barr complained bitterly that his men were still without a sufficient number of uniforms and that "Ottawa [has] to date failed to

⁴⁷ C.P.C. Minutes, November 20, 1940, Box A-258, file 4, CVA.

⁴⁸ Executive Committee Minutes, October 15, 1940.

⁴⁹ Barr to the Cornwall (Ontario) Volunteer Guard, October 31, 1940, Box A-276, file 2, CVA.

contribute a cent to the Verdun C.P.C."⁵⁰ It was not until May 1942 that the Verdun C.P.C. obtained 100 new blue uniforms from the federal government.

In December 1941, the Verdun C.P.C. also found itself desperately short of emergency equipment. Following a meeting with Barr and Dubeau, Wilson wrote Charles Barnes:

...we have not the intention of finding ourselves any longer in this miserable position of unpreparedness, and, without exaggerating our needs or displaying any tendency towards panic, we are firmly of the opinion that it is necessary for us to have immediately [original emphasis] six auxiliary pumps and 3000 feet of hose...

It is not our wish to become a nuisance or to draw to your attention facts that must already be apparent to you, but we...are convinced that the C.P.C. organization is useless without necessary equipment to adequately control any serious eventuality that may occur.⁵¹

The timing of Wilson's outburst was linked to fresh A.R.P. apprehensions brought upon by the news of war with Japan. J. Gordon Ross informed the city that as soon as A.R.P. equipment was made available from the federal government he would attempt to satisfy Verdun's most pressing needs. In addition to water pumps and hoses, the municipality wanted warning sirens, first-aid kits, stretchers, steel helmets, uniforms (coveralls) and armbands for its wardens. Except for the uniforms, these hopes were not immediately satisfied. Ross reminded the city that "in a great many cases, the Federal Government is having the same difficulty in obtaining equipment from the manufacturers as you might feel you have in obtaining equipment from us."⁵² Ross had earlier described the provincial C.P.C. headquarters as merely a "clearing house for...equipment and all federal

⁵⁰ *The Guardian*, October 3, 1941.

⁵¹ Wilson to Barnes, December 12, 1941, Box A-322, file 3-A, CVA. The mayor wrote three letters on this date to various authorities demanding action on matters related to the Verdun C.P.C.

⁵² Ross to Burgess, January 26, 1942, Box A-322, file 3, CVA.

orders, literature, etc. for relay to the municipalities".⁵³ No one at the municipal or provincial levels was willing to assume responsibility for A.R.P. shortcomings. Since the entry of Japan into the war and the widespread panic this had caused on Canada's west coast, the federal government had diverted a good deal of vital A.R.P. equipment earlier earmarked for eastern Canada, including some for Verdun, to Victoria and Vancouver.⁵⁴ In no real danger, Verdun had to wait.

It was not until February 1943, at a time when the threat of enemy attack on eastern Canada seemed more remote than ever, that Verdun received its allotment of 1500 gas masks from the federal government, part of the more than one million Ottawa distributed nationwide. The gas masks were divided among C.P.C. workers, city employees earmarked for A.R.P. work and members of local voluntary organizations assisting with A.R.P. duties. Judging by the membership numbers provided by Barr a year earlier, half the gas masks probably remained unpacked.⁵⁵ Since gas masks were available commercially, either money or the perceived need for their distribution, or both, was lacking in the C.P.C.

The C.P.C. wasted little time in achieving a high profile in the community. On December 1, 1940 the C.P.C. organized a massive parade in Verdun of some 1000 C.P.C. members from 11 mainly waterfront communities located in the southwestern part of Montreal and along the south shore. Many C.P.C., civic, political, police and military dignitaries from all these municipalities were present at a reviewing stand set up in front of the Verdun Police and Fire Station on Lasalle Boulevard.⁵⁶ The organization of such a large parade

⁵³ Circular letter from Ross to local C.P.C. organizations, January 14, 1942, Box A-322, file 3-A, CVA.

⁵⁴ *The Guardian*, January 16, 1942.

⁵⁵ *The Messenger*, January 14, 1943; Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

⁵⁶ The guest list is found in Box A-276, file 2, CVA.

in Verdun, and the impressive turnout of dignitaries and spectators it attracted, underscored the strategic nature of the St. Lawrence River, the status of Montreal as a potential target for enemy action and the measures taken by local civilian organizations to aid in its protection. Verdun housed the Montreal Aqueduct filtration plant which was a hub for the entire metropolitan district and obviously a critical infrastructural facility.⁵⁷

By April 1941 air raid practices occurred every second Monday in Verdun.⁵⁸ On May 12, 1941 a casualty clearing demonstration was staged in the streets of the city to highlight the C.P.C.'s readiness to respond to an enemy air attack. The main ambulance posts/casualty clearing stations in each district were the focal point of activity for the C.P.C. wardens, auxiliary firemen, first-aid workers (including a significant representation from the C.P.C. Women's Auxiliary), street patrols and the many other participating groups which included the W.V.R.C., Red Cross nurses, members of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, Boy Scouts, Boys Brigades and other volunteers. The exercises were as realistic as possible. According to one C.P.C. report:

Railway flares - burning red for ten minutes - are lighted at intervals of about six minutes. The patrols, on spotting a flare (i.e. incendiary bomb), call the Control Centre from the nearest available telephone...The Control Centre operator records the call and immediately calls the Ambulance Post in that District. The Post...despatches an ambulance car which picks up two casualties and carries them to the Post. C.P.C. stretcher bearers meet the ambulance...and carry the casualties inside where the nurse in charge, acting as Casualty Admitting Officer, records name, address, injury and disposition of case. Ten flares are lighted in each district; 20 boy scouts

⁵⁷ Wilson noted this in a letter to the Verdun Catholic School Commission (V.C.S.C.) reminding them of the need for individual schools to make arrangements to safeguard the lives of pupils. Wilson to R.E. Mackay, Secretary, V.C.S.C., January 10, 1942, Box A-322, file 3-A, CVA.

⁵⁸ C.P.C. report on "Organization and Activities", June 17, 1941, Box A-276, file 2, CVA.

are used as casualties (two Scouts to each flare), giving the Red Cross and Ambulance Post staff plenty of practice.⁵⁹

At its own suggestion the W.V.R.C. was placed under the occasional command of the C.P.C. to assist during practice air raids or other simulated civil emergencies. The W.V.R.C. provided 10 women to act as street patrols in each of the five casualty clearing stations. Other women served as ambulance drivers at each first-aid post (with private cars taking the place of real ambulances) and also as telephonists at the City Hall Control Centre. Although the C.P.C. benefitted enormously from the assistance of the W.V.R.C. Barr deflected the W.V.R.C. suggestion that Senior Commandant Joan Adams or another W.V.R.C. representative be admitted to the C.P.C. executive. He refused to relinquish any A.R.P. decision-making responsibility to the W.V.R.C. and stated flatly that all ambulance and first-aid posts would be "supervised exclusively by C.P.C. officers".⁶⁰ These uniformed women had been of considerable value in A.R.P. work, but sharing in the decision-making of the C.P.C. was out of the question.

As of mid-1941 these five posts could be staffed by a total of 150 men and 75 women proficient in first aid and drawn from both language groups. Meanwhile, the auxiliary firemen trained once a week with hose and ladder though they were not allowed to assist regular firemen during the course of a real blaze as no government yet was willing to assume liability for injuries suffered in the performance of their duties.⁶¹

⁵⁹ C.P.C. report on "Organization and Activities", June 17, 1941, Box A-276, file 2, CVA; *The Guardian*, May 16, 1941.

⁶⁰ Barr to R.B. Joan Adams, May 8, 1941, Box A-322, file 3, CVA. In June 1942, the City of Montreal A.R.P. auxiliary fire service organized a women's division. This was the first of its kind in North America. Auger and Lamothe, p. 109.

⁶¹ C.P.C. report on "Organization and Activities", June 17, 1941, Box A-276, file 2, CVA. Only in September 1941 would Ottawa agree to compensate C.P.C. members for any injuries sustained while on C.P.C. service or engaged in training.

On June 9, 1941 a trial blackout involving several Montreal-area municipalities was organized on orders from the Department of National Defence.⁶² In Verdun this widely-publicized drill entailed the participation of over 600 people, including 260 C.P.C. wardens, 86 men from the Police and Fire Department, 83 women of the W.V.R.C., 125 Boy Scouts, 35 members of the Boys Brigade, 28 from the St. John Ambulance and, according to *The Guardian*, though not the C.P.C. summary of the event, cadets from local French Catholic schools. One of the emergency ambulance posts was fully staffed with two doctors, ten Red Cross workers and three St. John Ambulance men. With foot patrols from these groups ready to move, at 10:20 p.m. a two-minute "alert" signal was sounded from police sirens and nearby factory whistles. Residents and motorists thereupon were granted ten minutes to extinguish or mask completely all lights. At 10:30 another two-minute blast was heard, signalling the start of the actual enforceable blackout period. Street lights were also extinguished at this time. The "all clear" signal, consisting of a succession of short siren and whistle blasts, was sounded at 10:45, at which time normal activity was resumed.

During this exercise, only 34 residential light violations were noted by monitors deployed to all Verdun's streets. Nine stores and two automobiles were also found to be showing light. This was an excellent record for a city of 67,000 inhabitants. The blackout was described as the "nearest to war Verdun has yet seen".⁶³ Verdunites had shown themselves to be extremely co-operative in this exercise and, by taking it seriously, legitimized the work of the local C.P.C.

⁶² Only in the summer of 1943 was Verdun granted permission from provincial C.P.C. headquarters to organize blackouts covering only its territory. *The Guardian*, June 25, 1943.

⁶³ "Trial Blackout, Instructions to Wardens" and "Organization and Activities", in Box A-276, file 2, CVA; *The Guardian*, June 13, 1941. The C.P.C. wardens were also on the lookout for any "criminal acts" occurring in these brief moments of total darkness.

The City of Verdun and the C.P.C. would not tolerate unco-operative citizens, though mechanisms had not been fully established to prosecute blackout violators. The city was not in possession of legal certification from the C.P.C. provincial headquarters specifically covering its territory and, despite the Defence of Canada Regulations, there was little that could be done. Even six months later a frustrated Wilson expressed his opinion on the matter in a letter to Ross:

We should...be pleased to hear what steps, if any, have been taken against those who infringed instructions during the latest blackout, or if there is any intention of taking such steps. We had several flagrant violations in Verdun and it is our opinion that proceedings should be taken, and if not - why not? You have been furnished with a copy of a list of all those who decided not to comply with the regulations laid down. We want to know what value such a list has and whether the blackout regulations mean anything.⁶⁴

Despite the mayor's outburst, the community remained overwhelmingly co-operative, even if the threat of air attack seemed imaginary. The citizens of Verdun, who had become accustomed to participating in the war effort in myriad ways, responded without question.

In the summer of 1941, perhaps coincident with the cessation of the relentless bombing of Britain, interest in civil protection began to wane. The C.P.C. summary of the June blackout noted tellingly:

The blackout increased the attendance of C.P.C. Wardens by 25% over fortnightly turnout...Trial blackouts should be staged once a month. Men who had lost interest in the C.P.C. organization turned out and several new members were obtained. It rejuvenated the organization.⁶⁵

Trial blackouts were only held at irregular intervals and usually in conjunction with island-wide exercises. Still, the Verdun C.P.C. was far from dead. A Montreal-wide

⁶⁴ Wilson to Ross, December 12, 1941; Ross to Francis Fauteux, City Solicitor, undated, late June, 1941, Box A-322, file 3-A, CVA.

⁶⁵ "Organization and Activities". Box A-276, file 2, CVA.

blackout on February 22, 1942 was considered especially successful in Verdun, with over 700 people engaged in monitoring duties. But with the new Japanese enemy scoring victory after victory in the Pacific, and with rising fears of attacks on the west coast of North America, Burgess, who acted as the C.P.C. secretary, noted that "this blackout clearly demonstrated [the] increasing realization of all citizens of the approach to Canada of actual warfare".⁶⁶ But once the shock of Japanese successes had worn off, it became clear to citizens that the threat to Verdun had not increased.

Though compliant, Verdunites grew increasingly sceptical of the need to observe blackouts. Burgess warned in February 1942:

A number of citizens had neglected to observe the blackout regulations, some unwillingly, others more or less seriously. Where flagrant violations occurred, particularly deliberate refusal to obey orders, the offenders will be hailed before the Recorder's Court.⁶⁷

In March 1942 Burgess wrote to Marcel Gaboury, K.C., who earlier that year had replaced Ross as head of the provincial C.P.C., and obtained legal authority for Verdun to enforce adherence. Gaboury, conscious of the need to maintain maximum public support for A.R.P. operations, cautioned Burgess that, "it would be advisable to prosecute only those cases of flagrant bad faith".⁶⁸ Provincial headquarters seemed to take a dim view of Verdun's insistence on forcing its recalcitrant citizens to heel.

On October 20, 1942 a mock air raid, actually using aircraft, was mounted against Verdun in what was to prove a very realistic training exercise. Some Liberator bombers, Harvard trainers and reportedly even an American B-17 Flying Fortress all participated in a simulated 15-minute bombing run over the general vicinity of the city hall on Church

⁶⁶ Verdun C.P.C. Press Release, undated, February 1942, Box A-322, file 3-B, VA.

⁶⁷ Verdun C.P.C. Press Release, undated, February 1942, Box A-322, file 3-B, CVA.

⁶⁸ Burgess to Gaboury, March 2, 1942, and reply, March 5, 1942, Box A-322, file 3-B, CVA.

Avenue. The roar of aircraft and the simulated explosions of bombs and anti-aircraft fire caused "mild panic" and sent some people scurrying for shelter. According to a press report, some "exploding somethings" were detonated which caused a "deafening" noise, much smoke and also some minor damage in the form of four shattered windows, apparently at the city hall 'target'.⁶⁹ The C.P.C. showed off its potential first aid skills during this exciting event, which seemed to cause quite a stir in Verdun. The demonstration formed part of a consciousness-raising effort at the time of the Third Victory Loan campaign then under way. Other similar incidents and demonstrations (minus the aircraft) were staged in October 1943, again to publicize the need to purchase war bonds.⁷⁰ The relevance of the C.P.C.'s A.R.P. work had become irreversibly subordinated to its utility as a public relations exercise for other war causes.

In October 1941 Barr boasted that the Verdun C.P.C. was the "best trained in the Province of Quebec".⁷¹ Several months later great compliments were paid to both Barr and the Verdun C.P.C by Ross, who also stated he had "received from no Mayor of any municipality more constant support and wise counsel than from Mayor Wilson."⁷² In July 1943 an article in *The Messenger* claimed "perhaps the most comprehensive system of Civilian Protection against enemy air raids in the whole province has been perfected in Verdun".⁷³ The same article noted that "few citizens realize the protection that has been organized to protect the lives and property of Verdunites". Perhaps they simply did not feel the need to be protected. In fact, Barr had admitted as early as October 1941 that the primary mission of his organization was to foster a "win the war" attitude among the

⁶⁹ *The Guardian*, October 23, 1942.

⁷⁰ *The Guardian*, October 23, 1942 and October 29, 1943.

⁷¹ *The Guardian*, October 3, 1941.

⁷² Ross to Burgess, January 26, 1942, Box A-322, file 3, CVA.

⁷³ *The Messenger*, July 29, 1943.

population. Subsequent A.R.P. exercises, then, even though taken seriously, were meant mainly to instill civic interest in the prosecution of the far-off war and not as an end in themselves.

Despite the success of A.R.P. exercises and blackouts, *The Messenger* cryptically noted in November 1943 that Verdunites' enthusiasm for the C.P.C. was slackening. Acting as a recruitment aid for the C.P.C., the paper noted that.

If a few hundred others now on the sidelines would come along to help, the organization would be that much enlarged and improved...It is a sure fact that if a real air raid does occur the biggest grumblers and faultfinders will be those who have not lifted a finger to assist...and who will loudly condemn the C.P.C. and the municipal authorities for any damage or loss of life they may sustain.⁷⁴

A realistic simulation of an increasingly unlikely event could still provoke interest in Verdun, though perhaps not volunteers.

With the military situation for the Allies on all fronts improving considerably by the end of 1943, the Verdun C.P.C. conducted exercises, honed its skills, promoted itself and consolidated its organization. But the threat of attack from the *Luftwaffe*, always remote at best, was no longer credible. There was no sense of urgency even though the semblance of vigilance had to be maintained if for no other reason than morale-boosting. In November 1943, the prime minister, W.L. Mackenzie King, announced that certain areas of Canada which previously had been considered at risk were no longer threatened. Along the entire west coast and from the east coast inland to the western tip of the Island of Montreal, the prime minister's statement insisted that there must be "no relaxation by C.P.C. organizations".⁷⁵ Verdun technically was still in a slight risk zone, though clearly

⁷⁴ *The Messenger*, November 4, 1943.

⁷⁵ *The Messenger*, November 11, 1943. Some Verdunites actually believed at one point that an enemy attack was in progress. At 00:40 on September 5, 1944 a mild earthquake rumbled through the Montreal area which awoke some Verdun residents and caused, in one

only just. A.R.P. work, like the C.P.C.'s anti-sabotage watch earlier, had lost its *raison d'être*.

From this point onward, the C.P.C. was an organization in rapid decline, divorced from relevance. During an earlier trial alert in September, and a blackout in October 1943, the C.P.C. itself admitted that its "Medical Services completely failed to function."⁷⁶ Apathy was setting in. In December 1943 Barr was obliged to admit in a letter to the provincial C.P.C. head, Gaboury, that his organization needed no more than 50 uniforms "due to non-attendants".⁷⁷ The most important use of the City Hall Control Centre at this point was to co-ordinate salvage collections.

Canadians still feared that Germany's advanced V-1 rockets and V-2 missiles might yet be launched against Canada, especially as Radio-Berlin had recently threatened to bomb New York using these weapons.⁷⁸ *The Guardian* warned:

While probabilities of enemy attacks from the air naturally grow smaller...it is a common trait of the wild beast to make a last...fell attack

case, some slight "hysteria". "On Manning Avenue [in west-end Verdun] a women and her two children were [found] kneeling on the curbstone praying, at the same time shrieking that enemy planes were bombing the city." *The Guardian*, September 7, 1944. Obviously the dire warnings of the Verdun C.P.C. really had sunk in with some people.

⁷⁶ C. Meehan, Secretary-Adjutant, Verdun C.P.C., to Burgess, October 22, 1943. Box A-322, file 3-A, CVA.

⁷⁷ Barr to Gaboury, December 17, 1943. Box A-276, file 2, CVA. Similar problems afflicted A.R.P. organizations elsewhere. Nationally, 775 communities had set up C.P.C. units during the war. The peak year was reached in 1942 at which time 280,000 Canadians were nominally engaged in A.R.P. duties. Many had begun winding down their activities before the end of 1943. Steven Lee, "Power, Politics and the Cold War: The Canadian Civil Defence Program and the North Atlantic Alliance, 1945-1959", M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1987, p. 12.

⁷⁸ *The Guardian*, June 22, 1944. Gordon Galbraith has recalled in an interview of November 13, 1993, that he was never in the least bit worried about an air raid or any other enemy action in wartime Verdun.

upon his enemy...There is still a "kick". and a great deal more, left in the Nazi vulture...Jerry may search to punish Canada for taking such a great part in the destruction of the Hitler regime of blood, terror and oppression. His birds of prey may still darken our skies and drop destruction and death upon our people, even right here in Verdun.⁷⁹

Yet, that autumn the writing was on the wall for the C.P.C.

In October 1944, the provincial office of the Civilian Defence Committee (C.D.C.), as the C.P.C. had been renamed at this time, no longer issued A.R.P. equipment. Restrictions were lifted on storefront lighting. Blackouts became a thing of the past. Wardens and others to whom personal items such as uniforms, flashlights, helmets and whistles had been issued were allowed to keep these, while heavier equipment such as water pumps, hoses, and other fire-fighting gear were offered for sale by the federal government through one of its Crown Corporations, War Assets Corporation, to those host municipalities having set up a C.D.C. The organization was officially disbanded across Canada in mid-February 1945 and the Verdun C.D.C. held its last meeting that month.⁸⁰

When Britain's fortunes were at their lowest ebb in the war, interest in the C.P.C. increased in Verdun. The fear of subversive activity stimulated the formation of the group as much as the perceived air raid threat. By the time A.R.P. activity was organized, no credible German threat against the Montreal area was believed to exist though the outbreak of war with Japan created security repercussions felt as far east as Verdun. In the last two years of its existence the C.P.C. no longer had a meaningful A.R.P. role in the community. But it hardly mattered: air raid precautions in Verdun had been mounted mainly to assuage popular fears and improve shaken civilian morale, including that of the middle-aged men who offered their patriotic service to the Civilian Protection Committee.

⁷⁹ *The Guardian*, June 22, 1944.

⁸⁰ Provincial C.D.C Circular Letter No. 26, October 13, 1944, Box A-322, file 3-A, CVA; *The Guardian*, October 5, 1944 and February 22, 1945.

THE VERDUN SALVAGE COMMITTEE

The war continued to progress unfavourably for the Allies in the year following the fall of France. Ottawa responded by organizing the nation for total war. One of the new wartime measures gaining the widest publicity and ultimately involving perhaps the largest number of Canadians was the collection of salvageable raw materials, especially metals, paper, rubber, glass and rags. The National Salvage Campaign was organized in April 1941 by the Department of National War Services to co-ordinate the recovery of salvage on a permanent basis for the duration of the war. Provincial administrators were appointed and hundreds of local salvage committees quickly sprang up across the country, often municipally led, but sometimes organized by local social organizations such as the Canadian Legion or the I.O.D.E. The goals of Ottawa's campaign were to assist the war effort by increasing the supply of available raw materials, provide ordinary Canadians the greatest opportunity to become involved in the war effort and facilitate the collection of funds for patriotic groups through the sale of salvaged material for industrial use.⁸¹

Some Verdunites had become concerned enough about salvage by 1941 to write Wilson in the hope of inciting him to organize a city-wide collection program, as other Canadian municipalities had done. "Some of us are wondering when there will be a house to house collection of salvage", wrote one woman in June 1941.

In some towns the Boy Scouts have done this on their own and made several hundreds of dollars which have been used to further the war. The other week I got after one of the Scouts so he came with another lad, and brought a little coaster wagon. He could not take all I had but took what the little wagon would hold and sold it. He got thirty-eight cents which he

⁸¹ "*Campagne Nationale de Récupération*", pamphlet published by *le Ministère des Services Nationaux de Guerre*, April 1941, Box A-331, file 2 "Salvage", CVA.

turned in to the Red Cross. A lot of stuff which could be sold for salvage is put out in the garbage.⁸²

In fact, the city already had made "temporary arrangements" to pick up salvageable material and a large salvage drive was organized in Verdun later that summer in conjunction with most other municipalities on the Island of Montreal. One salvage collection in Verdun at the end of July 1941, billed as "Aluminum Night", was given wide publicity in the Montreal press. Over 7000 pieces of aluminum, mainly pots and pans, were deposited in Woodland Park, near the waterfront at the intersection of Lasalle Boulevard and Woodland Avenue. *Le Canada*, a Liberal Party organ, in addition to printing a photograph of Wilson holding some items of salvage, noted that "*Si l'on en croit les organisateurs, Verdun est encore une fois aux premiers rangs des municipalités du Québec*". By comparison, only 5000 articles of aluminum had been collected in the City of Montreal up to that date.⁸³

The first general scrap collection in Verdun (again, part of an Island-wide campaign) was held the following week, with the C.P.C., W.V.R.C., Boy Scouts and other volunteers undertaking a systematic appeal, which was described as "Canada's first door-to-door salvage effort to cover a complete municipality".⁸⁴ People were reminded in the local press that one ton of scrap metal made 150 field artillery shell cases, ordinary waste paper such as envelopes was converted into food containers, first aid kits and cartridge cases

⁸² Miss E. Heywood to Edward Wilson, June 11, 1941, Box A-452, file "Salvage Campaign, 1941-44", CVA. The patriotic Miss Heywood ended her letter by informing Wilson, "I was more than pleased to think we had a decent Englishman to represent the City when our beloved King and Queen came to Montreal...I may say I come from Lancashire also."

⁸³ *Le Canada*, August 1, 1941; *The Gazette*, August 1, 1941; *La Patrie*, July 31, 1941. "Aluminum Scrap is wanted to help in Scrapping Hitler", ran one headline in *The Messenger* of July 31, 1941.

⁸⁴ *The Guardian*, August 8, 1941.

and old clothes and rugs meant greatcoats and blankets for the men in uniform.⁸⁵ So successful was this inaugural Verdun salvage day, which yielded 150 truck-loads of material totalling a reported 200 tons, that the co-chairman of the National Salvage Campaign for Montreal wrote Wilson that "we had anticipated a mere two-thirds of the quantity collected" and that this constituted "a further indication of the civic-mindedness and the patriotic spirit of the people of Verdun".⁸⁶ *The Gazette* published an editorial lauding Verdun's effort: "it's another feather in the cap of the city which, as far as the war effort is concerned, had no lack of feathers before".⁸⁷ Densely-populated Verdun contained over 16,000 dwellings in 1941, which made door-to-door canvassing a laborious but potentially rewarding task. A large population meant a lot of waste material, which made for successful salvage collections for certain items such as paper and rags.

But a regular collection system was still lacking. Jean Cool, part owner of a well-known trucking business in Verdun, felt it his duty to inform the city in January 1942 that, as a local garbage collector, he felt certain a ton or two of scarce rubber was being incinerated every week through the carelessness of Verdunites. Intent on halting this waste, he wrote: "*Je m'attends...que le conseil me donnera les moyens à prendre pour éviter une pareil chose.*"⁸⁸ That same month the city decided to take action. Verdun's territory was nominally covered by the Montreal and District Salvage Committee. Verdun's Protestant

⁸⁵ *The Messenger*, July 31, 1941.

⁸⁶ *The Guardian*, August 15, 1941; C.T. Russell to Wilson, August 30, 1941, Box A-452, file "Salvage Campaign 1941-44", CVA. The local and Montreal press was in the habit of over-estimating, sometimes wildly, the tonnage of salvaged goods.

⁸⁷ *The Gazette*, August 9, 1941.

⁸⁸ Jean Cool to City Hall, January 19, 1942, Box A-331, file 2, CVA.

schools and Boy Scouts had also occasionally collected local salvage.⁸⁹ Verdun's Executive Committee decided that the municipality itself was best able to administer a formal local salvage organization. Accordingly, Wilson was named head of the Verdun Salvage Committee (V.S.C.), with the eight city aldermen, J.R. French, and all other ranking city administrators appointed to the committee. The Verdun Salvage Committee Fund was officially registered as a war charity at the end of January 1942. While it was a community effort, the city took on the task of organizing, publicizing and materially assisting in salvage operations.⁹⁰ For the remainder of the war City Hall acted as the focal point for the receipt and dissemination of salvage information and the despatch of appropriate transportation to recover material. The city made available "Salvage Trucks" which were employed every Wednesday to collect salvage from Verdunites who had called the salvage committee office at City Hall. Salvage was dumped and sorted at the municipal yard on Galt Avenue in the city's east end or in a large playground adjacent to the Verdun Auditorium. The City of Verdun did not offer the *free* regular use of city trucks nor the labours of municipal employees who sometimes were required to sort scrap metal and other salvaged items. Expenses for the use of the trucks were borne by the V.S.C. Again, municipal patriotism had its financial limits.

⁸⁹ From the autumn of 1940 to the end of 1941, Verdun's Woodland Boy Scout troop had made 10,000 house calls across the Island of Montreal and collected 43 tons of newsprint. They donated their money to a Boy Scout Spitfire Drive and to the Mayor's Cigarette Fund. *The Guardian*, January 23, 1942.

⁹⁰ Executive Committee Minutes, December 22, 1941; Council Minutes, January 19, 1942; RG 44, Volume 72, War Charities Organizations, NAC; Arthur Burgess to E. W. Stapleford, Director of Voluntary Services, D.N.W.S., April 1, 1942, Box A-331, file 2, CVA. Similar efforts were made during the war by the civic administrations of nearby Westmount, Lachine and Outremont. In November 1941, two Verdun aldermen met with Westmount officials to review Westmount's recently-established salvage organization. Council Minutes, November 24, 1941. One very successful salvage operation was set up in Winnipeg a full year before the creation of the National Campaign. Gertrude Laing, *A Community Organizes for War*. (Winnipeg, 1948), pp. 22-29.

In its first month, the V.S.C. earned over \$700.00 from the sale of 45 tons of collected salvage to nearby scrap metal yards, paper manufacturers and other dealers. The city was disappointed to average less than 110 pick-ups per week that first month: the V.S.C. had hoped for upwards of 400 calls every week. Salvage was considered vital; it was a question, said *The Messenger*, of "Save or Slave". Residents were implored to cooperate.⁹¹ In March 1942 calls rose to an average of over 160 a week. But this was the high-water mark for the entire war. By July 1943 salvage pick-ups were cut back to once a month, though not a week went by until July 1945 that phone calls were not received from Verdunites seeking to contribute their waste materials to the war effort.⁹² Given Verdun's residential character, the V.S.C. was entirely dependent on the continued enthusiasm of residents and could not rely on large caches of salvageable material, especially iron, often found abandoned in industrial areas or along rail tracks in other cities. Verdun's salvage was almost exclusively household salvage.

From the beginning the Verdun Salvage Committee wanted to be Verdun's sole salvage authority. Within days of its creation, the committee sought to control the *ad hoc* salvage efforts of the local Junior Red Cross groups, Protestant schools and Boy Scout troops. It

⁹¹ Verdun Salvage Committee, "Report of Salvage Collections for February 1942", March 5, 1942, Box A-331, file 2, CVA; *The Messenger*, March 5, 1942. There were 1722 local salvage committees in Canada by the end of 1942, including 254 in Québec and 520 in Ontario. A year later, almost all provinces registered a decline in the number of salvage committees, British Columbia dropping by over 30%. Quebec lagged far behind Ontario in salvage tonnage, both absolutely and proportionately. Though it might not be an accurate measure of available salvage nor of popular support for its collection, to the end of 1943, Ontario, with 33% of the population had contributed 52% of the salvage collected by voluntary salvage committees while Quebec, with 29% of the population had generated only 16% of the national take. D.N.W.S., National Salvage Division, Statement of Salvage Operations, to November 30, 1942, dated December 10, 1942; and to December 31, 1943, dated January 14, 1944, Box A-331, file 2, CVA.

⁹² Detailed monthly reports prepared by the V.S.C. showing the number of pick-ups, the tonnage of what kinds of material salvaged and the value obtained through re-sale are located in Box A-331, file 2, CVA.

also informed local merchants that all future salvage collections or publicity had to make reference to the V.S.C. In April, the V.S.C. sought Ottawa's permission to hold exclusive jurisdiction to collect salvage in Verdun. Ottawa was unable to grant the V.S.C. such a right, though it indicated "duplication of effort" clearly was to be avoided.⁹³ The V.S.C. jealously guarded its mandate and wanted no competition for Verdunites' scrap.

The local and Montreal press gave Verdun's second major salvage drive in late April 1942 wide publicity. The C.P.C. organized this collection while local Scout troops and the Boys' Brigade performed much of the actual physical labour involved. This pattern of co-operation was repeated during every subsequent salvage drive. The timing of the April 1942 drive took advantage of the traditional May 1 moving day in the Montreal area, which especially affected a city of tenants like Verdun. People seemed more prone to divest themselves of unwanted articles at this time of the year. On this occasion Verdunites turned up 160 tons of salvage, the largest single-day total of the war under the jurisdiction of the V.S.C. The haul was carted away by trucks loaned by nearly two dozen local firms, merchants and individuals.⁹⁴

By "special authorization from the National Salvage Committee", the C.P.C. obtained most of the proceeds derived from the sale of this salvaged material. All Canadian salvage committees were empowered to donate funds to whatever war charity they saw fit, such as the Red Cross or the Overseas Services of the Salvation Army. Strictly

⁹³ Arthur Burgess to Roger Charbonneau, Provincial Organizer, National Salvage Campaign, February 4, 1942; Burgess to Steinberg's Wholesale Groceries, February 23, 1942; Burgess to William Knightley, Supervisor, National Salvage Campaign, April 16, 1942 and reply, April 21, 1942, Box A-331, file 2, CVA.

⁹⁴ Transportation continued to be the greatest problem and expense in salvage operations. "*Noms des propriétaires des camions prêtés re: cueillette de la Récupération 22 avril 1942*". Box A-331, file 2, CVA; *The Gazette*, April 23, 1942, almost certainly citing statistics provided by someone close to the operation, claimed that this salvage drive yielded 600 tons of material, which is unlikely.

speaking, the C.P.C. was not a war charity. But Verdunites could hardly oppose funding an organization devoted to their own welfare, notwithstanding the fact that A.R.P. was rapidly becoming irrelevant. Charity started at home. A press release from City Hall described Verdun as a "very important and vulnerable city", while the C.P.C. was said to be "in urgent need of funds".⁹⁵ Wilson recognized that collections in Verdun "would be very difficult undertakings without the help" of the C.P.C.⁹⁶ Other recipients of V.S.C. aid were almost all local groups including the Red Cross, the Lion's Club, the W.V.R.C., the Kinsmen Club of Verdun, the Mayor's Cigarette Fund and the crew of H.M.C.S. *Dunver*. The Red Cross and C.P.C. were the V.S.C.'s preferred charities.⁹⁷ In finding salvage for sale, Verdunites directly helped their own, and through them, the national war effort.

It was difficult for salvage drives to be cost-effective. Prices for salvaged materials were generally standardized by Wartime Salvage Limited, a Crown Corporation. With average prices in December 1942 of \$15.00 a ton for scrap iron and steel and a mere \$8.00 a ton for waste paper, it took a considerable amount of materials to make the high costs of carting and sorting worthwhile. In that month, for example, the V.S.C. spent \$106.00 to pick up only eight tons of material worth \$128.00, a whopping 83% of income lost to overhead expenses.⁹⁸ The percentage of expenditures over receipts was very rarely below 30% during the war, and in eleven individual months in the period March 1943 to June

⁹⁵ "Gigantic Salvage Collection - 22 April", City of Verdun press release, April 14 (?), 1942, Box A-331, file 2, CVA.

⁹⁶ Wilson to Barr, October 5, 1944, Box A-331, file 2, CVA. By 1943 there was little else of practical value for the C.P.C. to do in Verdun.

⁹⁷ Verdun Salvage Committee, "Statements of Receipts and Expenditures" 1942 to 1945 and V.S.C. reply to questionnaire sent by Roger Charbonneau, Provincial Organizer, National Salvage Campaign, June 1942, Box A-331, file 2, CVA.

⁹⁸ By the spring of 1943, the prices for many commodities, especially rubber, had actually fallen. "List of prices re: salvage materials", prepared by the City of Verdun's purchasing agent, G.E. Noël, May 20, 1943.

1945, costs actually exceeded receipts. In February 1945, for example, it cost the V.S.C. nearly \$51.00 to pick-up salvage worth \$30.00. For the entire period of the V.S.C.'s active existence from January 1942 to July 1945, nearly half of all earnings went to cover expenses.⁹⁹

The only really profitable salvage ventures were the widely-publicized special salvage days organized once or twice a year, and which often coincided with a Montreal-wide appeal. On these days, the V.S.C. collected material residents placed on the curb, much like a garbage collection. Often, the salvage was amassed by citizens over a period of time and saved for these occasions. The year-round call-in and pick-up program was inefficient, especially in the winter months when salvage returns were very low. Well over half of all salvage realized in Verdun during the war already had been collected by the end of 1942.¹⁰⁰ The next year saw the nadir of salvage collection. By 1944, citizens were asked to hold on to their diminishing amounts of available salvage until they were worth collecting.¹⁰¹ Trucking costs had become prohibitive and pick ups had to be consolidated. Moreover, there was simply less salvage to be had.

The wartime demand for salvage was also used to other advantage by the city. Salvage collections fitted in nicely with the goals of the City Improvement League of Greater Montreal with which Wilson was involved. The idea of property embellishment, inside and outside the home, through the removal of salvageable refuse was used by Wilson to further the objectives of the League as well as the Verdun Salvage Committee. In May 1942, the City Improvement League launched a major clean-up drive throughout the

⁹⁹ Technically, this was a contravention of the 1939 War Charities Act which in 1941 had been amended to disallow any fundraising activity necessitating expenditures of 25% or more of gross receipts. This problem had become common nation-wide but was clearly difficult to monitor.

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix B. This was a national trend. The campaign peaked early.

¹⁰¹ Box A-452, file "Salvage Campaign 1941-1944"; Box A-331, file 2, CVA.

Montreal area, including Verdun, in which salvage campaigns were to play a major role. By 1944, the new director of the Verdun Fire Department, R. Proulx¹⁰², also saw salvage collection as a convenient means of ridding congested Verdun of many fire hazards and seized upon the idea of linking preventable house fires with unpatriotic conduct. Proulx felt that manpower in his department could be freed up for other tasks if local women, whose husbands and sons were away on active service, took on the burden of inspecting chimneys and electrical systems and ensured the proper storage of inflammable cleaning materials. In eliminating the risk of conflagration, therefore, women could "kill two birds with one stone: Fire at home; Hitler at the front".¹⁰³ Cleanliness was patriotic, and Verdun was able to adapt a war-related activity to improve local conditions and thriftily reduce the demands on municipal employees. Again, Verdun was willing to contribute to the war effort but was not averse to using wartime circumstances for its own ends.

Women assumed the burden of much of the nation's salvage effort. Saving, storing and supplying fats, bones, paper, clothing, rags, glass jars and an assortment of discarded household items were tasks most often undertaken by women.¹⁰⁴ Children's salvage efforts, extremely important in Verdun and elsewhere in Canada, were frequently the subject of newspaper articles and advertising. Under the January 1943 headline, "Nails for Nazis, Iron for Italy and Junk for Japan", *The Messenger* suggested that signs reading "Admission: One Nail" be posted on the doors of local schools, movie theatres, parks, playgrounds and even churches. The enthusiastic accompanying article remarked, "Let's gather [the nails]...and give our fighting men a chance to shoot them at the baby

¹⁰² Alfred Dubeau died in 1943.

¹⁰³ Quoted in *The Guardian*, May 11, 1944; see also *The Guardian*, May 1, 1942.

¹⁰⁴ Auger and Lamothe, p. 61.

murderers who have been bombing women and children."¹⁰⁵ Verdun's wartime salvage campaign united the community across linguistic, gender and age barriers.

Verdun's salvage campaigns were regularly hailed for their military contribution, so important in a city with a large number of residents on active service. "Waste Paper May Save Lives of Boys of Verdun", stated a headline in *The Guardian*, which linked this increasingly valuable commodity with the lives of local men:

If the present emergency is not met, some of the fighting men, some of them boys from Verdun, who are 'over there' fighting the battles of freedom and liberty, may lack something to help save their lives. That single thought should stir the people in the city to [a] greater and more persistent effort.¹⁰⁶

Once again paper was the object of collections in April and May 1945. Children became "Waste Papertroopers", ferreting out valuable old telephone books and the like. "Waste paper is still Canada's war material shortage No. 1", stated a D.N.W.S. bulletin issued to all salvage committees. And from July 1944 until the war's end, waste paper became the V.S.C.'s top priority. Verdunites were also reminded that "perhaps the bundle they supply may save the life of one of their own dear ones in the fighting forces".¹⁰⁷ Nearly 18,000 (paper) flyers were delivered to every Verdun residence and business reminding citizens that all proceeds from the May 16, 1945 paper drive would be contributed to war charities serving local men. Even though the war with Germany had ended over a week earlier, an impressive 47 tons of paper and other materials were collected by 125 volunteers, most of

¹⁰⁵ *The Messenger*, January 28, 1943. In wartime Verdun, more paper was amassed by weight than steel, which fit into the central and eastern Canadian trend. The reverse occurred in the west. Nationally, the most profit, literally pound-for-pound, was derived from the sale of rags and old clothes.

¹⁰⁶ *The Guardian*, May 11, 1944.

¹⁰⁷ *The Guardian*, April 12, 1945; D.N.W.S. Bulletin No. 96, May 15, 1945, Box A-331, file 2, CVA.

whom were Boy Scouts.¹⁰⁸ By touting the salvage campaign as helping overseas Verdunites, the war effort did not remain a nebulous national issue: it became a matter of direct relevance to Verdun and Verdunites.

The Verdun Salvage Committee was officially dissolved on October 9, 1945. At the time, it still had a surplus of slightly over \$1000 which it donated to the Red Cross and the Canadian Legion's Provincial War Memorial Building Fund.¹⁰⁹ Overall, Verdunites contributed 873 tons of re-usable salvage during the war which sold for more than \$13,000.¹¹⁰

Verdun's salvage record was good but not particularly cost-effective since the city refused to defray the costs of transport. The early enthusiasm of the population was difficult to sustain after 1942. Moreover, there was only so much salvage to be had in Verdun. In the last year of the war, linking salvage with the individual lives of Verdunites helped rekindle the community's interest, but only insofar as paper and rags were concerned. These items were more commonly found in a residential community than was scrap iron. The commitment of the population to the cause of salvage, as to that of civil defence,

¹⁰⁸ *The Guardian*, April 12 and May 3, 1945; example of flyer and photo-description of event, Box A-331, file 2, CVA. Boy Scouts contributed valuable war work in Verdun.

¹⁰⁹ Circular letters from D.N.W.S., September 15 and September 26, 1945; Council Minutes, October 9, 1945; D.N.W.S. to Burgess, March 5, 1946 and April 12, 1946 and reply May 29, 1946, Box A-331, file 2, CVA.

¹¹⁰ By the end of 1943, Verdunites had given to the V.S.C. approximately 11.27 tons of salvage per 1000 residents, rising to over 12.5 tons by war's end, based on an average population of 70,000 in the period 1942-1945. Despite having only one significant industry and having no rail facilities, these figures were slightly above the provincial averages. Verdun Salvage Committee, "Report of Salvage Collections" 1942-1945; D.N.W.S., National Salvage Division, Statement of Salvage Operations, to December 31, 1943, dated January 14, 1944, Box A-331, file 2, CVA. In its 1945 Annual Report, the City of Westmount, which organized its salvage committee in 1941, claimed that from 1941 until September 1945, the staggering total of 1882 tons of salvage were collected in that city, which had less than half Verdun's population.

peaked early and it was a struggle for the Verdun Salvage Committee to maintain local interest and boost sagging results in the last years of the war.

VICTORY LOANS AND WAR SAVINGS

The cost of Canada's war was immense and Ottawa employed various means to finance it, the most obvious being increased taxation. Another was borrowing. As in the Great War, the federal government appealed for public assistance. From January 1940 to June 1941 three large national campaigns were mounted to sell War Savings Certificates. These public sales of government bonds, savings certificates and stamps, offered at 3% interest and redeemable well into the postwar period, yielded considerable sums.¹¹¹ When this method proved insufficient the first of nine carefully-orchestrated "Victory Loan" campaigns was held in June 1941. Mass publicity, ample use of the machinery of government and the constant reminder that purchasing bonds was a patriotic duty, combined to make this program a huge success. The nine Victory Loan campaigns held between June 1941 and November 1945 raised \$12 billion, with slightly more than half this amount invested by corporations.¹¹²

In November 1940 the Verdun War Savings Committee (V.W.S.C.) was established under the chairmanship of J.R. French, the city's chief financial officer. The group's inaugural meeting drew Wilson, Verdun's M.L.A., J.J.L. Comeau, local merchants and prominent citizens. Though it was customary in Verdun for the local elite to run wartime patriotic organizations, Wilson remarked that "the present war is everyone's war and

¹¹¹ J. Douglas Gibson, "Financing the War", in J.F. Parkinson, ed., *Canadian War Economics*, (University of Toronto Press, 1941), pp. 38-39.

¹¹² Norman Hillmer, "Victory Loans", in *The New Canadian Encyclopedia*, (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1988), Volume 4, p. 2262. Morton and Granatstein, *Victory 1945: Canadians from War to Peace op. cit.*, p. 86, note that \$10.2 billion was raised.

every citizen is expected to do his share in bringing it to a successful conclusion."¹¹³ Nine of the sixteen men present were French speaking, reflecting the fact that most elected officials from Verdun as well as the majority of the merchant, professional and landlord classes came from this language group. Almost all Verdun businesses were requested to act as points-of-sale for War Savings Certificates and the Committee delegated speakers to address local social groups and clubs (especially women's groups) to request their assistance, particularly as sales agents for stamps and certificates. The City of Verdun and the Protestant and Catholic school boards immediately instituted the "employer-employee" plan of payroll deductions for employees wishing to purchase certificates. Several of Verdun's larger businesses followed this lead while others having at least five employees were urged to adopt the plan.¹¹⁴ Within a month, all permanent city employees, "*sans exception*", had subscribed to the employee-employer plan.¹¹⁵ The majority of city workers were French Canadian. Because of its 100% employee participation rate, Verdun was included on the National War Savings Committee's Honour Roll in 1941 as were most of the city's participating firms.¹¹⁶

Within a year, over 30 English-speaking women's organizations, including the women's auxiliary of the Legion, the Y.W.C.A., the W.V.R.C., the I.O.D.E., the Daughters of England, the Verdun Women's Club and women's groups from almost every English-

¹¹³ Verdun War Savings Committee, Minutes, November 28, 1940, Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

¹¹⁴ Verdun War Savings Committee, Minutes, November 28 and December 5, 1940, Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

¹¹⁵ J.R. French to City Council, January 13, 1941, Box A-331, file 1 "War: Salaries, Military Training, Bonus, etc.", CVA.

¹¹⁶ E.J. Quinn, Associate Director, Payroll Savings Division, National War Savings Committee, to City of Verdun, no date (probably April 1941), Box A-331, file 1, CVA; *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 16, 1941.

speaking Verdun church participated in the sale of Savings Certificates.¹¹⁷ A meeting of the heads of these groups, as well as of Verdun's French-language groups, was organized by the city. Wilson wrote to each of the English-language organizations while French wrote to the French-language groups. As a French speaker, perhaps the general manager had more influence with this audience than the British mayor. In any event both language groups responded to the call to invest in the war effort.¹¹⁸ Among social groups, the selling of bonds was chiefly a female role, especially on the part of English-language organizations.

R.P. Jellett and Napoléon Charest, co-chairs of the Provincial War Savings Committee, attended the V.W.S.C.'s first business meeting in December 1940. Jellett urged his audience to convince workers that the purchase of certificates would not only help win the war but would constitute a sound financial investment; otherwise deductions might be viewed as merely a request for another form of salary tax. Harkening back to the economic downturn which afflicted Canada after the Great War, Jellett stressed "the importance for all wage-earners to...creat[e] for themselves a useful back-log of savings for the depression period which usually follows a war". This was sound advice for a working-class community. J.P. Dupuis, a member of the V.W.S.C. and Verdun's leading merchant, reported that the principal objection, reasonable or not, to purchasing war savings certificates voiced by some of his over 200 employees was the fear that the bonds might be lost or destroyed in a fire. Despite the disturbing military situation, the idea of investing in Canada's war had to be sold to many Canadians, including Verdunites, many of whom were earning steady wages for the first time in years. Charest congratulated the

¹¹⁷ "War Certificates Campaign - November 1941". Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

¹¹⁸ Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

V.W.S.C. for its "enthusiasm" and added that it was "one of the best organized...in the Province."¹¹⁹

Even before the Verdun War Savings Committee had been established in July 1940, when an invasion of Britain was believed to be imminent, *The Guardian* exhorted Verdun's substantial British-born population to invest in the war effort. A co-ordinated nation-wide 'theatre night campaign' had been organized for which participating Canadian theatres admitted patrons free of charge so long as they purchased at least 50 cents' worth of War Savings Stamps. *The Guardian's* caption beneath a photo of the Royal Couple read: "Loyal Britishers throughout Verdun will prove their loyalty...by purchasing War Savings Stamps at their favourite local theatre." Verdun's British sentiments were an important factor in the city's war responses and Verdun's four theatres managed to sell \$3500 worth of stamps (often in small denominations to children) almost double the expected amount.¹²⁰

War stamps were especially popular with school children. From December 1940 to the end of April 1941, Verdun's 5300 Protestant school children purchased \$10,500 worth of stamps, averaging nearly \$600.00 a week. Three years later the total amount had reached \$63,000, including some teachers' contributions. At the elementary school level, pupils gave their teachers small change and, once 25 cents had been amassed, a savings stamp was glued on a card provided by the National War Finance Committee. When the card was full, it was sent to Ottawa in exchange for a \$5.00 certificate.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Verdun War Savings Committee, Minutes, December 5, 1940, Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

¹²⁰ *The Guardian*, July 12 and July 19, 1940.

¹²¹ *The Guardian*, April 25, 1941; *Canada's Weekly*, April 14, 1944 (published in London for Canadians overseas). War Savings Certificates were sold at 80% of their face value and matured to 100% seven and a half years later. Morton and Granatstein, *Victory 1945*, p. 86. By March 1943, the number of students enrolled in Verdun's Protestant schools had dropped to 4700. The fundraising efforts of Verdun students compare favourably with those of

One Riverview School pupil, Bill Jameson, invented a slogan promoting the sale of War Savings Stamps for his school newspaper. The slogan, "Hey, gang? Keep on licking War Savings Stamps - they're full of Vitamin V!", soon propelled him to national prominence. The slogan was adopted by the National War Finance Committee and thousands of posters were distributed to schools across Canada showing the young Verdunite uttering his famous patriotic appeal. So popular was the slogan that it was picked up and used officially in the United States. *The Guardian* treated this story almost as glowingly as it did that of overseas war heroes. Young Jameson, and the actions of thousands of Verdun children like him, represented the patriotic spirit which had made Verdun famous and Verdunites proud.¹²²

To the end of the fiscal year 1940-1941, Ottawa had borrowed over \$640 million from the public. But this was hardly enough to keep pace with war expenditures and the federal government hoped that double this amount would be raised in 1941-1942.¹²³

Accordingly, the first Victory Loan campaign was organized for June 1941. The city of Verdun took out a Victory Loan advertisement in *The Guardian* under the headline, "Verdun Defies Hitler". Readers were told that:

thousands of Verdun Citizens are already on active service. Thousands more are helping by their work on the home front, willingly, eagerly...Let us make our dollars talk democracy! Keep Verdun on the map as a fighting outpost for a democratic victory...Verdun is always in front - we will not fail!¹²⁴

Edmonton, whose high school students purchased \$1145 in War Savings Stamps in November 1941. See Jeff Keshen, "Morale and Morality on the Alberta Home Front" in Tingley, ed., *For King and Country: Alberta in the Second World War, op. cit.*, p. 155.

¹²² *The Guardian*, July 2, 1943.

¹²³ Gibson, "Financing the War", in *Canadian War Economics, op. cit.*, pp. 38 and 41.

¹²⁴ *The Guardian*, May 30, 1941.

Many local business people, such as the patriotic J.P. Dupuis, and social groups, such as the Legion, sponsored advertisements in the press in support of the war bond drives. In June 1941, the Lion's Club, newly-formed that month, sponsored a bellicose advertisement which read, "When Verdun is aroused Hitler may well tremble...Let's Show Canada what Verdun can do."¹²⁵ Local pride in the city's military contribution and potential was enormous.

Verdun women mobilized for this first Victory Loan drive. A well-publicized bond-purchasing rally in Woodland Park, which followed an evening parade through the streets of Verdun complete with bilingual floats, attracted 3000 women, including representatives of the W.V.R.C., I.O.D.E., C.P.C. Women's Auxiliary, the Red Cross, the Girl Guides, the Verdun Sisterhood, the Verdun Women's Club, many church groups and the wives of several prominent Verdun elected officials, including Elizabeth Wilson. Thérèse Casgrain was the main speaker, which lent importance to this event. All purchasers of war bonds were rewarded on the spot with the gift of a Union Jack. The only men officially participating in this rally were the pipers of the Black Watch band.¹²⁶

While Verdun met its subscription goals, the campaign organizers expressed some disappointment that many Verdunites had purchased their Victory Bonds at work in downtown Montreal. Since these did not count as having been purchased in Verdun, *The Guardian* gently reproached Verdunites for their neglect of local subscriptions.¹²⁷ Even in 1945, during the Eighth Victory Loan campaign, *The Messenger* reminded Verdunites to:

Buy in Verdun. When you make your investment, let Verdun get the credit. Don't buy in Montreal where you work, but buy in Verdun. It's

¹²⁵ *The Guardian*, June 6, 1941.

¹²⁶ *The Montreal Daily Star*, June 12, 1941.

¹²⁷ *The Guardian*, June 13, 1941.

your city. It's a patriotic city. Verdun has sent the cream of her youth to the fighting front. Verdun must back them up.¹²⁸

The importance attached to the recognition of Verdun's patriotic contribution seemed at times as great as that accorded the actual subscriptions. The Verdun press regularly exhorted readers to patronize local businesses, use local facilities and promote Verdun's impressive war record. Local newspapers constantly reminded citizens that the differences between Montreal and Verdun were real ones. Verdunites' patriotism was strongly linked to local identity.

In January 1942 the city obtained the consent from all 225 of its employees to deduct \$1.00 a week from their salaries, in addition to voluntary contributions, towards the purchase of a war savings certificate. This more or less obligatory imposition of war savings was not rescinded until September 1945.¹²⁹ In June 1941 the Executive Committee agreed to French's plan to allow employees to subscribe to Victory Loans on credit provided by the city. The city purchased the bonds from the government immediately and collected its employees' money from a payroll deduction scheme. Employees obtained their bonds from the city upon final payment.¹³⁰ During the Second Victory Loan in March 1942, of \$10,000 subscribed by city employees, \$9,000 was loaned them by City Hall. The city loaned over \$200,000 to its employees in this manner. In some loan campaigns, city employees pledged more than 15% of the amount of the city payroll.¹³¹

¹²⁸ *The Messenger*, April 26, 1945.

¹²⁹ It was easier for the employees to agree to the scheme since the city simultaneously increased weekly salaries \$3.75 as a cost of living allowance. J.R. French to Executive Committee, January 7 and January 19, 1942; Council Minutes, January 7, 1942 and September 11, 1945. In the year preceding January 1942, \$28,000 had been raised from municipal employees, a figure which well satisfied the city council, Burgess memo, January 28, 1942, Box A-331, file 1, CVA.

¹³⁰ French to Executive Committee, June 10, 1941, Box A-331, file 1, CVA.

¹³¹ *The Guardian*, November 12, 1943; Council Minutes, November 8, 1943.

Overall, Verdunites attained 157% of their subscription objective during the March 1942 campaign. Substantial oversubscription from Verdun became the norm for every Victory Loan drive, even when, by November 1944, the fixed objective exceeded \$1 million, exclusive of payroll deductions.¹³² In October 1943, in recognition of Verdunites' contributions, the National War Finance Committee awarded the City of Verdun the honour of flying a three-star "V" pennant from City Hall. A photo of the flag was proudly displayed on the front page of *The Guardian*.¹³³ Lieutenant André Marcil, Executive Officer of H.M.C.S. *Dunver*, visited Verdun in November 1944 as the representative of the National War Finance Committee and presented the city with yet another Victory Loan Flag. He also exhibited before city officials a White Ensign flown by *Dunver* during Marcil's latest Atlantic crossing.¹³⁴

With the exception of larger institutional investments, the money derived from the sale of bonds came essentially from Verdunites' savings. As the war progressed more Verdunites earned more income. More than 5000 separate purchases averaging \$2000 each were made by individuals, businesses and local institutions in the November 1944 Seventh Victory Loan campaign. This was 700 more than during the previous campaign. These purchases constituted a large amount for a working-class community.¹³⁵

The pressure to subscribe was very great. In May 1943, Wilson, speaking in support of the Fourth Victory Loan campaign, told city employees packed into the council chamber that good Canadians bought Victory Bonds whereas bad ones did not. In the mayor's mind, it was that simple, as it was for many Verdunites. Wilson spoke mainly in French

¹³² J.R. French to City Council, March 9, 1942, and his reports following each Victory Loan campaign, Box A-331, file 1, CVA; *The Guardian*, April 24, 1942.

¹³³ *The Guardian*, November 12, 1943; Council Minutes, November 8, 1943.

¹³⁴ Council Minutes, November 13, 1944.

¹³⁵ *The Guardian*, November 16, 1944; Box A-331, file 1, CVA.

and his strong words were a thinly-veiled reference to certain French-speaking groups' opposition to involvement in the war effort. A film was shown, in French, depicting the horrors the Germans were visiting upon occupied Europe. On the podium with Wilson were two Verdun survivors of the corvette *Weyburn*, recently torpedoed. One sailor was a French speaker and the other an English speaker, and both spoke of their difficult experiences and implored the city workers to contribute to the Victory Loan. A show of hands was then requested of all those who would not purchase a bond. No one budged, and all present thereupon signed over more payroll deductions for the cause.¹³⁶ By all means possible, including coercion, the city induced members of both Verdun's language groups to purchase for victory.

The Eighth Victory Loan campaign in May 1945 yielded \$1.25 million from Verdun, as against the \$1 million sought. Many of the sales were termed "gratitude" purchasing, seemingly the result of V-E Day euphoria. Ottawa's sole remaining selling points during this campaign were that Japan remained to be subdued and that a considerable expense would be borne in speedily repatriating Canadian service people.¹³⁷ Like all Canadians, Verdunites wanted their men and women home as quickly as possible. The Ninth (and final) Victory Loan campaign was held in November 1945, long after the Pacific War had ended but well before all Canadian troops had returned. The huge Verdun quota of \$2.25 million was oversubscribed 150%, making it by far Verdun's largest financial response of the war. Verdunites had plenty of disposable income available by then, especially as there had been few consumer luxuries available during the war on which to spend the

¹³⁶ *The Guardian*, May 7, 1943.

¹³⁷ *The Guardian*, May 17, 1945; Executive Committee Minutes, May 28, 1945; Box A-331, file 1, CVA. *The Messenger*, April 26, 1945, exhorting Verdunites to invest in the war against Japan, reminded readers unequivocally that "Canadians were at Hong Kong! Our Australian brothers are menaced!...Japan must be levelled to a couple of barren rocks where the yellow devils must eat raw fish or starve." Despite its 125% oversubscription, Verdun did not place in the top ten Canadian oversubscribed cities in May 1945. Glace Bay, Nova Scotia led the country with 151%. *The Montreal Daily Star*, June 18, 1945.

good wages they had earned in war industries. Verdun and Point St. Charles, combined, led the "west-end" of Montreal during this last campaign¹³⁸, which illustrates the wartime socio-economic transformation of the working class families inhabiting these districts.

The War Savings campaigns in Verdun induced contributions and co-operation from all strata of the city's population. Individuals and workers formed the backbone of the drives' success but businesses and employers, schools and City Hall were also major patriotic participants in this fundraising, which crossed all social barriers. The dense network of local community groups, which were able to reach large numbers of Verdunites, played an important role in selling the government's war financing schemes. Verdunites' responses generated a good deal of community pride and the city and the local press used this pride to stimulate further sales. While some Verdunites undoubtedly purchased war bonds for patriotic reasons others acquired them as good investments and insurance policies against the economic downturn believed likely to follow the cessation of hostilities. Patriotism and personal gain mixed easily.

'BRITISH' VERDUN AT WAR

The texture of wartime Verdun can also be examined through local initiatives and by special events. The Montreal press frequently commented on the determination and war-mindedness of Verdun's population. Verdun's ethno-linguistic character and ingrained sense of community pride shaped popular attitudes towards the war as much as the domestic and international contexts. Some war-related events in Verdun were common to communities across the country while others were the outcome of unique local conditions.

¹³⁸ French to Executive Committee, November 3, 1945. Box A-331, file 1, CVA: *The Guardian*, November 1 and November 15, 1945.

That Verdun's English-speaking majority and strong British character helped define the city's posture towards the war and its reactions to news from overseas is obvious. The more perilous the military situation for Britain in the spring and summer of 1940, the more personally intense became the patriotism of many citizens. For example, on May 24, 1940, *The Guardian* published a front-page morale-boosting article as well as a special prayer for victory which were aimed directly at Verdun's very worried British population. With almost every edition, *The Guardian* re-affirmed the city's British character, which was so unlike the composition of the vast majority of Québec municipalities. For "Empire Day" in 1941, this newspaper published a full page advertisement, headed up "Loyal Canadians", which was sponsored by local English-speaking businesses. The advertisement stated: "this page has been made possible by the Citizens and Firms in the City of Verdun who re-affirm their loyalty to the British Empire and their firm intentions to Buy and Sell British and Canadian Merchandise."¹³⁹ Without losing sight of the obvious commercial goal of the advertisement, Verdun's special connection to Britain was unmistakable. John Parker, a Verdunite who taught at Woodland School from 1940 to 1942, has recalled the very strong sense of "Old World" patriotism which existed in Verdun, with great attachment to the empire and the monarchy. He felt that the bombing of London was considered by many Verdunites to be no different than if Canada were attacked.¹⁴⁰

In July 1941 Ottawa issued "A Call to Arms" to the Canadian people making it known that victory depended on the efforts of "all true Canadians". "Stout-hearted able-bodied men" were encouraged to enlist immediately. At the invitation of Brigadier General E. de B. Panet, District Officer Commanding, M.D. 4, Wilson formally and gravely read the proclamation to an estimated 15,000 people massed in Woodland Park. Alderman Albert

¹³⁹ *The Guardian*, May 23, 1941.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with John Parker, January 14, 1994.

Rolland read it in French.¹⁴¹ Nearly a quarter of all Verdunites had assembled to listen. Panet made the same request of other communities in his district but Verdun's reputation as an especially responsive and patriotic city could only have been enhanced by so strong a showing from its population. The war was taken seriously in Verdun and by none more than its large British-born population.

In August 1941 a "recruiting convoy" visited Verdun. The showpiece was a Bren gun carrier, and a photo was published in *The Montreal Daily Star* of Wilson, French, the city engineer, Henry Hadley, other municipal officials and the M.L.A., J.J.L. Comeau, sitting and standing in the vehicle. "Verdun's enthusiasm for Canada's war effort was demonstrated again last night", wrote *The Star*.

when thousands of men, women and particularly children of Quebec's third-largest city turned out for the demonstration...The show was preceded by a tour of the city staged by the convoy with sirens screaming and people running through the streets...From the crack of the first torpedoes to the roar of the finale, the mimic war put on by the soldiers was as popular with Verdun's war-minded citizens as it is wherever it goes.¹⁴²

The next day, *The Star* again highlighted Verdun's patriotic mood and war consciousness. The City of Verdun was described as possessing the "enviable double record" of leading Canada's war effort and building "outstanding" recreational and municipal facilities without increasing municipal debt. Though *The Star* recognized that precise enrolment figures broken down according to municipalities were unavailable, it appeared to this newspaper that Verdun proportionately led the country.

Following up an enviable Great War record of service, the men, women and children of the suburban city are making a contribution to the war effort that should prove a shining example to other communities in the Dominion. It is on the home front that the widest participation in the war

¹⁴¹ Wilson to Panet, July 10, 1941, Box A-331, file 6, CVA: *The Messenger*, July 10, 1941, estimated the crowd at 18,000.

¹⁴² *The Montreal Daily Star*, August 15, 1941.

effort is evident in Verdun, from war loan drives to school children selling candy in aid of relief funds.¹⁴³

Wilson and French were described as working "day and often night" on behalf of the war effort. Wilson seemed consumed by his war work and many Verdunites emulated his example.

The same month the Québec Tourist Bureau asked Wilson to arrange for the City of Verdun to paint the famous "V for Victory" emblem ("V...-") on the principal intersections of the municipality. While considered "*une oeuvre patriotique*", the Tourist Bureau admitted that the purpose of these signs was to enhance the image of Québec with potential visitors from the then still-neutral United States. The Bureau believed that American tourism would increase "*si nous leur montrons que nous sommes cent pour cent de coeur et d'esprit dans ce mouvement pour la victoire*". Verdun happily obliged by painting a large Victory sign on the street at the west-end waterfront intersection of Lasalle Boulevard and Bannantyne Avenue, near the Natatorium. The event was recorded in the Montreal press, which claimed Verdun was the first area municipality to use its city streets and flower beds in public parks to promote victory. Later, in response to a solicitation from M.D. 4, the city also painted victory slogans on selected Verdun sidewalks.¹⁴⁴

To commemorate the first anniversary of Canada's declaration of war Ottawa organized a national Reconsecration Week, complete with special military displays, solemn church services and public pledges to see the war through to its successful conclusion. Reconsecration Week was important to the government and public in the first few

¹⁴³ *The Montreal Daily Star*, August 16, 1941.

¹⁴⁴ Maurice Hébert, *Le publiciste du gouvernement et directeur général de l'Office du Tourisme*, to Wilson, August 18, 1941, and reply, 26 August, 1941, Box A-331, file 7, CVA; *La Presse*, September 4, 1941; *Le Canada*, September 2, 1941; Burgess to Recruiting Centre, M.D. 4, June 29, 1944, Box A-331, file 7, CVA.

difficult years of the war. For Reconsecration Week 1941, Verdun decorated all its public buildings with patriotic bunting and called on citizens and merchants to do the same. The entire text of Ottawa's Reconsecration Proclamation was read into the minutes of city council and Wilson wrote to local clergy, school boards and various public bodies to urge their participation in solemnly reconsecrating themselves to victory. He called on "any and every organization which is a factor in contributing to the religious, educational, cultural and social life of our community" to promote the war effort and improve civilian morale. Wilson proudly invoked Verdun's "exemplary tradition" of high wartime morale.¹⁴⁵ At every turn, City Hall was prepared to stimulate war consciousness among the population and these efforts were well received throughout the city.

To mark Reconsecration Week 1942, Verdun and M.D. 4 combined to stage a large military parade. Detachments from the R.C.A.S.C. and R.C.E., quartered at the Auditorium, and the C.W.A.C., W.V.R.C., C.P.C. and Verdun's veterans' groups participated. City Hall saw the occasion as "an expression of the intense feeling in [Verdun] to prosecute the war to the utmost". Brigadier Panet took the salute from a reviewing stand located at the intersection of Verdun and Desmarchais, in the heart of the city. Thousands of Verdunites lined the streets and followed the procession. At a rally in Woodland Park, Panet described Verdun as "one of the most patriotic municipalities in the entire Dominion." The popular Wilson exhorted all Verdun citizens to engage in war work of some kind, an appeal which met with "applause and cheering...most enthusiastic and vigorous". Perhaps in keeping with the sensibilities of the audience, selections chosen by the military and local bands included *There Will Always be an England* and *Tipperary*.¹⁴⁶ Panet's decision to attend the Verdun ceremonies at a time when his presence would have been appreciated in many areas of M.D. 4 confirms Verdun's high-

¹⁴⁵ Council Minutes, September 9, 1941; *The Guardian*, September 12, 1941.

¹⁴⁶ *The Guardian*, September 11, 1942; City of Verdun press release, September 3, 1942, Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

profile military and civil contributions to the war effort. Verdun's selection by Panet reinforced the city's image as Québec's leading patriotic city.

Perhaps nowhere in Canada was the memory of the famous Second Battle of Ypres, fought in April and May 1915, more vigorously observed than in Verdun. Since 1920 Verdun had held an annual military parade and remembrance ceremony on the Sunday falling closest to April 22, "Ypres Day", to commemorate this fierce struggle. Verdun's Canadian Legion branch organized the events.¹⁴⁷ The Ypres Day celebrations in Verdun became well known in Montreal for the large numbers of participants and onlookers they attracted. Many Verdunites had participated in the battle and, given Verdun's Great War record, it seemed fitting that this community acted as the centrepiece of numerous Ypres Day activities in the Dominion.

By the late 1930s, with another war looming in Europe, Verdun's veteran community (joined by some others from Montreal) increasingly observed these celebrations. In April 1939 an estimated 4000 Great War veterans participated in the Verdun Ypres Day Parade and ceremonies in addition to the marching bands (including the obligatory pipes and drums of the Black Watch), political, military and clerical dignitaries and representatives of various civic and social organizations. Nearly 20,000 cheering spectators lined the parade route and attended the ceremony at Verdun's Great War memorial, including a sizeable number who journeyed to Verdun from elsewhere in the Montreal area. "Nowhere more than in Verdun has the Ypres Day Celebration a greater significance", proclaimed *The Guardian*.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ As of 1996, and though only a shadow of former celebrations, the Verdun Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion continued to organize the only known Ypres Day Parade in Canada.

¹⁴⁸ *The Guardian*, April 28, 1939.

In 1940 these commemorations took on added poignancy and illustrated Canada's grim determination to prosecute this second world war. In addition to the usual pageantry, Verdun's parade included representatives of the Canadian Active Service Force and many other military units from all services. Brigadier J.P. Archambault, D.O.C., M.D. 4, took the salute from the reviewing stand, as would his successors in subsequent war years.¹⁴⁹ Ypres Day was a major event in Verdun, judging by the generous space and number of photographs allotted it in *The Guardian*. As the Second World War progressed, the impressive spectacle only grew in size and meaning. In 1942 a record 50,000 people reportedly attended the ceremonies.¹⁵⁰

The significance of all these wartime parades should not be underestimated. They were symbolic of the importance of the veteran and military presence in the community. The occasions were solemn and dignified, and the extraordinary annual Verdun rite which brought together thousands of participants, onlookers and dignitaries to mark the achievements and losses of Canadians during the Great War constituted a public display of the prevailing values and attitudes of the Verdun community. Wartime parades gave sanction, authority and legitimacy to the participants as well as to the groups they represented.¹⁵¹ The Verdun Ypres Day Parades highlighted not only the soldiers of two world wars, but also symbolized the host municipality, its citizens and their demonstrated patriotism.

In Verdun, the tradition of granting the use of city streets for military parades found wide popular approval. No public gatherings in Verdun during the war were larger than the Ypres Day Parades and no military procession in the prewar period could garner a more

¹⁴⁹ *The Guardian*, April 26, 1940.

¹⁵⁰ *The Guardian*, May 1, 1942.

¹⁵¹ Peter G. Goheen, "Symbols in the Streets", *Urban History Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, February 1990, pp. 237-240.

impressive turnout than those held during the war. The war served as a catalyst for the success of the parades and no other event, be it a Victory Loan rally or the gatherings of charitable, social or religious organizations, held the same attraction for Verdunites as did these military processions.

Verdun's reputation in the Montreal area as a steady source of British-inspired patriotic sentiment and military enlistments was confirmed and publicized by the Ypres Day parades. Verdun seemed inordinately chosen by M.D. 4 as the locale for a host of military gatherings and demonstrations. Verdun's Britons, none more than Edward Wilson, increased their profile during the war, when their emotional ties to their beleaguered homeland grew more pronounced and gained in prominence. This generally dovetailed with both national sentiment and federal war policies. The patriotic spirit of the city did not emanate only from its British-born or English-speaking residents. French-speaking Canadians, too, volunteered their time and services, participated in war-related activities, such as civil defence, salvage collections and the purchase of war bonds and attended military parades and displays. Verdun's war was fought on the homefront and overseas by men and women born on both sides of the Atlantic and representing both of Canada's principal language groups. The message from Verdun was unity in war and community participation for victory.



R.B. Joan Adams, Senior Commandant.
Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps, March 1941
(Courtesy Miss R.B. Joan Adams)



Verdun Salvage Committee.
Verdun General Hospital in background.
June 16, 1943
(City of Verdun Archives)



Verdun Salvage Committee.
Collection depot behind Verdun General Hospital.
Verdun Auditorium in background.
June 16, 1943
(City of Verdun Archives)



Verdun Salvage Committee.
Depot near Verdun Auditorium.
From left, Georges Ladouceur, Deputy Warden of the Civil
Protection Committee, Dr. Charles Barr, Chief Warden,
and Mayor Edward Wilson. June 16, 1943
(City of Verdun Archives)



Verdun Defies Hitler!

**THE CLARION CALL SOUNDS TO BUY THE TOOLS
of WAR, for VICTORY and PEACE!**

Thousands of Verdun Citizens are already on active service. Thousands more are helping by their work on the home front, willingly, eagerly.



**BUY
VICTORY
BONDS**

Hitler sneers at us, pushes his panzar divisions and wafts his luftwaffe across the world, with a ruthless efficiency that takes no account of human feelings or human life.

Guile, cunning, treachery, contempt for moral values . . . plus a people driven by compulsion to do his will.

Can Democracy meet this challenge . . . on its own terms? It's for YOU to say, Verdun and hundreds of Canadian cities, towns, villages, must give the answer.

Let us make our dollars talk democracy! Keep Verdun on the map as a fighting outpost for a democratic victory!



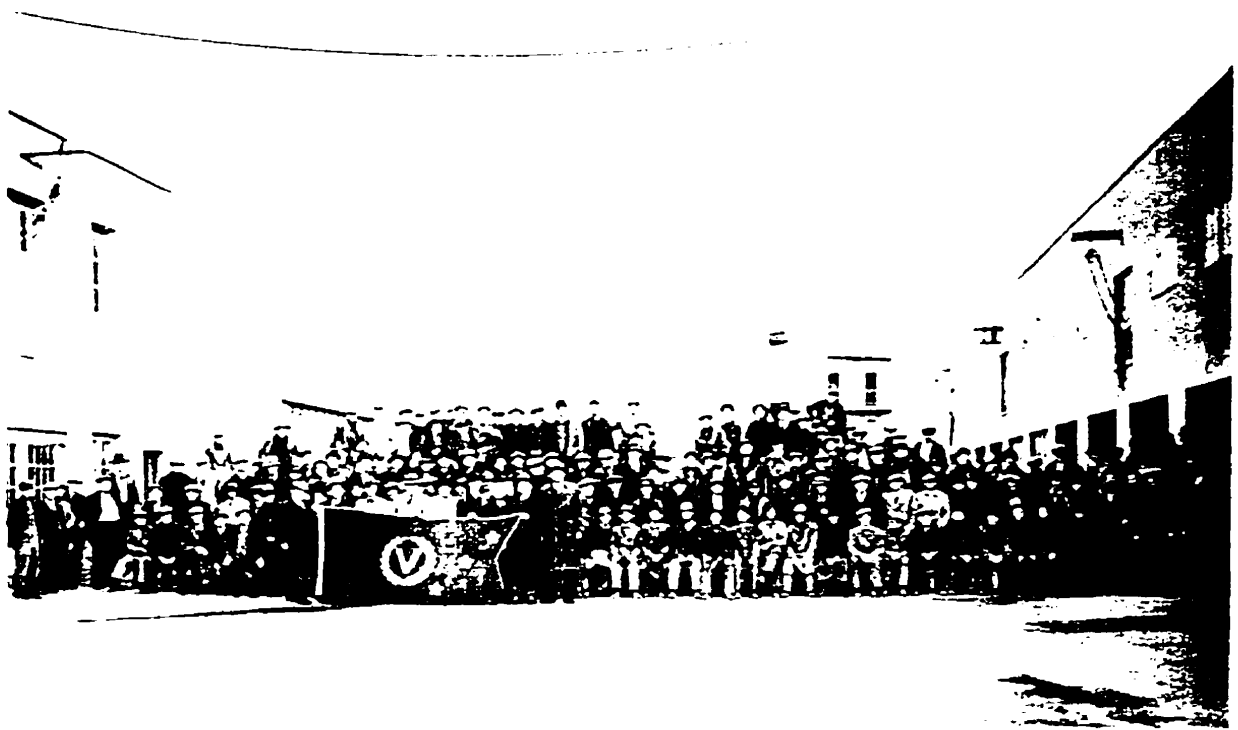
**BUY
VICTORY
BONDS**

The Mayor and Council of your City have implicit faith that all citizens will answer this call to the very utmost of their ability.

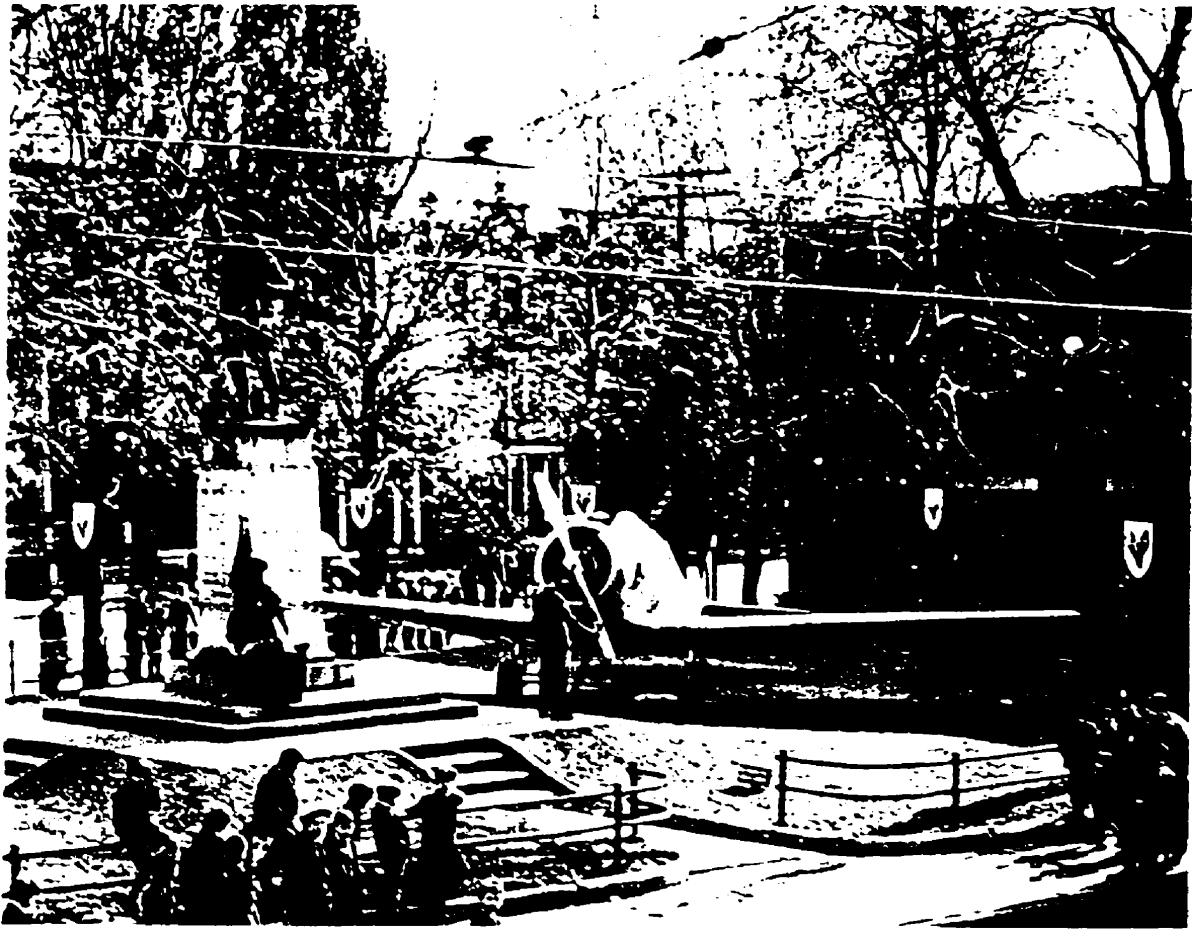
Verdun is Always in Front — We Will Not Fail!

HELP FINISH THE JOB — BUY VICTORY BONDS!

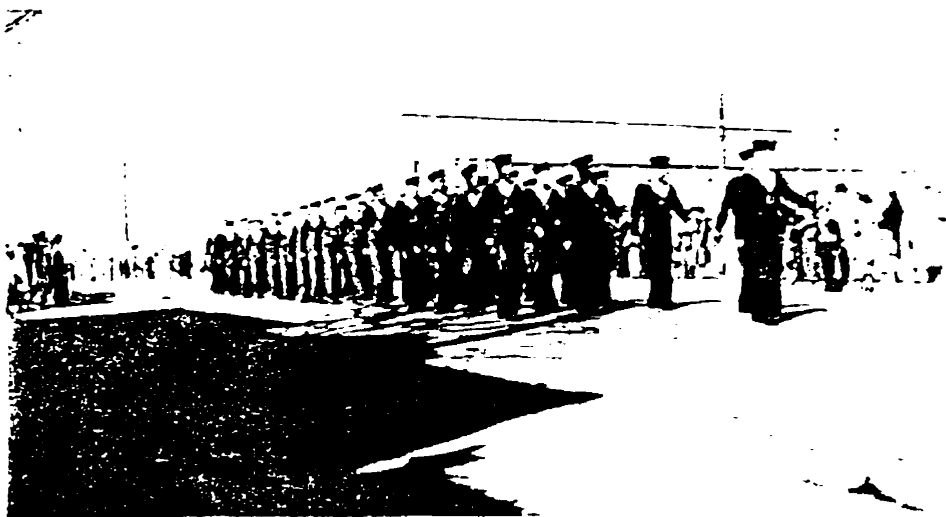
*The Guardian regularly linked national campaigns to local issues.
May 30, 1941*



Fifth Victory Loan Campaign.
Verdun city workers vastly oversubscribed their quota and
this flag was flown from City Hall in recognition.
November 1943
(City of Verdun Archives)

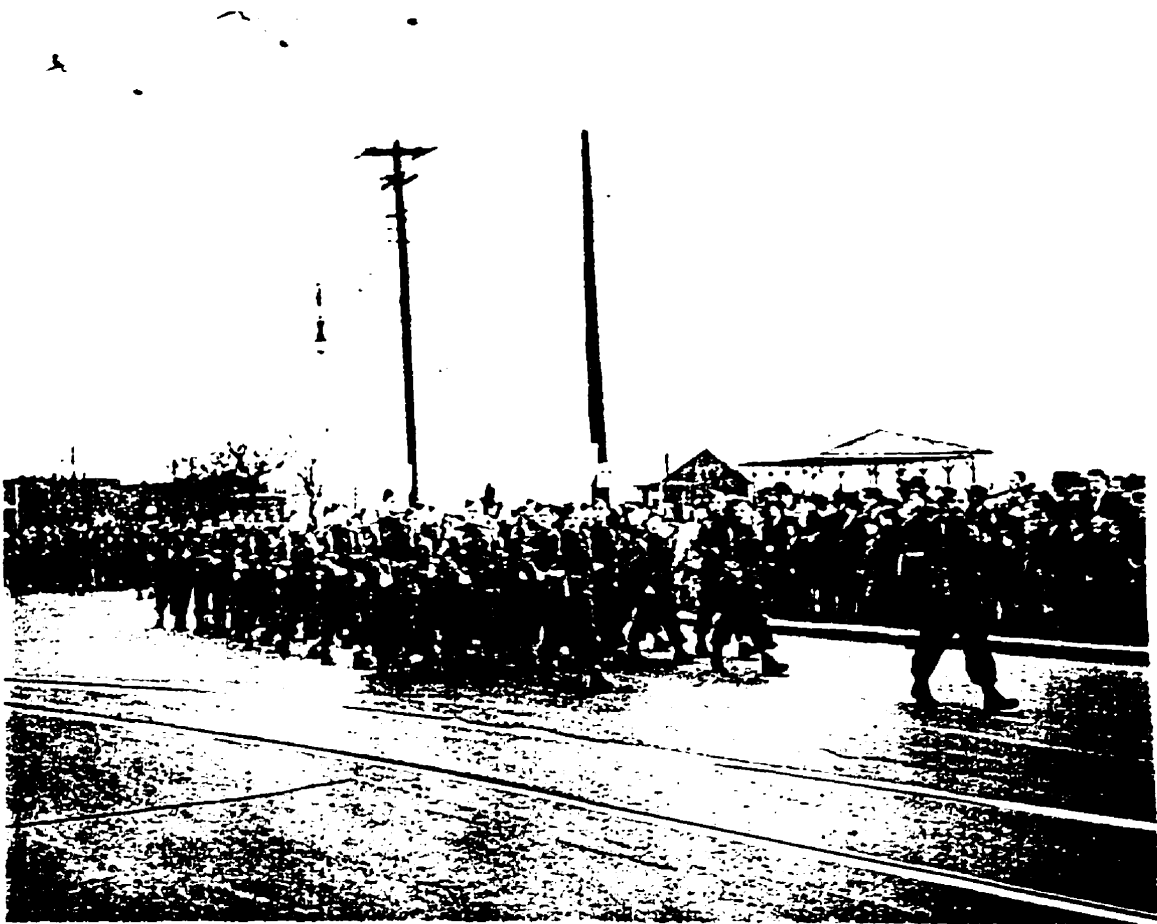


Fifth Victory Loan Campaign.
Harvard advanced trainer displayed next to Verdun's cenotaph.
Intersection of Lasalle and Wellington in city's east end.
October 1943
(City of Verdun Archives)

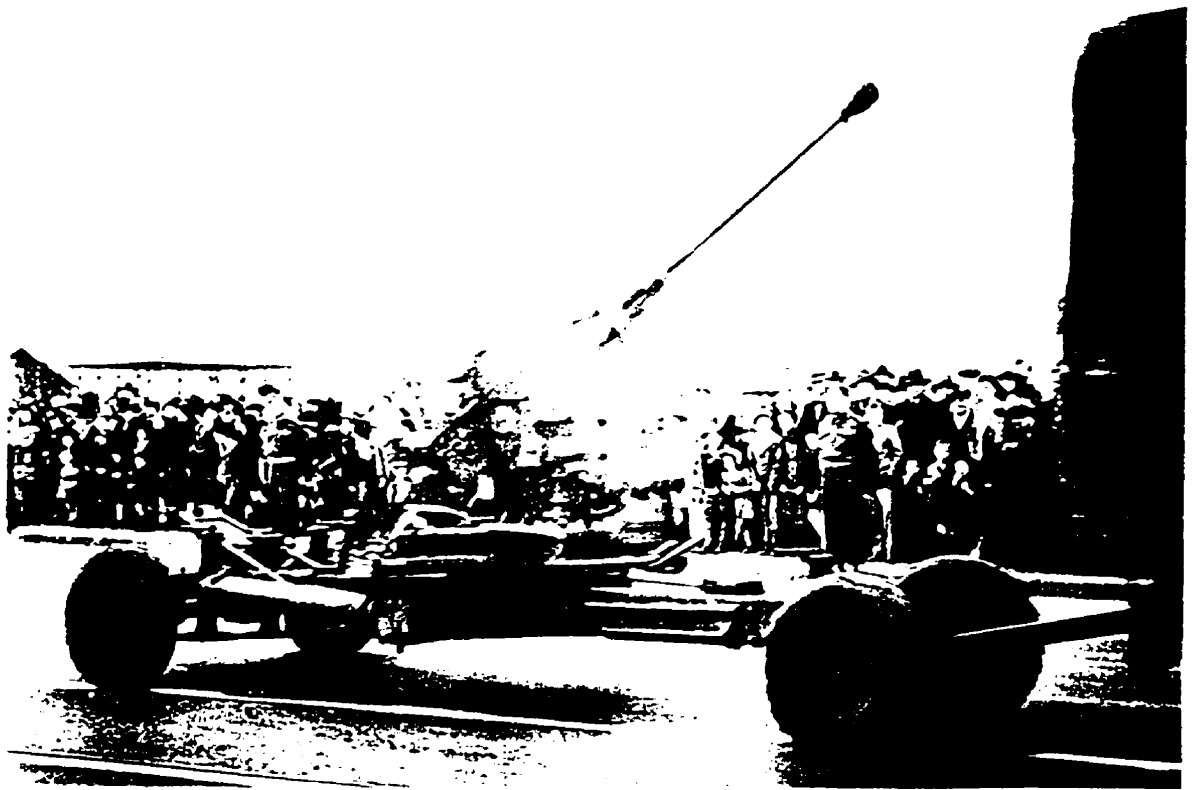


April 1942

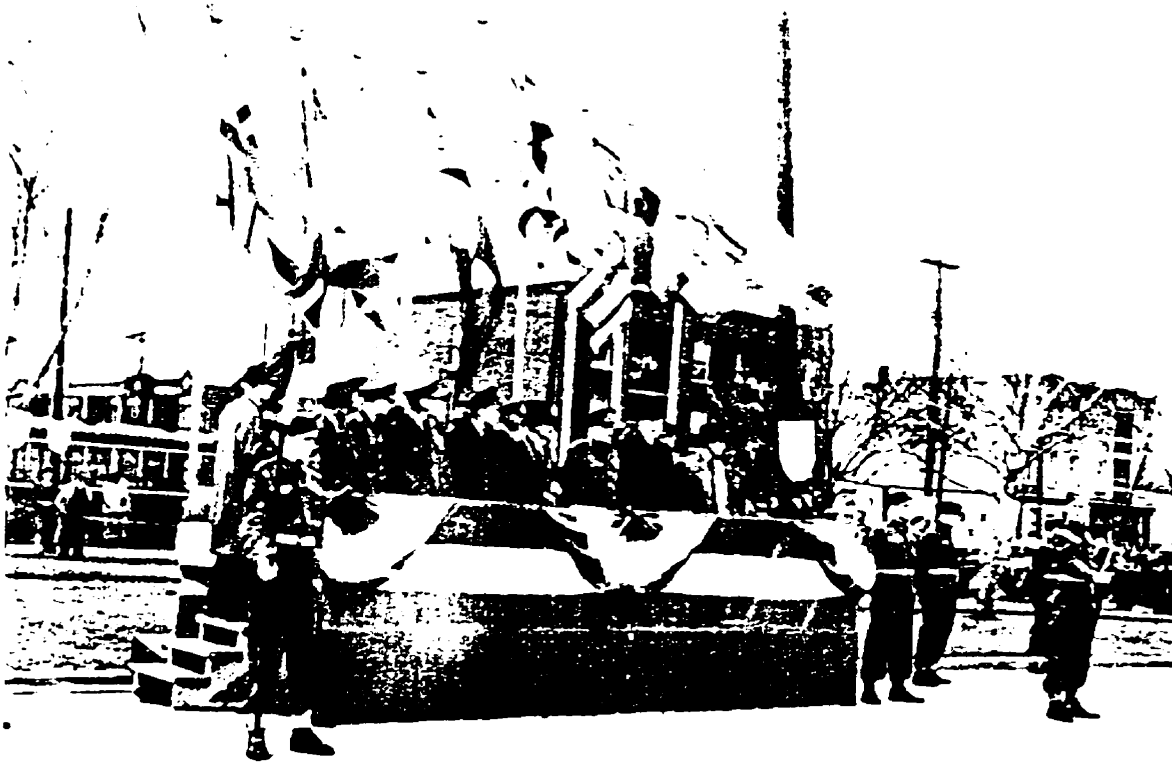
Sailors marching in the Ypres Day Parade April 1942.
Lasalle Boulevard. Verdun Auditorium in background.
(Courtesy Charles Elliott)



Ypres Day Parade 1944
Intersection of Lasalle and Woodland. Woodland Park in background.
(City of Verdun Archives)



Ypres Day Parade 1944
40 mm anti-aircraft gun
(City of Verdun Archives)



Reviewing stand. Ypres Day Parade 1944
Wilson in centre. To his left, Brigadier General E. de B. Panet and
J.J.L. Comeau, M.L.A.
(City of Verdun Archives)

CHAPTER 5

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE WAR

During the Second World War Verdun housed a large number of diverse social organizations. Many of these organizations grew from the city's sense of local identity and community. Others were based on linguistic, class, religious or gender lines. Still others united diverse social elements. Many were branches of larger, usually national organizations. Some were linked by the socially prominent: the names of well-known Verdunites sometimes appeared on different groups' letterheads.¹ The City of Verdun supported many of these organizations in some way or other, often by making available municipal facilities for meetings or special events.

In the 1930s and 1940s Verdun contained the densest concentration of British-patterned social groups in the Montreal area, their memberships made up in significant proportion by the British-born. Charitable organizations included the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.), the Canadian Legion, and the Army and Navy League. Recreational associations included many sporting clubs, choirs and dramatic societies. Among the nationalist fraternal orders were the Sons of England, the Ancient Order of Hibernians and various Scottish clan organizations. Though mainly composed of a Canadian-born rank-and-file, British-born leadership dominated civic organizations such as the Verdun Voters' League, Liberal, C.C.F. and Conservative Clubs, and the Verdun Workmen's Association. Another group in Verdun popular with the English-speaking community was the Young Men's Christian Association.² Many of these groups were united by their active participation in the war effort.

¹ Perhaps no one was more socially prominent in this manner than the mayor, Edward Wilson, who was a member (sometimes honorific) of a dozen or more community-based associations and boards with social, ethnic, religious, business, civic and educational affiliations.

² Reynolds, *The British Immigrant*, pp. 138-139; Davidson, "The Social Adjustment of British Immigrant Families", p. 211.

The two largest and most active French-Canadian charitable or fraternal organizations in Verdun were *La Société St-Jean-Baptiste* and *La Société St-Vincent-de-Paul*.

Monseigneur J.A. Richard, founder of Verdun's largest French-language parish, *Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs*, had been a cleric in Verdun for nearly half a century by 1939 and wielded great influence in the French-speaking community. Consequently, many high-profile French-language social organizations in Verdun were of a Catholic-nationalist nature, while other less visible groups such as *Les Gouttes de lait*, were social in outlook.³ Despite Verdun's English-speaking majority, *La Ligue des propriétaires de Verdun* and the local chamber of commerce were also almost entirely French-speaking organizations. French-Canadian social organizations and institutions in Verdun were fewer in number and less diverse in interest than their English-language counterparts. At first glance they appeared less supportive of the war effort; however, the Catholic nature of these groups often prevented them from too close an involvement with nominally Protestant organizations like the Y.M.C.A. or the Salvation Army. Moreover, especially early in the war English-Canadian or British groups in the community were identified with providing aid to British as opposed to Canadian causes. In fact, Verdun's considerable French-Canadian support for the war effort was reserved mainly for local initiatives and in support of Verdunites, notwithstanding their language.

Much of Verdun's war effort consisted of voluntary and charitable work. Leisure time was applied to patriotic pursuits. The goal of voluntary service was to "support the Fighting Forces and win the war".⁴ Most volunteers were women. Many worked for

³ Clavette, "*Des bons au chèques*" pp. 43-44. Monseigneur Richard almost single-handedly built-up the huge parish of *Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs* (as well as others in Verdun), controlled the Verdun Catholic School Commission and in 1932 had erected, amidst controversy, *l'Hôpital Christ-roi*, a Catholic institution.

⁴ Gertrude Laing, *A Community Organizes For War*, (Winnipeg, 1948), p. 1.

registered war charities⁵, such as the Red Cross or on behalf of an official Auxiliary War Service, such as the Salvation Army. Thousands were members of smaller, less conspicuous organizations which contributed their resources to larger groups. For example, the St. George Society often donated the proceeds of its social activities to the Mayor's Cigarette Fund. Many volunteers were inspired by patriotism; others sought distraction and social interaction. Most were moved by genuine devotion to the war and concern for those on active service.

One thing is certain: mutual aid was a well-established tradition in Verdun. With so many local men in uniform, volunteering energy and resources on the home front usually meant indirectly (and perhaps directly) helping a family member, neighbour or friend on active service. "War work and community work went hand in hand", wrote the historian of Winnipeg's domestic war effort.⁶ This truth made giving in Verdun a relatively easier task.

The precise number of Verdunites who belonged to various wartime voluntary associations is difficult to ascertain. In his study of the urban development of Halifax during the Second World War, Jay White has written that "producing quantitative figures on the precise dimensions of [citizens'] involvement would entail meticulous research into the activities and membership rolls of many organizations".⁷ Yet, this is what the present work attempts with selected larger patriotic organizations operating in Verdun during the war, as well as with the important organized responses from Verdun's churches

⁵ In 1939 Ottawa passed *An Act Relating to War Charities* which defined and regulated the activities of the tens of thousands of non-profit war charities officially registered with the government. A bewildering array of patriotic charities of all sizes were registered in this fashion. The war charities were administered by the Department of National War Services. See RG 44, Volumes 66 and 67, Registers of War Charities Organizations, NAC.

⁶ Laing, *Community Organizes for War*, p. 16.

⁷ Jay White, "Conscripted City: Halifax and the Second World War". Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1994, p. 253.

and school boards. Unfortunately many of the surviving records of local groups and institutions, small and large, are fragmentary and, in most cases, simply non-existent.

This chapter provides an account of the war-related activities of Verdun's Red Cross, Canadian Legion, Y.M.C.A., Salvation Army and *Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste*. These groups have been chosen because they offer linguistic, religious, gender, class and age dimensions from which to view the wartime responses of a sampling of Verdun's social organizations and, through these responses, that of Verdun's population in general. While English-speaking organizations often inter-acted with each other during the war, French- and English-language groups had little to do with one another.⁸ Some patriotic groups, such as the Red Cross, contained both French and English speakers. This group also fused together different strata of Verdun society. Patriotic impulses contributed to social unity but also highlighted differing, though not necessarily conflicting, approaches to the war effort on the part of local organizations divided by language, religion and function.

After the war Verdun's city clerk, Arthur Burgess, wrote that so many voluntary organizations were active in Verdun during the war that "each...is worthy of an historical record."⁹ What follows then is only part of that record, but a representative one.

THE VERDUN BRANCH OF THE CANADIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY

Within a week of Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 and before Canada was officially at war, representatives of about a dozen Verdun social organizations,

⁸ While both Canadian linguistic groups contributed to the war effort, they rarely did so jointly or, if so, with the French-language participation subordinated to the English. This might explain to some extent the lack of recognition accorded French-speaking groups generally in the English-language historiography of Canada's "home front" during the Second World War.

⁹ Arthur Burgess, "*Cité de Verdun: La Plus Grande Banlieue Residentielle de Montreal*", typewritten manuscript, March 1962, Box A-237, file 12, CVA.

including women's groups, church groups, mutual aid societies and fraternal associations, met at the city hall to organize a local chapter of the Canadian Red Cross Society. The meeting was called at the request of the provincial Red Cross headquarters, located in Montreal, and the groups attending included the I.O.D.E., the Verdun Sisterhood, *Les Gouttes de lait*, *L'Assistance maternelle*, *les Dames de charité* and the women's auxiliaries of the Royal Canadian Legion and other veterans' organizations.¹⁰

More than any other wartime body, the Red Cross rallied a wide cross-section of Verdun society to its cause. The reasons for this are clear. It possessed a long and distinguished record of public service in the face of war and disaster and had built up a solid public reputation for its efforts. It was an inclusive group, seeking and accepting the assistance of all Canadians. Moreover, its appeal was distinctly humanitarian and non-partisan or sectarian. Few could argue with its wartime role of alleviating suffering and loneliness. The Red Cross grew to be Canada's most recognizable war charity and it earned an exalted position in the ranks of wartime organizations. Red Cross volunteers, the majority female, raised funds, prepared articles of clothing and medical supplies for overseas servicemen and prisoners of war, staffed blood donor clinics and assisted with other wartime community programs.

Two weeks following this first meeting the Verdun branch of the Red Cross was formally chartered by the provincial organization. By this time the Y.M.C.A., the Verdun Community Club, Catholic and Protestant church organizations, the International Order of Foresters and other community groups had pledged to undertake work on behalf of the Red Cross. Each group, such as the Chalmers Church Red Cross or the I.O.D.E. Red Cross, was designated a "unit" or a "work group". These were self-guided and administered by the Verdun branch on behalf of provincial headquarters.

¹⁰ Council Minutes, September 7, 1939; *The Guardian*, September 8, 1939.

The City of Verdun generously supported this patriotic venture. The Red Cross received the use of the city hall for its executive meetings while the police station gymnasium, located on Lasalle Boulevard at Rielle Avenue, in the city's east end, accommodated the office space and warehouse needs of the organization for the duration of the war. In addition, the organization's furniture requirements were met from city stocks.¹¹

The Verdun Red Cross's executive committee consisted entirely of local political, community and business notables; the Red Cross was prestigious, especially in the early years of the war. Edward Wilson was the president of the chapter and Émile Ste-Marie, an alderman, was the organization's first vice-president. Ste-Marie was later replaced by another French-Canadian member of city council, Albert Rolland, a close associate of Wilson's. Others on the committee included J.R. French, Arthur Burgess, the city engineer, Henry Hadley, Dr. Charles Barr, who was involved in numerous wartime organizations and J.P. Dupuis, one of Verdun's leading merchants and employers. Despite the presence of these high-profile men, much of the organization and certainly most of the actual work of the Red Cross was undertaken by the women of Verdun. The separate "Ladies' Committee" was chaired by Elizabeth Wilson, the mayor's wife. She was the real head of the organization.¹² Edward and Elizabeth Wilson led Verdun's war by example.

An examination of the home addresses of the Red Cross's male and female executive committee members indicates once again that these were almost all drawn from Verdun's elite. Of the 23 officers and executive committee members in July 1944, 10 had French

¹¹ Executive Committee Minutes, September 18, 1939.

¹² *The Guardian*, September 22, 1939; Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Canadian Red Cross Society, Verdun Branch, February 11, 1944, Box A-331, file 5, CVA. Mrs. Wermenlinger, the wife of Verdun's M.P. and Mrs. Lafleur, the wife of the M.L.A., were also early Red Cross organizers. There is no evidence that their successors, the spouses of Paul-Émile Côté, M.P. or J.J.L. Comeau, M.L.A., ever became involved in the work of the Red Cross in any executive capacity.

surnames, 13 had English names and all but four lived in noticeably more affluent west-end Verdun. Nine of the ten men and women with French surnames lived there.¹³ The linguistic mix of committee members remained fairly constant throughout the war. But the Red Cross also had wide appeal among all classes in Verdun.¹⁴

The Guardian wasted no time in gloating that the Verdun branch had been "organized quicker and more completely than any other on the Island of Montreal".¹⁵ Before the month was out, Miss E. Huntley Duff, from the executive of the provincial headquarters, concurred, stating that "the City of Verdun has shown the way by a truly magnificent example unequalled in the Province of Quebec".¹⁶ In February 1940, less than two weeks before the death of her husband, the Governor General, Lord Tweedsmuir, Lady Tweedsmuir visited the Verdun Red Cross branch at its headquarters in the police station.¹⁷ This was considered high recognition; Lady Tweedsmuir, a patron of the Red Cross, did not visit every branch of the organization.

Verdun's first modest Red Cross fund-raising drive in November 1939 was a resounding success. The \$7200 raised from a community not yet fully recovered from the debilitating effects of the Great Depression was more than double the organizers' modest

¹³ Canadian Red Cross Society, Verdun Branch, (list of officers and executive committee), July 7, 1944, Box A-331, file 5, CVA.

¹⁴ This was not the case with another established women's group in Verdun. The local branch of the I.O.D.E. had only 11 active members in February 1940 - and this after 19 years of existence in Verdun. The I.O.D.E. was a middle-class organization and few Verdunites were attracted to it. In May 1940 the Verdun I.O.D.E. registered as a war charity and pledged itself to provide comforts and clothing, especially knitted goods, to Canadian troops slated to go overseas. *The Montreal Daily Star*, February 20, 1940; *The Guardian*, October 6, 1939 and February 23, 1940.

¹⁵ *The Guardian*, September 22, 1939.

¹⁶ *The Guardian*, September 29, 1939.

¹⁷ *The Guardian*, February 16, 1940.

target of \$3000. It was an impressive start to Verdun's wartime fund-raising record. During the campaign all of the city's nearly 17,000 households were canvassed by some 700 volunteers, 450 of whom were women. Patrons at movie theatres, concerts and miscellaneous social events were also solicited. Some 10,000 Verdun households contributed.¹⁸ Once a member of a household had donated to the appeal, a small Red Cross sticker was affixed to the door or window of the dwelling. Later, a follow up call was made on every home not displaying such a sticker. Most donations were given in proportion to the modest incomes of the contributors, who represented all areas of the city and included men, women and children from both language groups. The Red Cross instilled a sense of common purpose in wartime Verdun.

The provincial Red Cross campaign organizers singled out Verdun for its thorough canvassing methods and remarkable oversubscription. *The Montreal Daily Star* noticed too: the Red Cross appeal was stated to have "gripped the people of Verdun", and the Verdun branch was the only one mentioned in an article which appeared early in the campaign.¹⁹ Each district's class and family economies must be weighed into an analysis of the amounts raised in the Montreal area. The average contribution in Verdun, a densely-populated city containing many children and low wage-earners, was not high. It should come as no surprise that well-off, English-speaking Westmount, with less than half Verdun's population, contributed well over \$33,000 to the drive in the same time period.²⁰ In the following year more than \$10,000 was raised in Verdun, representing over 17,000 individual subscriptions.²¹

¹⁸ *The Guardian*, November 24, 1939 and March 15, 1940; *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 15, 1939.

¹⁹ *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 15, 1939. This system of canvassing was employed in Verdun throughout the war.

²⁰ *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 23, 1939.

²¹ *The Guardian*, January 24, 1941; Box A-331, file 5, CVA.

By early 1943, with virtually full employment across the country, provincial headquarters assigned the Verdun branch a fund-raising quota of \$14,000. By this time, local Red Cross organizers had divided Verdun along linguistic lines for the purposes of fund-raising. English- and French-speaking campaign managers were appointed to co-ordinate the drive. Each had the responsibility of targeting the public institutions of his own language such as schools, parishes, churches and hospitals and other community organizations. Verdun's Red Cross units, most of which could be identified as either English or French speaking, came under the supervision of the campaign chairmen.²² Each unit canvassed its members, parishes or neighbourhoods, as the case might have been. In this way, previously-established local or associational bonds were brought into play in furtherance of the appeal. The co-operation and generosity of both language groups ensured that Verdun's wartime Red Cross fund-raising quotas were always fully or oversubscribed.²³

Throughout the war years the proceeds from various benefit shows and events staged in Verdun were donated to the local Red Cross. One highly-publicized fund-raising activity was that of children's contributions. The stories of youngsters patriotically giving of their time and energies provided good newspaper copy and heart-warming accompanying photographs. Many Verdun children set up candy, baked goods or lemonade stands to raise money for the Red Cross. The first large number of such ventures in Verdun took place during the grim days of August 1940. The names and addresses of the children participating indicated almost all were English speaking and lived in the east-central part

²² *The Guardian*, March 19, 1943 and February 24, 1944.

²³ See Appendix C for the fund-raising data. In March 1944, a Red Cross appeal netted \$350.00 from Verdun's Catholic students, with a disproportionately high \$100.00 contributed by the city's only English-language parish, St. Willibrord's. *Procès-verbeaux du Conseil des Commissaires, Commission des Écoles Catholiques de Verdun (C.E.C.V.)*, March 14, 1944, *Archives de la C.E.C.V.*

of Verdun on one or other of the densely-populated avenues located there.²⁴ They had been encouraged by their parents to join in the war effort in their own small way. Though children's stands on street corners could be found throughout the war, sugar rationing, announced in 1942, made it more difficult to produce some of the more traditional confections. What is more, not all proceeds were destined for the Red Cross: in the later war years the children had a greater choice of charities.

Verdun's Red Cross women volunteers made bandages, medical supplies and bedding for hospital use, clothing for refugees and warm clothing, such as tuques, gloves, sweaters and socks, for the use of servicemen.²⁵ Some of the Verdun women worked at the police gymnasium but many worked at home or in their unit's meeting places. The nature of their work was usually an extension of their traditional maternal social roles as caring, nurturing providers. This did not seem to matter: their efforts were immense and valued highly by Canadian servicemen overseas.

Verdun's Chalmers United Church Red Cross unit in east-end Verdun, established immediately upon the outbreak of war, serves as an example of Verdun women's contributions. This group met every Wednesday at the church "where [by 1941] eight sewing machines were kept in operation". Most of their knitting was done at home, however. By the end of 1940, 71 women of the congregation worked in this unit, though on average only 35 attended the weekly working sessions. These women produced a total of 19,000 articles, including quilts and afghans, which were sent to members of the armed forces as well as to British victims of air raids. They did not officially wind up their activities until January 1946.²⁶ Although the Chalmers women believed theirs was the

²⁴ *The Guardian*, August 9, August 16, and August 23, 1940.

²⁵ *The Guardian*, November 3, 1939.

²⁶ *Chalmers United Church: Fifty Years 1899-1949*, (Verdun: 1949), pp. 18 and 21; Minutes of the 42nd to the 47th Annual Congregational Meetings 1941-1946, Minutes of Congregational Meetings, Book 2, Chalmers United Church, Verdun.

best Red Cross unit in Verdun. in April 1940 the single largest unit in the city was that of the large English-speaking Catholic parish of St. Willibrord, the boundaries of which extended throughout the city limits.²⁷

As the war progressed the Canadian Red Cross Society took on the responsibility of providing relief parcels for Allied prisoners of war. These parcels included food, medicine, various amenities and cigarettes and were prepared and packaged by Red Cross volunteers. Over eight million of these parcels were despatched from Canada during the course of the war, with one quarter of these being prepared in the Province of Québec.²⁸ The efforts of Verdun supporters of the Red Cross were poignantly rewarded in February 1944 when a repatriated prisoner of war appeared at the Verdun branch's annual meeting to recount in vivid personal detail the great importance placed on these parcels by Canadian prisoners in German hands. Sergeant André Michaud, a Verdunite, was captured at Dieppe as a member of *Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal*. He gave an "inspiring" address and responded to numerous questions regarding life behind the wire asked by the over 60 people in attendance. Michaud assured the gathering, in the words of the surviving minutes of the meeting, just "how grateful the men were for the service rendered by the Canadian Red Cross Society, without which service life in the Camp would be intolerable."²⁹ It was a gratifying experience for the men and women who had devoted so much time on behalf of Allied prisoners to hear first-hand that their efforts really did make a difference.

One of the most important tasks undertaken by the Red Cross during the war was to appeal for blood donations. By January 1944, Verdun's enthusiastic wartime responses to

²⁷ *The Guardian*, April 5, 1940.

²⁸ Auger and Lamothe, p. 109.

²⁹ Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Canadian Red Cross Society, Verdun Branch, February 11, 1944, Box A-331, file 5, CVA. Similar talks given by repatriated prisoners of war across Canada all mentioned the essential work of the Red Cross.

routine, Montreal-wide solicitations for blood persuaded the Red Cross to establish a permanent blood donor clinic in Verdun. At the time, the closest clinic to Verdun was on Ste. Catherine Street in downtown Montreal. At the end of 1943 there were 71 established clinics and 314 sub-clinics in Canada, two-thirds of which had opened in the previous 12 months. The idea of local clinics drew a positive response from communities across Canada, and Verdun was no exception.³⁰

The blood clinic galvanized a wide cross-section of Verdun society to action. A local French-speaking pharmacist, T.E. Gaucher, indicated his willingness to organize the clinic and publicized his intention in a full-page advertisement in the local press. The Lion's Club, composed mainly of English speakers, volunteered to sponsor and staff the proposed facility. *The Guardian* agreed to act as a "clearing house" for information, suggestions and offers of assistance. Edward Wilson, acting both as president of the Verdun Red Cross and as mayor, endorsed the proposal wholeheartedly. There seemed no doubt as to the willingness of Verdunites to support their facility. The Superintendent of Protestant Schools in Verdun, H.E. Grant, noted that

the population of Verdun consists mostly of Old Country people with a high percentage in the armed forces. Naturally, their relatives would appreciate a clinic in Verdun and...their response would be very good."³¹

The Guardian printed over two dozen quotations from leading citizens in support of the clinic, including words of encouragement from merchants, clergymen and heads of local institutions and social organizations drawn from both language communities.³²

³⁰ "So much is this service upon the hearts of the people of Canada that almost every community from coast to coast without a Blood Donor Clinic has been clamouring to provide one." *Facts on Red Cross Activities*, (Toronto: The Canadian Red Cross Society, 1944), p. 11, Box A-331, file 5, CVA.

³¹ Quoted in *The Guardian*, February 3, 1944.

³² *The Guardian*, February 3, 1944.

Following more than nine months' planning, preparation and lobbying, in November 1944 a Red Cross blood donor clinic was opened in Verdun using space donated by Defence Industries Limited (D.I.L.) in the munitions plant which earlier in the war had been established in Verdun's easternmost neighbourhood.³³ D.I.L. actually provided the staff for the clinic on an interim basis until the Verdun Lion's Club could provide properly trained volunteers. The over-burdened Montreal clinic transferred the files of all registered Verdun donors to the new site.

To sensitize the population to the need to make small sacrifices so that others might live, *The Guardian* published the moving story of Victor St. André, a handicapped Verdun tailor, described as "small and slight", who was said to have donated blood on 51 occasions thus far in the course of the war. Though unable to don a uniform, the French-speaking St. André, a member of the Lion's Club, was hailed as a selfless participant in a valued part of the war effort.³⁴ Whether imbued with additional patriotic spirit or simply shamed into donating as a result, Verdunites could not avoid following the lead. By the autumn of 1944 Canadian and Allied troops had suffered terrific casualties, especially in Normandy and Northwest Europe, and there was the promise of many more to come. In these urgent circumstances Verdunites were asked to give their blood.³⁵

The role of Verdun's French-Canadian social organizations in support of the Red Cross was also important. They had participated in all of the Red Cross's successes in Verdun including fundraising, producing goods, organizing the blood clinic and serving on the

³³ The D.I.L. plant is discussed in Chapter 6.

³⁴ *The Guardian*, November 2 and November 23, 1944.

³⁵ *The Guardian*, January 11, 1945. Unfortunately, less than three months after its hopeful beginnings, D.I.L. notified the Red Cross that a new contractual commitment with the Department of Munitions and Supply necessitated use of the clinic's space. The Verdun Red Cross could not replace the generosity thus far provided by D.I.L. and Verdun lost its much-coveted clinic early in 1945.

organization's executive committee. Verdun's three largest French Catholic parishes maintained active Red Cross units during the war.³⁶ This stands as a small example of the unheralded support for the war found in French-Canadian society, in Verdun and elsewhere. The Red Cross brought Verdunites of different languages and religions together.

In February 1941, the Verdun Red Cross trained 796 women in home nursing and in dealing with war emergencies of whom 514 were English speaking and 282 French speaking.³⁷ One Québec woman has recalled that because of their larger families, many French-speaking women had less disposable time to devote to voluntary services of any kind.³⁸ This indicates that the participation rates of French-Canadian women in patriotic organizations might have had less to do with wartime politics or their level of commitment to the war effort and more to do with family demographics and family income. They participated roughly in proportion to the linguistic balance existing in the community.

Before the war was two months old, the Verdun branch possessed an astonishing 35 units totalling 1200 women volunteers.³⁹ The Québec average at the end of 1939 was about 860 volunteers per branch, though national Red Cross statistics on membership seem to

³⁶ "Liste des organisations de charité dans les paroisses canadiennes-françaises de la Cité de Verdun", October 30, 1941, Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

³⁷ *The Guardian*, February 28, 1941; *The Montreal Daily Star*, March 13, 1940. Hundreds of local women continued to be trained in home nursing and first aid throughout the war, though the numbers diminished as the war progressed. By the end of 1943, 276 were enrolled. Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Canadian Red Cross Society, Verdun Branch, February 11, 1944, Box A-331, file 5, CVA.

³⁸ Auger and Lamothe, p. 111.

³⁹ *The Guardian*, November 3, 1939.

have been exaggerated, or at least elastic.⁴⁰ Within a few months of its creation, the Verdun Red Cross branch was one of the largest in Québec and was said to be the most productive on the Island of Montreal. By February 1941 the organization claimed 1400 regularly active volunteers, which amounted to one in 45 Verdunites or, if one can reasonably assume that virtually all of the volunteers were female, one in 18 females over the age of 14.⁴¹

One study of the lives of Québec women during the Second World War estimated that in July 1942 there were 35,000 Québec women knitting and sewing articles of clothing or rolling bandages for the Red Cross, of whom perhaps 80% were French speaking. They were scattered across 190 provincial branches, averaging about 185 workers per branch. In light of these figures, Verdun's membership and production totals are impressive.⁴²

⁴⁰ The claim, for example, that in 1943 over 2.6 million Canadians of all ages worked for the Red Cross, is somewhat misleading given that only between 700,000 and 800,000 of these were women workers producing items for overseas distribution, a ratio at any given time of between 26-30%. The remainder were volunteers engaged in other essential, though often occasional, work such as staffing offices, hospitals or clinics. The figure also includes hundreds of thousands of school children working for the Red Cross from time to time as a regular school activity. See the booklet, *Facts on Red Cross Activities*, (Toronto: The Canadian Red Cross Society, 1944), p. 31, Box A-331, file 5, CVA. See also The Canadian Red Cross Society's *Annual Report*, 1939, RG 44, Volume 39, NAC.

⁴¹ *The Guardian*, February 27, 1941; 1941 Census, Volume II, pp. 256-257; In 1944, the city estimated that at its peak, however, the Red Cross comprised 1300 women organized in 33 sub-groups. Arthur Burgess, "Verdun's War Effort", *Canada's Weekly*, April 14, 1944 (published for Canadian servicemen in Britain), p. 41, Box A-242, file 50, "Période de Guerre", CVA. On the other hand, *The Montreal Daily Star*, August 16, 1941, using municipally-supplied statistics, stated 1800 Verdun women were engaged in Red Cross work. Whichever figure is most accurate, it seems that over 1400 Verdun women during the war worked for the Red Cross at one time or another.

⁴² Auger and Lamothe, pp. 109-111. Verdun Red Cross production data is listed in Appendix D.

The proliferation of varied wartime charitable organizations and patriotic causes at the national and local levels taxed the community's resources, however. There were limits to the availability of volunteers and individuals had to make difficult choices. The increased availability of war work for women also eroded the time available for charitable work. By 1941 this competition began to diminish the Verdun Red Cross's membership. At the end of that year, the local branch was down to 26 units totalling 668 volunteer workers, less than half the estimated available support earlier that year. Twelve months later there were only 19 units totalling 496 workers.⁴³ While the Verdun Red Cross managed to increase the output of medical supplies and clothing for overseas servicemen and refugees every year up to 1944, the local committee was forced to do so with a shrinking number of participating units and a significantly depleted cadre of volunteers.

Early in 1943 Elizabeth Wilson explained that the dwindling number of Verdun Red Cross workers was due to the fact many women volunteers had decided to work for the auxiliary units of regiments or services in which their male relatives were enlisted. This decision provided a personal meaning and immediacy to their efforts, usually unavailable in Red Cross work. The great number of Verdun enlistees acted as an indirect drain on local Red Cross resources. This did not reflect a diminution in the volunteering spirit of Verdun women in general: it merely meant that this spirit was more widely diffused and made more difficult to trace. Mrs. Wilson also noted that by the end of 1942 many Red Cross volunteers had taken jobs in war industry.⁴⁴ It was difficult for them to be both wage workers and volunteers, especially when these tasks were added to the well-established female responsibilities of work in the home.

⁴³ Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Canadian Red Cross Society, Verdun Branch, February 9, 1943, Box A-331, file 5, CVA.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Canadian Red Cross Society, Verdun Branch, February 9, 1943, Box A-331, file 5, CVA.

By December 31, 1943 the Verdun Red Cross, still productive, could muster 467 volunteers spread over 22 units, the slight rise in the number of units further indicating that their individual sizes were shrinking.⁴⁵ At the start of 1945 the Chalmers United Church chapter described above numbered 46 women, representing a decline in membership of 35% from one of Verdun's best Red Cross groups organized by one of the city's most patriotic churches.⁴⁶

The Verdun branch of the Red Cross attracted the largest number of regular and occasional volunteer workers and program participants of any war-related or patriotic organization in Verdun. Though membership declined as the war progressed, the activities of the Red Cross for nearly six years continued to be the focal point of the war effort for hundreds of Verdunites of all backgrounds, the overwhelming majority of whom were women.

THE CANADIAN LEGION

Following the Great War Verdun became well known in the Montreal area as a veterans' community. By 1939 Verdun possessed four separate veterans' groups: the Canadian Legion, Branch (No. 4) of the British Empire Service League (B.E.S.L.); the Canadian Corps Association, Verdun Section No. 1; the Army and Navy Veterans in Canada; and the Canadian National Railway War Veterans' Association. In addition, with nearly 900

⁴⁵ Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Canadian Red Cross Society, Verdun Branch, February 11, 1944, Box A-331, file 5, CVA. There is no surviving evidence to determine whether or not there was a language element to this decline in membership.

⁴⁶ Minutes of the 42nd to the 47th Annual Congregational Meetings 1941-1946, Chalmers United Church, Verdun. Jay White, in his study of Halifax during the war, noted in a general discussion of female voluntarism that "enthusiasm waned in the latter stages of the war when the novelty of the experience wore off and the long hours and meagre rewards began to take their toll." See "Conscripted City", p. 254.

Newfoundlanders living in Verdun⁴⁷, the Newfoundland War Veterans' Association established a branch in the city in 1942. The largest of these groups was the Canadian Legion and this organization played a significant patriotic and social role in Verdun during the Second World War. While the Verdun Legion is introduced here, many of its varied wartime activities, such as its efforts to ameliorate the wartime housing crisis and assist the civil re-establishment of discharged soldiers, are examined in other chapters. Documentary evidence for Verdun's Legion branch no longer exists due to the loss by fire of wartime records at both the Verdun Legion and at the Legion's Québec Command headquarters.

In 1919 a branch of the Great War Veterans Association (G.W.V.A.), at the time the largest veterans' group in Canada, was established in Verdun. This was hardly surprising given the fact that perhaps a staggering 20% of the population of that city had been in uniform during the First World War. In 1926, as a result of a national amalgamation of returned servicemen's organizations, Verdun's G.W.V.A. branch became a branch of the Canadian Legion. The local Legion's impressive headquarters, the Great War Memorial Hall, located in the centre of Verdun at the intersection of Verdun and Willibrord avenues, was officially opened in 1929 by the Governor General, Viscount Willingdon.

Branch No. 4 was a working-man's institution. J. Arthur Mathewson, K.C., the legal advisor to the Verdun Legion, wrote in 1939 that "most of the fathers of the Branch were men without financial resources and without great influence"⁴⁸. The members of the executive of the Verdun Legion were almost exclusively made up of 'other ranks', not officers as was often the case in other branches. The President of the Verdun branch for most of the war was Arthur H. James, who succeeded F.C. Stapley, M.M., in 1940. In

⁴⁷ 1941 Census, Volume 2, pp. 718-719.

⁴⁸ *The 1939 Anniversary Programme of the Verdun (No. 4) Branch of the Canadian Legion, British Empire Service League, Verdun, October 31, 1939, p. 6.*

October 1939 there were 4197 Legion members in Québec. At the end of May 1940 there were 4573 members in 53 branches, an increase of 10% in only a matter of months. The Verdun branch numbered at least 400 to 500 members.⁴⁹

A review of the frequently-changing members of Branch No. 4's executive committee in the period 1919-1939 shows not a single French surname or man whose mother tongue was French. Similarly, during the Second World War the Legion was led exclusively by English-speakers. A listing of the 55 active members of the branch who had died during the interwar period shows 53 English surnames and two French surnames. Although Verdun's Legion branch was an almost entirely English-speaking organization, there were at least some French-speaking members given that a commemorative program of the branch's 20th anniversary celebrations published in 1939 offered a few French translations of some statistics on Canada's involvement in the Great War. A congratulatory message from Mayor Edward Wilson also appeared in both languages.⁵⁰

In the interwar period Verdun's Legion was a leader in the national organization's struggle with the federal government to obtain improved pensions and disability allowances for veterans. The Legion also assisted numerous Verdun veterans and their families who found themselves in straitened financial circumstances. The Legion felt that "the Branch ha[d] won an honoured place in the Community of Verdun."⁵¹ By 1939, with its large

⁴⁹ *The Montreal Daily Star*, May 31, 1940 and *1939 Anniversary Programme*, pp. 11 and 31.

⁵⁰ *1939 Anniversary Programme*, pp. 18-19 and inside back cover.

⁵¹ *1939 Anniversary Programme*, p. 31. In 1935 the federal government established a committee to investigate unemployment among Canadian veterans. The authors of a study of Great War veterans' rehabilitation termed Verdun a "notorious" case in the eyes of the federal government. Verdun's veterans' groups zealously investigated the plight of their unemployed, destitute members, providing the government commission with many sad case studies. See Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), pp. 215 and 218.

membership and modern facilities, the Legion had become a pillar of Verdun's English-speaking society.

During the Second World War Ottawa designated the Canadian Legion as one of the few official Auxiliary Services. The others were the Y.M.C.A., the Salvation Army and the Knights of Columbus. All of these organizations worked together and benefitted from federal government support for their activities in Canada and overseas. The Legion's patriotic credentials included its twenty-year struggle on behalf of veterans. Moreover, Legion members clearly knew more about the nature of war and the demands required of a wartime society than any other social group.⁵² Verdun's Legion branch (like its parent national body) passed many war-related (and war-like) resolutions, offered advice on the war effort, placed its facilities and expertise at the disposal of the nation, and offered its services and financial assistance to many patriotic and charitable causes.⁵³ Much of No. 4's correspondence was directed at City Hall, where the Legion generally found a supporter in Edward Wilson. Every week *The Guardian* reported on the Legion's social and recreational activities and frequently mentioned its financial contributions to local groups such as the C.P.C. or the M.C.F. The Legion took on a visible wartime presence

⁵² Great War veterans accepted it as their right and duty to examine critically Canada's war effort. Many veterans also felt they had bequeathed a sacred trust to all those who would follow them that the principles for which they had fought would be upheld. Shortly after the outbreak of war, Lord Tweedsmuir told the Executive Council of the Legion that the organization had a major role to play in the prosecution of the war because veterans "are the people with knowledge and experience" who could "teach the younger generation the rudiments of the business and keep...the national spirit keen." Quoted in James Hale, *Branching Out: The Story of the Royal Canadian Legion*, (Ottawa: The Royal Canadian Legion, 1995), p. 61.

⁵³ The Canadian Corps Association (of which several provincial executive members belonged to the Verdun chapter), though a smaller organization, nevertheless also routinely despatched letters and copies of resolutions to City Hall on a range of war-related topics. Even before Canada (or Britain) was at war, the C.C.A. wrote to the mayor and city council deploring price-gouging and "war profiteering" by local merchants. See letter from George Aubé, Secretary, Canadian Corps Association, Verdun Section No. 1, September 2, 1939, Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

with its well-orchestrated parades and commemorative ceremonies such as the observance of Remembrance Day. These events took on patriotic overtones and were used as platforms by the Legion to promote its patriotic views and remind citizens of their wartime civic obligations. Verdunites were a receptive audience.

One of the Legion's major wartime contributions was the material assistance and comfort it provided to the needy or distraught families of overseas servicemen. The Legion was described as having taken a significant but "silent" role throughout the war in assisting these Verdunites.⁵⁴ Long before the end of the war a severe housing shortage afflicted Canadian urban centres. Veterans and their families often were forced to live in demeaning conditions. The situation was especially acute in a city like Verdun where, by 1945 the population had swelled by some 10,000. Concerned that the housing crisis eroded civilian morale, the Legion attempted to find shelter for its members' and servicemen's distressed families. The Legion also felt that the housing situation adversely affected the troops' morale and publicly questioned why Canadians should be asked to fight tyranny overseas when their loved ones were unable even to find decent, affordable housing at home. Verdun veterans' and servicemen's families facing eviction registered with the Legion in the hope shelter might be found for them.⁵⁵ The Legion also took on the responsibility of comforting bereaved families, a task which in Verdun was increasingly common in the last two years of the war.

Throughout the war the Dominion Command of the Canadian Legion vociferously supported conscription and total national mobilization, a position adopted at the organization's Dominion Conventions in the 1930s and confirmed during its convention in Montreal in May 1940. The Legion urged the immediate national conscription of

⁵⁴ *The Guardian*, December 14, 1944.

⁵⁵ See Chapter 7 for a review of Verdun's housing crisis and the Legion's prominent role in the community's struggle to ameliorate the situation.

manpower, wealth and industry and remained hostile to the Ottawa's refusal to impose conscription.⁵⁶ During the 1942 plebiscite to release the federal government from its previous pledge not to impose compulsory overseas service, the Verdun Legion campaigned locally for the "yes" side (even though the Legion considered the government's strategy a half-measure). The Legion's views obviously represented much of English-speaking Verdun since the city voted 63% in favour of the measure.⁵⁷

While identified very positively with the welfare of Canadian service people, the Legion's aggressive stance and rhetoric on conscription and other wartime issues also confirmed it as an essentially English-speaking, Empire-minded organization, a situation reflected in the views and membership of the Verdun branch. This also contained the potential to divide wartime Verdun along linguistic lines. Throughout the war the Verdun Legion proved a strong and able supporter of Verdunites in uniform and helped define the community's wartime self-perception; but it did little to improve local language relations.

THE Y.M.C.A.

To meet the needs of an English-speaking Protestant population which had doubled in the previous decade, a branch of the Young Men's Christian Association opened in Verdun in 1929. An impressive recreational and sporting facility, known as the Southwestern Branch of the Y.M.C.A., was completed in 1930 on Gordon Avenue, above Bannantyne, in the east end of the city. The City of Verdun co-operated with the Y.M.C.A. in every way possible and the "Y" soon occupied a very important place in the social, recreational and sporting life of Verdun. Not long after it opened, nearly two dozen other community groups began using the Y.M.C.A. building in some capacity, especially for swimming and

⁵⁶ Clifford H. Bowering, *Service: The Story of the Canadian Legion 1925-1960*. (Ottawa: Dominion Command, Canadian Legion, 1960), pp. 103-121; *The Montreal Daily Star*, May 28, 1940.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 8 for a full discussion of the 1942 plebiscite.

as a meeting place.⁵⁸ With 900 members by 1932-33, the "Y" rapidly became the largest community organization in Verdun (though some of its members lived in the nearby Montreal parishes of Côte St-Paul and Ville-Émard). The Southwestern Branch was a "Family Y", one of only a handful in all of Canada which allowed female members.⁵⁹ During the Great Depression the Y.M.C.A. implemented many useful programs to assist unemployed and destitute Verdunites. At the end of 1941, Verdun's ever-growing "Y" boasted 1330 members.⁶⁰

At the outbreak of war in 1939 Verdun's Southwestern branch, following the "Y"'s national policy, "made available its physical facilities and its personnel to whatever extent they might be needed for the duration of the...conflict".⁶¹ With the large influx of young men into the armed forces, suitable training, sporting and recreational facilities in the Montreal area were in great demand. With its modern swimming pool, Verdun's "Y" proved very popular with the military. From mid-September until the end of January 1940, 3249 uniformed personnel used the pool, gymnasium and lounge. In the early months of the war it was commonplace to see soldiers marching toward the Verdun Y.M.C.A. As with other branches across Canada, the Southwestern "Y" provided any man in uniform full membership privileges.⁶²

⁵⁸ Harold C. Cross, *One Hundred Years of Service with Youth: The Story of the Montreal Y.M.C.A.*, (Montreal: Southam Press, 1951), pp. 288, 317 and 331. The Verdun "Y" did not operate a hostel. N.D.G. did not get its own branch of "the Y" until 1940.

⁵⁹ Davidson, p. 213.

⁶⁰ "Report of Member Associations for the Calendar Year 1941" and letter from Walter Kemball, Executive Secretary of the Southwestern Branch, to R.E.G. Davis of the National Council of the Y.M.C.A., May 16, 1941, MG 28, I 95, Volume 291, file 17, NAC.

⁶¹ Annual Report of the Southwestern Y.M.C.A. 1939-1940, MG 28, I 95, Volume 291, file 18, NAC.

⁶² Annual Report of the Southwestern Y.M.C.A. 1939-1940.

The local "Y"'s women's volunteer committee offered weekly teas, socials and dances to troops stationed in, or passing through, Montreal who needed distraction. Similar groups were established at other Y.M.C.A. facilities around Montreal. Women members from Verdun's "Family Y" also established a Red Cross unit and provided home nursing courses.⁶³ Miss Betty Allen, a survivor from the first British ship lost in the war, the passenger liner *Athenia*, which was torpedoed on September 3, 1939, spoke to a large audience at the "Y" about her experiences at the time of the sinking. The event aroused considerable interest since 21 Verdunites, most returning from visiting relatives, had been aboard the ill-fated vessel.⁶⁴ Highlighting the important contribution offered by the Verdun "Y" early in the war, Walter Kemball, the Executive Secretary of the Southwestern branch, was selected to chair a committee made up of representatives from various Montreal social groups to co-ordinate all auxiliary services of a recreational nature in Military District No. 4.⁶⁵

Many of the "Y"'s regular recreational activities were transformed into war-related, patriotic work. For example, boys from the modelling club and other arts and crafts groups devoted thousands of hours to making wooden model airplanes for use by instructors of the R.C.A.F. The Verdun Arts and Trade School assisted in this task by allowing the "Y" to use its power tools to speed up the production process. Verdun High School students, also seeking to help, later undertook the basic woodworking of the

⁶³ Cross, *One Hundred Years of Service*, p. 325; Annual Report of the Southwestern Y.M.C.A. 1939-1940.

⁶⁴ Annual Report of the Southwestern Y.M.C.A. 1939-1940; *The Guardian*, September 8, 1939. Mrs. Gladys MacFarlane and Miss Hannah Baird, who were lost in the sinking, can be said to have been Verdun's first fatal casualties of the Second World War. See *The Montreal Daily Star*, October 10, 1939.

⁶⁵ Annual Report of the Southwestern Y.M.C.A. 1939-1940.

models while the "Y" modelling club continued to finish and paint the airplanes.⁶⁶ This provides a good illustration of Verdun youths from different organizations working together in a war-related cause.

Still, these groups were all English-speaking. There was little interaction between the Southwestern "Y" and Verdun's French-language community. The "Y" was an English-language institution with a previous history of evangelical Protestantism. French-Canadian Catholics traditionally had shunned the organization and continued to do so at this time even though the "Y" had replaced its mission-oriented character with a greater concern for sports and recreation. Of the 195 boys and girls enrolled in the "Y"'s "Summer Vacation Club" in 1937, only two attended French Catholic schools while another 21 were members of English Catholic St. Willibrord Parish. Moreover, half of these youths lived west of Desmarchais Boulevard (the traditional dividing line between east-end, poorer, mainly French-speaking Verdun and the better-off, mainly English-speaking west end) and only 7% were from east of Church Avenue, arguably the poorest section of Verdun. The Y.M.C.A. was used mainly by Verdun's more financially secure families.⁶⁷

There had always been a good deal of co-operation between the "Y" and the local Protestant school board and local Protestant churches. A listing of the 63 groups using the "Y" during the first year of the war indicates that only a single French-language

⁶⁶ "Model Aeroplane Building By Y.M.C.A. Boys in Co-operation with the R.C.A.F., Department of Armaments", no date (1941?) in MG 28, I 95, Volume 291, file 18, NAC; *The Guardian*, October 3, 1941.

⁶⁷ See MG 28, I 95, Volume 291, file 18, NAC. Davidson, p. 97, noted that Verdun's "Y" was "an institution...not much used by the poorer classes." It must also be pointed out that east of Church Avenue, there was less overall population as well as a lower percentage of English speakers than elsewhere in Verdun.

organization was associated with the "Y", and that was *l'Église Bethany*, a Protestant church. The Y.M.C.A. was an English-speaking, Protestant, war-conscious association.⁶⁸

The Verdun Y.M.C.A. was also conscious of the role it could play in maintaining civilian defence workers' morale. In early 1941, R.S. Hosking, of the National Council of the Y.M.C.A., met with a representative of Canadian Industries Limited (C.I.L.), the parent company of Defence Industries Limited, Verdun's ammunition manufacturing plant. Together they explored the possibility of organizing recreational and sporting activities for war workers in Verdun, a service the "Y" was successfully providing at the D.I.L. plant in Brownsburg, Québec.⁶⁹ The "Y"'s Executive Director in Verdun, Kemball, felt that the excellent facilities of the Southwestern Branch, located less than two kilometres from the D.I.L. plant, could be put to better war use if an arrangement with D.I.L.-Verdun could be reached. One of the stumbling blocks was the initial reluctance of D.I.L.-Verdun to invest money into recreation and the "Y" had to convince the company of the merits of its proposal. From 1942 many D.I.L. inter-plant sporting competitions were arranged by the "Y" between the Verdun, Villeray, Montreal Works and Brownsburg plants.⁷⁰ The Verdun "Y" played an important role in improving morale in Montreal-area defence industries.

⁶⁸ The 1939-1940 activities brochure of the Southwestern Y.M.C.A. detailed a French language course being offered. French sounded exotic: "If you want the *savoir faire* to rattle off a French phrase or two *en passant*; while your friends envy you that certain *je ne sais quoi* which will make you the howling success you wish to be; Mlle. Idola St. Jean [the well-known feminist activist] of the Extension Department of McGill University will help you to accomplish the business *comme il faut*..." See MG 28, I 95, Volume 291, file 18, NAC.

⁶⁹ R.S. Hosking, note to file of February 4, 1941, MG 28 I 95, Volume 108, file 20, NAC.

⁷⁰ Letter from Walter Kemball, Executive Secretary of the Southwestern Branch of the Y.M.C.A. to Richard S. Hosking, National Council of the Y.M.C.A., June 7, 1941, and additional material in MG 28 I 95, Volume 108, file 20, "Defence Industries Limited, Brownsburg, Quebec, Correspondence and Miscellaneous 1940-1944", NAC.

The war allowed the "Y" to enhance its already strong leadership role in Verdun's Protestant community. The Y.M.C.A. integrated wartime activities into its regular schedule of events and acted as the focal point for many English-speaking, Protestant Verdunites' patriotic efforts. But unlike the Red Cross, the Y.M.C.A. did not play a major role in bridging social barriers in the interests of common patriotic pursuits.

THE SALVATION ARMY

At the time of the Munich Crisis in September 1938, the Salvation Army was the first Canadian organization to offer its services and resources to the government in the event of war. In November 1939 the Salvation Army was accorded official status as a Canadian Auxiliary Service by Ottawa. Its War Services organizations were known collectively as the "Red Shield", which had been the emblem of the Salvation Army's war efforts during the Great War.⁷¹

Verdun was home to a small Salvation Army citadel which had distinguished itself in the 1930s by its generous support to a community in socio-economic distress. Indeed, most Verdunites, and Canadians generally, had come to view the Salvation Army as more of a charitable institution and provider of social services than as a spiritual movement and, if anything, its activities during the Second World War confirmed this view.⁷² The 1941 census, showed a mere 126 Verdun adherents to this denomination. Despite its small numbers, during the course of the war Verdunites of different spiritual allegiances were able to repay the Salvation Army for its earlier services to the community. Religion was not the point: war charity was. Hundreds of Verdunites worked as Salvation Army volunteers and thousands more donated money. The Second World War marked the first

⁷¹ Scott Young, *The Red Shield in Action: A Record of Canadian Salvation Army War Services in the Second Great War*, (Toronto: F.F. Clarke and Co., 1949), pp. 3-6.

⁷² R.G. Moyles, *The Blood and Fire in Canada: A History of the Salvation Army in the Dominion 1882-1976*, (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1977), pp. 207-208.

time in the "Army"'s history that it had relied on massive volunteer assistance from Canadians who were not of its own denomination. It also began to rely on the organizational and administrative contributions of "influential non-Salvationists" in ensuring the success of its Red Shield campaigns.⁷³

In early November 1939 the Verdun Salvation Army held its first "tag day" which yielded \$539.00 in support of its war services.⁷⁴ In February 1940 Alderman George Brown assumed the chairmanship of the Salvation Army's campaign organization in Verdun for its week-long "War and General Services Campaign" to be held the following month. Arthur Burgess also acted as a prominent local organizer and among the 31 appointed canvassers could be found Brown, several municipal officials and policemen and Kemball of the Y.M.C.A. Nine of these were French Canadians, a high figure for a Protestant evangelical sect.⁷⁵ An official association with the City of Verdun was highly welcome news to the Salvation Army. Lionel E. Brittle, the Campaign Director of the Québec Salvation Army, was warmly complimentary in a message to Brown, noting "the very thorough manner in which the City of Verdun has been organized for other campaigns and the splendid results obtained...[W]e know from your past record that any advice we may offer to you in this connection would be superfluous".⁷⁶ With the war only a few months old, Verdun already was considered a most patriotic and generous community.

⁷³ Moyles, *The Blood and Fire in Canada*, p. 173.

⁷⁴ *Le Messager, édition centenaire*, December 15, 1976.

⁷⁵ Salvation Army War and General Services Campaign, March 11th to 27th, 1940, "Recapitulations of Subscriptions obtained in Verdun District", Box A-16, "Salvation Army", CVA.

⁷⁶ Lionel E. Brittle, Campaign Director, Salvation Army to Alderman George Brown, February 16, 1940, Box A-357, file "*Armée du Salut*", CVA.

Since numerous charitable causes competed for Canadians' largesse at a time when unemployment in the country was still significant, Brittle pointed out that "the work of the Salvation Army does not in any way overlap that of other organizations". The purpose of the campaign, said Brittle, was to fund Salvation Army Huts and Auxiliary Services for Canadian troops overseas as well as for service centres in military camps and in cities across Canada. Some money would also be used for the Salvation Army's more traditional charitable services at home.⁷⁷ The Salvation Army's financial objective for Verdun was fixed at a modest \$2500 out of the \$225,000 the Salvation Army sought from the Montreal area. But even this sum seemed unattainable: according to the city's figures a mere \$1119 was raised, less than half the quota. Seventy-nine percent of the 624 cash subscriptions and pledges were in the amount of \$1.00 or less. This disappointingly low number of subscriptions also illustrated the scarcity of disposable income in Verdun. The Salvation Army was not a priority for Verdunites' largesse.

Starting in April 1942 the Salvation Army, the Legion, the Y.M.C.A. and the Knights of Columbus, were funded by Ottawa for their volunteer work with Canadian forces overseas. From then on, Salvation Army fundraising campaigns were meant to finance domestic humanitarian programs only⁷⁸ which, to the war-conscious public, might have seemed a less attractive destination for contributions. The objective set that year for Verdun, remarkably still considered by Brittle to be a generous and patriotic city, not surprisingly had dropped to only \$1200. That year, the provincial objective was a mere \$145,000 which, while not a large amount, nevertheless appeared difficult to obtain given all the similar and preceding demands made of people's generosity by seemingly more

⁷⁷ Lionel E. Brittle, Campaign Director, Salvation Army to Alderman George Brown, February 16, 1940, Box A-357, file "*Armée du Salut*", CVA.

⁷⁸ Colonel A.A. Magee, Salvation Army Campaign Chairman for the Province of Quebec, to Mayor Edward Wilson, July 21, 1942, Box A-357, file "*Armée du Salut*", CVA. According to Magee, "the Dominion Government...made no provisions for home services". See also Moyles, p. 195.

pressing patriotic causes. The campaign, running from September 24 to 30, 1942 was extended by two days to October 2 in the hope that it would meet its financial target.

Verdun's campaign chairman, Edward Wilson, despatched letters to all Protestant clergy in Verdun enlisting their support. Verdun Protestant school children gave generously, donating a total of almost \$112.00, nearly 10% of the quota.⁷⁹ Many of the pledges also came from local businesses and organizations. Unlike in 1940, Verdun met its quota. By this stage of the war, the family economies of Verdunites had improved and Brittle's view that "the reputation of the City of Verdun in raising money for philanthropic work is second to none" was this time substantiated.⁸⁰

Some evidence exists, however, to suggest that Verdunites again nearly failed to respond positively to the Salvation Army appeal. In a front-page story, *The Guardian* reminded Verdunites of their responsibilities towards the Salvation Army's fundraising campaign. As an impetus for readers to donate, the article noted that well-to-do Town of Mount Royal, already having amassed almost \$1600, had doubled its quota virtually before the campaign had even begun. The piece ended with a characteristic burst of civic pride, tinged with class rivalry: "Verdun will certainly not lack [sic - lag] behind and should do even better than the Town of Mount Royal."⁸¹ A week later, when pledges from Verdunites were found to be wanting, *The Guardian's* publisher, Henry Emo, who had been named publicity chairman for the Salvation Army's Verdun campaign, decried the "apathy of the public" in yet another front-page article. Still, the newspaper mustered a brave front. "It is confidently expected", it stated, "that the people of this city will not

⁷⁹ Letter from Wilson to D.F. Evely, President of the Kinsmen Club of Verdun, October 14, 1942; see also the receipt signed on the letterhead of The Protestant Board of School Trustees of Verdun by P.H. Lane, October 1, 1942, Box A-357, file "*Armée du Salut*", CVA.

⁸⁰ Lionel E. Brittle, Campaign Director, Salvation Army to Mayor Edward Wilson, August 4, 1942, Box A-357, file "*Armée du Salut*", CVA.

⁸¹ *The Guardian*, September 25, 1942.

allow themselves to be shamed by the manner in which others have 'put it all over them' in the matter of charity and generosity."⁸² Working-class Verdun was proud of its reputation as a patriotic city which routinely oversubscribed to fundraising appeals.

Not even in the relatively minor (and not, in this case, specifically war-related) matter of a Salvation Army financial campaign could Verdun's weekly English-language newspaper allow the city to let up. At times the competition with other independent municipalities in the Montreal area (all wealthier than Verdun with the possible exception of Lachine) seemed as important to *The Guardian* as did the cause of the appeal. No evidence exists that Verdunites were ever found wanting during any wartime fund-raising campaign, be it on behalf of the Red Cross, Victory Loan campaigns or in support of such local charities as the Mayor's Cigarette Fund. Although the Salvation Army was a popular organization, Verdunites preferred to fund local war-related charities over domestic welfare efforts.

Not surprisingly, an estimated 90% of the Salvation Army's hundreds of Verdun volunteer canvassers and workers were English speaking. However, the local French-language branch of the Catholic Knights of Columbus, *Les Chevaliers de Colomb*, undertook to accept pledges on behalf of the Canadian War Services Fund (C.W.S.F.), of which the Salvation Army was a principal beneficiary.⁸³ In this way, any religious objections to contributing to the Salvation Army on the part of Catholics was overcome. Every one of Verdun's French-language schools also canvassed for the C.W.S.F., as did the English-language elementary schools, both Protestant and Catholic. Nevertheless, most organizations or individuals who contributed or canvassed during the pledge drive,

⁸² *The Guardian*, October 2, 1942.

⁸³ So too were the Knights of Columbus, the Y.M.C.A. and the Canadian Legion. In April 1941, not long after it was established, Verdunites contributed \$34,000 to the C.W.S.F., when the fixed quota had been \$18,000. *The Guardian*, April 11, 1941.

including the students of Verdun High School, did so directly on behalf of the Salvation Army.⁸⁴

The goodwill of Verdunites, themselves recently the recipients of the Salvation Army's generosity, manifested itself across religious and linguistic lines in modest aid of this organization's domestic and overseas charity programs. Verdun's Salvation Army did not have a major wartime presence and did not specifically assist Verdunites in uniform. It did, however, serve as a patriotic cause to which Verdunites could respond and from which fellow townspeople might derive benefit, at home and overseas.

LA SOCIÉTÉ ST-JEAN-BAPTISTE

In the 1927-1928 Verdun City Directory, *La Société St-Jean Baptiste* described its role in the following terms:

Tous les canadiens-français devraient se joindre à notre Société. Il s'agit d'une question de fierté nationale dont le succès aura des conséquences sur le développement de notre solidarité patriotique en vue des luttes que nous réserve l'avenir. Nous avons à Verdun deux des plus belles sections de La Société St-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal.

A decade later, with the outbreak of the Second World War, the *Société*, then having three parish chapters in Verdun, faced a series of struggles on wartime issues such as conscription, immigration and helping men on active service.

As early as July 1937 the Outremont branch of the *Société* passed a resolution against a Canadian contribution in manpower, armaments or money in any overseas war. The next month the large Montreal headquarters branch complained against federal government

⁸⁴ Box A-357, file "Armée du Salut", CVA.

plans to increase defence spending and called on Ottawa to limit such expenditures.⁸⁵ Not surprisingly, on September 2, 1939, the day before Britain's declaration of war on Germany, the *Société*, in a letter to Prime Minister Mackenzie King, implored the Government of Canada to remain neutral in the upcoming war.⁸⁶

Officially *La Société St-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal* tried to remain neutral. According to the organization's official historian, Robert Rumilly, when the *Société* was asked early in the war for its co-operation by Lieutenant-Colonel Eugène Nantel, head of auxiliary services for M.D. No. 4, the *Société* suspected that Nantel's request was but an attempt by the government to use the *Société's* apparent influence with French-Canadians for Ottawa's own propaganda purposes. On the other hand, not to participate in organizing Montreal-area auxiliary services would be to leave French-speaking servicemen at the mercy of English-speaking, Protestant organizations such as the Salvation Army or the Y.M.C.A. Consequently, the *Société* collected French-language books and magazines for the use of French-Canadian troops and regiments stationed in the Montreal area and sent representatives to attend various auxiliary services committee meetings.

The *Société* was more genuinely concerned with the welfare of French speakers on military service than Rumilly's interpretation allows. In June 1940 the *Société* officially registered its "*Comité d'aide aux soldats*" with the federal government as a war charity and even requested that Ottawa expedite its application so that it could hold a tag day in aid of soldiers' recreation on the occasion of the annual *Saint-Jean-Baptiste* Day parade on June 24, 1940. That summer, despite the passage of the National Resources Mobilization Act, the *Société* devoted most of its weekly radio broadcasts to publicizing

⁸⁵ Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal*. (Montréal: L'Aurore, 1975), pp. 452-454.

⁸⁶ Rumilly, *Histoire de la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal*, p. 485. Rumilly, on page 486 of his skewed and anti-semitic work, claimed without providing any evidence that 90% of French Canadians agreed with this sentiment.

and vaunting the efforts of its *Comité d'aide aux soldats*.⁸⁷ This suggests an early positive involvement in the domestic war effort on the part of this nationalist organization.

Once conscription for home defence had begun in earnest in the winter of 1941, however, the *Société's* leadership co-operated as an auxiliary service only grudgingly. The continuing more or less unilingual-English nature of the Canadian armed services also disinclined the organization from further fund-raising activities and the business of *Le Comité d'aide aux soldats* was wound down by mid-1941. The final straw appears to have been the divisive and acrimonious conscription plebiscite of April 1942. Thereafter, with the exception of giving some remaining *Comité* funds to *Le Régiment de Maisonneuve* and despatching song books to military camps in Québec, *La Société St-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal* remained uninterested in soldiers' welfare.⁸⁸ Their view of patriotism was local defence and non-compulsion and this clashed with the patriotism of Verdun's other mainly English-speaking social groups.

While this was taking place all three Verdun branches of *La Société St-Jean-Baptiste* kept low profiles compared to the extraordinary war efforts being made by other local groups.

⁸⁷ See the exchange of correspondence between Alphonse de la Rochelle, *chef du secrétariat, La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste*, Lt. Col. Eugène Nantel, Director of Auxiliary Services, Military District No. 4 and W. Gordon Gunn, Registrar, National War Charities, Department of the Secretary of State, Ottawa, June 4-22, 1940, microfilm 8003/pages 002011-002023 and also the extract from the *Société's* Executive Council Meeting of July 2, 1940, 8003/002047, *Archives Nationale du Québec (ANQ)*, Montréal.

⁸⁸ See 8003/002136-002153, ANQ and Rumilly, pp. 488-489 and 497. In pages 448-541, Rumilly frankly documents the *Société's* anti-war views and especially its vehement opposition to conscription and Jewish immigration to Canada. *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal* claimed 8000 members in 1942, 8500 in 1943 and 9100 in 1944. Rumilly, p. 537. Still, Red Cross working units organized by the many chapters of *La Société St-Jean-Baptiste* across Québec provided over 23,000 knitted items during the course of the war. Auger and Lamothe, p. 111. This is ignored in the literature, which too easily dismisses this organization's wartime contributions or employs the wartime attitudes expressed by the elitist *Société St-Jean-Baptiste* in Montreal or Québec City as a metaphor for the views of all French Canadians.

The Verdun organizations maintained their regular activities, but rarely contributed to war-related fundraising campaigns with the occasional exception of the M.C.F. Not surprisingly, *The Guardian* rarely mentioned the *Société*. Its first wartime mention occurred on October 20, 1939 when a small item appeared reporting the holding of an oyster party in the basement of *Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes* Church, with all proceeds being donated to the parish. In contrast, to the *Société's* local focus, by this time most English-speaking groups organized social events to raise money for some patriotic cause, such as the Red Cross. This was the case with an I.O.D.E. card party which was advertised in the same edition.⁸⁹

During the war the *Société* generally adopted a negative tone, questioning or attacking the federal government's political and social policies, such as immigration or conscription. Circular letters routinely were despatched to municipalities, including Verdun, seeking their support to pressure the federal government into limiting immigration to Canada following the war's end.⁹⁰ In February 1944 25 members of one of the local parish branches, including Alderman Georges Tetrault (later a mayoral candidate) and Verdun's Liberal M.P., Paul-Émile Côté, met at *Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs* Church. Tetrault was firmly opposed to immigration to Canada until all service people had been repatriated and war workers had been given an opportunity to find new employment. Côté seems to have kept a low profile at this meeting.⁹¹

No evidence exists to suggest that relations between City Hall and the Verdun chapters of *La Société St-Jean-Baptiste* were particularly close. The mayor himself would have had

⁸⁹ Nevertheless, it has been estimated that during the war *Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste* branches across Québec together averaged about \$20,000 in purchases per Victory Loan Drive. Many branches also sold war stamps. Auger et Lamothe, p. 55.

⁹⁰ See for example Council Minutes, January 24, 1944.

⁹¹ *The Messenger*, February 17, 1944.

difficulty accommodating an organization whose aims were widely considered in English-speaking circles to be contrary to the successful prosecution of the war. In 1942 the City of Verdun refused the *Société's* invitation to provide an allegorical float for the annual *Saint-Jean-Baptiste* Day parade which had as a theme the tercentenary of the founding of Montreal. In the aftermath of the April 1942 conscription plebescite this parade had taken on important political overtones. The *Société's* planned celebrations of the founding of Montreal as a French Catholic city were viewed as excessive by English-speaking patriotic groups more concerned with the national total war effort.⁹² It is not clear to what extent politics played a role in Verdun's decision. However, the *Société* quickly despatched a representative to City Council and subsequently the city decided to join with the Town of Lasalle in preparing a float.⁹³ The fact that Verdun had planned its own *Saint-Jean-Baptiste* Day parade might also have prompted the city to decline participation in the tercentenary festivities. The Verdun parade was described in *The Guardian* as a "great patriotic demonstration" with the mayor and several aldermen present, as well as local scout groups, cadet corps from French-language schools and delegations from all Verdun parishes.⁹⁴

It is difficult to measure the *Société's* support among French-speaking Verdunites. According to *The Guardian's* rare coverage of the group, membership appears to have been small in the three parish branches. Generally viewed as a conservative, elitist organization, it is also unclear to what extent the *Société* influenced the local population. Its public campaign against married women working in war industries, for example, promoted in alliance with the Catholic clergy, seems to have been ineffectual. As the leadership, and even membership, of the *Société* was drawn from the local French-

⁹² Rumilly, pp. 509-511, 517-518 and 520.

⁹³ Executive Committee Minutes, May 11 and June 1, 1942.

⁹⁴ *The Guardian*, June 26, 1942.

speaking elite, the organization seems to have possessed only a limited appeal for working-class, French-speaking Verdunites.⁹⁵

At the outset of the war, a war in which Rumilly claims the *Société* did not approve participating, this organization was willing to co-operate with military authorities and provide French-Canadian enlistees with comforts and amenities. But the slide towards conscription portended by the N.R.M.A. and the basic unilingualism of the Canadian military establishment made the organization end its support for military causes. While the views of Verdun's French speakers generally coincided with those of the *Société* on conscription, they continued strongly to support local initiatives in aid of Verdunites on active service. Indeed, even the Verdun *Société* branches themselves contributed to the Mayor's Cigarette Fund throughout the war.⁹⁶ After 1941 the pull of local identity made them diverge from their parent organization.

THE CHURCHES' WAR

Verdun was a city of many churches, Catholic and Protestant, French and English. In January 1940 there were four French and one English Catholic and 15 Protestant churches, one of which was a French-language Baptist church, and two mission halls, including the Salvation Army citadel. By the end of the war there was one more English Catholic and one more French Catholic churches and one less Protestant.⁹⁷ There were no non-Christian places of worship. The churches played a significant social role in pre-war

⁹⁵ The *Chevaliers de Colomb*, for example, was perhaps a more popular group since it was seen as class "inclusive" - and therefore considered a vulgar association by some French-speaking traditional elites who also felt the group had an "Irish taint" to it. Everett C. Hughes, *French Canada in Transition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), pp. 123, 127-8.

⁹⁶ Box A-348, correspondence file, CVA.

⁹⁷ "List of Public Buildings in Verdun at January 20th/40", Box A-237, file 40, CVA; City of Verdun Annual Report, 1944, Box A-99, CVA.

Verdun, often serving as the focus of social, charitable and recreational activities. Many parishioners looked to their churches as a source of identity; religion remained a powerful social force in Verdun, both as a unifying and divisive element. Schooling, hospital care and social assistance services were virtually all religiously segregated.

The nature of the churches' participation in the local war effort was determined as much by the language of their congregations as whether they were Catholic or Protestant. According to the 1941 census, 74% of Verdun's Catholics were of French origin the overwhelming majority of whom spoke French as their mother tongue. Of the remainder, more than one-third were of Irish ethnicity, with almost all the rest being English, Scottish, Italian or Polish.⁹⁸ Verdun's English-language churches contained a large number of British-born and first-generation Canadian members and contributed earnestly to the war effort. Churches, both French and English-language, acted as fundraising centres for patriotic causes, provided space for Red Cross units and other groups undertaking war-related relief work and also comforted spiritually and emotionally the anguished, the fearful and the lonely.⁹⁹ It was said of Reverend Donald H. MacVicar, Minister of the Chalmers United Church, that "those of his congregation who came to know him found in [him] a source of strength, support and friendship that served them faithfully during the long years of the Second World War." At the bottom of St. Willibrord Parish's honour roll of June 1944, the following message of support was offered to grieving and worrying parents:

To the parents of all those "Boys" of our Parish who have made the supreme sacrifice, we the priests and parishioners of St. Willibrord's, assure them of a continued remembrance in our Masses and prayers that Our Lord may grant them eternal rest.

⁹⁸ 1941 Census, Volume 4, pp. 158-161.

⁹⁹ *Chalmers United Church 1899-1974*, (Verdun, 1974), p. 13, Archives of Chalmers United Church, Verdun.

To the parents of those serving either here or overseas, we know that they join us in our daily prayers that Our Lord will watch over them and bring them safely home: If it be His will that they should not return we, with them, humbly beg of Him that He grant them to leave this world in His grace and friendship.¹⁰⁰

The churches' provision of comfort to those left behind remains a little-publicized but integral part of their wartime role.

Most English-speaking congregations and parishes maintained honour rolls of all parishioners who enlisted. "In this war, as in the previous, Chalmers gave of its best in both combatant and non-combatant services", stated a commemorative booklet issued by the Chalmers United Church.¹⁰¹ All of the English-language churches in Verdun could have said as much.

Nor did the churches forget the material needs of those who had enlisted. The Chalmers United Church established a Soldiers' Comfort Fund which raised money to despatch cigarettes and chocolate to Chalmers "boys and girls" serving overseas. The Fund despatched 720 cartons of 300 cigarettes and 297 parcels of chocolate overseas between 1942 and 1945. Money for these was deposited in two collection boxes located at the front entrance and raised through occasional special collections. These boxes kept the war in the minds of the congregation. In 1946 the fund ceased to operate following a "Welcome Home Party" held at the church for returned servicemen of the congregation.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ "Roll of Honor", St. Willibrord's Parish, Verdun, September 1939 - June 1944, mimeograph provided courtesy of Mr. Stewart Carson, former warden of St. Willibrord Parish.

¹⁰¹ *Chalmers United Church: Fifty Years 1899-1949*, (Verdun: 1949), p. 13, commemorative booklet found in Box A-242, file 16, CVA.

¹⁰² *Chalmers United Church: Fifty Years 1899-1949*, (Verdun: 1949), p. 14; Minutes of the 44th to 48th Annual Congregational Meetings 1943-1947, Minutes of Congregational Meetings, Book 2, Chalmers United Church, Verdun.

The Church of St. John The Divine, serving Verdun's somewhat more affluent west-end Anglicans, undertook similar patriotic activities, though surviving documentary evidence does not indicate the effort to have been an especially large one. For the first few years of the war enthusiasm seemed lacking, which was unusual for an Anglican church. A small War Comforts Fund was established only in 1943. Later in that year, and for the remainder of the war, minor amounts of money were collected for specific charities or causes, such as India-China War Relief and special D-Day and V-E Day collections. The latter, at \$186, was the largest amount, and the money was despatched to the "Bombed Churches of Europe" Fund.¹⁰³ St. John the Divine's increased interest in the war seems to have coincided with the arrival of Reverend Ernest S. Reed to the parish in January 1942, a posting he held until 1946. The highly-respected Reed played an active role in the community and wrote several columns in *The Guardian* on war-related and patriotic themes. This increased the profile of his parish in the community's overall war effort.

In January 1943 St. Willibrord's organized its Overseas Cigarette and Comfort Fund. By the summer of 1945, over 3800 cartons of cigarettes, averaging more than three per enlistee, had been despatched overseas in the name of this extremely successful fund. The fund also sent some 450 "comfort packages" to the disproportionately large number of men from the parish serving in the Royal Canadian Navy many of whom were listed as based in Canada and ineligible to be sent cigarettes at discount rates.¹⁰⁴ The Catholic Women's League, a charitable welfare organization which grouped together 1460 women in the Montreal area, operated one of its largest chapters out of St. Willibrord's. Their war work seems to have paralleled that of the Red Cross: they made clothes, collected books and magazines and raised funds, mostly for Britain, sometimes to the Catholic

¹⁰³ Information obtained from the 1944, 1945 and 1946 Financial Statements of the Church of St. John the Divine, Verdun.

¹⁰⁴ *The Messenger*, November 8, 1945 and "Roll of Honor", St. Willibrord's Parish, Verdun, September 1939 - June 1944. The comforts included woollen socks, mitts, toothpaste, gum, razor blades and other items. *The Guardian*, October 29, 1943.

Women's League operating there. Other recipients of their largesse included the Merchant Marine and the St. Willibrord Boys' Overseas Christmas Fund.¹⁰⁵

St. Willibrord's patriotic acts seemed always to be taken independently of other Catholic parishes, from which it was divided by language, and other English-speaking churches, from which it was divided by religion. It seemed the odd parish out but, with approximately 10,000 parishioners by the end of the war, it was sufficiently large as to organize substantial fund-raising campaigns to satisfy its needs. If English-speaking Catholics were at odds with their French-speaking co-religionists, it was not over the war effort but rather the administration of the Verdun Catholic School Commission (see below). The war did nothing, however, to bring their views closer together. On the other hand, Verdun's English-speaking Catholics and Protestants were often united in common patriotic purpose, though when working through their churches, their approaches remained separate. Other wartime community efforts, like salvage collections or the M.C.F., brought all these groups together. Verdun social harmony was not weakened by any internecine Catholic rivalry along religious lines which did not predate the war. Whether the war actually exacerbated intra-Catholic tensions is unclear.

Following the war, Edward Wilson wrote of the remarkable enlistment record and patriotic contribution from St. Willibrord's, stating that "no part of the population did more than our English-speaking Roman Catholic youth. To them...the City of Verdun owes a lasting debt."¹⁰⁶ Verdun's war was a Catholic as well as a Protestant one. As important a role as the churches played, Wilson's comment about youth could have extended to their non-church-related participation in the war effort, especially their activities at school.

¹⁰⁵ *The Guardian*, October 3 and October 17, 1941.

¹⁰⁶ *The Messenger*, November 8, 1945.

Verdun's French-language parishes offer virtually no records or other evidence of their wartime efforts. Of the commemorative booklets issued for each parish since 1945, only one even mentions the war.¹⁰⁷ Other than what could be gleaned from other sources regarding their Red Cross work or certain fund-raising campaigns, there is little upon which to draw conclusions about their roles in the community. But since the clergy administered the Catholic school system in Verdun, an examination of the Catholic schools' participation in the domestic war effort also sheds light on local parish views.

VERDUN SCHOOLS AND THE WAR EFFORT

According to the 1939-1940 Annual Report of the Montreal Protestant Board of School Commissioners, in all schools in its jurisdiction, including those in Verdun, "the principals and teachers have been vigilant to inspire and maintain a patriotic spirit among the children."¹⁰⁸ War-related activities, excursions, plays and films became a regular part of the school curriculum. War Savings Stamps and Certificates were sold in schools. Junior Red Cross groups were formed to raise funds and prepare clothing bundles for beleaguered Britain and newspaper, metal and glass salvage drives were organized, with every Protestant school being converted into a salvage depot. Teachers gave lessons in democratic ideals and "practical patriotism". "In almost every respect", stated the 1940-1941 Annual Report of the Protestant School Board, "the daily programme of the schools

¹⁰⁷ *Album Souvenir de la Bénédiction solennelle de l'église Notre-Dame Auxiliatrice*. Verdun, May 1942; *Album souvenir 75e Anniversaire de la Paroisse Notre-Dame-Des-Sept-Douleurs Verdun 1899-1974*. Verdun, 1974; *25ième Anniversaire de la fondation de la paroisse Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes*. Verdun, October 1953; *Les 50 ans de Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Verdun 1928-1978*. Verdun, 1978.

¹⁰⁸ Annual Report of the Protestant Board of School Commissioners, 1939-1940, (Montreal), p. 4. Archives of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal (P.S.B.G.M.).

has accommodated itself to the influence of the War."¹⁰⁹ And so it was in Verdun's seven Protestant and, to a lesser extent perhaps, 13 Catholic schools.

Students attending Verdun's Protestant high school were certainly war conscious. The 1940 Verdun High School *Annual* contained students' essays and poetry devoted to Canadian and British war themes, mainly invoking the defence of democracy and the maintenance of the British Empire's integrity as justification for Canadian participation in the war. Still, this *Annual* seemed restrained given that the country had just gone to war. In 1941 the tone of the *Annual* was far more warlike. The editor, Bruce Raymond, wrote, "[a]s might be expected, the War situation has influenced almost unbelievably the contributions to the *Annual*. Articles on democracy, War Heroes and War Histories were received...and the best of these have been printed."¹¹⁰ The students' sense of the costs of the war to their community was also becoming more apparent. Mildrid Culkin, the 1941 associate editor, dedicated the *Annual* to those Verdunites who thus far had lost their lives. "There are many persons in our community...whose hearts are heavy with sorrow because of a loved one lost in this great conflict...", she wrote.¹¹¹ An Honour Roll of former students from V.H.S. (which opened in 1933) on active service was begun with the 1942 *Annual*. By 1945 it contained nearly 700 names.

¹⁰⁹ Annual Report of the Protestant Board of School Commissioners, 1940-1941, pp. 6 and 8. P.S.B.G.M. Archives. On the other hand, John Parker, who taught at Woodland School from 1940 to 1942, has not recalled that the war significantly affected his teaching habits. There were occasional references and discussions about the war in his elementary class but not much more. He organized no special war-related events with his pupils.

¹¹⁰ Verdun High School *Annual*, 1941, p. 7. High school students in Dorchester, New Brunswick were convinced the war was just and based their "loyalty" in "a revealing trinity: the British Empire, Canada and the local community." Douglas How, *One Village, One War 1914-1945*, (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1995), p. 259. Young Protestant Verdunites propagated these same themes.

¹¹¹ Verdun High School *Annual*, 1941, p. 6.

The 1941 *Annual* also noted that many classes from all grades in Verdun Protestant schools had contributed to war charities such as the Spitfire Fund, the Queen's Canadian Fund (to assist British victims of air raids) and the Red Cross. By 1943, the Aid To Russia Fund and the Navy League Fund were generously supported. In the summer of 1942, 32 students from V.H.S. participated in various programs which saw thousands of Canadian school children despatched to Western Canada to assist with the harvest.¹¹²

The 1944 yearbook of St. Willibrord High School provides a somewhat different picture of the activities of Catholic students at this time. References to "King and Country" and the "British Empire" are conspicuously absent, probably due to the sensibilities of the prominent Irish element present in this parish: these phrases are replaced by references to "God" and "Jesus".¹¹³ This publication has no war-tainted essays or patriotic photo collages. Yet the war is ever present. One student, Louise Matthews, whose favourite expression was said to be "*c'est la guerre*", wrote:

Because I'm patriotic I must remember to bring pictures of my brother for the military Honor Roll, and good reading matter to sustain the morale of our fighting men. We're going to offer a decade of the beads every day for those who appear on the Honor Roll.¹¹⁴

The Sodalists in the school also "organized groups to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion on specified days, for the intentions of specified soldiers of our Parish serving overseas." Seventy-five men were remembered in this way and "informed of this

¹¹² Montreal Protestant Central School Board, Board Meeting Agenda, December 22, 1942 (M261a), P.S.B.G.M. Archives; *The Guardian*, June 25, 1944.

¹¹³ *The Green and White Annual*, 1944, provided courtesy of Mr. Paul Moreau, Lasalle, Québec. See also *Revue Souvenir: Jubilé d'or de la Commission des Écoles Catholiques de Verdun 1898-1948*, (Verdun: *Commission des Écoles Catholiques de Verdun (C.E.C.V.)*, 1948), pp. 26-27, in which some of the over 600 former students on active service are remembered for having rendered "the supreme sacrifice for God and Country", *Archives de la C.E.C.V.*

¹¹⁴ Louise Matthews, "Diary of a Sodalist", October 25, 1943, *The Green and White Annual*, 1944, p. 15.

activity". Some thirty of them thought enough of the event to write letters of thanks to their former school.¹¹⁵

In the foreword to the 1941 V.H.S. *Annual*, the principal, J.A. Weatherbee, sombrely reminded the graduating class of the sacrifices being borne by Canada's youth, including many former students and graduates of their school. The basic message to his charges was that the promise of a good future was well worth fighting for.¹¹⁶ The superintendent of the Verdun Protestant school board, H.E. Grant, had a somewhat different message in the *Annual*. He remarked on the importance of obtaining a High School Leaving Certificate despite the fact that "it is not difficult now for any bright teenage boy or girl to find a job in an office or in industry". On the other hand, he did not oppose graduated students enlisting since he pointed out that "there are at present many disappointed youths who, because of failure to gain matriculation, are unable to qualify for commission in the Army, Navy or Air Force." In fact, few Verdunites attained officer rank and insufficient education was often the reason. Grant's tone was not inspirational but pleading: the lure of a uniform or of a job in war industry, sometimes needed to bolster a family's fortunes, was contributing to an already noticeably higher than average high school drop-out rate which bode ill for the future.¹¹⁷

The war affected school enrollment in Verdun. As part of a Montreal-area trend, high school enrollments dropped suddenly while elementary school enrollments climbed. The 1941 *Annual* listed only 67 graduates (of whom only 55 actually obtained their diplomas) as compared to the 83 listed the previous year, a decline of 19%. Many of the anticipated graduates identified military service as their ambitions. The 1942 *Annual* listed only 50 students in the graduating class. That year, many of the graduating females expressed a

¹¹⁵ *The Green and White Annual*, 1944, pp. 21 and 27.

¹¹⁶ Verdun High School *Annual*, 1941, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ Verdun High School *Annual*, 1941, pp. 9-10; *The Guardian*, September 6, 1940.

desire to become military nurses. In 1943, there were again only 50 potential graduates while in 1944, 66 were listed of whom 56 graduated. With a steady influx of people into the Montreal area and an improvement in many family economies, enrollment shot up dramatically. In 1945, 92 of 104 students graduated.¹¹⁸

Students' essays in the *Annuaux* were almost all British oriented. British prime minister Winston Churchill was singled out frequently for praise, as was the U.S. president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The Canadian prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, is never mentioned in the wartime *Annuaux* of V.H.S. Regarding conscription, in the 1943 *Annual* the editor, William Weintraub, wrote a not very subtle piece, in French, entitled "*Jean-Paul s'enrôle*", in which the author barely concealed his disdain for French Canada's seemingly less than enthusiastic response to the war.¹¹⁹

There was a martial air to high school experiences during the war. Many students participated in cadet programs which allowed them to look and feel like part of the war effort. In 1941, 200 students were enrolled in the Verdun High School Army Cadets, which was greater than one-fifth of the school population and about 15% of the P.S.B.G.M.'s cadet strength. The next year, as a result of student preferences, the Protestant Board converted its army cadet program to one of air cadets. However, in November 1941, the Air Cadet League of Canada already had formed a squadron of air

¹¹⁸ Annual Report of the Protestant Board of School Commissioners, 1942-1943, p. 7 and 1943-1944, p. 4; *Annuaux*, 1941-1946. In comparison, it has been estimated that between 1941 and 1944 attendance at Edmonton high schools decreased as much as 50%. Many of the drop-outs seemed to have found full-time employment to assist their mothers struggling to make ends meet on meagre Dependents' Allowances. See Keshen, "Morale and Morality on the Alberta Home Front", in Tingley, ed., *For King and Country*, p. 156.

¹¹⁹ Verdun High School *Annual*, 1943, p. 42. Weintraub would go on to produce films for the National Film Board and write books, articles and plays on the theme of language relations in Montreal as well as other topics.

cadets at Verdun High School. The local press heralded this as an important local initiative.¹²⁰

Verdun was proud of its air cadets. This was made clear on the evening of January 16, 1942, when an estimated 2500 people attended ceremonies at the Fifth Avenue and Park Theatres in Verdun where Air Chief Marshall Sir Frederick Bowhill, head of the Royal Air Force's Ferry Command, officially presented 69 Squadron (Verdun High School), Air Cadets with their squadron colours.¹²¹ By May 1942, 150 of V.H.S's over 900 students were enrolled in 69 Squadron. The Air Cadets played a prominent role in local military parades, demonstrations and other civic and military events. For example, on November 10, 1942, on the occasion of the triumphal homecoming of Verdun's fighter ace, Pilot Officer George F. Beurling, the air cadets from his former high school participated prominently in the gala ceremonies held in his honour at the Verdun Auditorium. That fall the Protestant School Board instituted compulsory air cadet training in all its high schools. In 1944 Verdun High School's air cadets numbered 143 Seniors (aged 15 to 18) and 84 juniors (aged 12 to 15), for a total of 227 out of a school population of about 1100.¹²²

The Verdun Catholic School Commission also co-operated with municipal and federal authorities' war efforts. The two elementary and two high schools (one each for boys and

¹²⁰ Verdun High School *Annual*, 1941, p. 57; Annual Report of the Protestant Board of School Commissioners, 1940-1941, p. 9 and 1941-1942, pp. 11-12, P.S.B.G.M. Archives. (Montreal); *The Guardian*, November 28, 1941.

¹²¹ Verdun High School *Annual*, 1942, p. 8; *The Guardian*, January 23, 1942.

¹²² Annual Report of the Protestant Board of School Commissioners, 1942-1943, p. 13 and 1943-1944, p. 26; Verdun High School *Annual*, 1944, p. 35 and 1945, p. 30. The Verdun High School Air Cadet Squadron was not disbanded until 1966. Charles Elliott, *A Short History of Verdun High School 1912-1984*, (P.S.B.G.M., 1990), p. 14. In January 1943 all Edmonton high schools combined mustered about 750 cadets aged 12 to 17, an unimpressive figure for a city of over 90,000. Keshen, "Morale and Morality", *op. cit.*, p. 155.

girls) of St. Willibrord's were English speaking while the remaining nine Catholic schools were French speaking. Throughout the war there were no English-speaking school commissioners on the V.C.S.C.'s executive committee, and by December 1941 this had become a sore point between the under-funded English-speaking Catholics in Verdun and the school commission.¹²³ This friction helps explain the lack of a united Catholic response to the war effort as well as St. Willibrord's decision to pursue an independent program of war charities.

The main French-language high school, *École Secondaire Richard* (named in honour of the omnipresent Monseigneur Richard of *Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs* Parish) organized an army cadet corps and all schools participated in Red Cross and other charitable organizations' fundraising appeals as well as in special salvage collections. In March 1941, all Catholic school children were asked to contribute one cent to the Canadian War Services Fund, of which Wilson was the local campaign chairman. The V.C.S.C. also allowed its schools to be used for national registration in August 1940, as meeting places for Verdun's Civilian Protection Committee and the Verdun section of the National War Finances Committee and as distribution points for the government's ration coupon booklets. The Knights of Columbus War Services received cash donations from the School Commission. Over 100 war maps were also purchased for use by the upper grades in all of Verdun's Catholic schools.¹²⁴

¹²³ See for example the *Procès-verbeaux du Conseil de Commissaires, C.E.C.V.*, December 9, 1941 and at frequent intervals thereafter, *Archives de la C.E.C.V.* The Parents Association of St. Willibrord Parish noted in 1945 that "grave friction is arising between the French- and English-speaking Catholics because several hundred English-speaking Catholic children have had to be accommodated in classes in French-speaking schools because of lack of accommodation in their own schools." *The Guardian*, March 15, 1945.

¹²⁴ *Procès-verbeaux, C.E.C.V.*, November 14, 1939, February 9, 1940, May 27, 1940, July 30, 1940, February 4, 1941, March 24, 1941, April 7, 1942, May 5, 1942 and November 9, 1943, *Archives de la C.E.C.V.*

In May 1942 the V.C.S.C. agreed to allow salvage collection depots to be established in its schools, but only on the condition that all proceeds from the sale of scrap collected in Catholic schools be donated to the Verdun C.P.C. The Verdun Salvage Committee, foreseeing an accounting nightmare, refused to guarantee this, with the result that no permanent depots were established. Wartime relations between the French-speaking Catholic school commission and City Hall, which oversaw the Salvage Committee, were never especially close.¹²⁵ Still, the V.C.S.C.'s demands fit in well with the notion of local assistance and protection. It was seeking assurance that community funds would be utilized for the good of the community. Although the Salvage Committee did in fact donate most of its funds to local causes it was unwilling to allow another organization to dictate the recipients of its charitable donations. The squabbling meant that the local war effort suffered.

As the war progressed, however, the V.C.S.C.'s willingness to co-operate with certain patriotic causes began to lessen. The clearest manifestation of this was the Catholic school board's deteriorating relationship with the broadly-based Civilian Protection Committee. In November 1943, the school commissioners demanded, in a 4-1 vote, that the C.P.C. pay a rental fee for the use of a school hall as a meeting place. The C.P.C., accustomed to co-operation, was outraged, and let the school board know it. At a subsequent meeting the school commissioners decided to refuse the C.P.C. permission to use Catholic school facilities. The V.C.S.C. felt justified in taking its position

*...à la suite de deux téléphones de la part de MM. Ladouceur [C.P.C. Warden of the organization's Section 3 in central Verdun] et Barr [Dr. Charles, Chief Warden] au près de la commission, lesquels ne se sont pas gênés pour faire des remarques très désobligeants sur le loyer demandé pour l'usage de cette salle à cette occasion.*¹²⁶

¹²⁵ C.E.C.V. to Arthur Burgess, Verdun Salvage Committee, May 8, 1942 and reply May 11, 1942, Box A-331, file 2, CVA.

¹²⁶ *Procès-verbeaux, C.E.C.V.*, November 9 and November 16, 1943. *Archives de la C.E.C.V.*

The two impolite telephone calls triggered the school commissioners' decision but were not its cause. This was a political decision determined by the C.P.C.'s close links to City Hall, with which the V.C.S.C. was engaged in a variety of disputes over financial and tax matters. The C.P.C. became a convenient target of the V.C.S.C.'s displeasure with the civic administration. The vote to end the school commission's co-operation with the C.P.C. was carried by a 3-2 margin. Less than a year later another dispute arose between the V.C.S.C. and the C.P.C. The Commission refused to grant the C.P.C.'s request for meeting facilities claiming that "*les circonstances ne semblent pas justifier pareille demande*".¹²⁷ The limits of the commissioners' support had been reached at least regarding an organization believed increasingly irrelevant to the community it served. The minutes of the Catholic commissioners' wartime meetings, never much concerned with the war, are almost mute regarding the war effort in the period following March 1944. This was not the case with their Protestant counterparts.

"It is...impossible to overestimate both the moral and material values of the contribution which the schools are making" to the war effort, stated the 1941-1942 Annual Report of the Montreal Protestant Board of School Commissioners. In addition to the students' tangible contributions, the children were also being used, the commissioners frankly admitted, to heighten war consciousness among their parents.¹²⁸ Yet, some school commissioners feared that the war, and perhaps the schools' role in the war effort, was having a detrimental effect on some children. "No other group in the community are giving so much of their lives and spirit to Canada's War Effort as Canada's children", stated the 1943-1944 Annual Report. "Who can measure the effect on these children...[of

¹²⁷ *Procès-verbeaux, C.E.C.V.*, September 12, 1944, *Archives de la C.E.C.V.* Some months later C.P.C. Chief Warden Barr was asked to refrain from parking on V.C.S.C. property near his dental office since it apparently contravened a fire ordinance. *Procès-verbeaux*, March 27, 1945. Jay White, "Conscripted City", p. 369, mentions that patriotic groups also regularly used Halifax schools for their meetings and that few paid rental fees, which led exhausted janitorial staff to balk at working the extra hours.

¹²⁸ Annual Report 1941-1942, pp. 9-10, P.S.B.G.M. Archives.

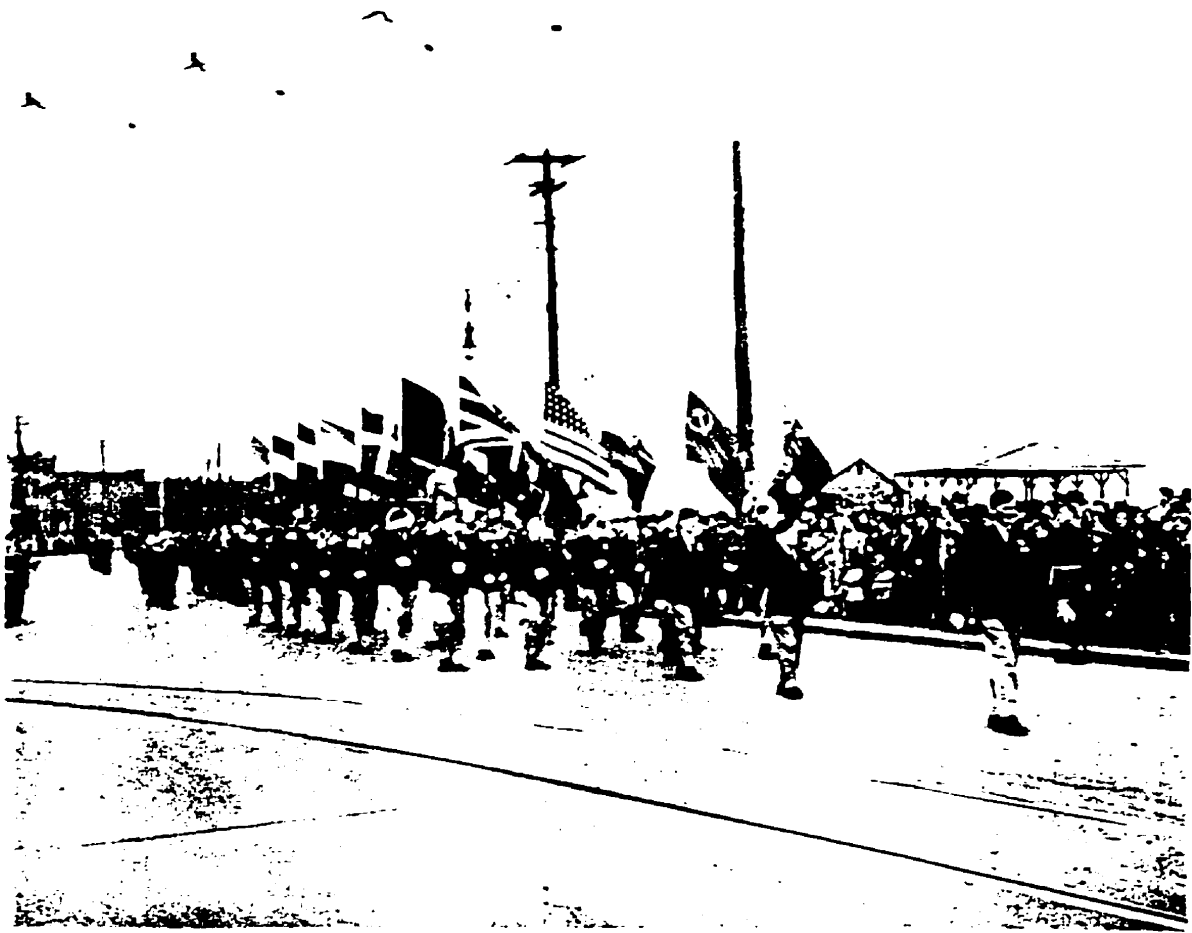
the] unrest and the war psychology which pervades the community?"¹²⁹ The school board's efforts to make the children war conscious might not, in the longer term, make them better citizens.

The wartime responses of Verdun's social groups and institutions were extensive in terms of the number and backgrounds of residents engaged and the diversity of activities undertaken. The Red Cross attracted the most volunteers, mainly women, and was the most successful in bridging linguistic and religious gaps. The larger English-language social organizations such as the Legion and the Y.M.C.A. devoted considerable resources in aid of Verdunites at home and in uniform. Due to a lack of data, it has not been possible to discern a comparable level of involvement by Verdun's few significant French-Canadian social organizations. Feelings of political alienation caused by the conscription debate might have dampened the official enthusiasm of certain groups and individuals as occurred with the *Société St-Jean-Baptiste*. However, local branches of even that organization subscribed to local causes and Verdun's French speakers, despite religious differences, actively participated in the fund-raising efforts of nominally English-language groups. Verdun's churches and schools were also active participants in the war on the home front. While local Protestants led the way, the Verdun Catholic School Commission participated in most patriotic undertakings and normally co-operated with federal authorities. Verdunites from both language and religious communities responded in large numbers to the wartime calls for money and volunteer work sounded by social and war services organizations. But the participation of both language groups in wartime charitable activities remained greatest when these activities were of direct benefit to Verdunites serving overseas.

¹²⁹ Annual Report 1943-1944, p. 11, P.S.B.G.M. Archives.



The Verdun branch of the Canadian Red Cross
preparing material to make into articles of clothing.
Police gymnasium. October 2. 1943



Ypres Day 1944
Canadian Legion colour party
(City of Verdun Archives)



Selling sweets to raise money for the Queen's Canadian Fund.
Corner of Rielle and Verdun Avenues in Ward 2.
September 20, 1941
(City of Verdun Archives)

CHAPTER 6

WAR INDUSTRY AND ECONOMIC RENEWAL

From mid-1940 onward, in response to Canadian and British military requirements, the scope and output of Canadian military-industrial production expanded rapidly. In 1941 Ottawa chose Verdun as the site of one of Canada's most important small arms ammunition manufacturing centres. The considerable employment and economic advantages this brought to Verdun helped rejuvenate much of the city's Depression-battered population. A local war industry meant that Verdun would support materially the enormous overseas manpower contribution for which the city had become renowned.

Until the summer of 1940 Ottawa had been remarkably slow and complacent about placing defence contracts with Canadian industry. C.P. Stacey has noted that "[n]othing could be much more unwarlike than the chronicle of contracts awarded through the winter of 1939-40" which assured for the armed services a plentiful supply of corn syrup and toilet paper though little in the way of the 'pointed end' of war supply.¹ After the crushing defeat of Allied arms in Western Europe in June 1940 Britain placed urgent orders for Canadian war *matériel* and Ottawa suddenly abandoned its policy of limited liability. The Canadian economy moved to a total war footing and this eventually resulted in the re-establishment of a defence industry in Verdun.

In 1941 C.D. Howe, the dynamic Minister of Munitions and Supply, authorized the widespread construction of new defence plants and the conversion and modernization of selected existing civilian facilities.² Canada's industrial base expanded in scope, diversity and technological complexity. Canadian war production proved of inestimable value to

¹ C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments, op. cit.*, p. 504. In the same work, p. 486, Stacey also noted that "[f]ew aspects of Canadian war policy are likely to surprise posterity more than the fact that measures to provide Canadian-made arms for the Canadian Army were not taken until June and July of 1940, some nine months after the outbreak of war."

² J. de N. Kennedy, *History of the Department of Munitions and Supply*. (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1950). Volume I, p. 8.

the Allied cause and was nothing short of remarkable for a nation of 11.5 million people. Canada produced over 400 naval escorts and minesweepers, 391 merchant vessels, 16,000 military aircraft, 850,000 military vehicles of every description, 251,000 machine guns, over 900,000 rifles and more than 72 million rounds of artillery and mortar ammunition.³ One of Canada's greatest wartime concentrations of military industries was located in and around Montreal. The number of manufacturing establishments, overall manufacturing and industrial employment levels and the gross value of production in the Montreal area all rose substantially. Montreal had the advantage of being Canada's greatest city and port and it also served as the headquarters for much of the nation's transportation industry.⁴

Throughout the war the Department of Munitions and Supply (D.M.S.) undertook a large-scale program of financial assistance to defence contractors. Ottawa provided grants and loans to upgrade or expand fixed and current assets. The federal government also entered the defence business. By the end of 1943 Ottawa owned and operated 33 Crown plants (in addition to owning and managing 16 Crown Corporations), owned a further 92 Crown plants which were operated by private companies and co-ordinated production at 299 privately-owned and operated war facilities.⁵

³ For further details on Canadian war production and its importance to the Canadian economy and Allied war effort, see Kennedy, *History of the Department of Munitions and Supply, op. cit.*; H.D. Hall and C.C. Wrigley, *Studies of Overseas Supply*. H.M.S.O. London, 1956; H.D. Hall, *North American Supply*. H.M.S.O. London, 1955.

⁴ A good summary of Montreal's military-industrial expansion can be found in "War Employment in Canada - Geographical Report", Fifth Edition, January 15, 1944, Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Munitions and Supply, RG 28 A, Volume 187, NAC.

⁵ "Report on Government-Financed Expansion and Industrial Capacity in Canada as at December 31, 1943", dated February 29, 1944, Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Munitions and Supply, RG 28 A, Volume 188, NAC.

At the outbreak of war only the government-run Dominion Arsenal at Québec and the private manufacturer, Canadian Industries Limited (C.I.L.), were capable of producing small arms ammunition in Canada (that is, all ammunition with a bullet diameter of one inch or less). Ammunition production at C.I.L. was almost all for commercial and sporting purposes. Yet by 1943 so successful had been the expansion of small arms ammunition production that, in the words of the official historian of Canada's industrial war effort, "it became an outstanding feature of the nation's munition programme".⁶ Small arms ammunition production in Verdun played a very prominent role in this success.

In 1939 Verdun was still suffering from the ravages of the Great Depression. Since only a small percentage of Verdunites who enlisted had been unemployed, and without local industries to provide work, the city's jobless rate remained high until mid-1940. Several times municipal authorities petitioned various federal and provincial departments and agencies to ensure that Verdun working men and women would not be forgotten in the nation's anticipated industrial expansion.⁷ City Hall was determined to exploit the economic opportunities occasioned by the war.

In April 1940 Arthur Burgess wrote to the War Supply Board in Ottawa (which was replaced in function on April 9, 1940 by the newly-created Department of Munitions and Supply⁸), reminding this body of the continued existence of the main facilities of Verdun's Great War-era munitions plant. Burgess noted that nearly 6000 Verdunites, the unemployed and their families, remained dependent on municipal relief and inquired as to

⁶ Kennedy, *History of the Department of Munitions and Supply*, *op. cit.*, Volume I, p. 77.

⁷ Council Minutes, March 11 and August 27, 1940.

⁸ For a description of the origins and responsibilities of this department, see Kennedy, I, pp. 3-9.

whether the government had considered taking over the site for production purposes.⁹ Eager to attract investment, Verdun also sought to lessen the financial burden of municipal relief payments to the city's unemployed. As with the city's leasing of the Auditorium to the Department of National Defence, wartime patriotism and financial self-interest merged conveniently in the city's attempts to join in the war effort.

Though Verdun had very little industry the War Supply Board noted the several Verdun firms capable of manufacturing defence-related goods.¹⁰ At this time there was no indication that Ottawa intended to revive Verdun's long-dormant munitions plant. In August 1940, however, Ottawa offered capital assistance to Defence Industries Limited, for the re-establishment of a munitions factory in Verdun. A subsidiary of C.I.L., D.I.L. was formed shortly following the outbreak of hostilities. The Verdun plant became a Crown-owned factory fully managed and operated on the government's behalf by D.I.L.¹¹

With orders for Canadian war supplies increasing as rapidly as the growing industrial economy could absorb them, in December 1940 the Verdun press triumphantly announced that the idle facilities on the site of the 1916-1918 British Munitions plant were to be reactivated. Renovation work, tooling and equipment installation began in January 1941, though some delays were caused by a serious shortage of machine tools. Consequently, the plant did not become operational until May 1941 and at first operated only at partial capacity. Delays such as these were common in Canadian war industries

⁹ Burgess to the War Supply Board, April 4, 1940, Box A-331, file 6, CVA. Municipalities all across Canada lobbied Ottawa at this time in the hope of obtaining defence contracts or military installations.

¹⁰ G.K. Sheils, Director of Administration, War Supply Board, to Burgess, April 9, 1940, Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

¹¹ "Report on Government-Financed Expansion and Industrial Capacity in Canada as at December 31, 1943", dated February 29, 1944, Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Munitions and Supply, RG 28 A, Volume 188, NAC; *The Messenger*, June 1, 1944.

and most munitions plants encountered early tooling problems which required time and experience to overcome. D.I.L.-Verdun was no exception.¹²

D.I.L. developed a large network of defence facilities across Canada. The firm manufactured small arms ammunition in the Villeray section of Montreal, where it operated a plant known as Montreal Works, as well as at a plant in Brownsburg, Québec. Other facilities produced explosives, cordite or related chemicals in Winnipeg, Windsor, Shawinigan and Beloeil, enormous shell-filling factories in Pickering, St-Paul l'Hermite (Cherrier plant) and Ste. Thérèse (Bouchard plant) and, more ominously, mustard gas in Cornwall.¹³ Like all war industries, D.I.L.-Verdun obtained its production contracts and operating guidelines from the Department of Munitions and Supply.

Though the main buildings constructed in 1916 were re-employed, the triangular, 27.5-acre lot in east-end Verdun bordered by Wellington Street, Rushbrooke Street and Lasalle Boulevard, was transformed in the period 1941-1945. By December 31, 1943, Ottawa had invested or had committed to invest in D.I.L.-Verdun more than \$17 million on buildings, renovations and modernization and a further \$32 million for fixed assets. No other small arms ammunition producer in Canada obtained more capital investment in its facilities than D.I.L., and none of the D.I.L. plants received more investment than the one established in Verdun. Very few Canadian war plants in any industry, and especially among those operated for the government by private firms, benefitted more from government investment than the Verdun plant.¹⁴ Some 40 new buildings were erected.

¹² Report of the Arsenals and Small Arms Ammunition Branch, Department of Munitions and Supply (1943), pp. 18-19, RG 28 A, Volume 26, file 1, NAC; Kennedy, I, pp. 77-85; *The Guardian*, December 20, 1940.

¹³ Kennedy, I, pp. 110-134 and 301.

¹⁴ "Report on Government-Financed Expansion and Industrial Capacity in Canada as at December 31, 1943", dated February 29, 1944, Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Munitions and Supply, RG 28 A, Volume 188, N.A.C.

including a ballistics testing range and railway sidings which linked the plant to the railway system of neighbouring Point St. Charles. Floor space doubled to 516,000 square feet.¹⁵ Verdun and its work force would soon reap the benefits of Ottawa's huge investment.

From the beginning the Verdun plant assumed a large role in the nation's production of small arms ammunition. D.I.L.-Verdun specialized in the manufacturing of .303-inch calibre ammunition used in the Lee-Enfield rifles, Bren guns and Vickers machine guns in standard service with the forces of the British Commonwealth as well as other Allied nations. The Verdun plant's original planned output was for 50 million rounds per month of .303-inch ball ammunition, officially defined as "a bullet composed of a bullet jacket and a lead core assembled with the cartridge case...filled with either powder or cordite".¹⁶ This estimate proved unrealistic and the production average to May 1943 was closer to 45 million per month. Nonetheless, D.I.L.-Verdun produced more .303-inch ball ammunition than any other munitions plant in Canada, including even the Dominion Arsenal at Québec, which supplied close to 40 million .303-inch rounds, all varieties, per month. In mid-1943, existing government stocks of small arms ammunition as well as projections for future requirements led to reduced orders for .303-inch rounds. Accordingly, Verdun's production rate was reduced to about 30 million per month.¹⁷

¹⁵ *The Guardian*, Special Supplement, May 23, 1946. By comparison, the enormous plant of Sorel Industries Limited which produced the 25-pounder gun, the standard artillery piece of Commonwealth field regiments, contained approximately 600,000 square feet of factory space and employed 3000 workers. At its peak, D.I.L.-Verdun employed 6800. See Kennedy, I, p. 193.

¹⁶ Kennedy, I, p. 77.

¹⁷ Report of the Arsenals and Small Arms Ammunition Branch, Department of Munitions and Supply (1943), pp. 19-20, RG 28 A, Volume 26, file 1, NAC. This report, p. 20, noted that "it has been extremely difficult to establish a stabilized picture at [the Verdun] plant due to the frequently changing requirements". See also Kennedy, I, pp. 77-79 and 83.

D.I.L.-Verdun produced over 1.5 billion cartridges during the war, an enormous output by any standard. This total included 1.2 billion rounds of .303-inch ball ammunition, 183 million .303-inch tracer rounds, 94 million rounds of 9 mm ammunition and 84 million of .30 calibre.¹⁸ The factory also produced millions of rounds of various kinds of experimental .303-inch ammunition, with mixed results, as well as some .45 and .50 calibre ammunition.¹⁹ During a visit to Verdun one year following the end of the European war, C.D. Howe, who had assumed the new portfolio of Minister of Reconstruction and Supply on December 31, 1945, noted that the local D.I.L. plant had been one of the largest small arms ammunition manufacturers in all of the Allied nations. A total of slightly more than 4.6 billion rounds of small arms ammunition had been produced in Canada during the Second World War, of which 3.3 billion was of .303-inch calibre. D.I.L.-Verdun's 1.38 billion .303-inch ball and tracer rounds constituted almost 42% of all .303-inch rounds produced in Canada while nearly one third of *all* Canadian small arms rounds were made in Verdun.²⁰ Moreover, the production of .303-inch ball ammunition in Verdun cost \$32.00 per thousand while similar ammunition obtained by the British Purchasing Commission in the United States cost \$50.00 per thousand. The Verdun plant also manufactured .303-inch ammunition slightly more cheaply than the Dominion Arsenal.²¹

¹⁸ *The Guardian*, May 23, 1946 and Special Supplement, May 23, 1946.

¹⁹ Report of the Arsenals and Small Arms Ammunition Branch, p. 22, RG 28 A, Volume 26, file 1, NAC; Kennedy, I, pp. 83-4.

²⁰ Kennedy, I, p. 88. During the war British industry produced approximately 10 billion rounds of small arms ammunition and the rest of the Commonwealth nearly 4 billion. The United States manufactured the enormous total of 42 billion. Hall and Wrigley, *Studies of Overseas Supply, op. cit.*, pp. 51 and 477; Hall, *North American Supply, op. cit.*, p. 427.

²¹ Report of the Arsenals and Small Arms Ammunition Branch, p. 20, RG 28 A, Volume 26, file 1, NAC; Kennedy, pp. 79 and 83.

At its height in early 1943, the small arms ammunition industry employed over 30,000 workers nationally, including those employed in private industry and at the Dominion Arsenals in Québec City and Lindsay, Ontario.²² At the peak of its production in early 1943 D.I.L. employed 32,500 people across Canada, engaged mainly in the manufacturing of small arms ammunition and related components. Compared to these overall figures, the Verdun plant employed 6805 workers during the crest of its production in December 1942, which was about 21% of D.I.L.'s workforce at that time.²³ Table 6.1 shows employment figures at D.I.L. for the period 1941-1943.

TABLE 6.1 EMPLOYMENT AT D.I.L.-VERDUN 1941-1943²⁴

	Male	Female	(%) Female	Total
July 1941	1166	591	(34)	1757
Feb. 1942	1809	1382	(43)	3191
July 1942	2622	2366	(47)	4988
Dec. 1942	3268	3537	(52)	6805
July 1943	2089	2184	(51)	4273

In July 1943, of the 27,100 Canadians employed in the manufacturing of small arms ammunition, 12,700 were men and 14,400 women (53% of the total). About 16% of

²² Kennedy, I. p. 76.

²³ While the employment peak at the Dominion Arsenal at Québec reached 13,000, this plant was engaged in many other forms of war production including rolling mill and foundry operations and the manufacture of components. Kennedy, I. pp. 78-9.

²⁴ This table is a composite drawn from information provided from the following sources (which do not always accord): "War Employment in Canada - Geographical Report", Fifth Edition, January 15, 1944, Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Munitions and Supply, RG 28 A, Volume 187; "Geographical Distribution of Labour Requirements for War Production", January 27, 1942, May 30, 1942 and January 26, 1943, RG 28 A, Volume 182; Report of the Arsenals and Small Arms Ammunition Branch, p. 21, NAC. The total figure for July 1943 is listed as 4949 in "War Employment in Canada"

these 27,100 workers were employed in Verdun.²⁵ No significant imbalance existed in the sex ratio of workers at D.I.L.-Verdun compared to the national average. After August 1942 women constituted the majority of war workers employed in Verdun.

A February 1941 D.M.S. projection of the labour requirements of the Verdun plant shows that the single greatest category of workers employed there was expected to be unskilled and that most of these unskilled workers would be women. Of the 7500 jobs forecasted for Verdun in 1941, 3225 were expected to be unskilled, 1200 semi-skilled, a mere 225 skilled, 225 clerical and fully 2625 were not categorized.²⁶ In January 1943, at the peak of production and employment at Verdun-D.I.L., planners from the Economics and Statistics Branch, D.M.S., believed that a maximum of 9500 workers, including 5700 women, might be employed at the plant.²⁷ While this forecast never materialized it is clear that the Verdun factory enjoyed a high profile with D.M.S.

The question of preferential hiring for Verdun residents at D.I.L. was raised in the city, as it had been during the Great War. At the time of D.I.L.'s opening in May 1941, the city council petitioned Verdun's M.P., Paul-Émile Côté, to ensure that Verdunites obtain "a reasonable proportion" of the new jobs created there. Côté replied that he had been working on this important issue since the beginning of 1941 and that, following discussions with officials from D.M.S., he could promise the mayor and council that *"préférence sera accordée à ceux de nos concitoyens qui auront les qualifications*

²⁵ Economics and Statistics Branch, "Estimated Employment on War Production", October 18, 1943, RG 28 A, Volume 188, NAC. If, as indicated in "War Employment in Canada", the July 1943 figure of 4949 is used, the proportion rises to 18%.

²⁶ "Estimated Production of Firms Engaged in War Production", February 20, 1941, Economics and Statistics Branch, D.M.S., RG 28 A, Volume 188, NAC.

²⁷ "Geographical Distribution of Labour Requirements for War Production", January 27, 1942 and January 26, 1943, RG 28 A, Volume 182, NAC.

requis pour l'emploi désiré".²⁸ The promise seems to have been kept, if later press commentary can serve as a guide.

As early as December 1940 *The Guardian* noted that Verdun residents would receive hiring preference and gleefully anticipated that the re-opening of the facility would prove "one of the biggest booms to this city that has ever occurred".²⁹ A month later, the Verdun Unemployment Relief Commission announced its decision to wind up its activities effective July 1, 1941 owing to dwindling unemployment and the expectation that joblessness in Verdun was "due to completely disappear...in the very near future" with the opening of the D.I.L. plant.³⁰ In this tangible way, the city and its inhabitants benefitted directly from the war: municipal finances improved considerably with the virtual elimination of local relief rolls and the family economies of thousands of Verdunites were noticeably enhanced.

Labour-management relations at D.I.L.-Verdun were described in *The Guardian* in 1946 as having remained "friendly" during the war.³¹ Given the number of labour disputes which occurred in Canada, the point seemed especially noteworthy. While the workers in Verdun did not strike, there is some evidence that not all was satisfactory. Alderman Émile Ste-Marie remarked in a meeting of the Executive Committee in February 1942 that he had received many complaints from D.I.L. workers who claimed they were not being paid as well as their colleagues in Ontario doing similar work. Although the city intended to form a special committee made up of Alderman Ste-Marie and Alderman Robert Scurrah to investigate the situation, no more was heard of the matter at the

²⁸ Council Minutes, May 7, 1941; Côté to City Council, May 15, 1941, Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

²⁹ *The Guardian*, December 20, 1940.

³⁰ Executive Committee Minutes, January 13, 1941.

³¹ *The Guardian*, Special Supplement, May 23, 1946.

municipal level.³² Even if the complaints were accurate they were never serious enough to lead the workers to disrupt production.

Setting up the D.I.L. installation in Verdun accentuated the city's housing shortage. As early as January 1942 the city realized that a considerable number of D.I.L.'s workers were not Verdunites. Employees naturally sought to live near their work. Since D.I.L. workers' housing was not provided by the federal government, City Council feared that the housing needs of a large influx of workers and their families might exacerbate local tensions and ultimately hamper war production. Verdun recommended to federal authorities that the city be designated a priority zone under the terms of both the National Housing Act (1938) and existing wartime restrictions governing the availability of building materials. In this case the city attempted to use the war situation to its advantage in acquiring greater resources for local development. Ottawa remained aloof to the request and a shortage of housing developed in Verdun which persisted well into the postwar period.³³

Even with the D.I.L. plant, Verdun retained its residential character during the war and municipal authorities preferred that it did so. D.I.L. remained Verdun's only significant war industry though some small local enterprises employing relatively few workers, such as lumber and coal yards and industrial laundries, contributed indirectly to the war effort. In June 1942 the city refused to grant a permit to R.C.A. Victor for the establishment of a woodworking plant on the grounds that the building the company sought to occupy, though removed from the city centre, was still in the midst of residential housing recently erected under the provisions of the National Housing Act. In an attempt to impress upon

³² Executive Committee Minutes, February 2, 1942. The D.I.L.-Verdun site apparently offered employees the best available in terms of conveniences and comforts. *The Guardian*, Special Supplement, May 23, 1946.

³³ Council Minutes, January 7, 1942. See Chapter 7 for a discussion of the housing crisis in Verdun.

Verdun the importance of the R.C.A. plant, D.M.S. made it clear to a delegation of city officials, which included Edward Wilson and three aldermen, that this woodworking plant was to be engaged solely in war work.

But the city remained recalcitrant and Ottawa attempted to find an alternate location before "requesting" that Verdun comply with its wishes.³⁴ Unless obliged, the city was unwilling to compromise Verdun's quality of life, even for so patriotic a cause as a war industry. From City Hall's point of view, unless federal and municipal goals coincided, Verdun's immediate needs took priority over those of the war. But once Ottawa insisted on having its way, the municipal authorities were quick to respond. In August C.D. Howe wrote Wilson that the site of the proposed R.C.A. plant was "urgently required for the execution of important war contracts". The almost apologetic Howe wrote:

I appreciate your reluctance to permit the establishment of an industry in close proximity to a residential area. On the other hand, we must realize that war brings with it many inconveniences. I would not ask you to issue a permit...if it were possible to find satisfactory building space elsewhere.³⁵

The permit was granted the same day, but only "in view of the urgent representations and direct request of the Hon. C.D. Howe". Verdun's hesitancy to accept another war industry was based on the desire to maintain the community's residential nature and avoid contributing to the local housing shortage. Once unemployment had more or less disappeared, industrial expansion seemed to portend more disadvantages to Verdun than benefits.

Verdunites worked in other war industries throughout the Montreal area. For example, when Canadian Pacific announced in March 1943 that its east-end Angus Shops facility was discontinuing production of the Valentine light tank (which was manufactured for

³⁴ Executive Committee Minutes, June 23, July 30 and July 31, 1942.

³⁵ Howe to Wilson, August 12, 1942, text reproduced in Executive Committee Minutes, August 12, 1942.

delivery to the Soviet Union). many among the 2000 workers to be laid off were expected to be Verdunites.³⁶ A few weeks later, Montreal was afflicted with an acrimonious and extremely inconvenient 48-hour strike by Montreal Tramways workers. Not only were thousands of workers' regular transit schedules disrupted, but Montreal's defence industries suffered dislocation as well. In an awkwardly expressed sentiment belying pride in Verdun's large contribution of military-industrial labour, *The Guardian* stated that "[t]here is probably no other outlying municipality where so many men and women, young and middle aged, and some even rather advanced in age, are engaged in Canada's great war effort, as in the City of Verdun, proportionally to its population."³⁷ Though this was perhaps an exaggeration, the point was not lost.

The local munitions works provided non-combatants the opportunity to assist in the war effort. With so many Verdun homes having contributed men and women to the armed services, the home-front labours of many local workers allowed them to feel they were tangibly supporting their relatives and friends in uniform. Considering the extent to which Verdun's press was eager to highlight local war efforts, it paid relatively little attention to the D.I.L. plant. Even taking into account wartime caution, *The Guardian* published few reports on D.I.L.'s immense importance to Canadian war industry or on Verdunites' substantial role in the plant's success.

The interaction between D.I.L. and the wider Verdun community is difficult to gauge. The Reserve Army units using the Verdun Auditorium as an armoury were occasionally granted permission to set up recruiting tables on the company's premises. The Verdun chapter of the Red Cross set up an on-site blood donor clinic and, on one exceptional occasion in 1942, the Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps solicited donations on behalf of the Mayor's Cigarette Fund from the thousands of D.I.L. workers leaving and entering the

³⁶ *The Guardian*, March 12, 1943.

³⁷ *The Guardian*, April 2, 1943.

plant during shift changes.³⁸ D.I.L. did not seem to need its host community to the same extent as Verdun needed it as an employer and, in fact, the city lent the company relatively little support. In the spring of 1942, the aptly-named Silver Bullet Club, a recreational group made up of D.I.L. employees, obtained municipal permission to use a nearby playground for its softball teams. But later that year the city refused D.I.L. the use of city hall for occasional company dances and social gatherings. The city claimed that "all available [space] is being increasingly required for war services and allied charitable purposes. Moreover, the city does not wish to prejudice the owners of local halls who pay taxes to operate."³⁹ While the city wished to help maintain war workers' morale, D.I.L. was not a charity and was expected to pay its way.

At the end of 1943, during the peak period of Canadian war production, C.D. Howe announced a cut in Canadian small arms ammunition production owing to lower than expected usage. This followed a May 1943 decision which had scaled back production in Verdun by one third. The D.I.L. plants in Verdun and Villeray were seriously affected by these decisions. Some 3500 of the company's workers nation-wide were to be let go by March 31, 1944. Other war industries were expected to absorb about 1800 of these workers. Notices were posted at the Verdun factory informing workers that up to 35% of them could expect to be laid off in the next three or four months, which is precisely what happened.⁴⁰ Most seem to have been absorbed into the Montreal economy and no serious social repercussions appear to have resulted from the lay-offs.

³⁸ R.R. Buchanan, Personnel Superintendent, Verdun Works, D.I.L., to Wilson, October 13, 1942, Box A-322, file 1, CVA.

³⁹ L.R. Wood, Secretary, The Silver Bullet Club, to Norman Dawe, Municipal Playgrounds Commissioner, no date (May 1942), and reply, June 1, 1942, Box A-258, CVA; Executive Committee Minutes, November 9, 1942.

⁴⁰ *The Guardian*, December 23, 1943; *The Messenger*, December 23, 1943.

As the war in Europe wound down, it was obvious that D.I.L. workers would be casualties of defence industry retrenchment. At the end of 1944 the payroll at D.I.L.-Verdun had dropped to 1800, a 74% reduction from what it had been two years previously. By the end of March 1945, production at the Verdun plant had virtually ended. Within two months, only the Dominion Arsenals continued to produce small arms ammunition in Canada.⁴¹ The cessation of hostilities in Europe in May 1945 brought significant job losses to Verdun. The plant shut down permanently in July. The government declared it surplus in August and turned it over to War Assets Corporation for disposal.⁴²

Thousands of Verdunites had found employment at D.I.L. and the city sought to retain a source of local employment into the postwar period. Even prior to Germany's surrender, various options were considered regarding the disposition of Verdun's war plant. Côté suggested that the D.I.L. facility might be used as a technical school to retrain veterans or former defence workers. He also hoped that part of the plant might be converted into an armoury or drill hall, a facility sought by many in Verdun.⁴³ The main consideration was to generate employment to protect against the effects of an anticipated postwar economic slump.

Due in no small part to Côté's own strenuous efforts, the city and War Assets agreed to transform the D.I.L. property into a minor industrial park. Within months War Assets had leased to private investors many lots and buildings suitable for manufacturing. The federal government's Real Estate Advisory Committee believed that offering leases would hasten the development of Canadian industry and allow companies to make quick inroads

⁴¹ Kennedy, I, pp. 83 and 86.

⁴² *The Guardian*, Special Supplement, May 23, 1946. War Assets was a Crown Corporation created by Order-in-Council in November 1943. It served as a clearing house for all surplus government wares.

⁴³ *The Guardian*, May 24, 1945 and September 13, 1945.

into national and international markets. Verdun's new industrial tenants were selected from among those applicants deemed capable of generating the greatest employment.⁴⁴ By November 1945, 26 light industries of a varied nature, including machine shops, furniture makers, printers and makers of pharmaceutical products, rubber goods, and small appliances had decided to locate on the site of the former war plant. An estimated 2500 jobs were expected to be created, many of them for Verdunites. The press hailed the possibility that local manufacturing jobs were to be available as "a great stabilizing power in the community". Verdun's working-class population had grown slightly apprehensive about their fate since the closure of Montreal-area war industries and the demobilization of thousands of servicemen.⁴⁵ But all augured well for Verdun. By May 1946, the D.I.L. site had attracted 39 firms which were expected to employ over 2900 people.⁴⁶

Since many of the firms had agreed to City Hall's request that Verdunites be granted the privilege of preferential hiring, expectations were high in the community for the success of Verdun's first peace-time industrial conglomeration. Some in the community believed that the local economic stimulus which the war had provided at least partly would continue into the postwar era, allowing Verdun to develop into an important centre for light industries. Yet, with military and industrial demobilization in full swing many among Verdun's former defence workers and service people worried about their prospects. City Hall was no longer worried about industry moving into Verdun; municipal authorities were willing to alter somewhat Verdun's traditional role as the "bedroom" of Montreal in the hope of securing employment for its citizens during a period of expected postwar economic depression.

⁴⁴ *The Guardian*, Special Supplement, May 23, 1946.

⁴⁵ *The Guardian*, November 1, 1945 and Special Supplement, May 23, 1946.

⁴⁶ *The Guardian*, May 2, 1946 and Special Supplement, May 23, 1946.

On May 20, 1946, the Minister of Reconstruction and Supply, C.D. Howe, inspected the former D.I.L. grounds, since renamed the Verdun Industrial Plant, and proclaimed the relocation of industries to Verdun a harbinger of greater things to come. Accompanied by a large delegation of politicians and officials representing three levels of government, Howe noted in a brief address that Verdun's successful postwar conversion of a munitions factory for civilian use showed great foresight, and he gave much of the credit to Paul-Émile Côté, who basked in the senior minister's praise.⁴⁷ Edward Wilson boasted that the future of Verdun as an industrial centre was assured.⁴⁸ On May 23, 1946, *The Guardian* published a special supplement, under the headline, "A Source of Prosperity for Verdun", devoted entirely to the proposed future development of the former D.I.L. lot. The industrial conversion of the facility was vaunted as the best example of its kind in Canada. The war had helped improve Verdun's image as a progressive and far-sighted city and *The Guardian* was sure that Verdun's stature had been enhanced in the eyes of the Montreal-area business community. Why else would so many industries agree to locate in Verdun? The war and its aftermath seemed to have brought a measure of permanent employment security to Verdun and injected an air of confidence and optimism.

The City of Verdun had sought and obtained a war industry and the local population and the overall war effort had become the joint beneficiaries. All elements in the community, notwithstanding other differences of opinion, favoured the establishment of so large a war industry and D.I.L. became part of the fabric of wartime Verdun, seemingly without disturbing the social structure of the community. With its successful conversion to civilian use following the end of hostilities, the D.I.L. lot continued for some time to

⁴⁷ Because of Côté's rather muted stance on the war, the Liberal backbencher heard little praise in Verdun. His political views are discussed in Chapter 8.

⁴⁸ *The Guardian*, May 23, 1946.

serve the city's economic interests, and this legacy, as much as the site's outstanding wartime achievements, is indicative of its lasting worth to the community.

CHAPTER 7

WARTIME FAMILY AND SOCIAL DISLOCATION

The Second World War affected Verdun and its residents in many varied ways, not all of them positive. For those who lost close relatives on active service, the war shook the foundations of their lives. For others who assumed a greater familial and financial responsibility during the temporary absence of male relatives, the war proved a social and personal burden. Others remained only slightly affected by the war. One Verdunite, John Parker, recalled that the Second World War was not a particularly noteworthy period for him. His most vivid memories of this time are focused not on the war but on his personal life and work experience, both only indirectly affected by the war.¹

Life may have gone on but it was difficult to ignore the war since it affected the way most people lived, worked, shopped and passed their time. The war affected everyone materially or emotionally, even though its influence might have been barely perceptible to persons like Parker. It permitted a greater range of civilian employment opportunities. For every family shattered by the war, two or three derived financial advantage from it.

But Canada's and Verdun's war was as much one of individual perceptions and reactions as it was an overarching national experience. Many people suffered personal and social discomfiture, fear and grief. Verdun's enlistments often produced emotional strain and, in some cases, financial hardship for those left behind. In a community like Verdun the removal from the household of the principal breadwinner could devastate family finances or otherwise adversely affect family morale. Some Verdunites were forced to accept social assistance. Rationing caused consumer anxiety. Children's behaviour and wartime culture were affected. Many Verdunites worried about the rise in juvenile delinquency. Indeed, Verdun was the scene of a serious social disturbance implicating large numbers of youths and servicemen. A national housing shortage seriously eroded many Verdunites'

¹ Interview with John Parker, January 14, 1994. Parker was an elementary school teacher at Woodland School in Verdun.

quality of life. Many of these issues were inter-related and contained class and linguistic dimensions, themselves magnified by the extraordinary circumstances of war.

THE CONSUMERS' WAR

Wartime profiteering began at once. Even before Britain or Canada had declared war on Germany, the Verdun branch of the Canadian Corps Association alerted City Hall to the fact that some local merchants had raised food prices, especially for sugar, in response to the crisis in Europe. Some allegedly extorted a minimum purchase of other goods from clients before agreeing to sell them sugar. The C.C.A., already concerned by the plight of the families of Verdun's Great War veterans struggling on relief, accused the merchants of "war profiteering". City Council informed federal and provincial police authorities while the city itself, relying on women consumers for most of its information, undertook to monitor local retailers' prices. The city served notice to consumers, too, reminding them that the hoarding of essential commodities would be "unhesitatingly" reported to the federal authorities. Verdun also urged Ottawa to grant municipalities the powers to enact special by-laws to "combat this abuse".² City Hall strongly condemned illegal pricing, a practice Edward Wilson considered unpatriotic.

As a result of the Canadian experience during the Great War, Ottawa adopted immediate measures to limit profiteering. At the outbreak of hostilities it established the Wartime Prices and Trade Board (W.P.T.B.) to regulate prices and avoid inflation. The W.P.T.B. wielded the power to control retail prices as well as the public supply of essential commodities and materials. Until the fall of 1941, however, the W.P.T.B. played only a discreet role in regulating Canadians' purchases. Then in October 1941 a serious rise in the cost of living obliged the federal government to impose a comprehensive system of wage and price controls effective December 1. This move reflected Ottawa's goal of

² Council Minutes, September 7 and September 11, 1939; *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 12, 1939.

consumer and commercial stability and restraint. Allowable prices for goods and services were set according to those in effect between September 15 and October 11, 1941. These complicated administrative measures, affecting the lives of all Canadians, proved successful: inflation was kept to a minimum for the remainder of the war.³

In October 1939 Sarah Upton, a representative of the embryonic Verdun Housewives' League, sought City Hall's help in organizing resistance to merchant profiteering. Arthur Burgess responded with nothing more encouraging than that the city was already co-operating with the R.C.M.P. in the matter. Upton's attempts to organize Verdun women suggests vocal public opposition to unscrupulous and unpatriotic local business practices.⁴ Since Canadian women spent nearly 85% of all household income on the purchase of retail merchandise, they also monitored prices and investigated suspected offenses. From December 1941 until the end of the war some 16,000 Canadian women, organized into Women's Regional Advisory Committees, acted as voluntary price wardens and supplied consumers with W.P.T.B. guidelines. Ruth Pierson has suggested that these women, in fulfilling their accepted and expected social roles as shoppers, were "indispensable" in checking inflation.⁵

In 1942 Canada introduced the full-scale rationing of scarce and essential goods and services. The W.P.T.B. administered the system and issued all consumers with ration coupons to be surrendered at the point of sale. Purchases of gasoline were regulated in

³ Joseph Schull, *The Great Scot: A Biography of Donald Gordon*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), pp. 54ff.

⁴ Sarah Upton to Wilson, October 8, 1939 and Burgess to Upton, October 23, 1939, Box A-331, file 6; Council Minutes, October 10, 1939.

⁵ In the first few months of the war retail prices rose approximately 13%. Auger and Lamothe, *De la poêle à frire à la ligne de feu*, pp. 53-59; Ruth R. Pierson, "They're Still Women After All", *op. cit.*, p. 40; Schull, *The Great Scot*, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-67. Schull, p. 63, refers to Canadian women as the "field force" of the W.P.T.B. To June 1942, however, only 147 merchants nationwide had been prosecuted as a result of consumer vigilance.

April 1942, sugar followed in July while tea and coffee rationing was imposed from August 1942 to September 1944. Butter consumption was controlled from December 1942 and in May 1943 meat allotments were regulated at one kilogram of meat per person per week. Many customers patronized a single supplier in the hope of obtaining small favours unsanctioned by ration regulations. One Verdunite, Wilson Dorman, recalled a butcher shop on Verdun Avenue which accorded his family certain privileges since they were regular customers.⁶

In response to the increased scarcity of certain food items many Verdun families tended "Victory Gardens" on vacant lots, most of which were located near the southwestern limits of the city in Ward 4. *The Guardian* frequently published brief items concerning the city's hundreds of Victory Gardens which supplemented the diets of thousands of Verdunites.⁷

Over 500 W.P.T.B. offices were established in cities and towns across Canada. One was established in Verdun in 1942. Wilson headed the local ration board which at first was housed in the city hall. He then recruited "responsible" citizens to carry out the board's functions, which included price monitoring and ration coupon booklet distribution. Eleven schools throughout Verdun acted as neighbourhood distribution points for the booklets and were staffed entirely by volunteers.⁸

⁶ Interview with Wilson Dorman, September 21, 1993.

⁷ Some 42% of Québec households benefitted from Victory Gardens and there was, in fact, considerable overproduction in some commodities. Auger and Lamothe, p. 73.

⁸ Executive Committee Minutes, October 26, 1942; press release, City of Verdun, February 1943, Box A-331, file 7, CVA; Verdun Catholic School Commission, Minutes of the Board of School Commissioners, April 6 and July 19, 1943, March 7 and March 21, 1944.

Frustrated merchants were required to undertake a daily coupon count and administer a complicated accounting procedure in which commodity sales had to match wholesale deliveries. The coupons became so onerous to handle and collate that in March 1943 chartered banks began collecting the coupons from merchants and sorting them in local branches. The scheme was known as "ration banking". Shopkeepers opened coupon accounts in which they deposited their customers' ration coupons. The bank then issued merchants a voucher for the coupons, a form of "surrogate currency", enabling merchants to re-order rationed items from distributors. By the summer of 1943 the Royal Bank of Canada branch in Verdun handled the comparatively enormous amount of 400,000 ration coupons a week, which underlines the density of Verdun's population.⁹

A black market developed which involved the diversion or theft of products, dishonest record-keeping and overpricing of commodities. Black marketeers justified their actions by claiming rationing was eroding their thin profit margins. Consumers who purchased goods at inflated prices were accomplices in this illegal practice. Despite its large population, remarkably little black market activity seems to have existed in Verdun. The press reported very few cases of ration control evasion. Perhaps the absence of significant industrial or wholesale enterprises made the city unattractive to the racketeers. But on a petty or individual level, Verdun was no different than other Canadian centres. Some residents sought to turn the system to their own advantage. In 1943 Verdun detectives broke up the local black market trade in automobile tires. Other citizens resorted to hoarding. Immediately following the imposition of gasoline rationing in April 1942 two raids in Verdun netted illegal caches of hoarded gasoline. A year later a Wellington Street man was fined \$100.00 for hoarding sugar, condensed milk and other

⁹ Duncan McDowell, *Quick to the Frontier: Canada's Royal Bank*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993), p. 293; *The Royal Bank Magazine*, June and July 1943, Archives of the Royal Bank of Canada, Montreal.

canned goods.¹⁰ One Peter McClask, owner of a small printing business in Verdun was arrested late in the war for possessing printing plates, dyes and other materials used for printing counterfeit gasoline ration coupons. He was fined a hefty \$1500.¹¹

Rationing affected some citizens through a diminution in municipal services. In October 1942 the Montreal-area Controller of Electric Power ordered Verdun, like other municipalities, to dim street lighting by as much as 20% to save electricity. To install street lighting in Verdun's recently-developed areas the city was obliged to curtail lighting for the Boardwalk, hockey rinks, parks and even along Verdun Avenue, a main thoroughfare. The Controller's order created some distress and provoked opposition from the Council of Women of Montreal. The women feared that at a time when police services were pared and juvenile crime was on the increase, the decision to reduce lighting was potentially hazardous for women on the streets after dark. Without dissenting from the view that rationing was a necessary wartime expedient, these women refuted the wisdom of this particular measure. Despite this group's request that Verdun not comply with the ruling, the city engineer, Henry Hadley, reported in November that street lighting had been reduced as required.¹² Verdun had had to conform and local women, sports teams and night-time pedestrians were the residents most affected by the move. For these citizens wartime nights would no longer be as enjoyable or secure as they had been.

One of the most urgent wartime commodity deficiencies to affect Verdun and cities across Canada was the serious home fuel shortage in the winter of 1943-44. Deliveries of hard anthracite coal from the United States for consumer use were sharply curtailed and.

¹⁰ *The Messenger*, May 27, 1943; *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 9, 1942; *The Guardian*, April 10, 1942 and July 30, 1943.

¹¹ *The Guardian*, April 19 and May 3, 1945.

¹² Executive Committee Minutes, October 13 and November 23, 1942.

since insufficient amounts of wood had been stockpiled during the previous year, the situation became desperate. Verdun City Council set up a Fuel Commission in September 1943. Wilson assumed the chairmanship and other members included J.R. French, Burgess, two aldermen, the M.L.A., J.J.L. Comeau, and several representatives from among Verdun's thirteen coal and wood merchants.

The commission's purpose was to ensure Verdunites suffered no fuel shortages in the upcoming winter. The dealers complained bitterly to city officials against the high costs they incurred in acquiring, transporting and storing fuel supplies, especially when compared to the low consumer prices for wood they were forced to charge according to W.P.T.B. stipulations. Ever concerned with ameliorating local conditions, municipal leaders vainly attempted to have the provincial legislature amend the Cities and Towns Act to enable the municipality to purchase quantities of coal or wood for resale to merchants and, ultimately, to citizens. Municipalities were prevented from engaging in this form of commercial transaction. *The Guardian* chided federal and provincial regulations and insisted that "necessity [knows] no law bar the law of necessity". How would the war effort be aided by allowing people to freeze in their flats in the coming winter?, wondered this newspaper. Wood yard operators in Verdun were understandably loath to stockpile large shipments of wood they would have to sell virtually at a loss. Although Verdun finally obtained Ottawa's consent in principle to purchase and distribute 5000 cords of wood to fuel merchants, in the end the federal government balked at guaranteeing the financial subsidies to local wood dealers upon which the Verdun Fuel

Commission had insisted.¹³ Verdunites therefore were obliged to make do with whatever fuel they could obtain from existing national stocks.

The city had made every attempt to care for the fuel needs of its citizens and took on a leading role in the Montreal area in this regard. As it happened, mild weather and the co-operation established between local merchants and City Hall enabled an equitable sharing among Verdunites of meagre coal and wood supplies. The community worked together and the situation was at least tolerable. The municipal Fuel Commission did not blame wood dealers for refusing to stockpile wood for the coming winter. Instead it "sympathize[d] with all local merchants who refused to pay the prices asked in the country[side]".¹⁴ In their view the culprit was the federal government. For the merchants, business came first, not patriotism. Concerned with the welfare of residents, the city agreed with the dealers. Like Canadians everywhere, Verdunites were forced to adhere to federal regulations and await the day when the restrictions on commerce would be lifted. There were ample signs, however, that neither Verdun residents nor City Hall would tolerate hoarders or unscrupulous merchants, despite the many inconveniences occasioned by wartime rationing.

FAMILY AND SOCIETY

While the Second World War may have solved some of the social and economic ills which beset Canada in the 1930s, it created, accelerated or magnified others. The war

¹³ Burgess to G.C. Piché, Deputy Controller of Wood Fuel (Montreal), Department of Munitions and Supply, July 30, 1943; Fuel Commission Minutes, September 20 and October 14, 1943; Bernard E. Harrison, Executive Assistant to the Wood Fuel Controller, Ottawa, to Wilson, October 19, 1943; Verdun Fuel Commission press release, October 20, 1943; G.C. Piché to Wilson, October 30, 1943, Box A-322, file "Fuel Committee", CVA; Council Minutes, September 14, 1943; *The Guardian*, October 1, 1943; *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 17, 1943.

¹⁴ Verdun Fuel Commission, press release, October 20, 1943, Box A-322, CVA.

years challenged existing social values, perhaps most noticeably those concerned with the role of women. The war was also exacting on the families of servicemen. Stress, fear and anxiety took their emotional and psychological toll on their parents, spouses and children. Family morale was often difficult to sustain. Yet, the booming war economy at least helped make life more tolerable and many families prospered. But not all Verdunites shared in this economic renewal.

Servicemen's spousal allowances and meagre service pay were often not enough for their dependents to make ends meet, especially for those with children. By the fall of 1942, the wife of a private received a Soldiers' Dependents' Allowance of \$35.00 a month and an additional \$12.00 a month per first two children, \$10.00 for a third child and \$8.00 each for fourth, fifth or sixth children. Overseas servicemen were obligated to remit half of their pay to dependents in Canada. For a private this amounted to no less than \$20.00 though rarely more than \$22.50 a month. A private's wife with three children, therefore, could expect to receive from \$89.00 to \$91.50 a month in allowances.¹⁵ The 1943 Marsh Report calculated that a Canadian couple with three children under twelve required no less than \$122.85 a month to make ends meet. By 1945 the annual average income of Canadians had reached an estimated \$1538.¹⁶ If a serviceman's wife with children was not gainfully employed, her Dependents' Allowance was clearly insufficient. In 1943 Robert England, who helped plan and implement Ottawa's civil re-establishment strategies during the war, admitted that Dependents' Allowances, "in the case of a small family...are not quite feasible if the family is resident in a large city."¹⁷

¹⁵ Robert England, *Discharged: A Commentary on Civil Re-establishment of Veterans in Canada*. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1943), pp. 149-152.

¹⁶ Granatstein and Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167; Douglas and Greenhouse, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 257.

¹⁷ England, *Discharged: A Commentary on Civil Re-establishment of Veterans in Canada*, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

The Department of National Defence recognized that many young mothers and in some cases aged parents were left in positions of hardship as a result of the enlistments of husbands and sons. Various administrative boards were established, such as the Dependents' Board of Trustees or the Dependents' Advisory Committee, with the mandate to provide special and often emergency assistance to servicemen's families suffering financial or medical misfortune. Many cases were brought to the attention of these boards and committees, usually through the medium of a local welfare or social agency.

In wartime Montreal the Family Welfare Association, a Protestant charitable group, assisted and counselled needy families of overseas soldiers. In 1941 this agency assisted with medical or childcare expenses 245 Verdun soldiers' families, often made up of aged or ill parents or unemployable spouses with children. These families also received advice on budgeting and managing debts. This figure accounted for the families of some 10% of Verdun servicemen, a high percentage. Over \$18,000 was spent by the Family Welfare Association in assisting Verdunites in 1941 and a similar amount was disbursed in 1942.¹⁸

Some women sought marital and emotional advice from the Family Welfare Association, symptomatic of their long separations from their husbands. Joan Adams noted that many marriages and relationships in Verdun simply could not stand the strains of lengthy separations. This was difficult on children when, in her opinion, the personal relationships entertained by some soldiers' wives, fiancées or girlfriends became the subject of gossip at school or in community organizations. The emotional stress was very hard on these families.¹⁹

¹⁸ *The Guardian*, September 4, 1942 and September 17, 1943.

¹⁹ Interview with Joan Adams, October 6, 1993.

By 1943 the absence of so many Verdunites overseas meant that an increasing number of Verdun families were left in financial hardship and, in some cases, destitution. Active service claimed many families' wage earners, sometimes forever. During the 1943 fund-raising drive of the Montreal Welfare Federation (made up of many different social agencies, including the Family Welfare Association), J.W. MacGillivray, a Verdun businessman and the local chairman of the appeal, noted solemnly, and tellingly, that "we in Verdun understand the needs of any welfare organization". Though he described employment for Verdunites as at an "all time high", MacGillivray also reminded his fellow citizens that many of those left behind by servicemen were living in straitened circumstances. Recalling the strong local community spirit during the Depression, MacGillivray asked residents to fulfill once again their social responsibilities towards less fortunate Verdunites. The appeal was linked to the patriotic view that servicemen could better perform their duties overseas secure in the knowledge that their families were being cared for at home.²⁰ In helping one another Verdunites supported the war effort.

In 1942 Verdunites contributed \$1900 to the Welfare Federation, a sum which met the community quota but which was only one-tenth of what the Federation returned to the community in aid. In the first eight months of 1943 the Family Welfare Association looked after at least 143 Verdun servicemen's families facing indebtedness, a seriously reduced standard of living or medical expenses. Some of these families were also aided by special grants from D.N.D.'s Dependents' Board of Trustees.²¹

In March 1944 the number of servicemen's families receiving aid remained over 200. Only six families, however, had their incomes and spending strictly supervised by the Family Welfare Association. "In view of the large number of Protestant families of enlisted men in Verdun", wrote *The Guardian*, perhaps with a tone of surprise, this

²⁰ *The Guardian*, September 17 and September 24, 1943.

²¹ *The Guardian*, September 17 and September 24, 1943.

constituted a "tribute to the [financial] management by the wives" left behind.²² Local Protestants' patriotism, and lack of extravagance, were much applauded by that newspaper. Clair McLaughlin, a prominent local merchant, and Elizabeth Wilson co-chaired the 1944 fund-raising effort in Verdun. McLaughlin stated that "nobody in Verdun needs to be told that [some] soldiers' families cannot cope with unforeseen problems." Verdunites, wearying of the large number of charitable appeals made to them by 1944, still donated \$2941, or 111% of the fund's objective for Verdun. Moreover, the Family Welfare Association presented Elizabeth Wilson with a trophy for having contributed the highest return by a "women's division" in the Montreal area.²³ Verdunites proved generous contributors, perhaps assured in the knowledge that their largesse would indirectly be channelled right back into their community, possibly even to families known to them. This made giving easier and the high costs of patriotism easier to bear.

In 1941 only 15% of the Family Welfare Association's Montreal-wide caseload concerned servicemen's families. But by 1944 the proportion had risen steadily to 43%, representing 1164 families. This might be explained by a greater Montreal enlistment rate by 1944 and that perhaps more employment opportunities were available for non-service families: mothers with children often could not work. In its annual report for 1944, the Family Welfare Association listed 392 casefiles in Verdun on which \$13,000 was spent - a

²² *The Guardian*, March 2, 1944. Catholics in Verdun were cared for by their parish *Société St-Vincent-de-Paul* or by one of over 30 groups which made up the Federation of Catholic Charities or the Federation of French Charities. *The Montreal Daily Star*, October 3, 1944; *The Guardian*, February 8, 1945.

²³ *The Guardian*, September 14 and October 5, 1944; *The Montreal Daily Star*, October 4, 1944. The view that many servicemen's wives were unable to cope with the intricacies of planning a family budget was a common one at the time across Canada. See also Nick and Helma Mika, *Belleville: Portrait of a City*, (Belleville, Ontario: Mika Publishing, 1983), pp. 47-55. In reporting on the good works of the Family Welfare Association in Verdun, *The Guardian* regularly insinuated that many women left behind could not adequately organize family finances and the needs of their families. Financial difficulties rarely resulted solely from the inability to manage available funds or balance a budget.

considerable reduction in the amount spent per household from the earlier war years. A greater number of soldiers' families were receiving less help. In March 1944 the proportion of Family Welfare cases in Verdun which dealt with servicemen's families was estimated at about two-thirds, indicating that a much higher average of servicemen's families from Verdun found themselves in distress than from elsewhere across Montreal.²⁴ Assuming that roughly 4000 Verdunites, the vast majority of whom were low-paid other ranks, were on active service at the time, this constituted between 6% and 7% of the families of overseas Verdunites. This large number is accounted for partly by Verdun's unusually young population which meant that a greater number of Verdun servicemen's wives or mothers cared for more children at home than was the case in other neighbourhoods. But by 1944 a far lower overall percentage of Verdun servicemen's families sought the aid of the Family Welfare Association than earlier. The increased labour demand especially from 1941 onward facilitated the financial recovery of many Verdun families whose members were able to work.²⁵

In 1940 a combined team from McGill University's School of Social Work and *l'École de service social* from *l'Université de Montréal* set up a Mothers' Assistance program in aid of single mothers. In 1943 this group provided assistance to nearly 11,000 Montreal-area families of which 55% were families of overseas servicemen. In 1944, Françoise Marchand from *le Bureau d'assistance social aux familles*, stated "[L]a guerre n'a pas supprimé les problèmes sociaux. Elle en a créé d'autres, et l'un des plus importants...est sans contredit l'absence du père qui désorganise des milliers de nos foyers."²⁶ Thousands

²⁴ *The Guardian*, March 2, 1944 and March 15, 1945.

²⁵ One Verdun woman recalled that her war labour helped restore her family's finances devastated by her husband's six years of nearly uninterrupted unemployment. Denyse Baillargeon, *Ménagères au temps de la crise*. (Montreal: Éditions du remue-ménage, 1991), p. 139.

²⁶ Quoted in Auger and Lamothe, p. 39; *La Presse*, October 26, 1944; Pierson, "They're Still Women After All", pp. 53 and 246 n128. In November 1942, the Protestant Board of School Trustees of Verdun informed the Executive Committee that its schools were ill-

of servicemen's wives were obliged to maintain their familial responsibilities as well as assume those of their husbands.

Hundreds of Verdun women found greater financial security working at Defence Industries Limited and other Montreal-area industries than was possible for them before the onset of war. One of the six day nurseries established in Québec during the war opened in Verdun in May 1943, where an obvious need for such a facility existed. All six were in the Montreal area and had an average enrollment of 115 children. This allowed more women with family responsibilities to work than otherwise would have been the case. Verdun's working women, with whom *The Guardian* found itself in sympathy, protested the day nursery's closure in October 1945.²⁷

With so many Verdunites overseas, Wilson was anxious that Dependents' Allowances be increased. He believed that the rise in the cost of living since 1939 had eroded the purchasing power of their incomes, some of which were fixed. In September 1942 he wrote both Ottawa and Québec City on the matter, detailing the plight of Verdun's disadvantaged families 'left behind'.²⁸ Wilson hoped to alleviate the desperate financial situation with which these families were faced and also sought to decrease the burdens on local social organizations which resulted from these families seeking assistance. Moreover, the local economy would benefit from residents' increased purchasing power.

equipped to provide a day-nursery service for the city's working mothers. Executive Committee Minutes, November 30, 1942.

²⁷ Pierson, "*They're Still Women After All*", p. 53; *The Guardian*, October 11, 1945.

²⁸ *The Guardian*, September 25, 1942. Timothy Findley's novella, *You Went Away*, (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1996), which is set in Ontario during the Second World War, vividly details the hardships encountered by a woman raising children alone following the enlistment of her husband.

Children's perspectives of the war are often difficult to obtain. Only some have significant or detailed war memories and few grasped the wider issues which so affected their lives. Mary Peate, who has published her recollections of growing up in wartime Montreal, believed many children were conscious of the government's efforts to involve them in the struggle and many found burdensome their wartime roles as fund-raisers or collectors of salvage. Children's war efforts were sometimes the result of adult-inspired participation in patriotic causes and were viewed as obligations dictated by their parents. For adolescents, however, wartime constituted a social and experiential "norm" against which many would measure the period which followed.²⁹

A significant wartime culture permeated children's lives. Chapter 5 has illustrated the war effort of Verdun's schools and shown that an alarming number of high school students left school early in order to enlist or work in war industries. In addition to collecting war savings stamps, joining cadet corps or participating in salvage and fundraising drives, childhood culture included films, comic books, toys, games, trading cards, mail-order paraphernalia of every description and even the backs of cereal boxes, all designed around a war-related theme or motif.³⁰ Many hobbies and past-times took on a martial tone. As mentioned earlier dozens of Verdun boys made wooden model airplanes for use as R.C.A.F. instructional tools. One American writer commenting on the similar children's wartime culture in the United States noted that "the normal ten-year-old can identify twenty times as many airplanes as his mother can" and an average boy was "fascinated by the evidences of the war that he can see for himself".³¹ The flavour of the war years was also reflected in Verdun sporting circles when hockey and football

²⁹ Peate, *Girl in A Sloppy Joe Sweater*, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-96.

³⁰ Mary Jane Lennon, *On the Home Front*, (Erin, Ontario: The Boston Mills Press, 1981), pp. 91-93.

³¹ A.W.M. Wolff and Irma S. Black, "What Happened to the Younger People", in Jack Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone*, (New York: Simon Schuster, 1946), p. 74.

teams adopted nicknames such as the "Corvettes" or "Dreadnoughts".³² The wartime shortage of players led to the disbandment of the Verdun Bulldogs of the Quebec Senior Hockey League in the fall of 1940. There were far fewer registrants for senior hockey throughout the Montreal area because of recruiting. Verdun's football leagues were badly depleted through enlistment.³³ In some cases, the war increased stress and anxiety levels in children. One 10-year-old Verdunite, Wilson Dornan, learned of the outbreak of war over the radio and became extremely frightened and agitated, believing that his home might be bombed. But as time passed, Dornan recalled that as far as he and perhaps most children were concerned, the war years settled down into a routine of "more or less business as usual".³⁴

The war dramatically accelerated the case load of the Verdun Protestant Hospital, one of Canada's leading psychiatric institutions. Since Canadian troops were not committed to a sustained ground combat role until the invasion of Sicily in July 1943, and as relatively few Canadian casualties were incurred during the first few years of war, the stress and anxiety resulting from the loss or feared loss of relatives and friends was not at first at noticeably high levels in Verdun. In the Verdun Protestant Hospital's 1940 annual report, the medical superintendent, Dr. C.A. Porteus, stated that the war "has not resulted so far in actually increasing the number of those admitted as patients to this hospital".³⁵ A year later only a slight increase in admissions had taken place. "Analysis of the individual cases does not reveal that the war, with its coincident depressing background...has been a specially determinant force in developing mental disorder", Porteus noted in his 1941

³² *The Guardian*, May 1, 1942.

³³ *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 29, 1940; *The Guardian*, January 10, 1941.

³⁴ Interview with Wilson Dornan, September 21, 1993.

³⁵ *Annual Report*, Verdun Protestant Hospital, 1940, p. 33.

report.³⁶ After three years of war, however, cracks developed in some Montrealers' abilities to cope with wartime nervous tension. In 1942 the hospital recorded 429 new admissions, the largest number ever recorded in a single year since the hospital opened in 1886. Still, Porteus downplayed these statistics. He noted that it was difficult to blame mental disorder on the war, though he reasoned it might have played a role in allowing the symptoms to manifest themselves. Recently he had observed stress levels rising in society, but concluded that this phenomenon was not alarming.³⁷ Whether the war caused mental or nervous breakdowns or merely accelerated them is less important than the fact that they occurred in increasingly large numbers. Porteus took an unusually long time before linking this sometimes crippling social and personal stress to the war.

In his 1943 report Porteus preferred to emphasize the large number of patients discharged from the Verdun Protestant Hospital in the previous year as opposed to the fact that a new record of 461 patients were admitted. There is also the hint, however, that a shortage of personnel, the result of enlistment and stringent federal labour allocation regulations, might have been responsible for a tendency to release patients more quickly than would have been the case in prewar years.³⁸ In 1944, with Canadians from all services heavily committed in Europe and elsewhere, another record was set with 477 new patients admitted. *The Messenger* referred to the "expressions of anxiety" common in Verdun following the Allied landings in Normandy since "it was known at once that Verdunites were in the vanguard, as Verdunites are to be found in many regiments."³⁹ Porteus could no longer minimize the role of the war in creating so many new stress cases, in particular among female relatives of serving personnel who made up a large percentage of the new arrivals. Over 2100 patients were treated in 1944, which constituted an increase of

³⁶ *Annual Report*, Verdun Protestant Hospital, 1941, p. 33.

³⁷ *Annual Report*, Verdun Protestant Hospital, 1942, pp. 27-28.

³⁸ *Annual Report*, Verdun Protestant Hospital, 1943, p. 30.

³⁹ *The Messenger*, June 15, 1944.

10,301 patient days over 1943.⁴⁰ Though new admissions dipped below 400 in 1945, they were yet again way up in 1946, at 502. Porteus acknowledged that though the shooting war had stopped, war-related social problems, especially the enduring housing crisis, led to depression and much despair.⁴¹

The patients admitted to the Verdun Protestant Hospital suffering from nervous collapse as a result of the war originated from all over the Montreal area and even further afield. It is not possible to determine how many were Verdunites. But the fact that this Verdun hospital acted as a regional psychiatric centre for the English-language community and witnessed some of the emotional and psychological stress induced by the war makes its experiences part of the fabric of wartime Verdun.

HOUSING

One of Verdun's most serious and widespread wartime social problems was an acute housing shortage.⁴² Until the end of 1942, Verdun benefitted from various low-cost

⁴⁰ *Annual Report*, Verdun Protestant Hospital, 1944, p. 28 and *Annual Report*, 1945, p. 26; *The Guardian*, April 26, 1945. In the United States, some wives and families of military personnel serving overseas also suffered considerable stress-related disorders including depression, alcoholism, frequent diarrhoea and headaches. Richard R. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?: The American Home Front 1941-1945*, (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1970), p. 97.

⁴¹ *Annual Report*, Verdun Protestant Hospital, 1946, p. 27. The Great Depression was also the source of much personal anxiety. But since psychiatric hospital admissions consistently increased during the war, it is possible that personal problems occasioned by the war, perhaps more clearly defined emotionally and psychologically than had been the case during the Depression, elicited a more sympathetic response on the part of medical authorities.

⁴² For a detailed overview of Canadian wartime housing policy and problems see Humphrey Carver, *Houses for Canadians*. University of Toronto Press, 1948; John C. Bacher, "Keeping to the Private Market: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy 1900-1949". Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1985. (This dissertation was published as *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy*, McGill-Queen's University

housing assistance programs offered under the provisions of the National Housing Act (1938). The onset of war did not change the city's practice of selling cheap empty lots on which to build modest bungalows or, in some cases, duplexes. Most of the lots had been seized from their owners by the city for non-payment of taxes during the Depression. No other city in Québec or Ontario took advantage of the National Housing Act's financial incentives and tax concessions to the extent Verdun did.⁴³ More dwellings were constructed in Verdun in 1940 than in any previous year since 1928. West-end Ward 4, particularly the Crawford Park neighbourhood, experienced a building boom in the early war years. The war seemed to accelerate building programs in Verdun, not impede them.

Ottawa recognized that the war would cause a housing shortage and social duress. Early in the war federal authorities regulated the distribution of building *matériel* and the labour supply allotted to housing construction. Since the expanding defence industries received first priority fewer residential structures were built and fewer still were of an adequate size and quality to meet market demands. The rapidly increasing urban industrial workforce, bolstered by a large-scale influx of men and women from rural areas seeking employment opportunities, presaged a national wartime housing shortage, especially in lower-income areas accommodating a wage-earning population. This influx, coupled with early wartime inflation, drove rents up across Canada. W.C. Clark, the Chairman of the federal Economic Advisory Committee on Housing Policy reported to Cabinet in November 1940 that, since it was accepted that the demands of the war economy must override normal housing needs, "Canada must accept an increasing amount of "doubling-up" and overcrowding...with all the social disadvantages" which would inevitably flow from this. Clark went on to state that "the outlook in this connection is not bright and we should not gloss over the evils that will result and the unrest and public criticism that will

Press. Montreal, 1993.)

⁴³ *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 25 and December 16, 1939. Virtually every week in the early war years, this newspaper's "Real Estate" section detailed housing construction taking place in Verdun.

follow."⁴⁴ These predictions proved all too accurate and housing construction remained secondary to the overall needs of the war effort. Despite this, in 1941 only 93 of 1572 Verdun households canvassed during a national study on housing needs reported more than one family resident in their dwelling. This was the lowest "doubling up" rate (5.9%) of any city over 30,000 in Canada.⁴⁵ Verdun was overwhelmingly a city of four- and five-room flats and these could not support more than one family and one or two boarders. For the most part, doubling up in Verdun could only be a last resort.

As early as March 1940 the Canadian Corps Association in Verdun had complained to the office of the provincial attorney general and to the city about landlords who refused to rent their flats to the wives and families of overseas servicemen. The property owners were worried that some among those left behind would be unable to pay their rent.⁴⁶ In the first few months of 1941, many Verdunites complained bitterly to City Hall about sudden and substantially-increased rent demands from their landlords. Rent controls had been established in officially-designated congested areas in September 1940 by the W.P.T.B. Rentals Administration, which investigated reports of illegal or unjustified rent increases. Sympathetic but powerless municipal authorities directed aggrieved tenants to the Rentals Administration, which wrote Wilson in February 1941 that it recently had received "a large number of complaints" from Verdunites about inflated rental demands.⁴⁷ A significant number of local landlords attempted to profit unduly from the war situation.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Bacher, "Keeping to the Private Market: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy 1900-1949", *op. cit.*, p. 276.

⁴⁵ Bacher, "Keeping to the Private Market", p. 287.

⁴⁶ Canadian Corps Association to Québec Attorney General, March 10, 1940; Théo. de la Madeleine, Secretary, *La Ligue des Propriétaires de Verdun* to Arthur Burgess, April 4, 1940, Box A-331, file 3. "National Housing Act", CVA.

⁴⁷ W.P.T.B. Rentals Administration to Wilson, February 7, 1941, Box A-331, file 7, CVA; Bacher, "Keeping to the Private Market", pp. 288-292.

The Verdun branch of the C.C.A. believed that the profiteering of many Verdun landlords was linked to the opening of the D.I.L. ammunition plant which was expected to draw hundreds of families to Verdun and create a tighter housing market. "It is not the British spirit to take advantage of any tenants because the Nation is at War", wrote Harry Shaver, the president of the Verdun C.C.A. Shaver's reference to a "British spirit" seemed to imply that as most landlords in Verdun were French speakers, by extension, they might have been less than fully committed to the war effort. The rental situation proved a serious social problem for low-income Verdunites who already resided in one of the cheapest rental districts in the entire Montreal area. Some Great War veterans were among those forced to vacate their flats as a result of their inability to afford higher rents. Other groups which denounced local landlords represented a mix of patriotic and social organizations and included the Canadian Legion, the Verdun branch of the Canadian Housewives' League, the Verdun Tenants' Association and individual wives of overseas servicemen. Given that the majority of English speakers were tenants, so too were the groups representing their interests.⁴⁸

Traditionally, May 1 was moving day, the date when leases expired in the Montreal area, and congested Verdun normally witnessed a moving frenzy on that date. Verdunites on the move usually stayed in Verdun, however. Notwithstanding some unfortunate local situations in early 1941, when cash-strapped tenants were forced to accept inadequate accommodations, Edward Wilson believed that, overall, there was "no serious situation in Verdun this moving season". The mayor's view was confirmed some months later by the local branch of the Canadian Legion which was aware of only a handful of unresolved housing problems involving the families of servicemen or veterans.⁴⁹ But the rent

⁴⁸ Harry Shaver, C.C.A., to City Council, no date, (spring of 1941), Box A-331, file 7, CVA; Executive Committee Minutes, February 3, 1941.

⁴⁹ Burgess, marginal notation of Council Minutes extract of April 29, 1941; Legion to City Council, September 23, 1941, Box A-331, CVA.

gouging and the tightening supply of available housing which characterized 1941 in Verdun were just hints of more serious problems to come.

Construction in Verdun continued throughout 1941 and 1942, despite limitations imposed in 1942 to the provisions of the National Housing Act and the growing scarcity of construction *matériel* and labour. Verdun was proud of its 458 dwellings erected in 1942, quite a feat given wartime restrictions.⁵⁰ By early 1943, however, owing to Verdun's population growth, very little housing remained available, a situation mirrored throughout the country. Making matters worse, densely-populated Verdun was overwhelmingly a city of tenants⁵¹ and an increasing number of unscrupulous landlords, unable to raise their rents to a level the market could easily sustain owing to government regulations, refused to renew the leases of their established tenants. They preferred instead to demand lucrative bribes ('key money') or other incentives from people desperate for housing. Some dishonest landlords imposed other illegal leasing conditions on potential tenants, such as the payment of a year's rent in advance. Others, chafing under W.P.T.B. rental ceilings, sent tenants renewal leases indicating a rise in rent for the forthcoming year but without stipulating the actual amount of the increase until the tenant had signed the lease. The Verdun Tenants' Association vocally opposed these ploys by landlords to circumvent W.P.T.B. guidelines, but with only limited success.⁵²

⁵⁰ *The Guardian*, October 25, 1940, July 4, 1941, March 20, 1942 and May 21, 1943; *The Montreal Daily Star*, May 11, 1940.

⁵¹ Some 91% of Verdun dwellings were occupied by tenants, the highest proportion of any city in Canada. 1941 Census, Volume 9, p. 166.

⁵² *The Guardian*, February 3, 1943; Clavette, "*Des Bons aux chèques*", p. 89 n59. Jay White, "Conscripted City", pp. 161-168 and 185-193 offers the view that in Halifax illegal rent increases were not as rife as the common perception has held. Moreover, in many cases it was not the cost of housing which was the problem, but rather its quality. White shows that the housing crisis in Halifax was not much different from those crises existing in other urban centres across Canada.

Some 30% of landlords were not Verdun residents, a figure which includes corporate property owners. These could not be expected to be imbued with the community spirit and sense of neighbourliness for which Verdun was recognized. Most resident Verdun landlords lived in the same tenement block as their tenants and it was not unusual for friendly relations to develop between them. Accordingly, some of the class tensions occasioned by landlords' rent demands might have been of non-Verdun origin. One suspects a language dimension to Verdun's housing crisis since a majority of Verdunites were English speaking whereas a solid majority of property owners were French speaking. The difficulties existing between the language groups over wartime issues remained manageable but their existence might have increased tension at the end of the war between returning soldiers finding their families in distress and those landlords who made illegal rent demands. However, no conclusive evidence of landlord-tenant animosity based on language was found during a careful gleaning of both *The Guardian* and *The Messenger*. The press generally employed a cautious approach to linguistic matters throughout the war.

According to *The Guardian* there was little activity in Verdun on "Moving Day", May 1, 1943 since

there were no places for dissatisfied tenants to move in to...[R]ewards of \$25, \$50 and even one of \$100 were [offered] to any person who could find a house or flat [for them] to rent in this city. Any moving that did take place was by tenants who exchanged the flats they were living in...for a residence occupied by tenants who also wished to change.⁵³

By July 1943, the city estimated there was an outright shortage of 500 dwellings in Verdun. There apparently was not a single vacant flat and only 32 vacant commercial properties. Sixty-two Verdun stores and shops were being used as dwellings, in some cases with more than one family sharing one of these inadequate accommodations. By 1943 doubling up had become a more common arrangement in Verdun's already-crowded

⁵³ *The Guardian*, May 7, 1943.

small flats and houses. No dwellings capable of comfortably accommodating families with five or more children had been built since 1942.⁵⁴

The situation was also desperate in the City of Montreal where hundreds of families squatted in empty warehouses or lived in garages or flimsy shacks which they had built themselves. In December 1943, 966 Montreal commercial properties were occupied by 1110 families totalling 5922 people, of whom 3206 were children.⁵⁵ By March 1944, 73 Verdun families had resorted to renting commercial space on Wellington Street, Verdun Avenue, Church Avenue and other streets and converting them as best they could into dwellings. City Hall was concerned about the health and hygienic conditions confronting these 172 adults and 222 children but did little in the next year to ameliorate their situation despite petitions from the Verdun Women's Club and the Greater Verdun Community Council that some assistance be provided them.⁵⁶ At least the store-dwellers had shelter.

By Moving Day 1944 the troubling issue of evictions had surfaced in Verdun. Many poorer Verdunites, and persons living in working-class districts of Montreal, often the families of servicemen, faced forcible removal from their dwellings as a result of their inability to meet their landlords' rental demands. Rents had far outstripped what the lowest wage-earners could afford. Two incomes were necessary for many working-class

⁵⁴ Council Minutes, February 14, 1944; *The Guardian*, March 2, 1944.

⁵⁵ Wilson to Paul-Émile Côté, M.P., July 29, 1943; Bacher, "Keeping to the Private Market", p. 335 and *Keeping to the Marketplace*, pp. 149-152; Auger and Lamothe, pp. 84-85. Conditions were considered worse in Halifax, Ottawa, Hull, Toronto, Hamilton, Vancouver and Victoria.

⁵⁶ *The Guardian*, March 9, 1944; Lillas V. Ferguson, Secretary, Verdun Women's Club, to City Council, February 5, 1945; Council Minutes, February 12, 1945. The same local social groups which during the Depression had fought to improve the living conditions of Verdun's disadvantaged residents found their services in demand again during wartime.

families to make ends meet.⁵⁷ Across the Montreal area approximately 5000 eviction notices were served on tenants, very few of whom had found suitable or affordable places into which to move. The plight of these people very quickly became Montreal's most pressing social issue. Changes to W.P.T.B. guidelines prevented landlords from evicting tenants with a good rental record unless the premises were to be used by the landlords themselves or by their relatives in demonstrable need of shelter.⁵⁸ But these measures were often circumvented without much difficulty.

Continuing its leading role in the fight against local property owners, the Verdun Tenants' Association unsuccessfully employed legal means to prevent evictions from taking place on May 1, 1944. The principal breadwinner of many of the 76 families facing the loss of their homes was on active service. Though some situations were resolved, *The Guardian* published many sad stories of patriotic Verdun families finding themselves without hope of securing shelter for the coming year.⁵⁹ One incident which attracted considerable local attention and indignation was the May 1944 eviction of the Glasgow family, which had lost two sons killed in action in 1942. *The Guardian* appealed to Verdunites to take this impoverished family into their homes though it remains unclear how their plight was resolved.⁶⁰

The local press rarely mentioned the dozens of other families facing eviction which had no members on active service. Only the combative Verdun Tenants' Association, which had won the respect of the tenant class during the Depression, seemed to take up their cause. The injustices of wartime evictions received greater attention when they involved a serviceman's family. Most housing agitation, like that of the Legion, seemed designed

⁵⁷ Auger and Lamothe, p. 85.

⁵⁸ Bacher, "Keeping to the Private Market", pp. 350-351.

⁵⁹ See for example *The Guardian*, March 2 and April 20, 1944.

⁶⁰ *The Guardian*, June 8, 1944. The Glasgows' loss is detailed in Chapter 9.

as much to repay patriotism as to alleviate suffering. While this might have been an effective wartime argument it implied a form of hierarchy among the dislodged in Verdun, one based in the level of their contribution to the war effort. Patriotic community groups, the press, City Hall and even the W.P.T.B. assigned priority in settling eviction cases to servicemen's families as opposed to families without members on active service. In October 1945, Eric R. Gold, Co-ordinator of the Emergency Shelter Administration (E.S.A.), visited Montreal to investigate the housing crisis. Gold's report to Donald Gordon, chairman of the W.P.T.B., clearly stated that wartime civilian dislocation was of no interest to the federal government's housing authorities unless it affected the families of servicemen: "[O]ur Administration will have to be completely hardboiled and turn a deaf ear to pleas of civilian families for assistance".⁶¹ While many Verdun families suffering from the housing crisis were those of servicemen, numbers of "civilian families" were without shelter and without the important visible crutch of patriotic sacrifice on which to lean in seeking to remedy their distress. They too were war casualties.

In 1944 dozens of classified advertisements began to appear in *The Guardian* from people seeking to rent or exchange flats and even single rooms. The conversion of a former Mission hall on Woodland Avenue into 10 dwellings attracted 400 inquiries from hopeful tenants.⁶² So desperate had many people become for satisfactory housing that they purchased as yet unbuilt small bungalows in Verdun on the basis of blueprints alone. *The Guardian* reckoned that if the number of dwellings built was increased ten-fold all would be sold in very short order.⁶³ One discharged serviceman, who merely identified himself as "troubled", wrote *The Guardian*:

⁶¹ Gold to Gordon, October 30, 1945, RG 56, Volume 17, file 105-10, NAC.

⁶² *The Guardian*, April 20, 1944.

⁶³ *The Guardian*, April 27, 1944.

For the past two years we rented an unfurnished room, ground floor and it is cold and damp. The doctor has told us that we must find something warmer...We have advertised for several weeks and tried all agencies, but without success and with the winter coming we don't know what to do. There are just two of us and we still hope to find a small, warm place as we want to stay in Verdun. Perhaps someone will hear our plea...⁶⁴

It was not uncommon by this stage in the war for Verdunites, as a last resort, to appeal publicly to the generosity and community spirit of their fellow citizens in seeking to end their social distress.

Wilson was outraged with the federal government for its inability to resolve the housing crisis and was equally disgusted by the profiteering and unfeeling attitudes of some local property owners. Wilson's viewpoint had changed considerably from that expressed in 1941 at which time he believed no housing crisis existed; this symbolized the very serious wartime deterioration in local conditions. He described the situation in Verdun as "detrimental to public health, family life and the efficiency of war workers and the general community", and promised that no citizen would be without shelter on May 1, 1944 even if it meant temporarily housing them in municipal facilities. This expediency was rarely employed. Verdun City Council despatched several resolutions to the federal government pleading Verdun's case, but to little avail. By the end of 1944, the city estimated Verdun's population at nearly 74,000 (including about 4000 who were on active service) and its immediate housing needs at no less than 1000 dwellings.⁶⁵

The poorest Canadians suffered most from the housing shortage. In a 1944 survey, nearly 90% of tenants in the lowest-income group across the country were shown to be paying a disproportionately high rent in relation to their income. Many Verdunites fell into this

⁶⁴ *The Guardian*, September 14, 1944.

⁶⁵ Council Minutes, February 14, 1944; *The Guardian*, April 20 and April 27, 1944; Verdun's response to the Québec Economic Advisory Board, Survey on Housing Situation, December 14, 1944, Box A-331, file 3, CVA. Whether or not Wilson was aware of it, Ottawa knew that other Canadian cities were more desperate than Verdun.

category. In this respect, wartime was not far different than Depression-era conditions. The urban planner, Humphrey Carver, noted in a 1948 study of the housing crisis that the poorest wage earners, those least able to withstand it, bore the brunt of the housing shortage and rent gouging on the part of landlords. Carver described this as a frustrating and humiliating experience for thousands of working-class Canadians.⁶⁶ One very disgruntled recently-discharged veteran, who sought to move to Verdun in 1944, wrote a letter to *The Messenger* in which he summed up the bitter feelings shared by many Verdunites:

For 3 1/2 years I served this country to the best of my ability. Discharged, I returned looking forward to being with my wife and child. My present employment necessitated my locating in Verdun.

Locating in Verdun! I wonder how many readers realize what that simple statement means...Yes, I can get a flat...or even a house if I want to pay up to \$300 for the key, pay a year's rent in advance or build. I am not in a position to do any of these. Had I remained behind like so many others [and] taken a job in a war plant...I would have a place today.

Just how long are we, the younger generation, supposed to swallow this stuff about "fighting for democracy" and "saving our freedom"? Take any hundred men who have served in this war and ask them, you'll get your answer.⁶⁷

The home front could prove a bitter pill for a discharged soldier who had sacrificed several years in the service of the country. As the housing situation in Verdun in 1944 became unpleasant, social tensions mounted.

From February 1945 until well after the war had ended, the housing crisis remained one of the issues to which *The Guardian* devoted the most attention, an indication of its social significance. With an increasing pool of discharged servicemen in Verdun, the Legion

⁶⁶ Humphrey Carver, *Houses for Canadians*, (University of Toronto Press, 1948), pp. 121-122; Bacher, "Keeping to the Private Market", p. 386.

⁶⁷ R.H. Wygant to *The Messenger*, April 20, 1944.

asserted itself as the protector of servicemen's families facing eviction. It organized meetings, sent delegations to city council to enlist municipal support, wrote letters to government officials and investigated every eviction case brought to its attention. The Legion was committed to assisting those families experiencing the greatest distress. At a Legion meeting in January 1945, one man wondered aloud what the attitude of returning soldiers might be towards those landlords who had evicted the soldiers' families from their homes. Violence could not be ruled out. The following letter from one destitute Verdun woman was read aloud, further inflaming those present at this highly-charged gathering:

My husband and two sons, and my two sons-in-law, are in the service. My daughters are making their home with me while their husbands are away. Five from one family doing their bit, now we are ordered to get out and nowhere to go. Is this what our boys are fighting for?...[T]hose who are staying at home and making big money are buying the houses and putting the servicemen out on the street. We have lived here for 12 years and always paid our rent regularly, looked after the property and kept [it] in good condition.⁶⁸

Mounting public frustration revealed cracks in wartime Verdun's cohesive community consensus. The sentiment grew in Verdun that, as Wilson believed, the federal government was letting down the very persons who had given so much to help win the war.

Another painful letter from a Verdun woman, who wished to remain anonymous, was published in *The Guardian* in February 1945. It could have left no readers indifferent to the sufferings of some of their neighbours.

I was evicted three years ago and since have occupied an abandoned store for which I pay \$25. per month. Each winter I use six tons of fuel. The thermometer is usually at 45 in the morning and may reach 66 during the daytime. My family (three school children) have no bath other than the swimming pool in summer. During the last three years a couch...has been my bedroom, with a plentiful supply of mice for company.

⁶⁸ *The Guardian*, February 1, 1945.

I have my three sons in the services since 1939. Three of my daughters are helping in the war effort by working in munitions plants. One of them has already had a nervous breakdown, owing to environment. I feel my duty to King and Country has far exceeded its limits. Where would King and Country be without sons such as mine, and what on earth are they fighting for? Of late I have begun to appreciate the word "sucker" when applied by a Zombie to a man in uniform...Could I have foreseen what has happened to us since 1939, believe you me, my three boys would have donned overalls instead of khaki...⁶⁹

This woman's plight served as a powerful indictment of the home front experience of some financially distressed Canadians. This letter, too, expressed working-class fury that while young men were risking their lives, the government seemed unable to alleviate many of their families' deplorable living conditions. The letter is symbolic of the more extreme social malaise occasioned by the war in Verdun and reflects the fact that social dislocation on the home front was borne heavily by the women and children 'left behind'. The patriotism felt in the early war years had waned somewhat by 1945 among Verdun's hard-hit urban poor. Perhaps there was the latent feeling among many servicemen's families that the war was beginning to cost too much on a personal level. For them, the war could not end soon enough.

Another letter to *The Guardian* written in March 1945 by a Verdun women from Ward 3, identifying herself only as "Fifth Avenue", echoed the concerns of the previous writers and showed to what extent the government itself, not necessarily the war, was the object of the people's wrath. She wrote that her 41-year-old husband enlisted because he

thought so much of Verdun, his family and home. He is somewhere in Germany offering his life to defend all these. Here is his reward, Sir, an eviction notice, all very legal, property being sold. But what about us? Where are we to go?...I have been told by some kind people to store furniture in my mother's basement and take rooms. Nice thoughts for the home it took twenty years to gather.

⁶⁹ *The Guardian*, February 15, 1945.

Is this the security men are dying for? Perhaps we would still have a home had my husband thought less of his country, stayed in his job, earned big money and let the government look after the war. Apparently, they cannot look after the fighting men's families. The kind government says write cheery letters, keep up their morale. How? By telling them we may be living in a garage in the spring? This being the reward for fighting for one's country, we can easily understand why we have Zombies and Draft dodgers.

Another eviction case on our street. The man has been overseas five years and is now fighting in Italy and his wife works in a defence plant. So this is democracy! A man can be fined for abusing an animal. But people can live in hovels and stores if they can get them, that is quite alright. Good way to help curb juvenile delinquency, by taking their homes from them.⁷⁰

In some cases the housing crisis exerted a deleterious effect on the morale of the men overseas, as the Legion claimed it would. One desperate Verdunite serving overseas wrote the mayor for help in finding his family a place to stay. Sergeant A.F. Hébert, R.C.A.F., wrote Wilson in 1945:

We had a very nice place on Bannantyne Avenue when I joined up in the summer of 1940, but had to give it up. My wife and little girl have since been living with her parents. Since the first of the year she has been trying to get a flat of any kind just as long as it is home for us. So far her efforts have been fruitless...I would very much appreciate it if you could try and locate something for her...⁷¹

All of these letters indicate that the housing crisis had created a significant social problem in Verdun and that many Verdunites left behind as well as many recently-discharged veterans shared the perception that their war effort was not being matched on a social level by the government.

⁷⁰ *The Guardian*, March 8, 1945. The Society of Verdun Servicemen's Families, formed in late 1944 or early 1945, sought to improve the living conditions of families such as those described in these letters. Despite obtaining the public support of many of Verdun's political, business, religious and community leaders, the group met with only limited success. See Box A-331, file 3, CVA.

⁷¹ Sgt. A.F. Hébert to Wilson, June 10, 1945, Box A-348, CVA.

Despite the strong feelings of many groups and individuals in Verdun, the federal government, overwhelmed by the magnitude of the housing crisis, attempted to assist servicemen's families. The National Housing Act was revised in 1944 to facilitate wartime construction and Ottawa hoped this would instigate about one billion dollars' worth of construction across the country. Ottawa also announced prior to the June 1945 federal election that 35% of all dwellings to be built in Canada in the immediate future were to be set aside for soldiers' families.⁷² Ottawa could not place a higher priority on housing policy than on the prosecution of the war. But the government's support seemed too little, too late for many Canadians, especially discharged servicemen unable to secure lodgings. There were many of these in Verdun. In February 1946, not one of Verdun's nearly 18,000 dwellings was vacant and only nine stores remained unoccupied. In April 1946, with the European war over almost a year, hundreds of Verdunites lived in stores, boarders lucky enough to find a room were routinely overcharged, hundreds of flats were overcrowded and reasonable rents were virtually impossible to obtain. Communities across Canada suffered similarly and some, like Halifax, with its huge military presence, far worse.⁷³

Under the provisions of P.C. 9439 (December 19, 1944), which set up the Emergency Shelter Administration (E.S.A.) under the control of the W.P.T.B., congested cities such as Victoria, Vancouver, Ottawa, Hamilton and others voluntarily delegated responsibility for housing in their municipalities to a federally-appointed Emergency Shelter Administrator. This federal agency controlled the movement of people within designated cities and had the authority to confiscate any building at any time for any purpose. The E.S.A. could also revoke eviction notices. The role of the E.S.A., however, was not to

⁷² Morton and Granatstein, *Victory*, p. 133; *The Guardian*, May 31, 1945; Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace*, however, demonstrates that Ottawa was hesitant and sometimes grudging in its wartime housing assistance schemes.

⁷³ *The Messenger*, February 21, 1946; *The Guardian*, April 4, 1946; White, "Conscripted City", *op. cit.*

build dwellings, but to co-ordinate the distribution of existing shelters. The Verdun Legion, which claimed to speak for the entire community, tried to pressure City Hall into placing Verdun in the hands of the E.S.A. in the hope that landlords' excesses might be halted. Despite Wilson's support for establishing an E.S.A. authority in Verdun, the city council declined to approve the measure. As far as the E.S.A. was concerned, Verdun was included in the Montreal area and, as no Administrator was appointed for Montreal, none could be assigned to Verdun without special arrangements with the W.P.T.B.⁷⁴

Although Verdun was extremely congested, it is not altogether surprising that the city refused to invite in the E.S.A. The Executive Committee of City Council represented the city's landlords and these were vehemently opposed to the idea. The Executive Committee members also sat in the Committee of the Whole of City Council. Even Wilson, a member of the Executive Committee, could not persuade the landlord class to change its position in the name of the greater good of the community's disadvantaged residents. The fault was not always Ottawa's and sometimes lay closer to home.

Instead *La Ligue des Propriétaires de Verdun* officially protested to the federal government over the potential loss of control over the landlords' own property which the measure threatened. As a result, both proprietors and tenants were on record as decrying Ottawa's policies, but for exactly opposite reasons. The *Ligue* considered the E.S.A. "excessif et injustifié" and as a violation of democracy.⁷⁵ The proprietors viewed with alarm any attempt to regulate the rental mechanisms by which many of them continued to profit, often as a result of exploiting their tenants. Many among the *Ligue's* members

⁷⁴ *The Guardian*, March 8, 1945; Council Minutes, January 22 and February 5, 1945.

⁷⁵ Alfred Bonin, Secrétaire, *La Ligue des Propriétaires de Verdun*, to W.P.T.B., January 25, 1945, Box A-331, file 3, CVA. In July 1945, the W.P.T.B. Rentals Administration decreed that no landlord (save a discharged service person) could force a tenant to vacate a flat on the grounds that the landlord or one of the landlord's relatives sought to occupy the dwelling. This decision was poorly received by landlords. *The Gazette*, July 25, 1945.

were Verdun residents and not absentee or corporate property owners. The landlords' views therefore indicate class divisions existing within Verdun. While the *Ligue* did not represent the views of all Verdun landowners, its attitude helped create tension between landlords and their less prosperous tenants, a situation worsened by a general linguistic dimension to the dispute. The Verdun Legion, wholly opposed to the goals of the proprietors, grouped together an overwhelmingly English-speaking and tenant-class membership. The Verdun Tenants' Association, too, was mainly English speaking.

For a time in the spring and summer of 1945 it seemed that the city would explode in anger and that hundreds of returned men would demand immediate remedies to their housing problem or, more ominously, seek revenge against dishonest landlords whose actions had harmed their families. Historians Desmond Morton and Jack Granatstein have referred to the "ugly tension between veterans and civilians" which the shortage of accommodations produced in Canada.⁷⁶ The housing crisis enraged Verdun's repatriated servicemen. In March 1945 the Verdun Legion even went so far as to request of Ottawa special leave for servicemen whose families were threatened with eviction so that they could "guard their homes and their dependents against those who would evict them". Notwithstanding this confrontational request, which implied the potential for violence, in August 1945 the Verdun Legion counselled distraught returned men not to resort to violent or extreme measures. This advice was prompted by the Legion's fears, also expressed by *The Guardian*, that continuing extortion on the part of some landlords requesting "key money" would lead to vigilante violence against them.⁷⁷ As this and earlier Legion meetings demonstrated, class divergences and wartime occupational and attitudinal differences between military families, mainly English speaking, and civilian landlords, mainly French speaking, had brought relations to a breaking point.

⁷⁶ Morton and Granatstein, *Victory*, p. 168.

⁷⁷ *The Guardian*, March 8 and August 9, 1945; Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace*, pp. 174-175 notes the potential for similar violence elsewhere in Canada.

Although disavowing violence, the Legion suggested that servicemen's families faced with eviction should simply refuse to move. Just days before the dreaded May 1, 1945 expiration of leases, Robert DeWitt, recently-elected president of Verdun's Legion branch, had this advice to offer these families:

Sit tight on May 1 and we'll do everything possible to keep you in your homes. If your landlord comes don't let him in...It will take six days for the landlord to issue a writ...and we'll immediately take protest action. We did that last year and...people are still in their homes.⁷⁸

While he refused officially to sanction illegal protective pickets around the flats of the unfortunate families for fear of violence, DeWitt insisted that "we won't see soldiers' wives abused" and arranged for a group of veterans to be on call at the Legion Hall May 1 in case any landlords acted too aggressively with soldiers' families. Arthur James, the Verdun Legion's immediate past-president, stated that "if your son is overseas then your lease is frozen as far as we're concerned." Verdun was home to at least one-third of the 150 cases of servicemen's families facing eviction in the Montreal area and which were brought to the Canadian Legion's attention.⁷⁹ The Legion was also perplexed by the apparent contradiction inherent in the government's ability to find money, materials and labour to wage war and its subsequent inability to find the same resources to solve the nation's housing dilemma. The strain on hundreds of Verdun families, of servicemen or not, was terrific. Nevertheless, no incidents of violence were reported.

In May 1946 at least 50 Verdun veterans and one "police dog" converged on the staircase and on the sidewalk in front of a flat on Fifth Avenue to protect a fellow veteran from bailiffs intent on evicting him and his family into the street. A Union Jack was strung across the steps as a patriotic barrier no person could cross with impunity, and which no one dared defy. Even in violation of the law, the protesters acted under the banner of patriotism. A contingent of police, who were *not* ordered by City Hall to intervene, and

⁷⁸ Quoted in *The Gazette*, April 26, 1945.

⁷⁹ *The Gazette*, April 26, 1945.

hundreds of onlookers were also on the scene. The incident took on the proportions of a *cause célèbre* in the Montreal area. Though *The Guardian* expected bloodshed following a "very precarious and dangerous" 48-hour stand-off, the Legion found the unfortunate family a flat in nearby Côte St-Paul. Though a small victory, in this dramatic and highly-publicized instance, the veterans clearly had had their way.⁸⁰

The City of Verdun devoted considerable attention throughout the war toward easing the housing strain on local residents. In the spring of 1941, Parkdale Homes Development Corporation, a residential development contractor, began purchasing many undeveloped areas in Crawford Park for the nominal sum of \$25.00 a lot.⁸¹ This development company undertook most of Verdun's wartime construction which mainly took place in this neighbourhood, the most suitable for residential expansion. The dwellings mainly consisted of small cottages, virtually all of the same basic pattern, as well as some duplexes. The city co-operated by extending and paving Crawford Park's streets and improving its infrastructure.

The number of new houses begun in Verdun was significantly lower after 1942, owing almost entirely to the inability of contractors to secure scarce building materials. Nevertheless, *The Municipal Review of Canada* noted in that year that Verdun was not "waiting for the post-war period, but has already made a big start in the building of permanent homes for the people."⁸² In December 1944, Arthur Burgess informed the provincial government that Verdun, "notwithstanding war conditions, [has achieved] considerable dwelling construction since 1939" and had been singled out by Ottawa as

⁸⁰ *The Guardian*, May 16, 1946.

⁸¹ Executive Committee Minutes, June 10, 1941.

⁸² Quoted in *The Guardian*, May 7, 1943. The view of Morton and Granatstein, *Victory*, p. 167, that since 1929 in Canada "almost nothing had been done to build or renew housing" did not apply to Verdun, where housing construction was always a priority.

"an example of success under the National Housing Act."⁸³ Table 7.1 shows wartime housing starts in Verdun.

The ratio of overall dwellings per building steadily declined by 32% between 1940 and 1944 owing to a greater concentration on erecting low-cost, single-family homes after 1942. At the end of 1944 Burgess estimated that even though nearly 1800 lots suitable for residential construction remained in Verdun, 90% of the city already had been built up.⁸⁴

**TABLE 7.1 WARTIME HOUSING CONSTRUCTION
VERDUN 1940-1944⁸⁵**

Year	Building Permits	Family Dwellings
1940	183	388
1941	276	486
1942	292	456
1943	173	300
1944	162	236

Verdun's successful housing development strategies helped alleviate a desperate shortage of shelter from 1944 to 1946. Between January 1940 and February 1946, 1787 dwellings were built in Verdun, mostly bungalows and duplexes. Sixty percent of these were built before the end of 1944, a notable accomplishment, as Burgess pointed out to the

⁸³ Quoted from Verdun's response to the Québec Economic Advisory Board, Survey on Housing Situation, December 14, 1944, Box A-331, file 3, CVA. In contrast, Calgary could only build 300 homes in the first three years of the war. Keshen, "Morale and Morality on the Alberta Home Front" in Tingley, ed., *For King and Country*, p. 148.

⁸⁴ Survey on Housing Situation, December 14, 1944, Box A-331, file 3, CVA.

⁸⁵ "Building Permits Issued", December 1, 1944, Survey on Housing Situation, December 14, 1944, Box A-331, file 3, CVA.

provincial authorities.⁸⁶ In July 1945 the city announced that Parkdale Homes would build 88 homes in Ward 4, 35 of which were reserved for ex-servicemen, well above the percentage which Ottawa had decreed be set aside for former military personnel. The small cottages were to be ready in the fall of 1945. These were the first of hundreds of identical 'veterans' homes' which eventually would dot west-end Verdun and come to characterize Crawford Park as a virtually separate veterans' community. In 1945 Ottawa unveiled a significant postwar housing program, part of its Veterans' Charter, which offered veterans cheap mortgages and easy repayment guarantees. Verdun was apparently the first Canadian city to initiate housing construction in accordance with this scheme.⁸⁷

City Hall had always taken a lead role in ensuring that the greatest possible number of dwellings were built in wartime Verdun. The policy of Edward Wilson and J.R. French was to convert empty city-owned lots into taxable real estate as quickly as possible. They were remarkably successful, given wartime conditions. By April 1945 total valuation had increased \$5 million.⁸⁸ In March 1945 Verdun set aside further large tracts of empty fields in Crawford Park and elsewhere for veterans' housing and sold the lots to developers (almost invariably Parkdale Homes) for the usual small sum of \$25.00 each on condition that construction was to begin within 60 days. Outside of these designated zones the city agreed to sell lots to developers at the generous rate of 50% of whatever the city had originally paid for them. Wartime Housing Limited, a Crown Corporation, did not interest the City of Verdun because, as the city explained, of the temporary nature of the dwellings which that agency constructed. City Council preferred to sell lots to private

⁸⁶ *The Messenger*, February 21, 1946; Survey on Housing Situation, Box A-331, file 3, CVA.

⁸⁷ *The Guardian*, July 12 and July 26, 1945.

⁸⁸ This statistic is drawn from the text of a pre-election speech Wilson delivered over CFCF Radio probably on March 31, 1945. Box A-57, file 6, "Municipal Elections 1945", CVA.

firms offering affordable, permanent homes.⁸⁹ The greater value of permanent homes increased municipal valuation rolls. Yet, at the end of March 1945, with Moving Day fast approaching, the city met with delegations representing the Society of Verdun Servicemen's Families and the Legion, both of which urged municipal authorities to seek pre-fabricated temporary housing from Wartime Housing Limited. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, and acceding to their request, the city sought to acquire some of these structures. But none was to be available for months and the city abandoned the idea, perhaps with some relief.⁹⁰ The City of Verdun's view throughout the war was that Ottawa should vastly increase the amount spent to subsidize wage-earning renters or purchasers of low-cost but permanent housing. Wilson did his utmost within the restrained wartime context to support the families of local servicemen and worked closely with local interest groups, especially the Legion, to that end. His relationship with *La Ligue des propriétaires*, with whose views he seemed constantly to disagree, was never close.

At the height of the local housing crisis in April 1945, and after Verdun learned that Ottawa would provide no temporary housing, the city entered into a contract with Parkdale Homes for the immediate erection of 100 flats on Egan Avenue in Ward 4. The city insisted that the first 36 rentals be reserved for Verdun servicemen or their families, including the families of those killed on active service. So anxious was Verdun to stimulate construction that these particular lots were sold for the nominal sum of \$1.00 each. *The Messenger* hailed this move with the headline "Verdun Leads Canada in Providing Shelter for Returning Veterans". But this newspaper also sombrely noted that there was an "unprecedented scramble" to find housing in Verdun. Similar arrangements for low-cost flats were contracted throughout the summer. In no small part as a result of

⁸⁹ Council Minutes, March 12, 1945; Burgess to James C. Bruce, Wartime Housing Limited, February 2, 1945, Box A-331, CVA.

⁹⁰ Council Minutes, March 26, April 23 and April 30, 1945; Box A-331, file 3, CVA.

the city's high enlistment rate, west-end Verdun's urban landscape was permanently altered by the urgent need to find housing for repatriated service people.⁹¹

Verdun's wartime housing crisis was serious but it was manageable. The proportion of families evicted or forced to live in inadequate accommodations was not as high as in some other areas across the country. The city had done all it could to facilitate housing construction and ease the social strain. The only blot seemed to be the city's failure to request a special arrangement with the W.P.T.B. to place Verdun under E.S.A. administration, despite Wilson's willingness to do so. The landlords' firm grip on those aspects of civic administration which most directly concerned them could not be broken. The Verdunites most affected were among those least able to cope and often included low wage earners and the families of servicemen. Some soldiers' spouses raising children required the space to maintain their quality of life and a higher income to pay increased landlord demands. As the letters published in the local press demonstrated, in many cases neither money nor room was available in sufficient quantities. In a working-class community having offered so many of its young men to the war effort, it was perhaps inevitable that some Verdun families would find themselves in straitened circumstances. If the letters written by dislodged Verdun women are any indication, by 1945 a growing number of Verdunites, especially low-income, overburdened mothers, began to view participation in the war more as a lengthy struggle against social marginalization and dislocation and less as a duty automatically answered. Whatever the motivation for voluntary enlistment, active service often entailed serious familial drawbacks.

⁹¹ Thomas Gray, General Manager, Wartime Housing Limited, to Wilson, April 14, 1945; Council Minutes, April 16 and April 30, 1945; "Project for the Construction of One Hundred Dwellings on Egan Avenue", May 3, 1945, Box A-331, file 3, CVA; *The Messenger*, July 26, 1945.

CRIME AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Verdun was not beset by serious crime during the war. While the incidence of crime and juvenile delinquency increased the press, community groups and public officials overstated the nature of the problem. Wartime conditions facilitated exaggeration of an issue widely perceived as socially destabilizing, divisive and, ultimately, unpatriotic. According to official police statistics and those of Verdun's Recorder's Court, in 1939 serious criminal infractions in Verdun were rare. There were very few cases of burglary, auto theft (few Verdunites owned automobiles) or assault, though there were 91 cases of loitering and 25 cases of disturbing the peace. Illicit gambling and the existence of backroom slot machines were considered Verdun's greatest criminal problems. In 1940 burglaries and auto thefts were reported to have decreased 50% over the previous year. In 1941 even fewer burglaries and only 14 instances of disturbing the peace were recorded in Verdun. Few offenses more serious than disturbing the peace were investigated by Verdun's police force in 1942.⁹² These are hardly the statistics of a crime-infested city, especially one with a 1941 population above 67,000. The war years, with their constant reminders of patriotic behaviour, were at first conducive to a 'law and order' mentality. While contrary to even peacetime social norms, non-conformity or criminal behaviour was perceived as especially harmful to the national war effort.

Wartime enlistment removed at least some of Verdun's older juvenile offenders from city streets. One organized group of teen-agers was dubbed the "Galt Avenue Gang" by the Verdun press. Opinions of these troublesome youths changed once the boys enlisted, at which time their fighting spirit and destructive energies were hailed as personal qualities, if applied to the proper cause. Their past misdeeds, including loitering and disturbing the

⁹² *The Guardian*, January 19, 1940, January 24, 1941, February 13, 1942 and February 5, 1943. It is also true that cases brought before a local magistrate do not represent all instances of crime in the community since not all crime is reported and not all that is reported results in court appearances.

peace, were explained in the press as nothing more than youthful exuberance. According to *The Guardian*, the Galt Avenue Gang, could

by no stretch of the imagination, have been termed anything but young lads "full of the devil"...None of them had any real bad traits or tendencies to do any actual harm...And now the "Gang", or the greater number of them...are in all the services of His Majesty's forces, in training...or chafing under the strain of having to wait to make the age limit.⁹³

A list of those gang members on active service showed ten names, all British in origin. Their ages ranged from one 16-year-old to one 21-year-old, with most being 18 or 19 years of age. As evidence of the group's organized patriotism, each member received a silver disk from the gang upon enlistment, a gesture much approved by the local press.

In September 1942, *The Guardian* reported under the headline, "Evil Minded Give Verdun Wide Berth", that Verdun "enjoys the enviable position of being probably the most law-abiding and peaceful community of its size...of any locality in the Dominion, if not on the American continent."⁹⁴ The sort of police work carried out in Verdun was described at this time as 50% "social work". Policemen seemed especially preoccupied with

readjusting family troubles, giving a word of friendly warning or stricter reprimand to a young fellow slipping ever so little from the strait and narrow way, or getting off the street and into his own home without fuss or scandal a decent citizen who may have dined not wisely but too well. This type of social work...in Verdun often reaches an average of 50 cases a week all done without fanfare or publicity.⁹⁵

The local perception of Verdun as a safe, conformist and patriotic municipality seemed justified by the crime statistics as well as the helpful attitude of the city's policemen.

⁹³ *The Guardian*, June 4, 1943.

⁹⁴ *The Guardian*, September 18, 1942.

⁹⁵ *The Guardian*, October 30, 1942.

themselves mostly Verdunites. But this idyllic self-portrait, representative of the strong sense of community existing in Verdun, would not last much beyond 1942.

By April 1943 a growing number of reported criminal transgressions created apprehension in the city and *The Guardian* suddenly took on an alarmist tone. For the first time since the outbreak of war public safety was being called into question.⁹⁶ Police statistics for May 1943 showed that incidents of fighting, vandalism, loitering and disturbing the peace were increasingly common in Verdun, especially among youths. *The Guardian* contended that most of these hooligans were not Verdun residents but it offered no evidence to support these views. The local press could not or would not believe that Verdunites themselves might be responsible for local disturbances.

Serious crimes committed in Verdun in 1943 consisted of two "highway robberies" and two hold-ups, 82 burglaries, 27 auto thefts, 15 cases of indecent assault and one of carrying a concealed weapon.⁹⁷ Crime was on the rise. Incidents of rowdiness became more common, especially at night along the riverfront boardwalk. In April 1944 the situation was considered sufficiently alarming for the city to institute regular police patrols of the Boardwalk by two or three plainclothes officers and a motorcycle patrol. This measure followed several serious disturbances involving gangs of youths which had congregated at the riverfront.⁹⁸ City Hall was determined to prevent Verdun from being a wartime battleground for disaffected youth.

The crime rate rose throughout the country during the summer of 1945. The cessation of hostilities relaxed the 'patriotic' social discipline which had characterized the war years.

⁹⁶ *The Guardian*, April 16, 1943.

⁹⁷ *The Guardian*, May 14, 1943 and February 3, 1944. There was only one recorded murder in Verdun in the years 1939 to 1946. See *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 12, 1939 and March 14, 1940.

⁹⁸ Executive Committee Minutes, April 24, 1944.

especially before 1944. The return of thousands of young servicemen from overseas signalled a rise in anti-social behaviour. Concern had been expressed in Canada that the demobilized soldiers, desensitized to violence by their training and experiences, might constitute a disruptive social force. In 1946 adult offenses rose 12% nationwide over those recorded in 1945, although they dropped 10% in Québec.⁹⁹

By early 1945 the community perceived a growing criminal problem in Verdun which was widely attributed to discharged soldiers. In the summer of 1945 a number of assaults on women took place in Verdun. Without evidence the press suspected returned servicemen of committing these acts of violence. Police patrols were increased. In the ensuing year *The Guardian* reported a dramatic rise in the number of loiterers and panhandlers in Verdun, some of whom were known to be discharged soldiers.¹⁰⁰ Not all Verdunites were able to re-adjust smoothly to civilian life. Although the war initially had been blamed for increased criminality, in the short term it was, the repatriation of thousands of servicemen which brought increased crime to Verdun.

Most Canadian and American studies of the home front during the Second World War refer to the rise in juvenile delinquency.¹⁰¹ The contemporary perception was very strong that juvenile delinquency was the direct result of disturbed family cohesion. The disappearance of hundreds of thousands of authority figures from the home and the absence of thousands of mothers, sometimes employed on evening or night shifts, suggested that a lack of parental supervision encouraged juvenile delinquency among

⁹⁹ Morton and Granatstein, *Victory*, pp. 171 and 207.

¹⁰⁰ *The Guardian*, July 12, 1945 and April 11, 1946.

¹⁰¹ The Canadian literature is sparse. See Jay White, "Conscripted City" and Auger and Lamothe, *De la poêle à frire à la ligne de feu*. For the United States, see Richard Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States 1941-1945*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1980; Jack Goodman, ed. *While You Were Gone*, *op. cit.*; Francis E. Merrill, *Social Problems on the Home Front*. Harper and Brothers, New York, 1948.

"latch-key children" or "eight-hour orphans".¹⁰² These growing problems were viewed as the result of overcrowded housing and the general tension and strain of wartime conditions. Stealing, vandalism, truancy and general "anti-social behaviour" were the usual transgressions of delinquents.¹⁰³

Many Verdunites were disturbed to learn in April 1940 that juvenile crime had risen 19% in the previous year, at the same time as adult crime was on the wane.¹⁰⁴ The trend continued until it was believed to have reached crisis proportions in the summer of 1943. Available statistics indicate, however, that this view was an exaggeration. National rates of juvenile delinquency peaked in 1942 and coincided with the vast increase in the employment of female labour in war industry. Yet, the steady decline in the national rate throughout 1943 and 1944 preceded the return of these women into the home, indicating that the causal effect of female labour was overstated. Moreover, as most 18 to 30-year old men, traditionally the most likely source of crime, were on active service, more time was devoted to policing youth. This increased the number of juvenile arrests and prosecutions (many for simple curfew violations) and inflated the apparent rate of juvenile crime.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² In June 1942, as a result of enlistment and female employment, more than 5000 children in Montreal were believed to be improperly supervised. Jean Bruce, *Back the Attack*, *op. cit.*, p. 67; see also *The Guardian*, May 11, 1944. Jay White, "Conscripted City", p. 339 also cites overcrowding and reduced recreational opportunities as encouraging juvenile crime in Halifax.

¹⁰³ A juvenile delinquent was an offender aged 16 years or younger until November 3, 1942 at which time the Juvenile Delinquency Act was amended to define juvenile offenders as aged 18 years or younger. Executive Committee Minutes, December 14, 1942.

¹⁰⁴ *The Guardian*, April 12, 1940. In the 1920s and early 1930s, juvenile crime rates had been very low in Verdun compared to other districts in the Montreal area. H.R. Ross, "Juvenile Delinquency in Montreal", M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1932, p. 108.

¹⁰⁵ Morton and Granatstein, *Victory*, p. 207; Keshen, "Morale and Morality", *op. cit.*, pp. 154-155.

In 1943 some minor vandalism took place on a regular basis in Verdun's public parks and against private property¹⁰⁶, and the situation worsened as that summer progressed. Of 21 people arrested in Verdun in July 1943, 17 were juveniles taken into custody for relatively petty offenses. One particularly disquieting incident took place in August 1943 when a roving gang of some 50 young rowdies disrupted a 'sing-song' concert for young people held at Woodland Park. Police were called to quell the disorder. This incident demonstrated that an organized gang of delinquents operated in Verdun. Future wartime sing-songs were tainted by the threat of violence and one woman, who was a child living on Third Avenue during the war, has recalled that it was considered risky to attend these gatherings.¹⁰⁷ In January 1944, 30 of 34 people arrested in Verdun for various offenses were youths. In June 1944, 40 of 52 offenders taken into custody were juveniles, most of them picked up on charges of loitering and disturbing the peace.¹⁰⁸ The local press, citing police sources, alternated between alarm and re-assurance. The frequency of delinquent acts depended on the season. The onset of winter brought lower rates of juvenile loitering and vandalism; there was less to vandalize in winter, especially in public parks. It is difficult to blame the war more than indirectly for increased juvenile crime.

In 1941 the Montreal Protestant Board of School Commissioners recognized juvenile crime and truancy as serious causes for concern in its schools. The commissioners blamed the temporary absence of fathers and older brothers on active service as a significant contributing factor to this misbehaviour. Given Verdun's enlistment rate and the fact Verdun's Woodland School was the largest Protestant elementary school in Canada and Verdun High School was the third-largest Protestant high school in the Montreal area, it is likely that the commissioners had Verdun in mind. They believed the

¹⁰⁶ *The Guardian*, June 18 and June 25, 1943.

¹⁰⁷ *The Guardian*, August 20, 1943; interview with Béatrice Ste-Marie, October 19, 1994. Much more serious outbursts of wartime youth violence occurred in Prince Rupert, Vancouver and Toronto, for example. Morton and Granatstein, *Victory*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁸ *The Guardian*, February 24 and July 20, 1944.

successful cadet corps programs in Protestant schools were useful ways to keep teenagers out of mischief.¹⁰⁹

Boredom was a further possible cause of juvenile crime. Consequently, Verdun decided to provide an alternative to juveniles' increasing use of the streets as their playgrounds. Sports constituted an important and inexpensive community activity and helped relax wartime tensions. In 1942 the Verdun Municipal Playgrounds Commission recorded its busiest year to that date. Nearly 1500 permits were issued for various sporting matches at local parks while 1233 players were registered in municipally-organized leagues and 305 others in independent leagues.¹¹⁰ The city saw to it that its playgrounds remained popular. In the summer of 1944 City Hall increased the budget of the Municipal Playgrounds Commission by \$5300 to improve existing sporting facilities and offer a greater number of organized activities. The city hoped that the distractions provided by sports and games would subdue the mischievous bent of a growing proportion of Verdun's young people. Between 1939 and 1945 the number of Verdun playgrounds increased from five to 11.¹¹¹ In co-operation with the city, Verdun's Y.M.C.A. branch expanded its many youth-oriented activities, all of which *The Guardian* viewed as "wag[ing] war on delinquency".¹¹² The city's campaign met with the approval of a broad spectrum of local groups including the Knights of Columbus, the Greater Verdun Community Council, *La Société St-Jean-Baptiste* and *La Ligue indépendante catholique*, among others.¹¹³ A common problem was solved with a united response.

¹⁰⁹ Annual Report of the Protestant Board of School Commissioners, 1941-1942, p. 13. Archives of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal.

¹¹⁰ *The Guardian*, December 18, 1942.

¹¹¹ Wilson pre-election speech, probably March 31, 1945, Box A-57, file 6, CVA.

¹¹² *The Guardian*, June 29, 1944.

¹¹³ Council Minutes, October 10, 1944.

While wartime Verdun experienced some growing juvenile delinquency the municipality was no hotbed of criminality. The overwhelming majority of young people were not delinquents. The city attempted to deal with juvenile crime though it is clear that public safety was not eroded during the war. The war exacerbated some social or familial circumstances which facilitated the drift to juvenile crime but, in this respect, the war cannot be judged too severely as a cause of social malaise rooted in criminality. The available statistics simply do not bear this out.

THE VERDUN 'ZOOT-SUIT' DISTURBANCES

Though not directly linked to local levels of juvenile delinquency, one spectacular, violent incident rocked wartime Verdun and became etched into the city's collective memory. In early June 1944, Verdun was the scene of a 'zoot suit riot' pitting over 100 sailors stationed in Montreal against a lesser number of young civilian men and teenagers many of whom were attired in the outrageous wartime garb known as the 'zoot suit'. Zoot suits were instantly recognizable for their garish, even shocking, combination of colour, cut and pattern. A zoot suit consisted of a long, loose coat with excessively wide, padded shoulders, ballooning pants pegged at the ankles, a shirt with wide collar points sometimes accompanied by an oversized bow-tie, a wide-brimmed hat and a long, hanging watchchain. Those who wore these outfits were commonly referred to as "zoot-suiters" or "zooters". This fad was most prominent in the United States and Canada, though some youths in Britain were also adherents.¹¹⁴

Most contemporary observers concluded that the zoot suit was foremost a symbol of rebellion and defiance on the part of restless youths. Anti-social behaviour such as drinking and loitering were often linked to zoot-suiters and some roving zooter gangs

¹¹⁴ The precise origin of the zoot suit is unclear. For background, see Mauricio Mazon, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1984), pp. 6-7.

were criminal and violent. Given the tense wartime atmosphere and government exhortations for social cohesion, the actions and appearances of the zooters took on unpatriotic overtones. Zooters' attire contravened W.P.T.B. guidelines regarding the rationing of fabrics and textiles, while their non-conformist attitude seemed to suggest antipathy to established social behaviour; their appearance and values clashed with wartime moral standards. Moreover, zooters *looked* the part of criminals and juvenile delinquents, often leading to an exaggerated or distorted media image of the zooter 'problem'.¹¹⁵ Considerable ill-will towards 'unpatriotic' zoot-suiters developed among servicemen stationed in or near large urban areas, where concentrations of zooters could be found.

In Montreal these two groups sometimes clashed violently and the collisions between them were occasionally worsened by linguistic differences. A serious outbreak of zoot-suit-related violence took place during the night of May 27, 1944 in St. Lambert, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River opposite Montreal. *La Presse* noted that the zooters were mainly of Italian origin, though there were also a few French speakers among them. The soldiers and some local youths who opposed them were English speaking. Further altercations took place on May 31 and fighting spread to the south shore landing of the Jacques Cartier Bridge, where a group of mainly French-speaking soldiers stationed in nearby Longueuil were set upon by a mixed-language band of zooters, 53 of whom were arrested.¹¹⁶ Isolated incidents occurred daily in the Montreal area until at least June 7, including the well-publicized beating of a sailor and his wife by zooters. At the end of May disturbances also occurred in Verdun along the riverfront Boardwalk as well as on Wellington Street. *The Guardian* referred to the incidents as

¹¹⁵ Mazon, *The Zoot-Suit Riots, passim*. A brief discussion of postwar zooter criminality in Toronto is provided by Mariana Valverde, "Building Anti-Delinquent Communities: Morality, Gender and Generation in the City", in Joy Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945-1980*, (University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 26-29.

¹¹⁶ *La Presse*, May 29, 1944; *The Montreal Daily Star*, June 1, 1944.

"baby riots" and "demonstrations of racial feeling". Although the combatants appear to have been divided by language it is unclear if servicemen were involved.¹¹⁷ Despite nearly five years of war and several passionate election campaigns which had often divided Verdunites along ethnic lines, this was the first reported wartime incident of linguistic discord in Verdun on a scale large enough to warrant police intervention.

A much more serious outburst of violence occurred in Verdun in the late evening of Saturday, June 3. This disturbance took place roughly at the same time as some 400 overwhelmingly English-speaking sailors sought out and attacked zooters in downtown Montreal, especially along Ste. Catherine Street. The men were apparently avenging those sailors attacked by zooters during the previous week. According to *The Guardian*, the trouble in Verdun began when

some of the over-excited sailors... drifted to Verdun and when they met with some youths who were wearing what looked like zoot suits, started to chase them. Fights developed in a pool room on Wellington Street... Later in the evening an exchange of blows occurred at the Verdun Dance Pavilion, where some zooters were somewhat badly mauled and manhandled before the police, aided by army and navy patrolmen, broke up the fight.¹¹⁸

Well over 100 sailors left Montreal on foot and made their way to the Pavilion, along the waterfront at the intersection of Lasalle Boulevard and Woodland Park, "*en formation de parade*"¹¹⁹, where they confronted perhaps 60 youths, not all of whom were zooters. Hundreds of non-zooter patrons at the Pavilion were also present and some of these, wearing pre-war, pre-W.P.T.B.-regulated suits were mistaken for zooters by the sailors.

¹¹⁷ *The Guardian*, June 1, 1944. It has not been possible to establish the exact date of these disturbances from information available in either the Verdun or Montreal press, though May 29 or May 30 are most likely. These incidents followed separate gang fights which had taken place along the Boardwalk the previous month. No evidence suggests these outbreaks of youth violence were linked though it is possible.

¹¹⁸ *The Guardian*, June 8, 1944.

¹¹⁹ *La Presse*, June 5, 1944.

Dozens of naval shore patrolmen, army provosts and Verdun police arrived on the scene to break up the *mêlée* while a large number of Verdunites lined the Boardwalk and Lasalle Boulevard to watch the fighting though it does not appear any took part in it. The brawl lasted for more than an hour and was over by about 11:00 p.m.

Some damage was sustained to the interior of the Dance Pavilion and many minor injuries were reported. Four civilians were arrested while some sailors were detained by the military police. Naval shore patrols monitored the explosive situation in Verdun long into the night. At first the Verdun police force was simply overwhelmed by the magnitude of the violence and many injured zoot-suiters, and especially those who were stripped of their outfits by the sailors, were simply driven to the nearby police station to await the arrival of friends or relatives. *The Star* referred to the June 3 fighting in Verdun as "vicious". *La Presse* emphasize the language dimension and noted that "*les bagarres ont pris des proportions graves à Verdun*".¹²⁰

The servicemen's vigilante actions against the zoot-suiters were looked upon approvingly by *The Guardian*, which insisted that linguistic tensions had played a role in the outbreak of violence. *The Guardian* treated the fighting almost as an innocent prank, noting it was accompanied "by a number of rather humorous incidents...[and] some laughter".

Reflecting the differences of opinion over which group was most responsible for the brawl, this account is restrained compared to the detailed report provided by *Le Messenger*, which was far more sympathetic to the assailed zoot-suiters, most of whom were assumed to be French speakers. In an English-language article, *Le Messenger* attacked the ill-disciplined sailors involved in the fracas, stating they "seemed quite willing to descend to Gestapo methods to enforce their own particular 'way of life' upon

¹²⁰ *The Montreal Daily Star*, June 5, 1944; *La Presse*, June 5, 1944. This incident is briefly mentioned by William Weintraub, *City Unique*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996), p. 51.

fellow citizens."¹²¹ Comparing Canadian sailors to the *Gestapo* is something *The Guardian* would never have done. Mirroring the views of most English-speaking Verdunites, *The Guardian* fervently opposed the zoot-suiters for what they were believed to represent: a dissentient view of the war effort, and a generally French-language one at that. Referring to the zoot-suiters as "clown-like", *The Guardian* insisted that the suits were the "symbol of insolence and army evasion, frivolity in time of war". This newspaper blamed the zooters themselves for the violence which occurred in Verdun.¹²²

The zooters who were beaten by the sailors at the Verdun Pavilion were not all French speakers and many of them did not even live in Verdun.¹²³ No incident specific to Verdun had ignited the fighting. The sailors' march on Verdun was an outgrowth of brawling in Montreal. That the Dance Pavilion was a known haunt of zooters was sufficient to attract the sailors. But among Verdun's English-speaking community, the zoot-suiters generally were identified as French-speakers. In 1943 one Grade XI student at Verdun High School wrote a short fictionalized conversation (mostly in French-accented phonetic English) based on the zoot-suit craze. The piece suggested that the typical zooter was French speaking. One former resident of Verdun, who was 15 years old at the time of the 1944 disturbances, has recalled the events vividly and stated the zooters were considered "the Frenchmen".¹²⁴ The hardening of attitudes in Verdun against the unpatriotic zooters was facilitated by the view many of them were French

¹²¹ *The Guardian*, June 8, 1944; *The Messenger*, June 8, 1944.

¹²² *The Guardian*, June 8, 1944.

¹²³ *The Messenger*, June 8, 1944, named three zooters who were arrested or injured and two were French speaking and one English speaking while only one was from Verdun. All were between the ages of 17 and 20. One was arraigned in court and told by the magistrate to visit his tailor so as to "avoid further trouble".

¹²⁴ Ruth Wolstein, "L'habit zoot", in Verdun High School *Annual*, 1943, p. 33; interview with Wilson Dornan, September 21, 1993. The June 1944 fighting at the Pavilion is well remembered by many Verdunites and usually discussed as a language issue.

speakers. But a post-riot investigation indicated that this perception, which was a contributing cause to the fighting, was mistaken.

Testimony taken at the navy's official board of inquiry into the Montreal-wide incidents indicated that the zooters whom the sailors attacked in Montreal and Verdun were drawn from many ethnic backgrounds. Five out of eight witnesses who were asked about the zooters' language or ethnicity insisted they were predominantly of Italian ancestry; two claimed the zooters were mainly French speaking while another believed that they were of all nationalities. Several witnesses also mentioned that some zooters were "Jewish" or "Syrian" and most agreed that there were many English speakers among them.¹²⁵ Despite contemporary notions and enduring popular perceptions, Verdun's zoot-suit disturbances did not neatly divide French speakers from English speakers. The belief that they did perhaps helped explain the occurrence of the incidents and, in Verdun, tainted perceptions of what the local fighting represented in terms of wartime social relations.

Verdun's municipal administration became alarmed at the sudden rash of violence taking place in the city, culminating in the June brawl at the Dance Pavilion, and acted swiftly to defuse tensions in the community. The Executive Committee petitioned Ottawa and the naval authorities in Montreal to investigate the matter and to take steps to prevent men under their command from engaging in renewed violence in Verdun. In fact, a quick inquiry into the Montreal-wide incidents had already been held on June 5, two days after the worst of the fighting. The City of Verdun received letters of assurance from the Minister of National Defence, J.L. Ralston, the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, Angus L. Macdonald, and Paul-Émile Côté promising that the matter would be investigated thoroughly. Edward Wilson, who lived only 200 metres from the Dance Pavilion and had made his way to the Verdun police station at the time of the disturbances, met with Commander F. Davis, Naval Controller of the Port of Montreal.

¹²⁵ "Board of Inquiry", H.M.C.S. *Hochelaga*, Montreal, June 5, 1944, RG 24, Volume 11,110, file 55-2-1/423, "Disturbances in Montreal", NAC.

Davis promised the mayor that measures would be taken to prevent similar situations from arising in the future.¹²⁶ Immediately after the fighting the navy declared the Dance Pavilion off-limits to naval personnel, cancelled naval leave for a week and imposed a sailors' curfew starting at 9 p.m. Since civil-military relations in Montreal were becoming increasingly tense, the navy was serious about curbing further violence involving its men.¹²⁷

Wilson enlisted Verdun's Catholic and Protestant clergy to restrain latent linguistic and social animosities existing in the community even though it was known few of the sailors and only some of the zooters involved in the fighting at the Pavilion were Verdunites. In a letter released to the press immediately following this incident the mayor appealed to the clergy to help influence the youth of Verdun (as well as their parents) to take a more conciliatory stance in their social behaviour. Although prompted by the recent zoot-suit brawl, Wilson aimed further afield in decrying recent local youth violence and juvenile delinquency in general. His letter read in part:

In Verdun, as elsewhere, one can see more and more that youth is losing its respect towards the public...It follows that to efface this intolerable attitude that is now growing in alarming proportions among certain groups of young boys and even among girls, it is necessary to adopt energetic measures. Consequently, the City Council has already taken efficient steps to punish leaders of gangs...

[W]e are sufficiently en rapport with internal conditions in our municipality to know that the present situation presents difficulties that we

¹²⁶ *The Guardian*, June 22, 1944. The naval inquiry into the matter, which heard testimony from sailors, shore patrolmen, onlookers, zooters and the owner of the Pavilion, attempted to exonerate the sailors' actions. These self-serving findings were rejected by the Naval Secretary in Ottawa and by other high-ranking officers in the Canadian Northwest Atlantic Command. Nothing came of the inquiry and the report was simply filed away. "Board of Inquiry", H.M.C.S. *Hochelaga*, Montreal, June 5, 1944, RG 24, Volume 11,110, file 55-2-1/423, "Disturbances in Montreal", NAC.

¹²⁷ *The Messenger*, June 8, 1944; "Board of Inquiry", H.M.C.S. *Hochelaga*, Montreal, June 5, 1944, RG 24, Volume 11,110, file 55-2-1/423, "Disturbances in Montreal", NAC.

must solve without delay. This is the reason...measures should be taken to improve community spirit in our municipality and awaken and impress our youth with the necessity of respecting our various religious beliefs.

The end that we are anxious to attain is that of national unity at all times and in particular during the time of the present war. For, if there is one thing which must be safeguarded above all others, it is that spirit of mutual goodwill for which the City of Verdun has always been renowned.¹²⁸

Wilson's veiled references to Verdun's linguistic dichotomy and religious differences are highlighted to an even greater extent in the French translation of this letter published in the same edition of *The Messenger*. The real intent of the letter is underscored by the replacement of the phrase "improve community spirit" with "*améliorer l'esprit de race*". Moreover, the mayor's comment about being "*en rapport*" with the social mood of the city implies the possibility that linguistic relations in Verdun might have been more strained at this time than the cordial façade indicated. Wilson also might have been acting to ensure that non-Verdun quarrels remained that way. No further zoot-suit battles took place in Verdun. The "mutual goodwill" between the two language groups, frequently referred to in the Verdun media as well as in documentation from City Hall, held fast. In any event, Verdun was the scene, not the origin of the quarrel. But the local riot was symbolic of the dichotomy inherent to Canada's war: those in uniform, those not, those English speaking, those French speaking.

Some Verdunites were outraged by the zoot-suit incidents. A frequent contributor to *The Guardian*, Reverend Ernest S. Reed, rector of Verdun's St. John the Divine Anglican church, possessed strong opinions on the matter. Up to the point of the zoot-suit riots Reed generally had been an erudite voice of moderation on a variety of social and patriotic issues. But in his "Church Editor's Column" of June 15, 1944, the Reverend Reed was anything but moderate. He referred to zoot-suiters variously as "hoodlums", "hooligans" and "chisellers of the lowest kind". In calling for "sterner measures" against these youths, whom he blamed entirely for the recent violence, he stated:

¹²⁸ *The Messenger*, June 8, 1944.

If there are those who object to military service, let them be honest...But young people who are making good wages in war industries and who spend their leisure time sniping at those in the armed services fall into a very different category [than conscientious objectors]...There may be even more sinister influences behind these disturbances. If any groups are using "zoot-suiters" to nefarious ends, let these groups be exposed. Those who, by their teaching or practice, set creed against creed, race against race or group against group are the most despicable kind of fifth columnists.¹²⁹

Reading between the lines of the last sentence, Reed clearly perceived a language dimension to the zoot-suit disturbances. He blamed the zooters and, by extension, seemingly unpatriotic French-speaking youths for the fighting.

The owner of the Pavilion, Rolland David, however, implied that the animosity existing between the sailors and the zooters had more to do with social and civil-military differences than with any overt linguistic conflict since he claimed both sides contained English and French speakers. His views must be carefully considered since, as a dance-hall owner accustomed to dealing with youth, David understood the social backgrounds of much of his clientèle. He was on the scene during the fighting and insisted the language factor was exaggerated as an explanation for the fracas. David warned the naval inquiry that following these incidents it would be dangerous for sailors to walk the streets of Verdun alone, as many local zooters and their friends and relatives would seek to avenge them. He believed that sailors risked being "knifed or hav[ing] their heads split open" in Verdun by zooters.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ *The Guardian*, June 15, 1944. Reed was not the only Verdunite who supported the sailors' cause. One of the few French-speaking sailors involved in the *mélée* remarked that some Verdunites among the large number who had gathered to watch the brawl openly offered the sailors drinks, indicating that sympathy for the men in uniform existed among the local population.

¹³⁰ David forgot that Verdun was something of a "navy town". Since over 1000 Verdunites were on naval service during the war, it is far from certain local sailors and their families would have had much to fear from Verdun zooters. "Board of Inquiry", H.M.C.S. *Hochelaga*, Montreal, June 5, 1944, RG 24, Volume 11,110, file 55-2-1/423, "Disturbances in Montreal", NAC.

The Verdun zoot-suit riots also became known to Verdunites serving overseas. In September 1944 one artilleryman wrote a letter of appreciation to the Mayor's Cigarette Fund in which he stated

... at the present time Jerry is on the run and the boys arn't (sic) giving him any time to rest...[B]ut if our loyal friends the zoot-suiters don't want to fight for their country, we will have to do it alone...If you need any reinforcements in Montreal to fight the Draft Dodgers, apply for them [in] France, you will get more than you need.¹³¹

The zooter-as-draft dodger view was a popular one among servicemen and current among the civilian population. The zoot-suit disturbances constitute evidence that not all was well in the Montreal area between servicemen and civilians, between French- and English-speakers and between youth and their elders. Verdun was not immune from the effects of these tense relationships.

The Second World War affected Verdun society in a variety of ways, some more than others. Although rationing was not severe in Canada its application was noticeable and often inconvenient. Verdun civic authorities attempted to improve the situation, especially with respect to fuel commodity shortages. City Hall joined with community and women's groups to monitor prices and limit the incidence of retailers' illegal price gouging.

Many Verdun families were left distraught by the war. Even though the majority of local family economies benefitted from war employment, the war brought financial distress, personal hardship, emotional duress and tragedy for a significant number of others. Servicemen's families were among the city's most disadvantaged residents, a situation that wartime patriotism found particularly odious. Verdun casualties, though not insignificant, were not as heavy as the city's enormous enlistment rates might have

¹³¹ Gunner R.I. Rowe to M.C.F., September 14, 1944. Box A-348, CVA.

suggested. More important was the disruption of family finances and cohesion caused by the departure of thousands of men on active service.

The housing crisis caused widespread demoralization in Verdun. Much bitterness was aroused in this community of tenants against dishonest and unfeeling landlords. The situation contained potential for violence. But far-sighted municipal authorities had implemented a wartime development plan which eased the burden somewhat. Without the interest and determination of the city, housing conditions would have been far worse in Verdun. The thousands of returning service people did not wait long before Crawford Park was converted into a comfortable veterans' enclave.

Juvenile delinquency increased during the war, but its incidence seemed unduly magnified by its unpatriotic characterization. The city became alarmed at this perceived rise in anti-social behaviour and provided Verdun youths with improved outlets for their energy. These initiatives were hailed in the community, which seemed satisfied with the Wilson administration's responses to the social problems occasioned by the war. The outburst of violence implicating zooters and sailors in Verdun was the result of wider issues than those of Verdun's own making. Despite the great potential for wartime division along class and linguistic lines, Verdun society generally remained cohesive for the duration of the war. The hardships were borne and the social fabric remained intact. The war brought both prosperity and devastation but neither in sufficient quantity to alter the city radically. Verdun was changed by the war, but Verdunites away on active service had no difficulty recognizing their home town upon their return.



Comfort station and stage, Woodland Park.
At left, the Verdun Dance Pavilion.
scene of zoot-suit disturbances in June 1944.

CHAPTER 8

VERDUN AND THE POLITICS OF WAR

During the Second World War Verdun's electors voted on eight occasions. Two campaigns were federal elections, in 1940 and 1945; two were provincial elections, in 1939 and 1944; three were municipal elections, in 1941, 1943 and 1945; and there was also the plebescite on conscription in 1942. The provincial and federal elections all dealt with the divisive issue of conscription and other war-related matters while the municipal elections focussed on the issues of municipal finances and local improvements. War-related issues rarely filtered down to the level of municipal politics. An examination of Verdun's wartime politics provides insight into local concerns and social divisions and the effects of national issues on community harmony and cohesion. The community's political responses were the measure of local social dynamics.

By 1939 Verdun's French- and English-speaking communities had co-existed for several generations. Traditionally, the city's English-speaking, working-class majority had voted Conservative in both federal and provincial elections. Whomever the majority of the English-speaking population supported stood the best chance of winning a seat in Verdun. During the Depression, the C.C.F.'s social programs became popular in Verdun, where the party achieved its greatest level of support in the Province of Québec. Yet, in the 1935 federal contest a Conservative was elected in Verdun, one of only 40 in Canada, five from Québec. In the 1935 and 1936 provincial elections Verdun returned a former Conservative under the banner of the *Union Nationale* (U.N.). But the war altered Verdun's traditional electoral behaviour. The war, not social issues, determined voting patterns, notwithstanding candidates' ethnicity. Ironically, the names of French-speaking candidates predominated on every ballot and in the period 1935-1945, no English speakers were elected federally or provincially from Verdun and few were elected municipally. Edward Wilson was the major exception. This did not sit well with all English speakers though most recognized that French-Canadian nominees could prove more attractive to French speakers.

English speakers were a majority in Verdun but a minority in the Montreal area and throughout the province. Verdun's English speakers, however, belonged to a wider linguistic majority and their attitudes towards the war resembled those of most English-speaking Canadians. Differing and competing social and political viewpoints towards the war existed in Verdun and these were sometimes most clearly defined by language. But votes were not merely cast on the basis of cultural identity. Each language group's success in *bloc* voting behaviour varied according to the type of election and the issues at stake.

Most of Verdun's English speakers and their mouthpiece, *The Guardian*, assumed a political stance based on national policies and were prepared to subordinate other issues to winning the war. But they usually split their vote among pro-war parties, including the C.C.F. French speakers were more likely to divide their electoral allegiances between a pro-war party (invariably the Liberals) and parties or independent candidates professing a more restrained approach to the war, such as the U.N. English speakers in Verdun voted in a solid *bloc* during mayoralty elections, always supporting Wilson and ensuring his election. The April 1942 conscription plebiscite also demonstrated that English-speaking Verdunites had more in common with English speakers nation-wide than with French speakers living alongside them. French speakers, too, exploited their local majorities in contesting ward seats during municipal elections and voted *en bloc* at the time of the plebiscite.

Each wartime provincial or federal election campaign held in Verdun clearly reflected issues of common concern to the wider electorate. But all campaigns were based in the community's wartime political culture. Candidates and parties accommodated themselves to the political inclinations of the electorate and these views reflected the community's linguistic and class composition.

What follows is an analysis of Verdun's wartime election campaigns with particular reference to language relations and linguistic voting behaviour. Because municipal elections were little concerned with wartime issues, they have been grouped together at the beginning for cohesiveness. The provincial and federal campaigns, as well as the 1942 plebiscite, appear chronologically since some of the contentious issues raised in these votes depended on the outcomes of previous elections and on the wider context of the war.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, 1941 TO 1945

Every two years Verdunites voted for a mayor and eight aldermen. Each ward elected two aldermen, though a huge population imbalance existed between the wards. More than half of all Verdunites and most of the city's English speakers lived in west-end Ward 4. Therefore, six aldermen represented three small eastern wards and two represented most of the population. Four aldermen were elected directly by the landlords of each ward and these made up the Executive Committee of City Council, which was responsible for voting all municipal spending. Elections took place the first Monday in April in 1941, 1943 and 1945. Voting was almost entirely a male right, as only women owning businesses in Verdun and married female property owners were allowed to vote.¹

The 1941 election was a tame affair. The incumbent, Wilson, campaigned on his record of fiscal responsibility and confidence he instilled in the future of Verdun, exemplified by the numerous building starts since 1939. Wilson boasted that the city enjoyed excellent relationships with the federal and provincial governments, a situation highly favourable to Verdun and for which he claimed credit. At the same time J.R. French conveniently

¹ *The Guardian*, January 12, 1940. In April 1940, City Council voted 5-1 to refuse women the municipal vote. Later that month, Aldermen Brown and Scurrah presented a motion to increase the number of women allowed to vote. This was defeated 5-2, indicating a linguistic divide on the matter. *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 2 and April 16, 1940.

announced an impressive slate of upcoming public works in the municipality. *The Guardian* praised Wilson's honest and efficient administration, indicating its support for his re-election.²

Wilson was challenged by Hervé Ferland, whom Wilson had defeated for the mayoralty in a close vote in 1939. Oddly enough, considering Wilson's ultra-patriotic attitude, it was Ferland who made the war an issue, if only a marginal one. He claimed that he would negotiate a preferential hiring practice for Verdunites at the D.I.L. ammunition plant which was scheduled to open in Verdun in May 1941. Wilson scoffed at this promise since he had already insisted on just such terms with the firm.³ Challengers for Wilson's job were better advised not to raise war issues since the mayor's stewardship was unassailable in this regard. Though candidates' attitudes towards the war might have influenced some voters, Verdun's municipal contests were fought on local issues. In 1941 a full-page campaign advertisement for Wilson appearing in *The Guardian* noted only two points: Wilson's irreproachable honesty and his success in driving out slot machines from the back-rooms of certain Verdun establishments.⁴

One divisive local political issue remained the existence of the Executive Committee, made up of French-speaking proprietors who controlled the city's budget. This situation was perceived in the English-speaking community as reducing most Verdunites "to serfdom", as one opponent of the Executive Committee phrased it.⁵ Throughout the war Wilson campaigned for the abolition of the Executive Committee. He felt its existence was a "prostitution of justice" and fundamentally undemocratic. The mayor argued that the proprietors "believe that the mere ownership of bricks and mortar constitutes a control

² *The Guardian*, January 24, 1941; *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 1 and April 4, 1941.

³ *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 2 and April 4, 1941.

⁴ *The Guardian*, March 14, 1941.

⁵ Frederick Bruce Horn to *The Guardian*, January 24, 1941.

over the majority of their fellow men." Over 90% of Verdunites were tenants. Wilson noted that the non-Executive Committee aldermen could not authorize the purchase of "a lead pencil"; as a result aldermen were no more than "waterboys" on council.⁶ This political issue divided the French-Canadian landlord class from the English-speaking working class. Sensing the potential for linguistic animosity, Wilson consistently attempted to make the matter solely one of class; French-Canadian tenants were also disadvantaged by the system.

On polling day the bitter rivalry between Wilson and Ferland split the community along language lines. Fifty-eight percent of eligible voters cast their ballots and Wilson owed his narrow win to English-speaking electors, especially from Ward 4. Table 8.1 provides a breakdown by ward of the votes obtained by each candidate.

TABLE 8.1 VERDUN MAYORALTY ELECTION RESULTS 1941⁷

	Ferland	Wilson
Ward 1	881	454
Ward 2	1756	854
Ward 3	712	572
Ward 4	1541	3762
	—	—
Total	4890	5642

The mainly English-speaking neighbourhoods, Ward 4 and significant sections of Ward 3, supported the English-speaking candidate; those mainly French-speaking, Wards 1 and

⁶ The Executive Committee, which has been described in Chapter 1, was abolished in a city-wide referendum in August 1945. *The Guardian*, February 2, 1940 and August 30, 1945; Council Minutes, August 28 and September 11, 1945.

⁷ *The Guardian*, April 11, 1941; André St. Denis, "Pourcentage du vote donné le 7 avril 1941", Box A-57, file 5, CVA.

2 and much of Ward 3, favoured the French-speaking candidate. Class was also an issue and Ferland, the combative mayor during the Depression, was considered a populist politician among French-speaking residents of Wards 1 and 2. One woman resident of Ward 2 remembered him as "*le maire des pauvres*" and claimed Ferland "*était un dieu dans le vieux Verdun. Tout le monde aimait Ferland.*"⁸ Both class and language were factors in the election, with poorer French speakers most likely to vote for Ferland.

One factor which worked against Wilson was that hundreds of Verdun men, the vast majority of them English speakers from Wards 3 and 4, were away on active service and did not participate in the election. One soldier, unaware of the election outcome, wrote the mayor from overseas that he was "keeping his fingers crossed as I realize that a greater number of the voting power of Ward 4 must be on Active Service."⁹ *The Guardian* was satisfied with Wilson's re-election and chided Ferland for his unspecified attempts to "rouse racial prejudice" during the campaign.¹⁰ Of the eight alderman elected to council, six were French speaking. This outcome was expected since both Wards 1 and 2 contained a majority of French speakers and no English speakers stood for election there. One English speaker was elected in Ward 3 and another in Ward 4. All nine members of the council were proprietors and merchants and four of them lived in Ward 4.

Most elected aldermen were Wilson allies and few disputes based on language marred council deliberations, though some political outlooks were at least influenced by aldermen's ethnicity. Like its predecessor, the 1941-1943 council promoted various war-

⁸ "*Vieux*" Verdun was defined as east of Desmarchais, but especially east of Willibrord. Interview with Noëlla Bisson, July 21, 1994.

⁹ Regimental Sergeant Major C.S. Bacon to M.C.F., April 9, 1941, Box A-333, CVA.

¹⁰ *The Guardian*, April 11, 1941. Wilson received dozens of congratulatory letters and telegrams from all over the Montreal area and further afield. One was from J.A. Gagnon, one of Verdun's leading merchants and another from Yves Leduc, a local lawyer, Liberal and strong supporter of the war effort. Box A-57, file 5 "Municipal Elections 1941", CVA.

related causes and co-operating closely with federal authorities. The divisive 1942 conscription debate was scrupulously avoided during its sessions. No resolutions were passed in the period 1939-1945 which criticized Canada's conduct of the war, unlike that which occurred in many Québec municipalities.

Wilson's second term of office was an entirely successful one and the 1943 election elicited little partisan enthusiasm in Verdun. Three days before the vote *The Guardian* observed that Verdun's 19,500 voters displayed "a general lack of interest" in the civic elections. No significant local issues animated the campaign, though the existence of the Executive Committee continued to rankle some Verdunites. One person identified only as "a proprietor of Ward 4", claimed the municipal structure eliminated "the inherent rights of the British subjects of Verdun". The arguments against the Executive Committee continued to be based on language as well as class or principal. This letter-writer did not believe that the interests of English speakers could be adequately served by French speakers and bemoaned the fact that English speakers were "outnumbered" on city council. According to this landlord, "The net result of this remarkable electoral system is that the minority rule the majority."¹¹ He direly predicted that in the forthcoming vote only a single English-speaking alderman would be returned to represent 60% of the electorate while seven French speakers would represent the other 40%. Another letter writer reminded all English speaking men that it was imperative to vote for Wilson.¹² Even allowing for the possibility that these letters were attempts to mobilize electoral support for Wilson, it was significant that the issue of representation was about language, not wards or population distribution.

On the other hand, in no wartime election did English speakers bother to stand for office in Wards 1 and 2 and only one of two Ward 4 candidates was English speaking until 1945

¹¹ Letter signed "A Proprietor of Ward 4", *The Guardian*, April 2, 1943.

¹² Charles E. Fayle to *The Guardian*, April 2, 1943.

when two were English speaking. It was a foregone conclusion that French speakers would dominate city council. Not surprisingly, ward redistribution was hotly debated and, following the 1943 election, council agreed to extend all ward boundaries westward, significantly increasing the number of English speakers in Ward 3 without decreasing the proportion of English speakers in Ward 4. Though this barely affected the ward populations, it facilitated the election of an English speaker in Ward 3, which was probably an acceptable compromise to both language groups. The linguistic imbalance in council, and particularly on the Executive Committee, made winning the mayoralty an important political objective of the English-speaking community, especially since the mayor had the power of veto over council resolutions. This veto was used infrequently, however, in large measure owing to City Council's co-operative attitude and the fear of splitting the community along language lines, something Wilson consistently sought to avoid. Most of Wilson's support continued to come from English speakers. In 1943 one of his campaign advertisements listed 212 citizens who supported him. Only 12 had French names.¹³

Wilson's opponent in 1943 was Émile Ste-Marie, an alderman in the previous council. The best alternative platform Ste-Marie could offer the electorate was the possibility of creating a beach along the St. Lawrence River and the promise to install more traffic lights. Wilson again stood on his record of fiscal responsibility, balanced budgets, and the fact that the city took out no new loans and did not raise taxes in the previous two years. This demonstrated administrative success appealed strongly to Verdunites of both language groups, including proprietors. Wilson also trumpeted his heavy personal involvement in patriotic causes, boasting during an election campaign radio address:

I feel I can say without fear of contradiction that since the outbreak of war I have striven conscientiously to provide...leadership and to encourage the people of our City to give their maximum support in every way possible both to our armed forces and to our government. Needless to say, I shall

¹³ *The Guardian*, March 19, 1943.

continue to do so... Verdun has justly gained the reputation of being one of the most patriotic communities in the Dominion. With your help, I want to do everything I can to maintain that reputation and even to surpass our previous contributions to the war effort.¹⁴

On the surface, the municipal elections were not linked to patriotic issues, though it would have been difficult to separate Wilson from his involvement in war-related work.

Wilson was easily re-elected, doubling his margin of victory. This was facilitated by a lower participation rate on the part of French-speaking voters than had been the case in 1941. As before, the bulk of Wilson's support came from English speakers in Ward 4. Seven of eight aldermen returned were French speakers. Table 8.2 shows the 1943 mayoralty results.

TABLE 8.2 VERDUN MAYORALTY ELECTION RESULTS 1943¹⁵

	Ste-Marie	Wilson
Ward 1	792	399
Ward 2	1478	848
Ward 3	576	542
Ward 4	927	3778
	—	—
Total	3773	5567

¹⁴ From text of Wilson's address over CFCF Radio, April 1, 1943, in Box A-57, file 12, "Municipal Election 1943", CVA. Wilson's patriotic pronouncements were published in *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 2 and April 3, 1943.

¹⁵ *The Guardian*, April 9, 1943. By 1943 Wilson had become well known and respected in the Montreal area and throughout the province for his successful municipal administration and for his war work. After his re-election he was congratulated on his victory and for his patriotic stewardship in dozens of telegrams and letters received at City Hall. Among his well-wishers, French and English speaking, were federal and provincial officials, mayors and municipal administrators from all over Québec, military authorities, patriotic groups, veterans' associations, businesses, social organizations and many individuals. Box A-57, file 12, CVA.

The election was so uninspiring that less than half of eligible voters bothered to cast a ballot. This light turnout indicated no significant voter antipathy towards Wilson and the inability of his opponents to mount an effective campaign. Nevertheless, *The Guardian* alarmingly reminded readers that with the defeat of George Brown in Ward 3, only two members of the newly-elected council were English-speakers: Wilson and Robert Scurrah, who held a seat from Ward 4. English-speaking voters were described in this newspaper as being "in large percentage...of the staunch, old, conservative British stock, who believe in the established tradition of British fair play."¹⁶ This meant support for Wilson, of course.

The English-speaking community assumed that if Wilson lost the mayoralty it would be due to the absence overseas of many of his patriotic (English-speaking) followers. One anonymous resident wrote *The Guardian* complaining that Verdunites on active service should be allowed to vote since 90% of them were likely to vote for Wilson. Gunner William J. Swain, an artilleryman serving in Britain, wrote an appreciative letter to Wilson in response to receiving his carton of cigarettes from the Mayor's Cigarette Fund. Swain told the mayor he hoped to be "back in Verdun when they hold another election because I'd vote for you 100 times using a different name each time just to see you as Mayor of Verdun." The cigarette-supplying mayor was popular with the troops and also with the men's families. One Verdun women whose brother was overseas wrote Wilson: "Thanks so very much for your wonderful interest in the Verdun boys - you sure [are] a good mayor."¹⁷ Wilson's patriotic activities did him no harm electorally, as he knew. Wilson was a patriot and a politician and each role served the other well.

¹⁶ *The Guardian*, April 9, 1943.

¹⁷ "Fifth Avenue" to *The Guardian*, April 16, 1943; Swain to M.C.F., no date, winter of 1941-1942, Box A-333, CVA; Mrs. Edythe Senior to Wilson, October 18, 1942, Box A-339, CVA.

Compared to its predecessor the 1943-1945 council dealt with a greater number of language issues, such as the imposition of a municipal curfew, the sale of municipal lots for the construction of a Catholic church and the inadequacy of English-Catholic school facilities. This council, too, managed to refrain from debating the emotional subject of conscription. There was a distinct 'live and let live' attitude towards this subject which might have been essential for the continuation of community harmony.

In 1945 Wilson faced a new opponent, alderman Georges Tétrault, with whom Wilson had sparred during the previous two years over a variety of issues, including the imposition of a curfew. Tétrault obtained very little support from the English-speaking community: he had been mentioned in 1944 as a potential candidate for the seemingly unpatriotic *Union Nationale* and this did not improve his popularity with this language group. Moreover, known U.N. party organizers helped Tétrault's 1945 mayoralty campaign.¹⁸ *The Gazette* (Montreal) strongly endorsed Wilson, reminding its readers that Verdun "ranks as one of the largest and most efficiently operated municipalities adjoining Montreal" and that Wilson's tenure as mayor had been characterized by "sound, sensible and progressive measures."¹⁹ *The Guardian* again listed some of the mayor's supporters: of the 58 identified, only eight had French names.²⁰

The major issue of this campaign had nothing to do with the war but it polarized Verdun according to language. The seven French speakers on city council supported the sale to the Catholic Church of parkland in Ward 4 on which it was intended to erect a French-language church. The same lot had been denied the previous year to embryonic St. Thomas More Parish, established in 1944 to serve Verdun's Ward 4 English-speaking Catholics. As a result of this earlier refusal, Wilson vetoed the sale to the French-

¹⁸ *Le Canada*, April 5, 1945.

¹⁹ *The Gazette*, March 31, 1945.

²⁰ *The Guardian*, February 15, 1945.

speaking Catholics and was supported in his decision by a petition bearing 2000 names drawn from Verdun's English-speaking Catholic and Protestant communities. Wilson claimed the ensuing furore was the most divisive he had ever witnessed in Verdun, highlighting the potent political mixture which resulted from an issue combining both language and religion.²¹

Wilson tried to downplay this controversial matter in his campaign. He emphasized his expectation that Verdun would suffer widespread unemployment as a result of military demobilization and stressed Verdun's need for an experienced administrator able to provide political continuity into the postwar period. Wilson claimed that this stability would benefit the returning men. Some opposition to Wilson was generated in the community as a result of his well-known C.C.F. leanings. He was denounced as a "socialist" by a newly-formed group calling itself the United Citizens' Association of Verdun as well as by the Verdun Voters' League, whose members included some tenants and proprietors from both language groups.²² But ideological opposition to Wilson seemed a hard sell in Verdun in 1945

The population voted for continuity. Wilson was re-elected by a count of 6817 to 4945, an increased majority for the second consecutive election. Fifty-seven percent of the 20,500 electors cast their ballots. Wilson won every poll in Ward 4, won Ward 3 and did reasonably well in Wards 1 and 2. The votes of already discharged servicemen improved Wilson's showing. The Verdun Voters' League lamented the results, claiming that they indicated "a split between the two principal racial elements living in Verdun", which was only partly true.²³ The lack of meaningful criticism regarding Wilson's leadership and the

²¹ *The Guardian*, March 1 and March 15, 1945. In the end, the new French Catholic parish, *Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde*, purchased another, less prominent lot on which to build.

²² *The Guardian*, March 29, 1945; *The Messenger*, March 22 and March 29, 1945.

²³ *The Guardian*, April 5, 1945; *The Messenger*, April 12, 1945.

public's general disregard for his left-wing ideology, at least at the municipal level, helped Wilson garner support from a wider cross-section of Verdun's population, including even some east-end French speakers. Five of eight aldermen elected were French speakers: one aldermen elected from Ward 3 and both from Ward 4 (including one to the Executive Committee) were English speakers.²⁴ *The Messenger* offered an interesting comment on the election of Patrick Quinn in Ward 3:

Pat Quinn's great victory in Ward three is a credit to the people of that district. It had long been felt that the Irish speaking (sic) citizens of Verdun should have a representative on the City Council, and the response of the French-Canadians of Ward three to the general feeling throughout the community resulted in Pat's election with 2121 votes over his opponent's 1038.²⁵

There is no evidence that this was actually the reason for Quinn's election but the perception that it might have been so speaks well of language relations in Verdun at this time.

Verdun's wartime municipal elections were quiet affairs, eliciting only moderate interest on the part of the electorate compared to the highly-charged provincial or federal contests. The war was infrequently an issue and war-related matters affecting Verdun, such as war employment or soldiers' civil re-establishment, were rarely mentioned. Wilson proved a popular and capable mayor. No grassroots movement was ever organized in an attempt to dislodge him from office. Still, his different French-speaking opponents in each of three wartime elections obtained the support of a majority of the French-speaking electorate

²⁴ One letter of congratulations sent to Wilson from a Montreal friend termed his reelection a "magnificent victory over all the gangsters and racketeers in Verdun. Every decent citizen is behind you. I do hope that the English speaking aldermen who have been elected will play the game and stand behind you in your efforts to make Verdun a city to be proud of." Reading between the lines of this letter reveals that Verdun's election represented for some a social and political struggle between honest (English-speaking) government and corrupting (French Canadian) influences. James Cummings to Wilson, April 4, 1945. Box A-57, file 6, "Municipal Elections 1945", CVA.

²⁵ *The Messenger*, April 5, 1945.

and Wilson's re-election was always due to the *bloc* voting behaviour of English speakers. It was more likely for a French speaker to vote for Wilson than for an English speaker to vote for one of Wilson's opponents. Language remained an important political issue in municipal elections as it was in most social matters.

THE 1939 PROVINCIAL ELECTION

The surprise provincial election called by the Québec premier, Maurice Duplessis, for October 25, 1939 created a great stir in Québec and across Canada because of its underlying wartime national unity implications. Ostensibly, the election was fought over the usurpation of provincial rights by the federal government and the legitimacy of Ottawa's conduct of the war effort. In fact, the major issue turned out to be the validity of Ottawa's promise not to impose conscription. Strong opinions on this matter were mobilized in Verdun.

Verdun's incumbent *Union Nationale* M.L.A., Pierre A. Lafleur, had represented the city in the Legislative Assembly since 1923 as a Conservative and from 1935 as a member of the *Union Nationale*, which had formed the government in 1936. Lafleur had always received a significant amount of support from English speakers and was sensitive to the wartime mood of the English-speaking electorate, which was ill-disposed to his party's lukewarm war stance. *The Guardian* noted that Lafleur had "pledged his loyalty to King and Country and held that the Government of Quebec was [as] loyal as any other in the country". Lafleur stated his opposition to conscription though he promised to keep an open mind on the subject as the war progressed. He distanced himself from his party, and his party leader, and reminded *The Guardian's* readers that his wife of 42 years was English speaking as well as the founder and regent of the small Verdun chapter of the

I.O.D.E. Accordingly, Lafleur offered his "energy and that of [his] wife" in fulfilling his mandate.²⁶

Lafleur's chief opponent was the Liberal candidate, J.J.L. Comeau, principal of the Verdun branch of O'Sullivan's College, a business and commercial school. Both the English- and French-speaking Liberal organizations in the riding endorsed Comeau in a semblance of Liberal unity which had not always been evident in Verdun.²⁷ Comeau's early identification with a vigorous national war effort earned him the strong support of the English-speaking electorate. His insistence on the need for Empire solidarity won the hearts of many British-born residents. Reflecting this community's mood, *The Guardian* warned that a Liberal defeat in this election would serve to encourage the "hideous armies of Naziism". Comeau's fortunes rested with the heretofore Conservative English-speaking community. "The question arises", noted *The Guardian*, "as to whether the west end of Verdun will vote Liberal. Stalwarts in the Comeau camp claim that this is one time [English speakers] can cast their ballots for a Liberal without suffering any pangs of conscience."²⁸ "Let every English-speaking voter in the Province of Quebec forget...party politics in this election and join hands with the right-thinking French-Canadian element that is determined to end the reign of tyranny and extravagance it has known...", read one

²⁶ *The Guardian*, October 6 and October 13, 1939. The provincial electoral boundaries of Verdun coincided with its municipal limits. In the two weeks preceding the polling date, *The Guardian* seemed interested in little else but the election. For a review of the 1939 Québec election see Conrad Black, *Duplessis*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), pp. 193-222.

²⁷ The newly-formed "Federation of Liberal Clubs" ran a united Liberal campaign for the first time "in many elections". Charles Barr, a well-known Liberal, mediated the reconciliation of Verdun's Liberals and served as Comeau's campaign manager. *The Guardian*, July 7 and October 6, 1939.

²⁸ *The Guardian*, October 13, 1939.

of Comeau's advertisements.²⁹ Comeau had one significant advantage over Lafleur: he had served three years with the C.E.F. in the Great War, a virtue which a veteran community such as Verdun could scarcely ignore.

Though the Liberals hoped the English-speaking community would vote for them *en bloc*, the candidacy of another high-profile veteran served to split the English-language vote. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation candidate, Robert L. Calder, a well-known Montreal lawyer, civil libertarian and active opponent of the Duplessis regime, was the only C.C.F. candidate to stand for election in the entire province. The bilingual Calder had served as an officer in the Black Watch during the Great War and his enviable military record was emphasized in advertisements and articles. These attributes did much to offset his party's potential unpopularity in Verdun owing to the C.C.F.'s early hesitation in fully supporting Canada's war effort. Calder was firmly against conscription, however, and felt Canada's participation in the war should be limited to voluntarism and the provision of arms and foodstuffs to the Allied cause.³⁰ As a result, some C.C.F. supporters among the city's large community of British-born workingmen were obliged to decide between ideology and patriotism.

The political vitriol increased as the election drew nearer. Comeau accused the U.N. of "treason" and asked the electorate, "Does the Union Jack still mean anything to you?". Lafleur tried to address some of the issues consuming his English-speaking constituents. He referred to Adolf Hitler as the "mad dog of Europe" and insisted he would resign from the U.N. if this party formed the next government and enacted laws prejudicial to Allied victory, a promise few *Union Nationale* candidates found politically expedient to make.

²⁹ *The Guardian*, October 13, 1939. There were numerous other Liberal calls for the Conservative English-language community to "set aside party ties". A greater relative proportion of English speakers than French speakers were over the age of 21, adding to the existing electoral strength of the 58% of Verdunites who were English speaking.

³⁰ *The Guardian*, October 20, 1939.

Late in the campaign, however, Lafleur reverted to the government line that the election was not about the war at all but federal-provincial relations and constitutional jurisdiction. He reminded voters that "Verdun has always been Conservative" and implored them not to "let the party down". But the issue of the war overrode party allegiances. The approving headline in a special pre-election issue of *The Guardian* screamed "Comeau says Duplessis Hitler Ally".³¹

The Liberals easily swept the riding. Comeau polled strongly throughout the city, whereas Lafleur's support dwindled rapidly and decisively outside the predominantly French-speaking east-end wards. The C.C.F. did reasonably well in English-speaking neighbourhoods, winning several polls and coming close to winning many others in Wards 3 and 4. The final vote tally showed Comeau with 4449 (51%), Calder with 2513 (29%), Lafleur with a dismal 1415 (16%) and a fourth candidate, Georges Daoust, representing the moribund *Action Libérale Nationale*, with 362 (4%). Comeau was the first Liberal ever elected from Verdun.³²

The turnout represented only 62% of eligible voters, lower than the Island of Montreal's average of 66.7%. Neither Verdun's French nor English speakers voted *en bloc*. English speakers deserted the U.N., ensuring Lafleur's defeat. If the C.C.F. received its support overwhelmingly from English-speaking voters, then nearly as many English speakers voted for the C.C.F. as for the Liberals. Ideology mattered as much as patriotism to many working-class Verdunites at this early stage of the war. Unless a greater proportion of French speakers did not exercise their franchise, as many French speakers voted Liberal as U.N. Province-wide, the Liberals obtained 52.7% of the popular vote to the *Union Nationale's* 40%. Verdunites from both language groups had joined with the rest of

³¹ *The Guardian*, October 20 and October 24, 1939.

³² *The Guardian*, October 27 and November 24, 1939.

Québec in rejecting the Duplessis government.³³ For the politically eventful first five years of the war, Verdun's representative in Québec City was an ultra-patriotic, French-Canadian Great War veteran sitting on the government side. Comeau did not disappoint those who had voted for a candidate pledged to support the war effort.

THE 1940 FEDERAL ELECTION

Amidst opposition charges of maladministration of the war effort and demands for a national government, Prime Minister Mackenzie King dissolved Parliament in January 1940 and called a general election for March 26. This announcement found Verdun's Liberal and Conservative constituency organizations in disarray. By the middle of the campaign, the Montreal press reported that "Verdun appears to be the political storm centre of the Montreal district".³⁴ The spirited campaign in Verdun attracted eight candidates, the most in any riding on the Island of Montreal.

When war was declared Jules Wermenlinger, the sitting Conservative M.P. for Verdun, stated that Canada "will have to go to whatever limit is necessary to win", which did not rule out conscription. But by the time the election was called considerable opposition had developed in local Tory ranks to this politically ineffective Verdun shopowner. Though Wermenlinger ultimately secured the backing of the riding association, his shaky position

³³ *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 9, 1939. Perhaps some French-speaking Verdunites, like others throughout the province, feared a Duplessis win would lead to an English Canadian backlash and a weakening in Mackenzie King's position, allowing for conscriptionist elements to gain greater authority in Ottawa. The implications of the threatened resignation of Québec federal ministers if Duplessis won, and the loss of their anti-conscriptionist influence, could not be ignored.

³⁴ *The Montreal Daily Star*, February 24, 1940. The federal riding of Verdun also covered the neighbouring town of Lasalle which had a population of about 4000 of whom perhaps 60% were French speaking. For a review of the 1940 federal election see J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government 1939-1945*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 72-113.

within his own party was underscored by the fact that an Independent Conservative candidate, Sam Currie, challenged him for Verdun's Tory vote.³⁵

The Liberals had troubles of their own. Despite attempts to unite the half-dozen widely divergent Liberal groups (based on language, ideology and personality), rivalries among them were too deeply entrenched and recriminations too heated. The united front created the previous October by the provincial Liberals could not be repeated by the federal Liberal groups. *The Guardian* labelled the situation in Liberal ranks as "badly muddled".³⁶ Language embittered the struggle among the Liberals. Verdun's English-speaking Liberals hoped to emulate the practice of Sherbrooke's Liberals where a French-speaking candidate ran provincially and an English speaker ran federally. With the election scheduled less than four weeks away, however, the party's national council broke the deadlock by choosing Paul-Émile Côté, a 30-year old Verdun lawyer, as its official candidate. Côté was neither fluent in English nor well known in the city, even in Liberal circles.³⁷

Côté's nomination dissatisfied many Liberals. Within a matter of days, two English-speaking and one French-speaking Independent Liberals threw their hats into the ring. The local party was wracked by factionalism. Côté stressed national unity (which only the Liberals could offer) and moderation in the war effort and attached his political fortunes firmly to the coat tails of Mackenzie King. During a campaign rally, Côté said, "I am not in favour of conscription...I will fight tooth and nail against any attempt to bring in the draft."³⁸ This was a somewhat risky statement to make in a predominantly English-

³⁵ *The Montreal Daily Star*, September 5, 1939 and February 21, 1940.

³⁶ *The Guardian*, February 2 and February 16, 1940.

³⁷ *The Guardian*, February 9 and March 1, 1940. Côté was mentioned only once in *The Guardian's* earlier references to possible Liberal candidates.

³⁸ *The Montreal Daily Star*, March 8, 1940.

speaking and traditionally-Tory constituency, even though the national Conservatives had not yet adopted conscription as a policy.

Robert Scurrah, an outspoken and zealously patriotic alderman from Ward 4, ran as an Independent Liberal. He claimed that his candidacy represented Verdun's English-speaking Liberals. Almost pathologically anti-French Canadian, Scurrah's campaign rhetoric was defamatory and inflammatory. He insisted that language alone should determine voting behaviour. He could therefore not make the slightest pretence about seeking to represent the 42% of Verdunites who spoke French. His exaggerated views suggest linguistic tensions in wartime Verdun, which were exacerbated by the emotional strain of war. In blurring the differences between language and politics, Scurrah's campaign expressed the difficulties of obtaining social and political cohesion in wartime Verdun. While Verdun's language relations were necessarily severely tested by the war, Scurrah's 1940 campaign was the closest thing to hate-mongering witnessed in Verdun's wartime politics. Local political differences remained only that and never translated into any outbursts of electoral violence.

Scurrah's full-page advertisement in the March 22, 1940 issue of *The Guardian* began by reminding readers that Verdun's majority English speaking population "alone can control this election". Then, below the heading "The Plain Truth", he elaborated his linguistic and political analysis:

Verdun, with 65% of its electors of the English-speaking race is one of the few Quebec communities which should, by all rights of fairness...and of Democracy, have an English-speaking representative at Ottawa.

Scurrah believed in the existence of a French-Canadian conspiracy and "intrigue" to deny the "solemn" agreement entered into among Verdun Liberals to nominate an English speaker to stand for federal office. Scurrah employed the term "French Canadian" purposefully and in near-obsessive fashion:

In 1933, a small group of French-Canadian proprietors went to Quebec and induced the French-Canadian members of the Legislative Council to pass a bill through the French-Canadian Legislature, sponsored by the French-Canadian Conservative member for Verdun, depriving 16,000 tenants, most of whom are English-speaking, of the right to the municipal vote, and placing the entire financial and actual government of Verdun in the hands of the four French-Canadian proprietor aldermen. This unfair and unbritish legislation has been fought from the start by Robert W. Scurrah.

For the past five years, the English-speaking majority that makes up this municipality has neither had a representative at Ottawa nor at Quebec. How can we express those opinions and feelings that are our birthright under the British flag?

The average French-Canadian voter is fair-minded enough to realize the justice of the position of his English-speaking fellow electors. The French Canadians are in the minority in Canada and they have seen their minority rights scrupulously respected and protected. It is only fair that they in Verdun should recognize the justice of sending an English-speaking man to Ottawa.

His was a campaign with a difference and it laid bare the linguistic social divisions with which Verdun politics had to contend. It remained to be seen how popular Scurrah's extreme views would be with the electorate.

The French-speaking candidate running as an Independent Liberal in Verdun was Hervé Ferland, the colourful former mayor. "I am not the official candidate of the Liberal Party", he proclaimed, "but...of the people of Verdun". Ferland, too, came out firmly against conscription and was the candidate most closely identified with a lukewarm war stance.³⁹ *The Guardian* simply ignored his candidacy. No political advertisements, articles or even references appeared in this newspaper. A seemingly anti-war candidate could expect no support from Verdun's English-language weekly.

³⁹ *The Montreal Daily Star*, March 9 and March 14, 1940.

R.L. Calder, the C.C.F. candidate, who had finished in second place in Verdun in the recent provincial election benefitted from a certain level of popular sympathy in Verdun but experienced difficulty in translating this into votes. The C.C.F.'s electoral support was weak for several reasons. The first was the party's failure to make inroads into the French-speaking electorate, which was influenced in large measure by adamant clerical opposition to the C.C.F.'s socialist outlook.⁴⁰ Nor did it help that the party's leadership came entirely from English Canada and that its support base was clearly outside of Québec. The C.C.F.'s failure to attract more English-speakers' votes was due to its early grudging support for the war as well as the unlikelihood of its electoral success. Given Ferland's strong support among French speakers, many English speakers felt it was important to concentrate the English-speaking vote.

One of the most unusual candidates anywhere in Canada in this election was R.B. Joan Adams, founder and principal of the Canadian Commercial College. She was a prominent Verdun social activist and feminist and, later, head of the Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps. She ran as an Independent on the basis of a "straight women's" platform, which included the demand for women's pensions at age 65, better legal protection for women and children, improved housing and increased allowances for mothers having at least one son serving overseas and assistance to non-pensioned war widows.⁴¹ She pointed out that her election would highlight Verdun as a progressive community, award the city national attention and help force the Québec government into granting female suffrage. She was the only woman candidate in the province and one of only nine across Canada.

Adams did not seek to alter the traditional role of women in society but to improve the conditions under which that role could be performed. In admitting that the purpose of

⁴⁰ David Lewis, *The Good Fight*. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 457-458.

⁴¹ *The Guardian*, March 1, 1940.

standing for election was to pass social legislation, she was not necessarily asserting the view that women were the political equals of men, a view disputed by most men and even many women. By concentrating on important issues long associated with the traditional female social and familial roles of nurturing and care-giving, Adams was not directly challenging the practice of male political leadership. She was a maternal feminist, as the term later came to be applied. Nevertheless, her campaign invaded a distinctly 'male territory' and by inserting her name on the ballot she laid claim to a slice of male power.

Adams fervently supported a strong war effort. She listed the "successful prosecution of the war" as her "first duty" and began one speech at Verdun's Legion Hall by stating that "a man who hasn't enough courage to fight for his country isn't much of a man."⁴²

Blending patriotism with feminism, and proclaiming "A United Front For War. A United Front For Women. Women of Verdun Unite", Adams insisted that Verdun's M.P. must be imbued with "sufficiently noble British ideals...We Verdun people are proud of the accomplishments of our soldiers, but we are also proud of the quiet way, without show or hysterics, that our women bear the brunt of the evils of war."⁴³ Adams gave feminism a patriotic face in Verdun.

Adams's views appeared to have affected the electorate, not to mention her political opponents. Fearing she might attract a large number of female votes, some of the other candidates suddenly felt it expedient to pander to Verdun's female voters. Scurrah reminded women that he sought "the ladies' vote" while Wermenlinger promised to support "all measures appertaining to women's rights". Ferland put the plight of Verdun's many non-pensioned widows on his political agenda.⁴⁴ At the very least, Adams's campaign sensitized voters and politicians alike to women's unequal social status.

⁴² *The Gazette*, March 21, 1940.

⁴³ *The Guardian*, March 8, 1940.

⁴⁴ *The Montreal Daily Star*, March 14, 1940 and *The Guardian*, March 15, 1940.

Adams's unprecedented patriotic feminist challenge was not always appreciated. The stodgy *Guardian* paid her little attention and on March 22 devoted a brief article to Adams without once mentioning her name, instead referring to her euphemistically as "the only women candidate in Verdun". Despite the fact that her political organization was staffed almost entirely by women volunteers, many Verdun women did not support her candidacy, instead agreeing with a common male view that women had no place in political life.⁴⁵ In the end, she received scant support on election day, indicating that the electorate remained unmoved by gender issues.

On March 26, 1940, Mackenzie King's Liberals won a decisive victory at the polls. They swept all 16 seats on the Island of Montreal. Verdunites played their role in this landslide victory by overwhelmingly rejecting the Tory incumbent and sending Liberal Paul-Émile Côté to the House of Commons as one of Canada's youngest parliamentarians. The final vote tally, less the soldiers' vote, is shown in Table 8.3. Côté was elected with an unimpressive 31% of the popular vote, most of it from English speakers. The results nevertheless signified a shift in voting behaviour in Verdun. *The Guardian* stated in an editorial that,

in the election of Côté, Verdun [has] changed its entire political physiognomy within the brief space of a year. Many thought the C.C.F. might take the seat, but that was only wishful thinking for the vote shows that the people almost treated it as a lost cause. [The C.C.F.'s] defeat had been predicted in view of the party's attitude on the war issue which in some quarters political propagandists had succeeded in confusing.

Mr. Côté's stand on the war issue coincides with that of his party and doubtless this had much to do in causing a large portion of the Conservative vote in the west-end of the city to swing to his favour.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Interview with R.B. Joan Adams, November 8, 1993.

⁴⁶ *The Guardian*, March 29, 1940.

TABLE 8.3 VERDUN FEDERAL ELECTION RESULTS 1940⁴⁷

Paul-Émile Côté, Liberal	8361 (30.93%)
Hervé Ferland, Independent Liberal	7092 (26.24%)
R.L. Calder, C.C.F.	3770 (13.95%)
E.J. Wermenlinger, Conservative	3489 (12.91%)
R.B. Joan Adams, Independent	1805 (6.67%)
Charles Halpin, Independent Liberal	1150 (4.25%)
Sam Currie, Independent Conservative	780 (2.89%)
Robert Scurrah, Independent Liberal	583 (2.16%)

Total 27030 (100.0%)

Perhaps more importantly, consolidated English-speaking support for the Liberal candidate was known to be necessary to ensure the defeat of the ever-popular Ferland, who placed a respectable second in the election.⁴⁸ This resulted in a shift away from the C.C.F. which, nominating only 96 candidates nationwide, had no chance of forming the government. The C.C.F. received fewer votes in Verdun than it had obtained there in 1935. Yet, more than half the votes cast for the C.C.F. in Québec in 1940 (spread over only three constituencies) were from Verdun.⁴⁹ Despite Ferland's strong showing, enough French-speakers also demonstrated their satisfaction with Liberal policies (or rejection of Conservative ones) to ensure Côté's election. The Tories simply never got off the ground in Verdun.

⁴⁷ *The Guardian*, March 29, 1940.

⁴⁸ Ferland's link to a brutal crime occurring the previous year, in which a night watchman at the Verdun Auditorium was savagely beaten by thugs allegedly acting on Ferland's orders, was either forgotten or forgiven by a large number of electors. Ferland was acquitted of charges brought against him in connection with this crime. *The Montreal Daily Star*, December 1, December 19, December 22, December 23 and December 28, 1939.

⁴⁹ Michiel Horn, "Lost Causes: The League for Social Reconstruction and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Quebec in the 1930s and 1940s", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1984, p. 144.

With 67% of Verdun's 40,196 eligible voters casting ballots⁵⁰, an analysis of the individual poll results showed that Ferland had built up a huge lead in Wards 1 and 2. A dramatic shift occurred at about Fifth Avenue, in Ward 3, at which point Côté became the clear favourite with voters, a trend which continued all the way to the western extremities of the city limits. Voting preference seemed linked to language. The small, mainly French-speaking electorate in Lasalle was split in its choice of candidate and did not affect the outcome of the election.⁵¹

Scurrah's last-place 2% of the popular vote (about 3.6% of the English-speaking vote) is a clear indication that the views of English-speaking Verdunites regarding language and ethnicity did not coincide with his own. Extreme views went unsupported electorally. Still, allowances must be made for those Verdunites who might have agreed with Scurrah's scurrilous anti-French Canadian views but who did not vote for him out of recognition that he had no chance of winning. Still, Verdunites wanted no part of his divisive views.

Verdun was the sole riding on the Island of Montreal where the winning candidate did not receive an absolute majority of the popular vote. Only Ferland, an Independent candidate, saved his deposit. Given Ferland's impressive showing and that a significant minority of English-speakers voted for the C.C.F., Verdun was obviously a reluctant Liberal constituency. Local candidates and local issues counted for something in Verdun and Ferland, bombastic champion of the city's poorer French speakers, remained very popular in east-end Verdun. Opinions of him among French Canadians were probably unaffected by his war stance.

⁵⁰ Only 59.9% of the electorate in the Montreal area voted, with the three highest local constituency percentages being Ste. Anne (74.1%), St. Henri (67.4%) and Verdun (67%) - ridings all located in the working-class southwestern part of the Island.

⁵¹ *The Guardian*, March 29, 1940.

An examination of the 1940 soldiers' vote yields some useful information on Verdun. Servicemen voted at special polls established on military bases in Canada and overseas and their votes normally were transferred to that constituency of their last civilian place of residence.⁵² Of roughly 90,000 eligible Canadian servicemen, 63% cast their ballots in the election. Overall, 49.8% voted for the Conservatives, 41% for the Liberals, 5.3% for the C.C.F. and the remaining 4% split their votes among lesser parties and independents.⁵³

On the Island of Montreal, the Liberals won a plurality of the 4621 military votes cast. Verdun was easily the constituency in which the greatest number of soldiers cast ballots. Verdun's 562 military votes outdistanced the large riding of St. Lawrence-St. George by 86. (It is not known how many Montreal-area servicemen were eligible to vote.) As Table 8.4 shows, Verdunites on active service voted in a pattern completely unlike that of their fellow townspeople. The losing Conservative candidate was the most popular among Verdun soldiers while the winning Liberal placed a distant fourth. For many, being in uniform dictated their electoral behaviour and the Conservatives, advocating a more vigorous national war effort, obtained considerable support from military voters, including Verdunites. Tory support might also have reflected old political allegiances. At first glance Ferland's surprising popularity suggests a larger number of French speakers on active service than has been assumed, though it is also true that his name was arguably the most recognizable of those on the ballot. This might have induced some without knowledge of his war stance to vote for him. Half of all Montreal's C.C.F. military vote (81/162) came from Verdun, a similar proportion to the civilian vote for this party. This confirmed once again that Verdun was the centre of C.C.F. strength in

⁵² J.L. Granatstein, "The Armed Forces' Vote in Canadian General Elections 1940-1968", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, February 1969, p. 7.

⁵³ Granatstein, "The Armed Forces Vote", p. 13; *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 6, 1940.

Québec. Some Verdunites remained conscious of their working-class origins despite the appeals of the Tories to the men in uniform.

TABLE 8.4 VERDUN SOLDIERS' VOTE, 1940⁵⁴

Paul-Émile Côté, Liberal	67 (11.92%)
Hervé Ferland, Independent Liberal	92 (16.37%)
R.L. Calder, C.C.F.	81 (14.41%)
E.J. Wermenlinger, Conservative	210 (37.37%)
R.B. Joan Adams, Independent	19 (3.38%)
Charles Halpin, Independent Liberal	43 (7.65%)
Sam Currie, Independent Conservative	33 (5.87%)
Robert Scurrah, Independent Liberal	17 (3.03%)
Total	562 (100.0%)

The 1940 federal election campaign demonstrated some general electoral patterns in Verdun which would persist for the remainder of the war. Both language groups split their votes. No party was able to garner the support of the great majority of either linguistic community. The Liberals were the only party able to depend on electoral support from both English and French speakers. Ferland, defeated in the mayoralty elections of 1939, retained a significant amount of public support among east-end French-speaking residents. The C.C.F. continued to be a political threat, especially as the war progressed and it dramatically increased its popularity with overseas servicemen. Class and military service combined to increase local support for this party, especially as greater numbers of Verdunites enlisted.

The 1940 election took place early in the war, just months before the military situation deteriorated for the Allies and measures were introduced in Canada to bring the country to a 'total war' footing. Though Côté's parliamentary performance would disappoint many

⁵⁴ *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 2, 1940.

English-speaking Verdunites, it would be nearly two years before the conscription issue would demonstrate that the city remained divided politically along language lines.

THE 1942 CONSCRIPTION PLEBISCITE

The outbreak of war in 1939 raised the contentious question of conscription for overseas military service. Mackenzie King repeatedly promised in messages aimed particularly, though not exclusively, at French Canada that his government would not impose conscription. The fall of France in June 1940, however, obliged him and his government to re-evaluate their war policies: Canada could no longer contribute to the war merely on a "limited liability" basis. In these difficult circumstances, on June 21, 1940, the House of Commons hastily passed the National Resources Mobilization Act which introduced plans for a national inventory of all Canada's resources, both human and material. It also introduced compulsory military service for home defence for Canadian men of certain age groups and civil status. Nevertheless, King pledged once again that the N.R.M.A. would not lead to conscription for overseas service. Only General Service volunteers would serve outside the Western Hemisphere.

National registration proceeded without serious disruption, despite some minor but widely-publicized criticism in Québec. But, as the months passed and the Allied military situation worsened, calls for full-scale compulsory military service grew more insistent from the Conservative Party (and some Liberals), much of the English-language press and diverse segments of the English-speaking public. In contrast, French-Canadian public opinion seemed almost unanimously opposed to the policy of conscription. In response to this mounting pressure, in January 1942 Ottawa announced that a national plebiscite was to be held on April 27, in which Canadians would be asked if they would release the government from its commitment to avoid conscription. At the same time, King renewed his personal vow not to impose compulsory service unless it became essential. The plebiscite campaign was loud and acerbic. Nowhere was this more so than in Québec.

For months Montreal was the scene of strenuous, sometimes raucous and always divisive debate. In mixed-language Verdun, the dispute over conscription might have led to an explosive social situation. But there is little evidence that this was the case.⁵⁵ Verdunites' calm response to the conscription debate demonstrated the existence of wartime linguistic understanding at a time when this was never more necessary.

In February 1942 Paul-Émile Côté spoke for the first time in the House of Commons: he stated his opposition to conscription. Côté termed Verdun's linguistic balance a "veritable miniature of Canada", and went on to say that Verdun had "more than once been cited as [an example] to all communities seeking progress in union, understanding and tolerance".⁵⁶ Côté reminded the House that he represented a patriotic, bilingual community and objected to any national policies which might divide it along linguistic lines since a fundamental lack of national unity would ultimately damage Canada's war effort. Echoing previous Liberal Party pronouncements, Côté remarked that those clamouring for conscription were more harmful to the war effort than those seeking to avoid the measure. Côté also claimed that:

The constituency which I have the honour to represent, and where there are people of various races and creeds, strongly supports maintenance of the voluntary system of enlistment for overseas service...I am all the more willing to express the views of my constituents on that subject as I am and will remain a supporter of the anticonscriptionist doctrine.

Though professing support for the government's decision to hold a plebiscite, Côté's attitude was distinctly cool to the prospect; he failed to indicate whether he would appeal for a "yes" vote.

⁵⁵ *The Guardian*, January 23, 1942 referred to Verdun as "truly united, working together, a stiff warning to Hitler and little Mussolini." This newspaper consistently reported Verdunites of both language groups as co-existing happily, even though it sometimes reported issues which had linguistic disputes at their core. In fact, close reading of *The Guardian* indicates that it was hardly sympathetic to French speakers.

⁵⁶ House of Commons, *Debates*, February 12, 1942.

Côté's opinion that his constituents did not favour conscription was only partly correct, and he undoubtedly knew it. Verdunites were split over the question along language lines. While a "yes" vote in the upcoming plebiscite would not necessarily be a vote for conscription, it would reflect an implicit acceptance of the policy. And large numbers of Verdunites seemed inclined to vote "yes". In a March 1942 editorial, *The Guardian* exhorted readers to vote in the affirmative, stating that this was "the only course people who love their country can take".⁵⁷ Until the plebiscite, similar editorials appeared every week in this newspaper.

The April 17 edition of *The Guardian* led with the front-page headline, "Leading Citizens Call for Affirmative Vote". The accompanying article noted that these "leading citizens" were drawn from "both races" as well as from all faiths and political parties. There followed endorsements from these community leaders urging support for the government. Several comments took the form of veiled barbs against those, obliquely identified as French speakers, who were opposed to the "yes" option. Wilson was quoted as saying, perhaps unhelpfully, "We are British in Verdun and proud of it." Charles Barr, head of the Civilian Protection Committee, stated, "You can quote me as saying that every man in the C.P.C. is voting 'yes'." Joan Adams of the Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps chimed in that "Every woman in the W.V.R.C. is 100% for the affirmative." Côté was not quoted but was said to be actively seeking a "yes" result in the riding. By his own later admission, it was not until King's "magnificent" radio address of April 7 that Côté undertook to campaign in favour of a "yes" vote.⁵⁸ But Côté's support was limited. He believed a "no" vote would destabilize King's position and allow viewpoints less sympathetic to French Canada to gain ascendancy in the government. In a French-language radio broadcast on April 23, Côté told listeners they should vote "yes" because he believed a victory for that option would delay the conscription debate in the House

⁵⁷ *The Guardian*, March 13, 1942.

⁵⁸ House of Commons, *Debates*, June 22, 1942.

longer than would a "no" vote. This was faint support. The M.P.'s final formal statement before the vote was also very restrained. He reminded the electorate that the alternative to King's moderate strategy was an even worse option; voting "yes" was essentially the lesser of two evils.⁵⁹ Many among Verdun's English-speaking former Conservatives, sensing Côté's lukewarm attitude, might have regretted their decision to support a Liberal in 1940.

Verdun's Liberal M.L.A., Comeau, was far more enthusiastic about endorsing a "yes" vote, which was unusual for a French-speaking Québec legislator during the campaign. Just days before the plebiscite he issued a patriotic press release calling on Verdunites to vote with the government. He expressed confidence in the "sound judgement" of Verdunites who would not be swayed by "young ultra-nationalists" in their midst. Canada needed all the manpower at its disposal to prepare for the struggle ahead; all "no" votes would provide "comfort to the enemy". His English-language advertisements preached to the converted.⁶⁰ A two-page spread urging a "yes" vote appeared in the last edition of *The Guardian* before the plebiscite. "The City of Verdun is Full of Valiant, Full-Blooded Canadians who will Vote Yes in Defence of Canada and their Homes", blared the advertisement, which was supported by Comeau, Wilson, Côté and other community leaders as well as by the Legion and the Canadian Corps Association.⁶¹

⁵⁹ *La Presse*, April 24, 1942; *The Guardian*, April 24, 1942; *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 22, 1942.

⁶⁰ *The Guardian*, April 24, 1942; *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 25, 1942. An editorial in *The Guardian* of May 29, 1942 strongly endorsed Comeau's action of being one of only seven M.L.A.s to vote against a house measure calling on the federal government not to amend the N.R.M.A. or impose conscription. The M.L.A.s for Westmount and N.D.G. also deplored the measure. *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Québec*, Volume LXXIX, May 20-21, 1942, p. 400.

⁶¹ *The Guardian*, April 24, 1942.

A day before the plebiscite Verdun held its popular Ypres Day parade. The parade, held in ideal weather, attracted a record-setting estimated 50,000 spectators and 2000 military and para-military participants, a spectacle which undoubtedly stirred the pride of many. Wilson and Comeau used the occasion to promote a "yes" vote by appealing to Verdunites' patriotism. Although it is impossible to judge the extent to which this emotive display swayed Verdunites, the timing of the parade was no accident. The Verdun Legion, which organized the parade in co-operation with the city, changed the parade date from the third to the fourth Sunday in April.⁶² The Ypres Day Parade served as a blatant propaganda vehicle for the "yes" side.

City Council tried to remain impartial on the conscription question. Accordingly, the city unanimously refused to endorse *La Ligue pour la défense du Canada's* petition that municipalities adopt a resolution in favour of a "no" vote. City Hall also ordered the police to remove "no" placards which apparently had been posted illegally throughout Verdun.⁶³ *La Ligue pour la défense du Canada*, organized specifically to lead the "no" campaign, received no assistance or sanction from Wilson's administration. On the other hand, the mayor's political support for the "yes" side and his co-operation in mounting the Ypres Day Parade on the eve of the plebiscite demonstrated that the City of Verdun had at least tacitly taken a position on the matter.

Despite the fact that nearly 30,000 French speakers resided in Verdun, no significant anti-conscription organization seems to have existed there. Neither *The Guardian* nor the French- or English-language Montreal press referred to any political speeches by prominent anti-conscriptionists taking place in Verdun at this or any other time. One "no" rally was held just before the vote in a church basement in the city's east end, though

⁶² *The Guardian*, May 1, 1942; *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 27, 1942.

⁶³ Council Minutes, April 20, 1942; *The Guardian*, April 24, 1942; *La Ligue's* petition is in Box A-331, file 6, CVA.

The Guardian disparaged the gathering as a failure, stating it attracted only 250 people while seating was available for 1000.⁶⁴ The names of no local politicians or notable citizens were associated with the "no" cause. As a riding, Verdun was a "yes" community. Most French speakers in Verdun knew how they would cast their ballots; there was no need to antagonize the majority of their fellow citizens who overwhelmingly were just as determined to vote in a contrary manner.⁶⁵ Verdunites' level-headed approach to divisive wartime political issues contributed to maintaining the community's basic social cohesiveness. Contrary views on so important a matter as conscription did not lead to local civil strife. This made Verdun an extraordinary city.

Visible, organized linguistic divisions were rare in Verdun though this harmony did not necessarily reflect the internalized views of all Verdunites. At least some simmering language tension existed in Verdun in the spring of 1942; the conscription debate might not have created the tension but it made it more visible. A hint of this at the popular level can be found in the 1942 *Annual* of Verdun High School. Writing in the French-language section of the yearbook (supervised by the school's French teacher), one 16-year-old student, Phyllis Robson, wrote with telling simplicity:

La majorité de la province de (sic) Québec n'est pas en faveur du plébescite parce que la majorité est canadienne-française et ses gens n'aiment pas à se battre pour notre patrimoine et nos foyers. Ils disent qu'ils veulent défendre le Canada et je me demande s'ils le ferait. Nous devons tous répondre OUI! parce que nous devons pas attendre que l'ennemi vienne ici - il sera trop tard! Le plébescite aura une influence

⁶⁴ *The Guardian*, May 1, 1942.

⁶⁵ Contemporary sources indicating popular attitudes in Verdun regarding conscription, other than press or municipal-level views, are rare. French-language voices are especially missing. This problem is compounded by the fact that copies of Verdun's bilingual newspaper, *The Messenger/Le Messager*, for the period up to January 1943 were lost in a fire.

*sur la conduite de la guerre. Nos soldats qui sont outre-mer sauront qu'il y a des soldats pour se battre à côté d'eux.*⁶⁶

French speakers were sweepingly considered to be unpatriotic (in the British-Canadian sense) and unlikely to take up arms, even in the defence of Canada. One English-speaking Verdunite has related to the oral historian, Barry Broadfoot, that during the war his French-speaking garagist suddenly refused to speak English to his customers, a situation which led to a strained relationship with his English-speaking clientele. The interview, as published, implied a tense linguistic relationship.⁶⁷

The national result of the plebiscite was a victory for the "yes" side, even though 73% of Québécois (and no less than 85% of French Canadians) voted "no". The turnout in Verdun was the largest in the city's history. Verdunites voted 20,855 "yes" (63%) to 12,253 "no" (37%), making Verdun one of only nine ridings in Québec, all in the Montreal area, to have voted in the affirmative. *The Guardian* noted with disapproval that the proportion of "yes" votes in the city had been less than anticipated. The appeals of Comeau and Côté went largely ignored as most French-speaking Verdunites voted "no". A ward-by-ward breakdown published in *La Presse* shows an unmistakable and predictable voting pattern in Verdun. Almost all polls in Ward 1 were won by the "no" side, though most by fairly narrow margins. The same is true of Ward 2, though a sprinkling of polls were taken by the "yes" side. Ward 3, where proportionately more families of Verdun enlistees resided than any other ward, voted very solidly "yes", with most polls being won by margins of 3-1 or 4-1. Ward 4 voted overwhelmingly "yes", with many polls running 6-1 and 7-1 in favour. One Ward 4 poll on Melrose Avenue, near the demarcation point with Ward 3, registered a vote of 61-0 for the "yes" side with no spoiled ballots, one of only two in Canada without "no" votes. Verdun's Ward 4 resembled most polls in Westmount, *Notre-Dame-de-Grâce* and several other distinctly

⁶⁶ Verdun High School, *Annual*, 1942, p. 40.

⁶⁷ Barry Broadfoot, *Six Years of War 1939-1945*, (Toronto: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 345-347.

English-speaking neighbourhoods or municipalities in the Montreal area.⁶⁸ There were no voting day demonstrations or incidents to report in Verdun: it was a quiet victory for the "yes" side which *The Guardian* felt endorsed Wilson's dictum that "Verdun is British and proud of it."⁶⁹ The campaign had been about conscription, and the results were dictated by language and ethnicity.

After the plebiscite, French-speaking Canadians became resigned to the inevitability of conscription and awaited its eventual imposition; many English-speakers clamoured for its adoption. Section 3 of the N.R.M.A. was amended in June 1942, with Bill C-80 providing for the possibility of conscription for overseas service, the governor-in-council deciding the timing of its enactment. During the House of Commons debate which preceded the passage of Bill 80, Côté opposed his government's plan to amend the N.R.M.A. He felt that the plebiscite results did not empower Ottawa to amend legislation in advance of the demonstrated need to do so. Like other anti-conscriptionists, Côté also worried about the negative social consequences which Bill 80 might entail. Concerned Québec legislators, moved by memories of the 1917-1918 conscription riots, advised the government to move more slowly in the direction of adopting conscription. Côté, speaking in the House for only the second time since his election in 1940, and for the first time in English, claimed that Verdunites did not seek conscription, despite the fact that almost two-thirds recently had voted in favour of the measure if it should become necessary.⁷⁰ It is impossible, however, to distinguish between "yes" voters who sought

⁶⁸ The only Québec ridings with larger proportions of "yes" votes than Verdun were the overwhelmingly English-speaking ones of Mont-Royal (82%), St. Lawrence-St. George (81%) and Cartier (71%). Others were Outremont (61%), St. Anne (59%), St. Antoine-Westmount (59%), Laurier (57%) and Jacques Cartier (55%). André Laurendeau, *La Crise de la Conscription*. (Montreal: *Les éditions du jour*, 1962), p. 120; Philip Stratford, ed., *André Laurendeau: Witness for Québec*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 92; *La Presse*, April 28, 1942; *The Guardian*, May 1, 1942; *The Montreal Daily Star*, April 28, 1942.

⁶⁹ *The Guardian*, May 1, 1942.

⁷⁰ House of Commons, *Debates*, June 22, 1942.

immediate conscription and those who merely wanted to empower the government against some future need.

The House voted 158-54 in favour of the bill, with 45 Québec M.P.s voting against. *The Guardian* noted drily that Côté was one of only two members from the solidly-Liberal Island of Montreal to vote against the government.⁷¹ Côté's position would not have surprised those who had listened to his February pronouncements. Verdun's M.P. voted with his conscience, not according to the desire of the greater part of his constituency. As a compromise candidate, he compromised his party loyalty, though perhaps not his personal integrity.

The results of the 1942 plebiscite indicated that Verdunites were divided by language over conscription, indeed on the future means of prosecuting the war. But this was not surprising. More importantly, the community experienced no significant political demonstrations or altercations pitting one language group against the other. No other neighbourhood in the Montreal area contained so large a mixed-language population in so compact a geographic space with such a potential for discord. Verdunites were conscious of the fact that many of the city's households, both English and French speaking, had contributed men to the armed forces. In an effort to support those serving, and in many cases out of an ulterior sense of patriotism towards both Canada and Britain, Verdun's English-speaking community voted in the affirmative. Since English speakers made up 58% of the population of Verdun and a lower proportion of French speakers were of voting age, more French speakers voted "yes" in Verdun than French speakers province-wide. This seemed to be the case in Ward 3, where many French-speakers voted "yes". Even so, most French-speaking Verdunites refused Ottawa's request and confirmed the political differences which separated them from their English-speaking neighbours.

⁷¹ *The Guardian*, July 17, 1942.

THE 1944 PROVINCIAL ELECTION

Conscription was the single greatest political issue of the war in Québec and elections were fought either directly or indirectly on this matter. The province had rejected Maurice Duplessis and the U.N. in 1939 on the basis of federal promises never to impose the measure. The passing of the N.R.M.A. in 1940, the plebiscite of 1942 and the creation of the *Bloc Populaire Canadien* in the fall of 1942 as a French-Canadian nationalist political party at both the federal and provincial levels had significantly altered the mood of the electorate by 1944. Many French speakers displayed at least some resentment towards national war policies.⁷² Though he remained more or less aloof towards the conscription debate, Duplessis relentlessly attacked Liberal Premier Adélard Godbout for his failure to protect Québec's autonomy from the centralizing tendencies of the federal government. Godbout was portrayed, and widely seen, as having acted as Ottawa's lackey during his five-year term in office. Québec's economic and labour woes were also troublesome political issues. The Liberals were at the end of their mandate when an election was called for August 8, 1944.⁷³

⁷² In August 1942 twice as many French speakers as English speakers polled (89% to 44%) believed Canada already was doing its utmost to win the war. In February 1943, five times as many French speakers as English speakers polled (32% to 6%) believed Canadians had been asked to make too many sacrifices for the war effort; four times as many English speakers as French speakers (54% to 13%) believed Canada was not doing enough. Wilfrid Sanders, *Jack and Jacques: A Scientific Approach to the Study of French and non-French Thought in Canada*. (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1943), p. 22. Even if much of French-Canadian opinion, and especially the nationalist leadership, publicly appeared indifferent towards the war, it is also true that extremely few French Canadians hoped for other than a complete Allied victory. See Richard Jones, "Politics and Culture: The French Canadians and the Second World War", in Sidney Aster, ed., *The Second World War as a National Experience*. (Ottawa: The Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1981), pp. 82-91.

⁷³ The 1944 provincial election is described in Black, Duplessis, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-298.

The provincial government refused Québecers on active service outside of Québec the right to vote. Though other provinces had made provisions for overseas votes, Godbout's Liberals decided the difficulties involved made the proposition impractical. Edward Wilson, a C.C.F. supporter, fumed at the decision, especially since the C.C.F. had obtained the support of most of Saskatchewan's soldiery at the time of that province's election in June 1944.⁷⁴ It was difficult to predict how the effective disenfranchisement of Verdun's large and mainly English-speaking military contingent would affect the outcome of the election, especially since a wartime influx of French speakers into Verdun had altered somewhat the overall linguistic balance in the community.

For the first time in a Québec provincial election women were allowed to vote. *The Guardian* felt women would support the governing Liberals who had granted them the vote in 1940. In fact the Liberals solicited the female vote, stating in some of their campaign advertisements that the outcome of the election "lay in their hands". Verdun's Liberal candidate suggested that appreciative women should vote for him.⁷⁵

Verdun's Liberal incumbent, J.J.L. Comeau, was dropped by his party in favour of Lionel A. Ross, a French-speaking Verdun lawyer and head of the *Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste* branch operating from east-end *Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix* Parish. One of the reasons for Comeau's dismissal seems to have been his extremely pro-war attitude which by 1944 was regarded as a potential disadvantage with Verdun's French-speaking electorate. The

⁷⁴ *The Montreal Daily Star*, July 28 and July 31, 1944; *The Guardian*, August 3, 1944. Saskatchewan had gone to extraordinary lengths to enable soldiers to vote in 1944. Morton and Granatstein, *Victory*, p. 134. Whenever feasible, Québecers on active service stationed in Québec were given 48 hours' leave to make their way to their constituencies to vote and return to their bases.

⁷⁵ *The Guardian*, July 20 and August 3, 1944; *The Montreal Daily Star*, August 5, 1944. It is not known what percentage of Verdunites who actually voted were women but following the election *The Guardian*, August 10, 1944, was of the firm opinion a larger proportion of English-speaking women had voted than French-speaking. *The Montreal Daily Star*, August 8, 1944, was of the same opinion for the Montreal area generally.

linguistic differences manifested in Verdun during the plebiscite campaign and the emergence of the *Bloc Populaire* as an electoral option for French-speaking Québécois' discontent had forced the Liberals to seek a new candidate. Though the C.C.F. remained a threat to the Liberals, it was comfortably assumed that the majority of English speakers would support whomever the Liberals chose. In any event, Ross claimed he would uphold Comeau's earlier pro-war stance.⁷⁶ Bitter at these developments, Comeau first decided to run as an independent on a patriotic platform similar to that which had secured his election in 1940. But to avoid a split Liberal vote he withdrew from the contest at Godbout's request.

P.A. Lafleur retained the U.N. nomination. But other candidates, such as Hervé Ferland, or Louis Hurtubise of the *Bloc Populaire*, eroded the U.N.'s support base in east-end Verdun. Lafleur scrupulously avoided mentioning his party, Duplessis or even the war in his English-language campaign advertisements. He emphasized his past record of service to Verdun and concentrated on Liberal failures in economic and fiscal planning. This was standard U.N. strategy in English-language campaign literature.⁷⁷

The C.C.F. hopeful was Lionel P. Lebel, who was personally endorsed by federal C.C.F. leader M.J. Coldwell. Lebel was not well known in Verdun and Edward Wilson's strong support strengthened this candidate's hand considerably. Throughout the campaign, Lebel's name was rarely found in the press or in advertisements without the name of Wilson being invoked. The two men were pictured prominently together in *The Guardian's* last pre-election issue. The accompanying caption insisted that the C.C.F. stood for "complete and final victory over the Axis enemy". The C.C.F.'s major interests

⁷⁶ *The Guardian*, July 20 and July 27, 1944; *Le Messager*, June 15, 1944.

⁷⁷ *The Guardian*, July 27 and August 3, 1944; Herbert F. Quinn, "The Quebec Provincial Election of 1944: An Analysis of the Election in the Democratic Process", M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1946, p. 36.

in this provincial election, however, were public ownership of utilities as well as labour and social reform. Lebel was the first French-speaker to run for the C.C.F. in Verdun.⁷⁸

The C.C.F. believed it had a very good chance of taking Verdun. Wilson issued a message to the community, signed in his capacity as Mayor of Verdun and published in *The Guardian*, urging electoral support for the C.C.F. He reminded readers that Lebel was a representative of the "working people of Verdun" and re-iterated the C.C.F.'s social strategies for postwar Canada. He termed the *Bloc Populaire* as a "fanatic" group and a serious threat to the future of Canada. Wilson's views received considerably more publicity in *The Guardian* during the campaign than did those of Lebel.⁷⁹ Just days before the election, the increasingly worried Liberals despatched the provincial treasurer, Arthur Mathewson, and the high-profile Westmount M.L.A. and City of Montreal Councillor, George Marler, to speak at a public meeting in Verdun where they discussed such issues as postwar employment and the need to build large numbers of modest dwellings in Verdun.⁸⁰ The Liberals identified the C.C.F. as their greatest rival for Verdunites' votes.

Hervé Ferland, Wilson's arch-rival, ran as an Independent C.C.F. candidate and was vigorously denounced by the Verdun C.C.F. for risking a split of the socialist vote in the constituency. Lebel's campaign manager emphasized that Ferland "represents nobody except himself" and Wilson informed *The Guardian* that Ferland was not even a member

⁷⁸ *The Guardian*, August 3, 1944. In this election, 20 of 24 C.C.F. candidates were French speakers, a hopeful sign for a party which repeatedly had been rejected *en masse* by the French-speaking electorate everywhere it had fielded candidates. Horn, "Lost Causes", *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151. In 1943 the Catholic Church in Québec had lifted its moral ban against voting for the socialist C.C.F.

⁷⁹ *The Guardian*, August 3, 1944. Though his origins were working class, Wilson operated a small business in Montreal's Bonsecours Market. *The Guardian* respected Wilson but was firmly opposed to the C.C.F. which it attacked in an editorial July 27, 1944.

⁸⁰ *The Montreal Daily Star*, August 5, 1944.

of the C.C.F.⁸¹ The nationalist *Bloc Populaire*, a social reform party, had actually sought Ferland as its candidate, but he had declined the invitation. Louis Hurtubise, who was not a Verdunite, accepted the nomination. A small advertisement appeared in *The Guardian* during the campaign for the "Canadian Popular Bloc" which announced a six-point program having nothing to do with the war.⁸² The *Bloc* had no chance of taking Verdun.

The Guardian's 1944 election coverage was more extensive than in 1939 and 1940. Nevertheless, the newspaper's passion did not seem at first to be shared by all Verdunites. An editorial in *The Guardian* of July 27 stated:

The political campaign locally is heating up, but there is still evidence of apathy on the part of...the electors...A score of issues and side-issues have been injected into the provincial campaign. It appears that locally, however, the issue will be overwhelmingly patriotic. The great majority of local voters will consider the question: How can I best assist the prosecution of the war by my ballot?...

This is above all a patriotic constituency. So long as the war is on; so long as Germany and Japan are on their feet and swinging; just so long will most local electors be impatient with issues of a minor character.

This newspaper considered issues such as provincial autonomy, language and French-Canadian nationalism as divisive and irrelevant. A second editorial on the subject, entitled "The Issues in Verdun", appeared the next week:

As an independent newspaper we...have presented the views of all candidates as they themselves have presented them to us...[But] there is lurking in the shadows, not daring to expose itself to light, a sinister voice which if heeded would, like a cancer, destroy the very heart of Quebec...

⁸¹ *The Guardian*, July 27 and August 3, 1944. A C.C.F. advertisement in *The Guardian* of August 3, 1944 even stated: "Hitler was a Christian once - Hervé Ferland was a C.C.F. member once (so he says)." Indeed, despite his earlier C.C.F. roots in 1933, Ferland ran as an Independent Liberal against C.C.F. candidates in 1935, 1936 and 1940.

⁸² *The Guardian*, July 20 and August 3, 1944.

The first duty of any government at Quebec is to keep faith with those dying men who have staked their hopes on full freedom for all. Must our battle-scarred men, whose blood turns rivers red, bring back their Cup of Victory only to find there is nothing to fill it with except dissent and strife?...It is unthinkable that the loved ones of these fighting men will sit idly by and surrender these freedoms to this sinister octopus whose tentacles attempt a strangle-hold on this province.⁸³

The vicious and ongoing fighting which had been taking place in Normandy during the previous two months, in which scores of Verdunites had become casualties, had heightened war consciousness in the community and hardened *The Guardian's* fiercely patriotic attitudes. Many Verdunites could not countenance the thought that, at the very moment of these heavy local losses against the Nazis, a suspiciously anti-war government or coalition government would assume power in Québec. Figure 8.5 shows the 1944 election results in Verdun.

FIGURE 8.5. VERDUN PROVINCIAL ELECTION RESULTS 1944⁸⁴

Lionel A. Ross, Liberal	8691	(36.68%)
L.P. Lebel, C.C.F.	5881	(24.82%)
L.P. Hurtubise, B.P.C.	3259	(13.75%)
Hervé Ferland, Ind. C.C.F.	3009	(12.70%)
P.A. Lafleur, U.N.	2854	(12.05%)
Total	23694	(100.00%)

Only 60% of eligible voters cast their ballots and the Liberal, Ross, was elected. He polled satisfactorily in all wards of the city. But his margin of victory was not impressive. His vote percentage was the lowest among Liberals contesting primarily English-speaking ridings, where Liberals obtained on average 60% of the vote. His was

⁸³ Next to the editorial was a large advertisement from the Quebec Liquor Commission stating in a bold headline: "Quebec Province Enjoys the Highest Rations in Canada - A Result of Foresight and Good Administration." *The Guardian*, August 3, 1944.

⁸⁴ *The Montreal Daily Star*, August 9, 1944; *The Guardian*, August 10, 1944.

among the lowest Liberal vote total on the Island of Montreal. The *Bloc* candidate and Ferland polled respectably in Wards 1 and 2, demonstrably less so in Ward 3 and disastrously in Ward 4. Ross out-pollled these candidates even in Wards 1 and 2. Solidly English-speaking Ward 4 produced less than 800 votes for Ferland, Hurtubise and Lafleur combined. Lafleur and the U.N. were rejected by both language communities. *The Guardian* boasted: "Verdun has rendered its verdict...[I]n this city we demand unity in Canada above all else. Verdun will have no part in ultra-national, separatist and subversive movements."⁸⁵ Neither the *Bloc* nor the U.N. made serious inroads among the French-speaking minority in Verdun.

The poorly-funded C.C.F. made an excellent showing in Verdun, but since the party only fielded 24 candidates province-wide, a majority of English-speaking voters, it seems, chose the Liberals, the only avowedly pro-war party with a chance of winning the election. Lebel fared poorly in the east-end wards, but picked up support in Ward 3 and won nearly half the polls in Ward 4, an impressive level of support which undoubtedly owed much to Wilson. Verdun's C.C.F. vote amounted to nearly a quarter of all C.C.F. ballots cast in the Montreal area. Verdun was the only Montreal constituency in which this party placed second.⁸⁶ The feeling amongst the C.C.F. hierarchy at the time was that Ferland had acted as a spoiler by siphoning off C.C.F. votes from Lebel.⁸⁷ This is most unlikely; despite C.C.F. fears expressed during the campaign, Ferland supporters almost certainly voted for the man, not the party. The colourful former mayor and alderman had developed a bedrock of support in French-speaking Verdun made up of electors who

⁸⁵ Ward and poll break-downs were published in *The Messenger*, August 10, 1944; Quinn, "The Quebec Provincial Election of 1944", Tables III and IV, unnumbered pages at the end of his thesis; *The Guardian*, August 10, 1944.

⁸⁶ *The Messenger*, August 10, 1944; Quinn, pp. 19, 37-38, 44, 59 and Tables III and IV.

⁸⁷ David Lewis, *The Good Fight, op. cit.*, p. 210; Duarto Nuno Lopes, "The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Québec, 1932-1950", M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1986, p. 162 makes the same inaccurate assessment.

voted for him whatever his political allegiance. Avowed C.C.F. supporters would not have voted for Ferland and Lebel's loss of votes directly to him was negligible at worst. Rather, Ferland's candidacy split the French-speaking vote in east-end Verdun and disadvantaged the U.N. and *Bloc* more than the C.C.F., for which few French speakers voted in any event.

The denouement to Ross's election victory annoyed many Verdunites who had voted for him. On March 1, 1945, Ross voted in favour of the motion introduced in the Québec Legislature by ultra-nationalist René Chaloult which condemned the federal government for its conscription policies. Back in Verdun, erstwhile Liberal candidate Comeau, shunted aside by the party in favour of Ross, was outraged and accused Ross of breach of trust. Ross had publicly promised that, if elected, he would follow the patriotic road taken by Comeau. Comeau insisted that Ross betrayed the 63% of Verdun electors who had voted "yes" in 1942 and demanded Ross's resignation or public apology, stating:

nothing less will erase from the hearts and minds of patriotic Verdun the shame and humiliation of having [its] name...coupled with such a brazen betrayal...Verdun has a record second to none in the British Empire for Patriotism, for Loyalty, for True Canadianism.⁸⁸

Many Verdunites felt let down by their Liberal representatives, first Côté in 1942 and then Ross in 1945. But victory in Europe was in sight and the war ended before the political repercussions worsened. It remained to be seen whether the Liberals would suffer in the upcoming federal elections for the wartime actions of their Verdun members.

⁸⁸ *The Guardian*, March 8, 1945; *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Quebec*, Volume LXXX, March 1, 1945, p. 97. Comeau had always voted against motions rebuking Ottawa's conduct of the war, even mild ones supported by his own party. See for example *Journals*, Volume LXXIX, April 26, 1944, p. 339.

THE 1945 FEDERAL ELECTION

The period stretching from the fall of 1944 into the winter of 1945 was a difficult one for Prime Minister Mackenzie King and the governing Liberals. An election was near but the Liberals worried about their chances. A perceived manpower crisis in November 1944 forced the adoption of a limited policy of conscription for overseas service which did not satisfy ultra-patriotic English speakers and angered nationalistic French speakers. In addition, the return to power of Maurice Duplessis in Québec in August 1944, the resignation of the Minister of National Defence for Air, Charles A. Power, in November, and the threatened development of a parallel, anti-government Liberal movement in Québec seemed to forecast serious electoral difficulties for the federal Liberals. The election of the C.C.F. in Saskatchewan in June 1944 and that party's generally strong showing in national public opinion polls served notice to the King government that the consequences of an election call would be difficult to predict.

Liberal electoral strategy concentrated on the future, particularly on a proposed new social order based on guaranteed social welfare measures, such as mothers' allowances, old age security and national minimum standards in matters of housing, health care and nutrition. Most of the grumbling in the Québec caucus had abated by the time King announced that a federal election would take place on June 11. Since the war in Europe ended on May 7, conscription was no longer a contentious issue. Nor did the war with Japan loom large as an election concern, the government already having announced that conscription would not be imposed for Pacific service.⁸⁹

The 1945 election campaign in Verdun, as in most of the country, was fought mainly on the issues of repatriation, civil re-establishment and the vaunted new social order for

⁸⁹ For a review of the 1945 election, see Granatstein, *Canada's War*, *op. cit.*, pp. 382-418.

Canada.⁹⁰ As many as 7000 Verdunites had served during the war and it was natural that these postwar issues would be of great concern to city residents. Despite all the emotional relief it brought, the end of the war also brought reminders of the economically dismal prewar period. Demobilization and the shutting down of armaments industries affected thousands of Verdunites whose war-inspired livelihoods were disappearing. The city was flooded with repatriated service people at a time when an acute local housing shortage existed. The 1945 federal election in the riding of Verdun (which also included Lasalle's 5500 residents) represented a microcosm of wider national anxieties.

The incumbent, Liberal Paul-Émile Côté, accepted the Liberal nomination. In a show of unity, and notwithstanding his stance on Bill 80, his nomination committee included representatives from both Verdun's English- and French-speaking Liberal associations as well as from Verdun merchants and professionals.⁹¹ While many English-speaking Liberals seemed prepared to forgive him, Côté still obtained much of his electoral support from French speakers. His stock had risen with this language group since 1940 as a result of his strong opposition to conscription. For most of the 1945 campaign he simply (and safely) stood on the Liberals' wartime record and insisted on the need for government stability and continuity into the postwar period. Côté had antagonized many English-speaking voters whose support he knew was essential: faced with a serious challenge from the C.C.F., he kept a relatively low profile during the campaign.

Edward Wilson had won an unprecedented fourth municipal election in early April 1945. Almost immediately thereafter he announced his candidacy as the C.C.F. standard-bearer in the June federal election. Wilson's municipal campaign had stressed the need for political continuity into the postwar period to deal most effectively with expected social

⁹⁰ As early as September 1943, 71% of Canadians polled stated they wanted social reforms instituted in Canada following the war. Sanders, *Jack and Jacques, op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁹¹ *The Guardian*, April 19 and May 3, 1945.

difficulties. These views could not be echoed at the federal level, however, since Wilson sought to unseat a government M.P. Suddenly, a vote for change was what was needed. Wilson believed that if the government had found the money to wage war, then funds could be obtained to pay the price of peace as well, including the provision of generous allotments for soldiers' civil re-establishment. C.C.F. leader M.J. Coldwell spoke on Wilson's behalf at a rally held in Woodland Park on May 28. The Lancashire-born Wilson was a socialist and an avowed patriot with the credentials to prove it. Wilson's political opponents attacked the "socialistic" and "revolutionary" views of the C.C.F. but refrained from overtly criticizing its popular candidate.⁹² The C.C.F. had always enjoyed strong support in Verdun and the high-profile Wilson was Côté's main rival for English speakers' votes. Yet, a pre-election article in *The Messenger* suggested that the C.C.F. had little chance in Verdun and that it would be difficult for Wilson

to go before a constituency like Verdun as the representative of a party which declared that "Canada must refuse to be entangled in any more wars fought to make the world safe for capitalism": a party which declared "We must make it clear to London...that we intend to fertilize no more crops of poppies in Flanders fields": a party whose leader, Mr. Coldwell, stated publicly that he would rather see his son in jail than in uniform.⁹³

Despite the high regard in which Wilson was held in Verdun, it was obvious that his work was cut out for him.

The official Progressive-Conservative candidate was Wilfrid Pagé, a Verdun automobile dealer, who was supported by a representative group of local business people. Pagé, too, was threatened by Wilson's candidacy and reminded Verdunites that the vigorous prosecution of the war in which so many of their friends and relatives had fought had not been the preoccupation of the C.C.F.⁹⁴ But it certainly had been Wilson's preoccupation.

⁹² *The Guardian*, May 24 and May 31, 1945; *The Montreal Daily Star*, June 9, 1945.

⁹³ *The Messenger*, February 15, 1945.

⁹⁴ *The Guardian*, April 26, 1945.

as every Verdunite knew. Pagé's advertising campaign in *The Guardian* was based on the Tories' national campaign, emphasizing the Progressive-Conservative "creed" of "Freedom, Security, Opportunity and British Partnership" and made numerous references to the Tories' upholding of the "British tradition".⁹⁵ While hardly designed to appeal to an already suspicious Québec audience, these slogans proved attractive to some British-born voters. In emphasizing the Conservatives' imperial tendencies, Pagé stood to gain more votes among these Verdunites than he might lose among the already hostile French-speaking electorate. In contrast, Côté used the generic national Liberal 12-point platform as the basis of his campaign. Its high-sounding social, economic and reconstructionist proposals seemed to have far greater relevance to the post-war period than the Tories' increasingly-dated, traditional platform.

By mid-May, no less than 10 candidates (more than twice the Québec average) had entered their names on the ballot in Verdun. Three Independent Liberals also ran, including J.J.L. Comeau. Clearly, all was not as well within Liberal ranks. Opposition to Côté had grown since his nomination. Other candidates, some not Verdun residents, included Louis Hurtubise for the *Bloc Populaire Canadien*, Henry Turcotte for Social Credit, and Walter Wilson, who listed his occupation as "a soldier" and ran as an Independent C.C.F. candidate in a transparent attempt to confuse the electorate and take votes away from Edward Wilson. Walter Wilson, it came to light, was not even a member of the C.C.F.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ *The Guardian*, May 10, 1945. The Tories had written off the votes of most French speakers and this was made plain when Pagé, a French-speaker, proclaimed his view that, like Americans, there should be no hyphenated Canadians. *The Guardian*, June 7, 1945.

⁹⁶ *The Guardian*, May 17 and May 24, 1945. In an advertisement which appeared in *The Guardian* on May 24, Walter Wilson is pictured in uniform and referred to as Quartermaster Sergeant Wilson. Military-minded Verdun took no apparent notice.

One of the Independent-Liberal candidates, Donald Elvidge, ran on the basis of his being an ardent Verdunite and a veteran, good enough reasons, he apparently felt, for his community-minded and patriotic fellow citizens to vote for him. His style added an interesting local flavour to what in fact was a campaign based on national issues. "In this electoral fight", his political advertisement begins, "I am facing a number of powerful adversaries, but a soldier of Verdun never shows the white feather, no matter how great may seem the odds against him." He slammed Côté as being unpatriotic for his negative vote on Bill 80 and dismissed the Tories as being "as ever for the Big Interests, and the Big Interests have nothing in common with the hard-working people of Verdun." Referring to Turcotte's candidacy, he felt it would "take an awful lot of education to make a Social Credit[er] out of the hard-headed boys of Verdun".⁹⁷ Elvidge ran as a local working-class candidate and seemed the stereotypical Verdunite. He fared exceedingly poorly on election day: perhaps Verdunites did not vote for those who reminded them too much of themselves. He had no chance of winning and few were prepared to waste their vote.

Comeau, the main Independent-Liberal candidate, was virulent in his attacks on Côté:

Mr. P.E. Côté, [is] the man who betrayed his electors on the one solemn vote taken to determine the degree of our war effort. This choice is an insult to Verdun, to our armed forces, to our war dead...The plebiscite vote in Verdun, 65% [sic - 63%] Yes, was the will of the people, given on Mr. Côté's own request as well as mine. Refusing to honour it in Parliament was [an] unforgivable crime...⁹⁸

Throughout the war Comeau, a Great War veteran, had been a consistent and seemingly sincere Imperialist. Even after the German surrender, he placed the "Unity of Empire, Unity of Canada" and "Complete Victory" ahead of such issues as "Social Reform" or "Veterans' Rights". He assailed Côté without respite for the entire campaign and there

⁹⁷ *The Guardian*, May 17, 1945.

⁹⁸ *The Guardian*, May 24, 1945.

were fears in Liberal circles that he might pry away enough English-speaking support from Côté to split the Liberal vote in Verdun.

The result of the June 11 election was a very sharply reduced Liberal majority in Ottawa (the party won 125 of 245 seats) but a landslide victory for the Liberals in Verdun. Paul-Émile Côté's win was so impressive that all other candidates lost their deposits. The final tally for each candidate, including the soldiers' vote which was recorded before June 11 but only tabulated in the days following the election, is found in Table 8.6. The percentage of popular vote obtained by each candidate is shown in Table 8.7.

TABLE 8.6 VERDUN FEDERAL ELECTION RESULTS 1945⁹⁹

	Verdun	Soldiers' Vote	Total
Paul-Émile Côté, Liberal	14777	770	15547
Wilfrid Pagé, P.C.	6664	309	6973
Edward Wilson, C.C.F.	5490	1293	6783
Louis Hurtubise, B.P.C.	3000	46	3046
Sam Bailey, L.P.P.	811	42	853
J.J.L. Comeau, Ind. Lib.	364	20	384
Walter Wilson, Ind. C.C.F.	242	33	275
Henry Turcotte, S.C.	172	8	180
Donald Elvidge, Ind. Lib.	87	40	127
J.M.O. Royer, Ind. Lib.	38	5	43
Total votes:	31645	2564	34209

⁹⁹ *The Guardian*, June 14 and June 21, 1945; *The Montreal Daily Star*, June 12 and June 19, 1945. There were 48,000 eligible voters.

TABLE 8.7 VERDUN FEDERAL ELECTION RESULTS 1945 (in %)¹⁰⁰

	Verdun	Soldier's Vote	Overall Result
Paul-Émile Côté, Liberal	46.9	30.0	45.4
Wilfrid Pagé, P.C.	21.0	12.1	20.4
Edward Wilson, C.C.F.	17.3	50.4	19.8
Louis Hurtubise, B.P.C.	9.5	1.8	8.9
Sam Bailey, L.P.P.	2.6	1.6	2.5
J.J.L. Comeau, Ind. Lib.	1.1	0.7	1.1
Walter Wilson, Ind. C.C.F.	0.7	1.3	0.8
Henry Turcotte, S.C.	0.5	0.3	0.5
Donald Elvidge, Ind. Lib.	0.2	1.5	0.3
J.M.O. Royer, Ind. Lib.	0.1	0.2	0.1
Total:	99.9	99.9	99.8

Seventy-one percent of eligible electors cast their ballots and Côté easily obtained the largest share. Côté even received a greater proportion of votes than the 41% his party polled nationwide. Pagé's vote percentage was more than double his party's overall share in Québec (which stood at a hopeless 8.4%), while Wilson's popular vote (19.8%) was higher than the C.C.F.'s national average (14.7%) and ten times greater than its provincial average. The enormity of Côté's victory surprised observers in Verdun and Montreal. *The Montreal Star*, virulently anti-C.C.F., had deliberately ignored Edward Wilson's campaign yet managed to express surprise at his defeat. The French-speaking Pagé's second-place finish was mildly surprising. There appeared to be more English-speaking Conservatives than socialists in Verdun. Verdunites appeared to want their popular mayor to stay in Verdun and attend to local matters. The utter defeat of Comeau and the fact that significant numbers of English-speaking voters continued to support Côté were unexpected results. The Liberals' postwar social plans had appeal, while it was known the C.C.F. would be unable to form a government, despite running 205 candidates across

¹⁰⁰ *The Guardian*, June 14 and June 21, 1945. Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Canada. The combination of votes from most French speakers and many English speakers enabled the Liberals to win Verdun with ease.¹⁰¹ The electorate supported the party with the most forward-looking social programs and the best hope of winning. The best means of securing the welfare of Verdun's returning soldiers and their families seemed to lie with the Liberals.

An examination of Verdun's military vote in 1945 yields some valuable insights. Only 46% of Canada's 750,000 service personnel eligible to vote bothered to do so in 1945, compared with 75% of eligible civilians. While it is not known exactly how many Verdunites serving at home or abroad were eligible, 2564 Verdunites in uniform voted, which constitutes a higher percentage than the 46% national average for service personnel. Verdunites on active service retained a strong interest in their community. Nationally, the military vote translated into 35% support for the governing Liberals, somewhat less than the national average of 41%, 32% support for the C.C.F., double that party's national average, and 26% for the Progressive Conservatives, 2% less than their success rate across Canada.¹⁰² Conscription for Pacific service, part of the Conservative platform, was clearly not popular with military voters, including Verdunites. Service people were concerned about the postwar period and civil re-establishment and voted mainly on this basis.

The June 1945 election produced huge gains for the C.C.F. among military voters. C.C.F. support in Verdun was remarkable. The soldiers' vote for the C.C.F. was far higher in Verdun, 50% of votes cast, than the Québec military average of only 14% (and a civilian C.C.F. vote of a mere 2%); it was also significantly higher than the national military

¹⁰¹ *The Guardian* reported that Côté recognized the Liberal vote in Verdun was a vote of confidence in Mackenzie King and the Liberals' social agenda more than a vote for him personally. *The Guardian*, June 14, 1945; *The Montreal Daily Star*, June 1 and 12, 1945.

¹⁰² *The Montreal Daily Star*, June 19, 1945; Granatstein, "The Armed Forces Vote in Canadian General Elections 1940-1968", *op. cit.*, p. 9.

average of 32%. One in five Québec C.C.F. military votes were cast by Verdunites and Wilson was the only C.C.F. candidate on the Island of Montreal to out-poll his rivals with respect to the soldiers' vote. The Conservatives fared worse among Québec's military voters than they did with the uniformed electorate in other provinces while the Liberals fared best in Québec, obtaining 50% of soldiers' votes.¹⁰³ These results were in keeping with previous Québec civilian voting trends.

The widespread support for the C.C.F. requires examination. The 1940 military vote from Verdun was 14.4% in favour of the C.C.F. The party's initially lukewarm support for Canada's war effort makes even this percentage impressive and partially accounted for by the community's class consciousness. In June 1945 the men and women of Canada's military forces at home and overseas were concerned for their postwar futures. The social security legislation advocated for years by the C.C.F. (some of which was adopted by the Liberals before the war was over) appeared sensible and timely. Hundreds of discharged Verdunites had returned to their community in time for the vote, and while their ballots were not tabulated as soldiers' votes, it is reasonable to assume that a high percentage of their support went to Wilson.

What made the C.C.F. even more appealing to Verdun's military voters in 1945 was its candidate. Edward Wilson embodied all that the city was doing for its volunteers. He was personally identified with the Mayor's Cigarette Fund, a high-profile initiative very popular in the community and with service people. The men vastly preferred Edward Wilson to the Independent C.C.F. soldier candidate Walter Wilson, who had been one of their own. Edward Wilson exploited his popularity with the men overseas and knew that it could be translated into votes. The men 'owed him one'. Using the carefully updated mailing list of the M.C.F., Wilson despatched a letter dated April 23, 1945 to the city's overseas volunteers. In it he complimented the men on the splendid job they had done

¹⁰³ *The Montreal Daily Star*, June 19, 1945; Granatstein, "The Armed Forces Vote", p. 13.

overseas and then baldly sought their electoral support. Enclosed with the letter was a leaflet outlining C.C.F. policies for postwar Canada. It is not known if Wilson sent letters to all Verdunites serving overseas or if he selected individuals from various units and requested that they act as his agents. Verdunites were found in almost every unit of the Canadian Army (Active), every sizeable ship of the Royal Canadian Navy and every squadron of the R.C.A.F.

Some Verdunites replied to Wilson's appeal, pledging their support as well as that of other Verdunites in their particular units. Sergeant G. MacWilliams, Royal Montreal Regiment, wrote "I am doing my utmost to get all the Verdun boys here to vote for you." Another man, Sergeant R. Lemieux, R.C.A.S.C., stationed at a Canadian Reinforcement Camp in England, wrote "[Y]ou can rest assure[d] that the fifteen Verdun Boys in this Camp are voting for you. And another thing, the majority of Canadian Soldiers are in favour of [the] C.C.F." Sergeant Maurice Dumouchel, *Le Régiment de Maisonneuve*, wrote Wilson from Germany on May 13:

Just a few lines to let you know I received your letter, and I was very pleased to read the leaflet enclosed. As I am always interested in politics and the future of my country, I really think that the party you are representing is our latest weapon towards peace...[Y]ou will receive my fullest co-operation and vote.

As far as the individual soldier is concerned over here, well they do not know much about politics so I passed my leaflet around for them to read and explained the parts that they could not understand. I can truthfully say that they found it very interesting and liked it.

Although many of the other French speakers in Sergeant Dumouchel's regiment might not have been from Verdun, the C.C.F.'s 1945 program had a wide appeal among Canadian servicemen, notwithstanding their language. French-speaking servicemen, perhaps because of their disillusioning military experiences, were more likely than their civilian co-linguists to discard any ingrained anti-socialist tendencies and vote C.C.F.

One overseas Verdunite, Sapper M.A. Belmont, R.C.E., received Wilson's political message on Victory-in-Europe Day, May 8, 1945. This stirred his emotions and made him realize that winning the peace was as important as winning the war. He wrote back the same day.

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to peruse the text of your platform here before me coming at a time like this. May I assure you that I've summed up each and every sentence with the greatest consideration and to put it bluntly I'm firmly convinced that your Party has something there...As there are a few Verdun lads in my Company I shall pass along your letter to them for a what you might term general discussion.

[I] thank you and all Verdunites who supported us so strongly and faithfully on the Road to a Just Peace.

Sergeant A.F. Hébert, a member of 418 Squadron, R.C.A.F., wrote a letter to Wilson from Holland on the day before the June 11 election. He had already voted in the advance polls established overseas in the week preceding the general election.

[T]he job is over now, we have done our part, the rest is up to the people who will be running our country this (sic) next four years. We had our voting day here [with] my squadron in Holland last week. We did not have the opportunity of fine campaign speeches or newspaper articles. But many a night we sat in our billets and discussed the various political parties in Canada.

[T]he arguments were thick and at times pretty hot. Our crowd represents just about every province in Canada so it was far from being one sided. I did notice however that when voting day drew near, the majority of chaps were thinking and arguing along C.C.F. lines...[A]ll were of the same opinion: it was time for a change. There is a big job to do and the right people must be put into power to see that it is done properly.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Hébert to Wilson, June 10, 1945. In exchange for his vote Hébert wondered if Wilson could help his wife find a flat in Verdun for the couple and their little girl. Also, MacWilliams to Wilson, May 15, 1945; Lemieux to Wilson, May 16, 1945; Dumouchel to Wilson, May 13, 1945; Belmont to Wilson, May 8, 1945, Box A-348, CVA. Seeking to shore up support among the ranks, the Conservatives also sent gifts of cigarettes to the troops. Granatstein, *Canada's War*, p. 412.

Verdun servicemen did not hesitate to vote for the man who had offered the firmest support of any candidate to the struggle they had just been through and who symbolized a commitment to that which was about to begin.

The war significantly altered the voting behaviour of Verdunites. Verdun forsook its Conservative past in favour of the Liberals. The Liberal Party won four hotly-contested wartime elections and one plebiscite in Verdun and emerged as the only political alternative acceptable to a significant element of the French- and English-speaking population. The November 1944 decision to send a limited number of conscripts overseas did not affect the Liberals' popularity with Verdun's French-speaking voters nor did that party's retention of Côté as a candidate lead to a significant loss in support among English speakers.

Language, not ideology (despite some continuing support for the C.C.F.), came to define the wartime politics of the Verdun electorate at all levels of government. But, except for municipal elections, Verdunites rarely voted as a language *bloc*. Both language groups split their votes with the Liberal candidate always receiving enough support from each group to ensure his election. During provincial elections in particular, the English-speaking majority, fearful of a *nationaliste* gain, concentrated their votes to ensure a Liberal win. The successful candidates in Verdun's wartime elections, Comeau, Côté (twice) and Ross, were all French speakers representing a mainly English-speaking riding. This made political sense, since an English-speaking candidate might not have fared quite as well with the French-speaking community. In their advertising campaigns in *The Guardian*, all candidates catered to the concerns and outlooks of Verdun's English-speaking community. This fervently patriotic newspaper was itself an essential ingredient to every political campaign in Verdun and has remained an essential source from which to analyze the wartime elections. Verdun wartime politics also produced some rare outspoken French-speaking imperialists such as Comeau and the Conservative, Pagé.

Their views were not popular with most French speakers. The 1942 plebiscite results showed a language schism in Verdun, but also reinforced the view that amicable relations were maintained between the linguistic communities living there. Existing social harmony was not especially destabilized by wartime politics. Verdun was a diversified but simultaneously tightly-knit community, and this was mirrored in the city's electoral practices and election campaigns.

CHAPTER 9

VERDUN AT PEACE

The Second World War accelerated significantly the process of social change within Canada. Even before the last shots had been fired, social reform, most vividly elaborated in the 1943 Marsh Report¹, had risen to the top of the Canadian political agenda. By 1944 the housing crisis, industrial conversion, sustained employment and rising postwar criminality competed with the war itself as the objects of Canadians' concerns. What remains to complete the story of Verdun's war is to address the city's reaction to the cessation of hostilities and the community's response to the repatriation and civil re-establishment of thousands of active service men and women.

Hostilities with Germany formally ended on the morning of Monday, May 7, 1945. The next day, proclaimed Victory-in-Europe (V-E) Day by the victorious Allies, was the occasion of national celebration. That Monday morning, many Verdunites streamed into Montreal to participate in the boisterous celebrations in that city's business district and along its main downtown thoroughfare, Ste. Catherine Street. There was some irony in all this. Though Verdunites had jealously maintained and even embellished their traditional notion of community during the war, and had imbued this spirit with a proud patriotism, at the long-awaited moment of victory many of them abandoned their city, boarded buses and streetcars, and merged more or less anonymously with tens of thousands of other celebrants drawn from all districts in the Montreal area. United by a common feeling of fierce municipal loyalty during the years of war, Verdunites celebrated the return of peace as Montrealers, as Canadians.

Verdun's youth, at least, observed V-E Day in their own neighbourhoods. Verdun High School students left their classes the moment they heard the news of the German capitulation and headed into the streets of Verdun (and Montreal) to celebrate. Hundreds of local residents watched as school children paraded during the noon hour in the heart of

¹ Leonard Marsh. *Report on Social Security for Canada*. Ottawa, King's Printer, 1943.

Verdun, along Wellington Street, Church Avenue and other streets. Some children sang *Rule Britannia*; many carried flags and most beat pots and pans and whatever else would noisily announce the German surrender, and the children's presence, to those Verdunites still in their flats. Others set off firecrackers and small flares. Motorists blared their horns, long-forgotten Air Raid Precaution sirens sounded and church bells pealed. Effigies of Hitler, stuffed with newspapers and some set aflame, swung from trees, lamp-posts and tramway wires. Though some violence and property damage came to characterize the V-E Day celebrations in Montreal, and elsewhere, no mischief was reported in Verdun.

Like telephone exchanges across Canada, those in Verdun were jammed that morning as people excitedly relayed the news to each other. A large number of families, especially those with members on active service, decorated the galleries and railings of their flats and homes with some combination of the Union Jack, the Red Ensign, the Stars and Stripes, bunting, streamers, ribbons and portraits of the Royal Family, Winston Churchill and other war leaders. Most Verdun businesses closed for the day. Verdun's celebrations were a fitting and moving tribute to a happy and long-awaited day. It meant Verdunites would soon be home again.²

The front page of *The Guardian's* May 10, 1945 edition was subdued. It patriotically displayed portraits of the King and Queen and Winston Churchill. With a tone of disappointment, this newspaper curiously described Verdun's victory celebrations as "remarkably quiet" and without "cheering or boisterous crowds". It offered the excuse that the announcement of peace had taken residents by surprise. *Le Messenger* was far more upbeat, countering *The Guardian's* sombre reporting by describing Verdunites'

² Verdun's most famous and most decorated Second World War veteran, George F. Beurling, was quoted in the local press as having the following reaction to V-E Day: "It's awful isn't it? I mean I'm glad for other people; it means the end of fighting and killing...but it sort of takes the wind out of a guy's sails...Oh well, there's still the Japs. We can drag that out for a while." *The Messenger*, May 10, 1945.

collective response as "an unprecedented outburst of rejoicing". Both language groups appeared well represented among the throngs of people participating in the local festivities. *Le Messenger* noted that "*même les Anglais qui d'ordinaires sont si flegmatiques avaient perdus leur contenance et s'associaient à la populale dans cette heure d'allégresse*". Never in full agreement over the divisive manpower debate which had created some local tension during the war, Verdun's two language groups were united in their celebration of the end of the European conflict. All Verdun's churches, Protestant and Catholic, French language and English language, offered thanksgiving services and solemnly remembered those who had fallen in the previous six years.³

Even though many local men had volunteered for Pacific service,⁴ Verdunites apparently paid scant attention to the Pacific War; for the vast majority of them, and for Canadians generally, the war that really seemed to matter, the war in Europe, was over. Later that summer the Pacific war finally ended. Victory-over-Japan (V-J) Day, announced August 15, 1945, was celebrated in Verdun in a similar though perhaps tamer fashion than had been V-E Day. Firecrackers, scattered bonfires, burning effigies, children's noise and the setting off of fire alarms were all part of the observances marking the end of the Second World War. Some French-speaking children gathered to sing *La Marseillaise*. Though the weather was poor and no large crowds were in evidence, the Verdun police were out in force to prevent the kinds of disturbances which had occurred in Montreal on V-E Day. Some loitering youths in west end Verdun were quietly dispersed; there was no trouble. City Council declared a two-day civic holiday August 15 and 16 to mark the return of peace. In the course of the following week, a celebratory Black Watch concert was held

³ *The Guardian*, May 10, 1945; *Le Messenger*, May 10, 1945; Ted Barris and Alex Barris, *Days of Victory: Canadians Remember 1939-1945*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 210-211; interview with Wilson Dornan, September 21, 1993.

⁴ *The Guardian*, August 2, 1945. V-J Day found many of them at home on leave awaiting their training period for the Pacific Theatre.

in Woodland Park and a small victory street dance was organized by restaurateur Léopold Lacroix on Hickson Avenue in east-end Ward 1.⁵ The war was indeed over.

The community was left with the mainly pleasant task of welcoming home the thousands of Verdunites who had served overseas and to assist in their civil re-establishment.⁶ From June 1945 to June 1946 over 600,000 Canadian servicemen were discharged and hundreds of Verdunites returned to their community every month. Family reunion parties were commonplace. During this period Verdun was almost continuously dotted with "Welcome Home" banners and other indications that families and friends were being reunited. Doug Whyte, discharged from the R.C.A.F., returned home to First Avenue in the summer of 1945 aboard *Ile de France*. His mother had strung up a "Welcome Home" banner in their flat and had organized a party attended by relatives and friends, including some former servicemen who had preceded him home. René Bisson, R.C.A.S.C., was met at Montreal's Bonaventure Station by seven family members. He has recalled the joys which the occasion brought to all of them and the manner in which Verdun was impressively decorated with bunting, decorations and flags, including some papal standards.⁷ As late as June 1946 one French-speaking family on Gertrude Avenue in the east-end of the city welcomed their son home with a particularly "banging reception" complete with a welcome sign installed on the sidewalk the letters of which were two feet high.⁸ And so it was across the city for a year following the war's end.

⁵ *The Guardian*, August 16, 1945; *The Messenger*, August 23, 1945; Council Minutes, August 14, 1945.

⁶ Still the most useful books on this subject in a Canadian context are Robert England, *Discharged: A Commentary on Civil Re-establishment of Veterans in Canada*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1943) and Walter S. Woods, *Rehabilitation: A Combined Operation*, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1953).

⁷ Interview with Doug Whyte, January 21, 1994; interview with René Bisson, July 21, 1994.

⁸ *The Guardian*, June 27, 1946.

Casualties among Verdunites were not insignificant. A close reading of wartime local press accounts, parish honour rolls, school board casualty lists and reports prepared by various local organizations, such as the Y.M.C.A., indicates that during the Second World War, at least 190 Verdunites were killed or died while on active service (including one member of the C.W.A.C.) and that between 500 and 600 were wounded, many suffering some degree of permanent disablement. The city's first fatalities were two civilians lost in the sinking of the passenger liner *Athenia* on September 3, 1939 and among the city's last sacrifices were some servicemen killed in traffic accidents in Britain in July 1945. Verdunites suffered death, injury and capture almost everywhere Canadian arms were deployed. They represented all services, units and ranks and they were killed and wounded in all manners. Among them were English speakers and French speakers. By the summer of 1943 between five and ten local casualties were listed in *The Guardian* every week and, like newspapers across the country, its columns were scanned with trepidation by the friends and neighbours of those on active service. At first R.C.A.F. personnel were over-represented in these casualty lists but, following Canadian participation in the invasion of Sicily and particularly in the wake of the Canadian Army's extremely costly campaign in Normandy, hundreds of Verdun soldiers became casualties.

In October 1946, *The Guardian* noted that at least 102 were killed in the army, 43 in the air force and 26 in the navy.⁹ These figures were more representative of Verdunites' particular enlistment trends than the national casualty rates recorded for each service. Fewer R.C.A.F. aircrew from Verdun meant lower casualties in a service which suffered disproportionately heavy losses. On the other hand, naval casualties in Verdun were higher than the national average due to the larger than average number of Verdunites on sea duty. Every Canadian warship (and many merchant vessels) lost seemed to contain Verdun crewmen listed as lost or saved.

⁹ *The Guardian*, October 31, 1946.

Fatalities were slightly lower than the national average among Verdun's 4000 or more soldiers. Verdunites might have been spared in this regard because of the absence of a locally-recruited regiment. Had such a regiment been in the Canadian Army's Order of Battle, a potential disaster could have struck the community. The story of Belleville, Ontario adds credence to this view. That city's war memorial lists the names of 160 men from the city and region who were killed during the war, a large number of whom were members of the locally-recruited Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment. This is an enormous loss for a city of only 15,000 serving an immediate hinterland population of perhaps equal number.¹⁰ Verdun generally escaped this unhappy fate, although many Verdunites were killed or wounded while serving in the Black Watch, which suffered appalling casualties.

Notwithstanding the absence of a locally-based regiment, several Verdun families lost two sons. Many families lost one member killed and one or more wounded. The Glasgow family from Ward 3 paid a heavy price and their story was much publicized in the local press. In 1942 two sons, Charles and William, both serving in the R.C.N.V.R., were killed within one month of each other in submarine attacks. A third son, John, remained on active service in the navy.¹¹ The Glasgows' bereavement was shared by the entire community and their loss took on symbolic overtones in the city for the remainder of the war. Few Verdun households were as shattered by the war as was the impoverished Glasgow family, which in 1944 was evicted from their flat. The local press often described the Glasgow brothers as representative of the patriotic response offered by Verdunites and the deaths of two of them as typical of the city's sacrifice.

The local elites also shouldered their burdens and grief. Edward Wilson's son-in-law, Warrant Officer Alex Stevenson, R.C.A.F., was shot down and captured; the son of Dr.

¹⁰ Mika and Mika, *Belleville, op. cit.*, p. 283.

¹¹ *The Guardian*, September 25 and October 23, 1942.

Charles Barr, Chief Warden of the C.P.C., was killed in the R.C.A.F. as were the sons of Henry Garritty and Norman Hill, longtime Trustees of the Verdun Protestant School Board.¹² Many Verdun parents were left childless, wives widowed and children rendered fatherless.

The dense local network of social and church organizations helped ease the pain. So did the nature of Verdun society, which was based on a common sense of class and local identity. Even the manner in which people lived in Verdun helped. Because of the construction and closeness of the flats, many neighbourhood sub-identities developed in addition to the wider community one. Most people knew their neighbours very well and a ready-made support network existed for a stricken family. Barry Broadfoot has offered the testimony of a telegram delivery boy who recalled the grief which engulfed a street or neighbourhood when he delivered the news of a death overseas. The former delivery boy claimed that this public manifestation of common mourning occurred only in the "poorer districts, where people looked after each other better."¹³ Verdun certainly fit this description and, as a society, might have been better equipped than many to cope with wartime loss.

Thousands of soldiers and airmen were repatriated even before hostilities in Europe had ended.¹⁴ From March to May 1945 *The Guardian* and *The Messenger* noted the arrival at Bonaventure Station of trainloads of repatriated or discharged Montreal-area servicemen, a significant number of whom were recovering from wounds. One newspaper article which described the reunion of Verdun families with their loved ones disembarking from

¹² Elliott, *A Short History of Verdun High School, 1912-1984*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹³ Barry Broadfoot, *Six Years of War 1939-1945*. (Toronto: Doubleday, 1974), p. 169.

¹⁴ England, *Discharged*, *op. cit.* p. ix. has remarked that "Demobilization begins...when war begins" and that by 1943, Canadian military discharges averaged over 2000 a month. Granatstein and Morton, *Victory*, p. 151, note that about one third of Canadian service people were discharged before V-E Day.

a casualty train began: "Limping, burned and blinded, many Verdun fighters fresh from the battlefronts of Europe are today safely back with their relatives and friends."¹⁵

The Guardian reminded Verdunites to be sensitive to the signs of "shattered nerves" which some returning local men were likely to manifest. Many men returned traumatized by their war experiences. One common theme in the local newspapers was the hope that the treatment Verdun's veterans would receive from their fellow citizens would be worthy of the sacrifices endured by those who had served. The press mentioned the "hell and horror" of their overseas experiences and the "privations, hardships and suffering" which might have altered the men's and women's personalities or sown the seeds of lingering pain and psychological distress.¹⁶ This was a rather different tone from the bombastic and aggressive statements and articles which had appeared regularly in the local press during the war.

The homecomings were causes for rejoicing, but they were not necessarily always easy. One discharged Verdunite simply exclaimed that the men were "ready to forget all we've gone through".¹⁷ An R.C.A.F. veteran from Verdun, John Neal, wrote years after the war that "it [was] impossible to recreate instant civilians when the uniform [was] gone. We could not simply press the "off" switch. I came...close to being alcoholic."¹⁸ In October 1945, *The Guardian* published a moving article which detailed the many needs of

¹⁵ *The Messenger*, March 1, 1945.

¹⁶ *The Guardian*, August 16, 1945.

¹⁷ Quoted in *The Guardian*, April 12, 1945.

¹⁸ John Neal, "Life in Lower Slobovia", *McGill News*, Summer 1990, p. 10. Many homecomings were made awkward by the fact that spouses or lovers had sometimes not seen one another for as long as five years. Young children barely knew their fathers or did not know them at all. Between 1939 and 1945 divorces rose 150% in Canada. Only the veterans seemed able to understand war's full brutality and many of their experiences and much of their pain remained internalized. Morton and Granatstein, *Victory 1945*, pp. 160-162.

Canada's repatriated soldiers, especially those having suffered wounds or injuries. In soliciting subscriptions to the Ninth (and final) Victory Loan campaign, the newspaper stated that:

Verdun...is now called upon to look after its own sons and none can shirk what is their most sacred duty and obligation...Verdun more than any other city, with its great percentage of returned men, will no doubt see to it that its own sons are taken care of.¹⁹

Verdunites' money was still needed, and obtained. This continuing generosity into the postwar period might have been facilitated by the sudden re-appearance in Verdun of relatives, friends, neighbours and members of the community who bore the marks of the war on their bodies and in their minds. Perhaps many discharged men and women subscribed to the campaign.

As Verdunites had closed ranks to support their men and women overseas during the war, so too, as *The Guardian* had predicted, did they assist its repatriated veterans. One successful postwar fundraising effort in Verdun was the Daniels Fund. Norman Daniels was 21 years old in 1944 when he was blinded in action in Holland. The young Verdunite was said to be Canada's youngest serviceman to lose his eyesight during the war. He returned to Verdun in the winter of 1946. A well-known star athlete in sports-minded Verdun, he was well-connected in many local circles. Community-minded individuals established a trust fund for the disabled Daniels to aid his education in Britain. Daniels came to symbolize the wartime sacrifices of all Verdunites. The Daniels Fund gave expression to a long-held community view that Verdunites took care of their own. Local community groups donated to and worked on behalf of the fund. Individual contributions were made in charity boxes displayed in many local businesses. Benefit concerts or sporting events were also organized to finance the fund. The original

¹⁹ *The Guardian*, October 25, 1945.

objective had been \$1000. By the end of June 1946, the fund had swelled to \$3500.²⁰ In massively oversubscribing to the Daniels Fund in the postwar period, Verdunites again demonstrated their strong sense of local identity. Daniels had represented Verdun overseas and his sacrifice was the city's.

Although many repatriated Verdun servicemen and servicewomen arriving at Bonaventure station required transportation home to Verdun, few Verdun families had automobiles.²¹ In August 1945, Wilfrid Pagé, a local automobile dealer and unsuccessful Progressive-Conservative candidate in Verdun in the June 1945 federal election, organized the Free Transport League to shuttle home Verdunites and even some non-Verdunites from the train station. Gasoline rationing had ended in May 1945 and the League intended that as few Verdunites as possible would be among the "forgotten men" having to take public transit home from the war. In addition to this organization, the Montreal-wide Voluntary Transport League had been organized in 1944 to meet the needs of repatriated wounded men and others needing assistance. By June 1946 the 700 drivers of the Voluntary Transport League in the Montreal area met 221 trains and provided

²⁰ *The Guardian*, April 25, June 6 and June 27, 1946. The Montreal *Canadiens* fastball team played a Verdun all-star team at Willibrord Park with the proceeds donated to the Daniels Fund. Included in the *Canadiens*' line-up were Bill Durnan, Butch Bouchard, Kenny Reardon, Maurice "Rocket" Richard, Elmer Lach and Toe Blake. Over \$200.00 was collected. *The Guardian*, June 6 and June 20, 1946. It is not clear from Woods, *Rehabilitation: A Combined Operation, op. cit.*, whether or not Daniels qualified for government-sponsored programs for studying overseas. In 1948, Daniels graduated from St. Dunstan's College, Brighton, an institute for the blind. He returned to the Montreal area a qualified physiotherapist and established a practice.

²¹ In 1941, less than one in five Verdun households (17.9%) benefitted from the use of an automobile. Of Canadian cities with a population of 30,000 or more, only Montreal had a lower average (15.7%). Verdun's automobile ownership average was even lower than the Québec standard for all communities, notwithstanding size. 1941 Census, Volume 9, pp. 83 and 142-144.

12,596 rides to 69,178 men and their kin. A significant amount of this group's activity was centred on Verdun.²²

At the end of the war General H.D.G. Crerar, Commander of First Canadian Army, stated with some exaggeration that "there can be no more stabilizing influence in any community than the presence of 'all ranks' of a unit that represented that locality overseas".²³ Because no regiment was based in Verdun, the city could not fully experience this proud privilege. The closest Verdun came to welcoming home 'its' troops occurred in early October 1945 when 4 Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers, paraded through the streets of the city. The headquarters of this particular unit at the start of the war had been in neighbouring Point St. Charles and many of its original members were Verdunites. This company, overseas since December 1939, was ordered to demobilize at the Verdun Auditorium, which had housed various Reserve Army engineering units since 1941 and in the meantime had become the temporary home for several others which had been mobilized, including 4 Field Company.

In late September 1945 the Verdun press excitedly reported news of this 150-man unit's impending arrival at Halifax aboard the troopship *Nieuw Amsterdam*. This was Verdun's only opportunity to receive formally a returning body of men still organized as a unit. In principle, the repatriation system devised by Ottawa was one of 'first-in, first-out'. As a result, most of the Verdunites who had enlisted in 4 Field Company in 1939 already had returned home in individual drafts. With a hint of inter-city rivalry, *The Guardian* noted that the Royal Montreal Regiment (which included many Verdunites) had received a "royal welcome" in Westmount the previous week and strongly suggested that Verdun

²² *The Guardian*, June 6, 1946. In addition to her other wartime activities, the indefatigable Joan Adams was also a driver for the Voluntary Transport League, one of only a handful of women engaged in that capacity. Interview with R.B. Joan Adams, October 6, 1993.

²³ Quoted in Morton and Granatstein, *Victory 1945*, p. 155.

should muster the same enthusiasm for 'its' engineers.²⁴ The company formed up at Bonaventure Station in early October and marched in battle dress but without arms to the Verdun Auditorium where the men's families had assembled to greet them. They arrived at 8:30 in the morning. Along the way, crowds were thin due to the wet, windy weather and the early hour. At the Auditorium all Verdun's political dignitaries were present to welcome the men while the Voluntary Transport League dutifully drove many of them home.²⁵ This hardly seemed a fitting tribute to Verdun's notable war record but the city made the most of its opportunity to receive troops who, under the circumstances, represented the thousands of Verdunites who had served overseas.

Verdun also welcomed another group of overseas arrivals. Several hundred war brides relocated to Verdun in the twelve-month period following the end of the war. Not long after the despatch of the First Division overseas in December 1939, *The Guardian* began publishing references to Verdunites taking advantage of their overseas posting to visit relatives in Britain. And as early as 1940 the same newspaper noted that some local men already had taken British wives. Even before the war had ended, dozens of war brides had preceded their Verdun husbands home. Most Verdunites who were married overseas, however, were repatriated to Canada singly, or with their units, and were forced to await the arrival of their spouses until shipping space could be found.²⁶

²⁴ *The Guardian*, September 27, 1945.

²⁵ *The Guardian*, October 5, 1945. Six weeks later, the 73 men of No. 1 Road Construction Unit, R.C.E., were accorded the honour of a similar, though smaller, ceremony at the Auditorium. While some Verdunites had served in this unit as well, few remained by November 1945. On February 2, 1946, another small unit of Engineers paraded in Verdun. *The Guardian*, November 22, 1945 and February 7, 1946; *The Messenger*, November 22, 1945.

²⁶ In one case, the Scottish widow of Private Donald Malcolm MacKillop made her way to Verdun to stay with his parents. MacKillop was killed in action in Normandy in 1944 while serving with the Black Watch. *The Guardian*, April 19, 1945.

In the spring of 1946 the local press frequently mentioned the arrival of groups of "Verdun" war brides. It appears that between 200 and 300 Verdunites were married overseas. One columnist in *The Guardian* estimated that the number of these marriages was small compared to the percentage of Canadian service people who were married overseas.²⁷ This is somewhat surprising given the high percentage of Verdunites who were either born in the British Isles or were the offspring of British-born parents.

The experiences of Verdun's war brides, like those of all Canadian war brides, varied. But because Verdun was an atypically British-Canadian city, many British women resettling in Verdun might have felt more at home there than in other Montreal-area districts (even predominantly English-speaking areas) and certainly more so than in many other parts of Canada. In Verdun, many of the new arrivals found familiar accents, attitudes and even shops offering British-style food and clothing. Very few of Verdun's war brides were other than British born. If contemporary press accounts can serve as a guide, it appears the reception the women received in Verdun was a warm one.

In September 1945 *The Messenger* suggested in successive front-page editorials that the City of Verdun should convene *en masse* to the Auditorium all Verdunites who had served in the military, as well as the families of those who did not return, so that they could be thanked officially for their efforts and sacrifices. The newspaper even suggested they should all be given a \$100.00 Victory Bond by the City of Verdun in appreciation of their efforts, as some other (smaller) Canadian towns had done with their citizen-veterans. For Verdun, this would have entailed an expenditure of between \$600,000 and \$700,000. An increasing number of Verdunites complained that the city had failed to provide a

²⁷ *The Guardian*, February 21, 1946. As of December 31, 1946, nearly 48,000 wives (94% British) and 22,000 children (97% British) of Canadian servicemen had arrived in Canada. Somewhat less than 10% of Canadians serving overseas were married which, if expressed in terms of Verdunites serving overseas, would translate into approximately 600 marriages. It does not appear this many Verdunites took overseas brides. See Joyce Hibbert, ed., *The War Brides*, (Toronto: PMA Books, 1978), p. 156.

suitable public commemoration for Verdun's veterans and war dead. Verdun had trumpeted throughout the war that it led the nation in enlistments and material support for the war effort; it was time the heroes were honoured.

City Hall, however, seemed far more interested in the soldiers' orderly civil re-establishment and the industrial conversion of the closed D.I.L. ammunition plant than in any expensive gestures exalting Verdunites' war services. Exceedingly patriotic during the war, Edward Wilson's administration remained so in the immediate postwar period. The difference was that civic leaders responsibly looked toward future economic growth, jobs and social concerns rather than the commemoration of the tragedies and triumphs of the recent past. Wilson had said as much in the 1945 municipal election campaign. Nevertheless, *The Messenger* adamantly pointed out that *all* Verdunites owed its citizen-soldiers a lasting debt, which might have been partially cancelled by an official material or financial tribute.²⁸

Some groups in Verdun agreed. For example, the Verdun Community Club, a charitable and service organization, granted \$50.00 to every returned service person who had been a member of the Club before enlistment.²⁹ In February 1945, the Verdun Labour Progressive Party Club announced its intention of raising sufficient funds to grant a \$50.00 Victory Bond to as many badly wounded Verdunites as possible.³⁰ No postwar

²⁸ *The Messenger*, September 13 and September 20, 1945. The municipal administration's muted response in honouring Verdun veterans did not seem to rankle the local veteran community since, in recognition of their ceaseless wartime efforts on behalf of Verdunites on active service, Wilson and Arthur Burgess were granted honorary memberships in the Verdun branch of the Canadian Legion. *The Guardian*, September 13, 1945.

²⁹ *The Guardian*, November 15, 1945 and July 4, 1946.

³⁰ In the Rosemount district of Montreal, block parties were held by the Labour Progressive Party to raise funds to provide returned wounded men with \$50.00 gifts. Most Verdun members of this party appeared to be English-speakers living in east-end Verdun. *The Guardian*, February 15, 1945.

consensus was ever reached in Verdun on a means of recognizing Verdun veterans' services or of compensating them for their sacrifices. While this seems odd for a community which had so strongly supported its thousands of volunteers, it is also true that Ottawa had prepared a comprehensive package of veterans' benefits. While providing the men with cash gifts would have appeared a patriotic gesture, City Hall did not perceive the men's financial welfare as its responsibility.

The merits of erecting a new war memorial to honour veterans of the Second World War provoked a minor debate in Verdun. The city's view was that building a new monument would be an unwise expenditure. This sentiment was shared by Verdun's Legion branch and by most local veterans. What the veterans sought was a more practical testimonial to their military service, such as an educational or job training facility. The men were more concerned with a stable future than with commemorations. Others in the community, strongly supported by *The Guardian*, felt that the building of an armoury and the establishment of a Verdun regiment would be the best means of remembering Verdunites' war services.³¹ In February 1946 the Greater Verdun Community Council requested that the city erect a needed community centre dedicated to Verdunites who lost their lives on active service. Not unnaturally, local sporting groups felt a new outdoor stadium would serve as the most fitting tribute.³² Instead of acting on these suggestions, the city decided to add the phrase "Also dedicated to the memory of those who fell during the Second Great War 1939-1945" to the inscription found on Verdun's Great War cenotaph. This memorial henceforth commemorated the military service of two generations of Verdunites. In its decision not to erect a Second World War memorial, Verdun fell into line with most other Canadian municipalities. No major spree of monument building

³¹ *The Guardian*, September 13, 1945.

³² Council Minutes, February 26 and December 2, 1946. England, *Discharged*, p. 331. believed in 1943 that the "most effective" memorial would be the willingness of a community to assure the successful re-establishment of all its veterans.

took place in Canada after 1945, unlike what had occurred following the end of the Great War.³³ It seemed time to plan the future instead.

Veterans' initial joys of repatriation sometimes were replaced by anxieties about future employment. As early as December 1939, long before the nation's war effort had reached its stride, Ottawa had started preliminary planning for demobilization and civil re-establishment. In 1940 local citizens' rehabilitation committees were formed in Canada's larger centres to assist local veterans to find employment. These committees normally were made up of leading citizens, usually including the mayor, representatives of the local Legion branch and other social groups and sometimes even representatives of organized labour. The co-operation of these committees and a wider community support network have been cited by the official historian of the federal government's rehabilitation programs as a primary reason for the success of veterans' civil re-establishment in Canada.³⁴ In 1943 an earlier chronicle of the government's programs to assist discharged veterans made it clear that local efforts were critical in allowing the servicemen to re-adjust to civilian life. "In the long run", stated the author, Robert England, "it is [the ex-serviceman's] own community which must effect his civil re-establishment." According to England, "no community should rest satisfied as long as any [veteran] is unemployed."³⁵ The role of the community, so great in assisting the prosecution of the war, would also be emphasized in the process of demobilization.

³³ Morton and Granatstein, *Victory 1945*, p. 250. The only other testimonial to the sacrifices of Verdunites to be commissioned in the city was an impressive stained-glass window installed in St. Clement's Anglican Church on Wellington Street in 1950.

³⁴ Woods, *Rehabilitation*, pp. 217-218 and 294-299. See also Dean F. Oliver's excellent dissertation, "When the Battle's Won: Military Demobilization in Canada 1939-1946". Ph.D. thesis, York University, 1996.

³⁵ England, *Discharged*, p. 329.

In March 1942 the Verdun Legion sought to have a Verdunite serve on the Civil Rehabilitation Committee of the Auxiliary Services branch of Military District No. 4. The city supported the Legion's bid, given that Verdun servicemen were found to "need assistance, guidance and employment upon their discharge". Despite the sometimes complex needs of discharged servicemen the sole purpose of Montreal's committee in 1942 was to assist discharged men find employment, and not to provide other services which they might require in re-adjusting to civilian life. Verdunites would get no special favours and no representative of that city was appointed to the Committee.³⁶ Nevertheless, the city had shown an early interest in the welfare of its discharged citizens.

Despite the fact that some 700 citizens' rehabilitation committees were established across Canada during the war, no community group ever seems to have been formed in Verdun to assist with the employment needs of that city's veteran population. Some Canadian towns and cities such as Sault Saint Marie and Weyburn set up well-organized committees which contacted local discharged servicemen to determine whether they required assistance in securing employment. Montreal's committee was a conspicuous success in matching available jobs with veterans' employment needs.³⁷ Because of Montreal's success and Verdun's limited employment base, there might not have been need of a separate Verdun committee. Verdun veterans seemed to have been served by Montreal's committee.

The city devoted some attention to the potential problem of local veterans' unemployment. Verdun's considerable success in managing public works projects in the

³⁶ G.S. Lowe, Secretary-Treasurer, Verdun branch, Canadian Legion, to City Council, March 12, 1942; Executive Committee Minutes, March 23, 1942; Burgess to Lowe, June 15, 1942, Box A-331, file 6, CVA. England, p. 10, estimated in 1943 that most discharges in the first few years of the war took place within a year and often within six months of enlistment. By December 1940, 20,000 men had already been discharged from Canada's armed forces. Woods, p. 295.

³⁷ Woods, pp. 218 and 298-299.

late 1930s was proudly recalled in 1944 by municipal authorities who planned a new round of public works schemes to absorb the anticipated work needs of Verdun's returning men. City Council sought to avoid a repetition of the socio-economic malaise which had afflicted Verdun during the 1930s. The city hoped to employ demobilized Verdunites to build a new city hall, fire station, and municipal stadium and also to improve Verdun's streets, parks and other facilities. But no firm decision could be taken on these matters until after the war was over.³⁸ In fact, none of these schemes materialized in the immediate postwar years but neither did the feared level of joblessness.

Verdun participated successfully in the process of postwar national industrial reconversion. Numerous light industries were established on the site of the former D.I.L. facility. From June 1944 Verdun's economic expansion and the jobs and prosperity which were expected to flow from it were at the top of Wilson's agenda. In an article prepared by City Hall in December 1945 for publication in the *Canadian Corps Magazine*, Verdun's reconversion program was described as "a real boon to the City of Verdun and...to its citizens, particularly those being discharged from the armed forces."³⁹ In the meantime, the city helped by filling available municipal positions from among the ranks of qualified Verdun veterans.⁴⁰ The city's goals and those of its repatriated men were the same: continued employment, social security and, for the city, social stability.

In 1946 the federal government published a 300-page volume commonly known as the Veterans' Charter. It contained all the legislation passed up to that point, most of it in 1944 and 1945, dealing with the re-establishment and rehabilitation of Canada's Second

³⁸ *The Guardian*, May 18, 1944.

³⁹ "Verdun Meets the Reconstruction Challenge". December 3, 1945, Box A-198, file 2, CVA. The article was probably written by Arthur Burgess.

⁴⁰ *The Guardian*, July 12, 1945.

World War veterans. All veterans were entitled to war service gratuities (calculated according to length of service), rehabilitation grants and re-establishment credits, the latter for their use in buying a home, business or the equipment necessary to make a living. Veterans were offered a land settlement scheme, free vocational or university education, insurance plans, medical treatment, pensions and other benefits.⁴¹ Canadians overseas, like Verdunite Ken Slade, R.C.A.S.C., armed themselves with booklets such as *The Common-Sense of Re-establishment* (June 1945) which outlined the rehabilitation schemes offered by the government and the financial benefits to which service people were entitled. The Verdun Legion, like Legion branches across the country, acted as a clearing house for information concerning veterans' benefits, allowances and pensions. The local Legion also provided a counselling service for returned men and women in the hope of assisting them avoid falling prey to swindlers who targeted recently demobilized service people having recently obtained their sometimes quite considerable service annuities and gratuities. Within months of the end of the European war, fraudulent investment or housing schemes had bilked some unwary Verdun veterans out of their re-establishment money.⁴²

In January 1945 *The Guardian* published a negative editorial on Ottawa's plans for educational and training benefits for returned service people. The newspaper's critical views were based on the correspondence of a Verdunite then serving overseas. The unnamed Verdun soldier believed that the federal government's apparently greater emphasis on university education as opposed to technical and vocational training was clearly aimed at a particular social class. He stated that his own prewar experience in Verdun, as well as the inclinations of other men with whom he had spoken overseas,

⁴¹ Woods, pp. xiii and 17-30. See also Morton and Granatstein, *Victory 1945*, pp. 133, 144-150. England, p. 332, noted that already in 1943 there was a vast amount of information available on re-establishment programs and that rehabilitation was a very popular topic among veterans.

⁴² *The Guardian*, September 27, 1945; Woods, p. 299.

indicated soldiers wanted a wider range of practical courses to prepare for "jobs that can be done with their hands".⁴³ While veteran vocational training schemes had been evolving since the Great War⁴⁴ and though this man exaggerated the unpopularity of obtaining a university education among Canadian service people generally, his working-class views may have coincided with those of many other Verdunites. The men of Verdun had shown the volunteering spirit. Following the war they wanted the government to address their own particular perceived needs, and not middle-class values. John Neal, however, the Verdun R.C.A.F. veteran, who before his enlistment had worked in the C.N.R. locomotive shops in nearby Point St. Charles, was able to attend McGill University as a result of Ottawa's program. This was a development which Neal claimed would not have occurred had it not been for the Veterans' Charter. He obtained an education which allowed him to avoid "a less satisfying life". But few other Verdunites seem to have taken advantage of this route to a university degree.⁴⁵

In 1946 the Verdun High School *Annual* offered the view that "world peace is today's aim": so too was "a better life for ordinary folk".⁴⁶ The war was over and it showed. No war-related section appeared in that year's publication. The Air Cadet band was only allotted a small photo on the last page of the *Annual*, just before the advertisements from sponsors. None of the poetry or short stories had a military theme. None mentioned the British Empire or the Royal Family, to which frequent references had been a noticeable

⁴³ *The Guardian*, January 18, 1945.

⁴⁴ England, pp. 224ff; Woods, pp. 72ff. See also Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930*. University of Toronto Press, 1987.

⁴⁵ John Neal, "Life in Lower Slobovia", *McGill News*, Summer 1990, p. 10. In addition to Neal's account, only one other Verdun veteran, Peter Sinclair, who also served in the R.C.A.F., has been found in the course of researching this work who attended university immediately after the war.

⁴⁶ Verdun High School, *Annual*, 1946, p. 5.

hallmark of all editions of the *Annual* since the first appeared in 1935. It was a new world and a new Canada, complete with a new mood, and the young people of Verdun, fervently patriotic during the war, clearly reflected this new postwar attitude.

CONCLUSION

Despite all that had taken place since 1939 social and institutional continuity remained very strong in Verdun. Yet, from the perspective of 1945 the prewar era seemed distant. The Second World War hastened Verdun's physical development and, in the short term, sharpened the city's image and self-confidence. Verdun had been a close-knit and proud community before 1939 and the war intensified these feelings. Arthur Burgess stated in an article prepared for publication in the December 1945 issue of the *Canadian Corps Magazine* that "[t]he fame of the City of Verdun is known from coast to coast, and beyond, for its magnificent contribution in both World Wars, both in the number of enlistments for active service and in the intense work of its citizens for all forms of patriotic activity."¹ The war re-invigorated Verdun.

Verdun's manpower contribution and well-organized domestic war effort had afforded Verdun national prominence and became the city's calling card. The city had furnished Canada's best-known military hero, George Beurling. Verdun's D.I.L. facility had been one of the top producers of small arms ammunition in the country and the remarkable Mayor's Cigarette Fund and other local initiatives had established Verdun as one of Québec's premier patriotic communities. In recognition of the city's growing wartime stature, in April 1944 a prominent article on Verdun's military and civilian war effort was published in *Canada's Weekly*, a magazine produced in London for the benefit of Canadian overseas military personnel.² Conspicuous throughout the Canadian military establishment overseas, Verdunites obtained recognition in a widely-circulated journal.

The war also affected Verdun's finances and family economies. On May 7, 1943 *The Guardian* prominently reprinted an excerpt from the *Municipal Review of Canada* which stated that "when Wilson became mayor [in 1939] Verdun was suffering from a

¹ "Verdun Meets the Reconstruction Challenge", Box A-198, file 2, CVA.

² *Canada's Weekly*, April 14, 1944, copy located in Box A-242, file 50, CVA.

hard dose of depression and past maladministration". but that as a result of several years of war, the "working-class city has become one of the most prosperous communities in the Dominion." While this was an exaggeration, the war had brought overall economic benefits to Verdun. Relief payments to unemployed Verdunites were ended in 1941 as thousands of citizens found work in war industry or enlisted in the armed forces. The increased amounts of disposable income available to most Verdun families as a result of wartime employment opportunities strengthened the local commercial economy and improved the city's taxation base. The city's net debenture debt per capita dropped 28% between 1939 and 1945. Despite the housing crisis which afflicted Verdun, the war stimulated urban growth and population expansion, both of which exerted a salutary effect on the local economy. Municipal finances were further aided through the sale of nearly 1600 vacant lots for property development. Between 1941 and 1946 more than 2000 dwellings were erected in Verdun and valuation rolls increased considerably as a result. Existing streets were widened and extended, new ones were built. Returning veterans could not help but notice the change and the progress. The future looked bright.³ Between 1939 and 1945 municipal revenue from property taxes, without a rate increase, rose 14%, revenue from water taxes rose 27% and that from local sales taxes rose 33%. Overall the City of Verdun's revenue increased 38% during the war.⁴ At the height of the war *The Messenger* marvelled at the abilities of Wilson and French to balance the city's budget and show a surplus. "It is evidence", that newspaper reported, "that all have worked together in this time of stress and crisis to keep the public services

³ "Verdun, Fastest Growing City in Quebec, Blazes Civic Efficiency Trail for Others". *The Financial Post* (Toronto), January 12, 1946. This article was based on a draft prepared by the City of Verdun, probably authored by Arthur Burgess, and submitted for use by *The Financial Post*.

⁴ Jean Barrière, "*Cité de Verdun: Aperçu historique, administration, commerce et industrie*", *Mémoire, École des Hautes Études Commerciales*, Montréal, 1947, p. 40.

at their highest level, while protecting the money of the taxpayers and looking forward to post-war conditions."⁵

In January 1946 a feature article in Toronto's *Financial Post* represented Verdun as an altered city with great economic potential. The article described Verdun as having been previously "almost obscured...by its proximity to Montreal", but the early postwar period had demonstrated Verdun was no longer merely a suburb of the greater metropolis. Verdun had experienced an "industrial boom" during the war and because of this "living conditions and general standard of living have been moving steadily upward." At the start of 1941 the city had but 22 manufacturers employing a paltry 343 workers whereas the wartime D.I.L. plant employed 6800 at its peak and its postwar reconversion to light industries was expected to generate several thousand permanent jobs in the city.⁶ There would be no going back to the depressed conditions of the 1930s.

A renewed sense of confidence reigned. The war had put Verdun on the map and perceptions of the city, within and without, were very positive. Wilson's efficient wartime municipal administration, the coming to power of which nearly coincided with the outbreak of war, brought renown to the city and infused the community with the hope that it might be possible after all to fulfill the grander destiny which in the 1920s civic boosters had predicted for Verdun. Verdunites' apprehensions about the postwar economy were tempered by a belief in their abilities to surmount difficult challenges. The experiences of the previous 15 years seemed to prove that it was indeed possible to survive onerous social conditions and implied that postwar life could hardly be more burdensome than that which existed during the Depression or the war itself.

⁵ *The Messenger*, March 25, 1943.

⁶ *The Financial Post* (Toronto), January 12, 1946.

Despite grim predictions of postwar unemployment and declining industrial production throughout Canada, Verdunites expressed faith in their city's future. On September 28, 1944, *The Guardian's* headline announced: "Wellington Street to Grow to Great Business Location on Island of Montreal". More than this, the accompanying article claimed that, as a result of projected modernizations, Verdun's busiest street would probably develop into one of the leading shopping districts in Canada. By 1946 Verdun believed itself on the verge of significant economic and population growth. A buoyant City Hall described Verdun as "one of the most progressive" municipalities in Canada. Riding the crest of wartime publicity Verdun had received, and in the hope of attracting investment, the optimistic city administration promoted Verdun's beautiful riverside location and its extensive municipal services, playgrounds and sporting facilities, especially the modern Auditorium and Natatorium.⁷ Much of this optimism was the result of local wartime growth, pride in the civil and military accomplishments of Verdunites and an enhanced sense of community. The war years had not defined Verdun's characteristics so much as reflected them.

As a whole, Verdunites remained remarkably united in pursuing a vigorous war effort. This was especially the case whenever their contributions to a patriotic cause offered them the possibility of directly helping fellow members of their community serving overseas, and not just supporting the federal government's stated military or economic policies or the even more distant general war aims of the Allied cause. The Mayor's Cigarette Fund is the best example of this. Verdun's community spirit created an atmosphere conducive to supporting local men and women on active service. In some cases this community identification was a contributing factor to Verdunites' decisions to enlist.

⁷ *The Financial Post*, January 12, 1946.

Although Verdun's wartime society was occasionally fragmented along ethnic, linguistic, religious and, to an extent, class lines, the war did not seem to have deepened these social divisions to any significant degree. While the different linguistic communities in Verdun did not always display wartime solidarity, perhaps more to the point, the war failed to exacerbate linguistic divisions, as it had elsewhere in the Montreal area. Though the war sometimes created tension in Verdun it also revealed a commonality of outlook or at least of shared local experience and common interest.

Community and class identity seemed as influential in governing social relations in Verdun as the existence of sometimes competing linguistic *blocs*. An outward appearance of linguistic co-operation existed during the war, and perhaps both groups' shared identity as Verdunites helped bridge the language barrier.⁸ It is also possible that the shrill wartime patriotism ever present in Verdun might have discouraged a too overt opposition to the war. Nevertheless, conscription for overseas service apart, there is very little evidence that French-speaking Verdunites were much opposed to their city's patriotic response to the war. The sense of pride which accompanied recognition of Verdun's contributions on the home and battle fronts was not linguistically segregated.

⁸ Wilson Dorman, who grew up in east-end Verdun during the war has recalled that several neighbouring families were French-speaking and although communication with them was difficult at times, there was no sense of animosity. He felt that neighbourhood identification meant these French speakers were people on whom he could depend if ever he needed their help. Dorman believed that language was an occasional barrier but not a permanent impediment to harmonious relations between neighbours in Verdun. Interview with Wilson Dorman, September 21, 1993. All English speakers formally or informally interviewed for this study made similar points. However, Clavette, p. 81 n25, writes "*Les conflits entre anglophone et francophones font partie des réalités quotidiennes à Verdun. Les batailles entre écoliers des deux groupes linguistiques...sont des faits largement connus.*" Her respondents were French speakers. This implies the existence of two different sets of oral histories about Verdun during the 1930s and 1940s, one English and one French.

The City of Verdun, and especially its energetic mayor, Edward Wilson, was wholeheartedly behind the war effort, which was unusual for a Québec municipality whose city council was mainly made up of French Canadians and which was home to over 30,000 French speakers by 1945. Municipal expenditures in support of patriotic endeavours caused not a ripple of dissent in city council. Nor was the city averse to profitable patriotism. For example, the city council found a military tenant for the Auditorium, the maintenance of which had become a financial burden.

Perhaps the shared "national experience"⁹ of war in Verdun forced existing social animosities below the surface of the community. Rather than leading to obvious linguistic discord, in Verdun the war signalled an era of relative harmony and consensus. Verdunites separated by language, ethnicity and religion shared common space in their congested city; compromise was absolutely necessary to reach accommodation on a personal and social level. This social stability, if perhaps not cohesion, was never more clearly demonstrated than during the political campaign leading up to the conscription plebiscite of 1942. Even though political response was governed by language and ethnicity, the plebiscite campaign in Verdun resulted in no reported untoward incidents. Examined from within the divisive linguistic context of wartime Canada, a close study of bi-cultural Verdun forces some re-examination of historians' traditional views of language relations at this time. By forcing the need for social accommodation, Verdun's linguistic duality actually helped ensure community harmony, not antagonism.

Over 6300 Verdunites served overseas during the war. French speakers on the home front contributed generously to the many causes which supported these men and women, notwithstanding the fact that 80% of Verdunites overseas were English speakers. French-speaking men and women were proportionately equal or near-equal partners

⁹ Sidney Aster, ed., *The Second World War as a National Experience*, *op. cit.*

with their fellow English-speaking Verdunites in many war-related activities, including working on behalf of the Red Cross, fund-raising for the Mayor's Cigarette Fund or for the crew of H.M.C.S. *Dunver*, participating in civil protection activities, salvage efforts, and Victory Loan campaigns, working in war industry and, ultimately, in enlisting.

But some public divisions and tensions remained, as the zoot-suit trouble of June 1944 symbolized. Moreover, *The Guardian* consciously did not accord the military contributions of French speakers in and out of uniform the publicity they surely merited. *The Guardian* was written by and for an English-speaking audience and set a tone of smug self-assurance in its view that French Canada's responses to the demands of total war were unduly weak and that those French speakers in uniform should hardly be glorified for performing what in effect were their basic obligations as citizens. *The Guardian* rarely hinted at the thousands of French speakers who contributed to Verdun's war effort. Yet, despite the occasional outburst against the seemingly divisive cause of French-Canadian nationalism, this newspaper often extolled the virtues of the linguistic harmony reigning, specifically, in wartime Verdun. In October 1942, six months following the plebiscite, *The Guardian* referred to the "splendid community and co-operative spirit which has and still exists among [Verdunites], irrespective of nationality or creed."¹⁰ In any event, linguistic enmity was considered unpatriotic and if *The Guardian's* attitude can serve as a guide, many English-speaking Verdunites felt it incumbent upon French speakers to refrain from contradicting the wartime wishes of the local English-speaking majority. Thus could social peace be ensured. Still, Wilson was proud to state in 1945 that during the war there existed "the most cordial and friendly relations between all sections of the community. We have not only preached the Bonne

¹⁰ *The Guardian*, October 30, 1942. The bilingual *The Messenger/Le Messenger* covered the French-language community's social organizations, religious life and politics and provided a distinctly French Canadian outlook on local issues. But *Le Messenger* was also muted compared to the larger, more overtly patriotic *Guardian* in reporting war-related events on the local scene.

Entente in Verdun, we have practised it as well."¹¹ Verdunites, understanding the dynamics governing social relations in their city, seemed less prone to extreme political views and social behaviour.

Verdun's unique mix of size, class, language, religion and sense of community identity both defines and explains the city's response during the war. The city's unusual British character, its working-class composition and its strongly-entrenched, cross-linguistic community pride were all important determinants in Verdunites' domestic and military contributions to the war effort.

Historian Sidney Aster has written of Canada's home front during the war that "patriotism, solidarity, community, stability and purpose were more often the rule than the exception."¹² Verdunites from all walks of life experienced the trials of the Second World War, adhered to its conditions and faced its challenges. To this extent the war acted as a unifying force, one which embodied a spirit of local community. But the national wartime experience itself was no more than a collection of smaller individual, group and community responses, many of which shared similar traits but none of which were identical. This examination of Verdun has viewed Canada's war from the perspective of these local experiences. It has illustrated that the war, and Ottawa's wartime policies, quickly filtered down to the community and individual levels. It is from these levels that Canadian men and women responded to the needs of the war and its prosecution was made possible because of them. Canada's war was a "people's war"¹³ as much as a unifying national experience. A bottom-up examination of the war

¹¹ Quoted from Wilson's hand-written editorial changes to his address delivered on CFCF Radio, March 31 (?), 1945, Box A-57, file 6, CVA.

¹² Aster, *War as a National Experience*, p. 2.

¹³ The phrase is borrowed from Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*. Jonathan Cape, London, 1969.

years reveals in some measure the scope and intensity of the war's effects on urban Canadians.

It is hoped that this study might stimulate research in other lesser-known areas of Canada's domestic experiences during the Second World War. Much remains to be done. The history of the Second World War from the perspective of a provincial government would be a valuable contribution to military, political, economic, social, regional and administrative history. The Canadian war economy and the means of war financing require a synthesis. French-speaking Canada's participation in the war at the grass-roots level also needs re-appraisal.

The municipal and community approach to history provides new insight into issues usually viewed from a national level: as far as this work is concerned, Canada's war was Verdun's war.

APPENDIX A

**WOMEN'S VOLUNTEER RESERVE CORPS
ACTIVITIES
JULY 1940 - DECEMBER 1941¹**

Assisted in National Registration. July 1940	
Assisted in Red Cross Campaign. Fall 1940	
Mayor's Cigarette Fund Tag Day, December 1940	\$ 605.00
Participated in War Savings Campaign (one team)	55.00
Women's Voluntary Services. England. for Mobile Canteen	1002.82
Assisted in Collection of Salvage	
Home Cooking Sale	20.00
Assisted in selling War Savings Stamps. Winter 1940	
Refugee Work [mainly clothing] valued November 1941	2500.50
Crippled Children Tag Day. May 1941	116.73
Spitfire Fund (Commission from Victory Bonds)	500.00
Participated in Victory Loan Campaign 1941 Aquacade [special entertainment event] ushers, supply and tickets sold	82.56
Queen's Canadian Fund. sale of "... ___ V" stickers	175.00
Dance at Pavilion. August 1941. for Air Force Benevolent Fund	200.00
Boardwalk Collection for Mayor's Cigarette Fund	111.26
Tag Day for Mayor's Cigarette Fund	676.03
Toys to England 1941	850.00
Clothing for torpedoed sailors	100.00
Mile of Nickels. November 15. 1941	574.13
Assisted in Provincial Blackout. November 1941	
Assisted in War Savings Stamp Campaign. November 1941	
Assisted in Recruiting Campaign. Verdun Auditorium. November 1941	
Donors to Canadian Blood Bank	
Completed First Year First-Aid Course	
Completed Advanced First-Aid Course	
Completed Home Nursing Class	
Completed Motor Mechanics Class	
	\$7569.03

¹ Compiled in early 1942 by Senior Commandant R.B. Joan Adams and drawn from her personal files.

APPENDIX B**VERDUN SALVAGE COMMITTEE
STATISTICAL SUMMARY¹**

	Salvage (tons)	revenue (\$)	expenses (\$)	costs as % of total
1942	459	8241	3270	39.65
1943	164	1616	1213	75.06
1944	166	2464	1155	46.87
1945	84	1302	597	45.85
Total	873	13623	6235	45.76

¹ Verdun Salvage Committee. Reports of Salvage Collections. February 1942 to July 1945. Box A-331. file 2. CVA.

APPENDIX C**VERDUN BRANCH OF THE RED CROSS
STATEMENT OF FUNDS COLLECTED¹**

1939 \$ 7245.09

1940 10275.69

1941 1389.25

1942 12124.02

1943 19324.85

1944 16839.19

\$ 67198.09

¹ Box A-331, file 5, CVA. The low amount for 1941 cannot be explained from available evidence.

APPENDIX D

**VERDUN BRANCH OF THE RED CROSS
STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF FINISHED ARTICLES
TO DECEMBER 31, 1944¹**

	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	Total
Hosp. Supp.	3697	13992	6155	1783	3335	3734	32696
Surg. Dress.	-	-	-	6150	320886	247850	574886
Knits - Mil.	692	11907	8126	9482	3489	2619	36315
Knits - Aux.	40	-	1392	929	400	48	2809
Conservation Dept. Articles	-	-	-	338	168	-	506
Civ. Clothes	1921	6481	8938	5438	2890	5184	30852
Donations	-	497	566	375	420	104	1962
Misc. - Navy	-	-	-	750	250	-	1000
Russ. Relief ²	-	226	-	5330	-	-	5556
	6350	33103	25177	30575	331838	259539	636582

¹ Box A-331. file 5. CVA.

² Almost certainly refers to Finnish war relief.

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RG 24 National Defence
RG 28 Munitions and Supply
RG 38 Veterans' Affairs
RG 44 National War Services
RG 46 Canadian Transport Commission
RG 56 Central Mortgage and Housing

Manuscript Groups

MG 28 I 17 Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire
MG 28 I 95 Young Men's Christian Association
MG 30 A 118 Robert H. Haddow

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R.B. Joan Adams

Sidney Ashford

René and Noëlla Bisson

John Buck

Wilson Dornan

Gordon Galbraith

Ronald Grover

John Parker

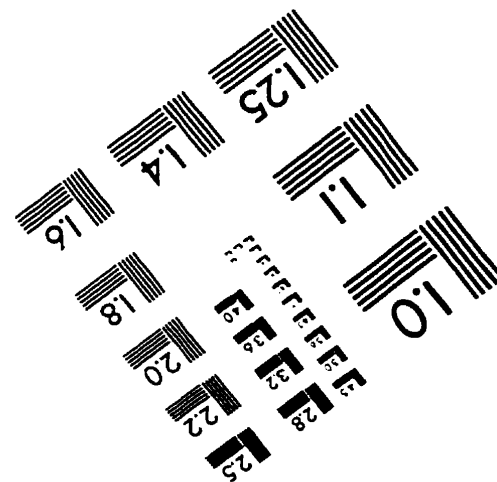
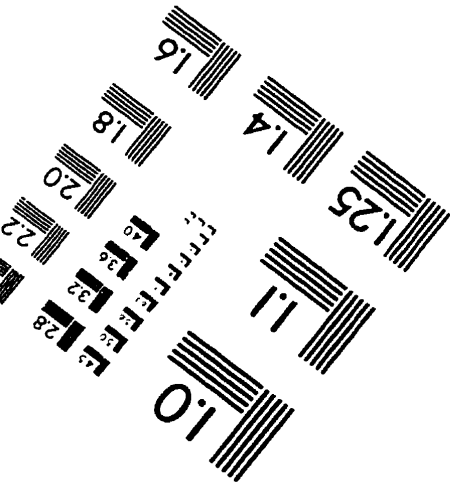
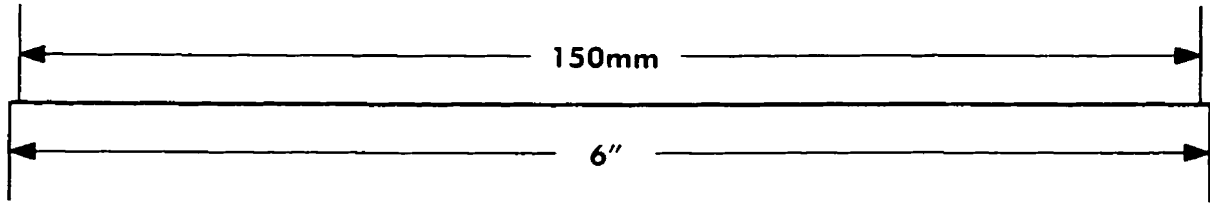
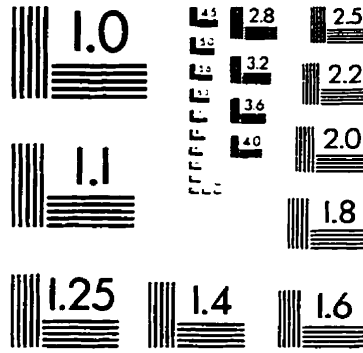
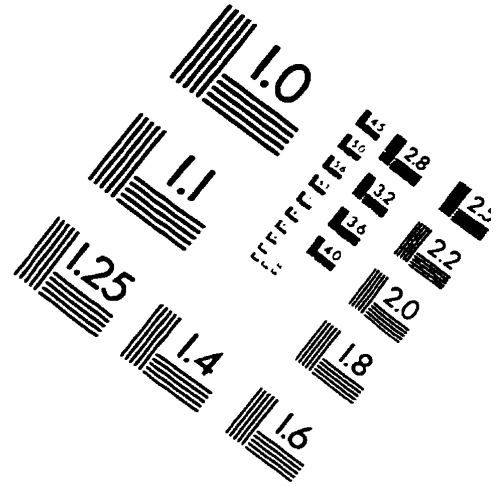
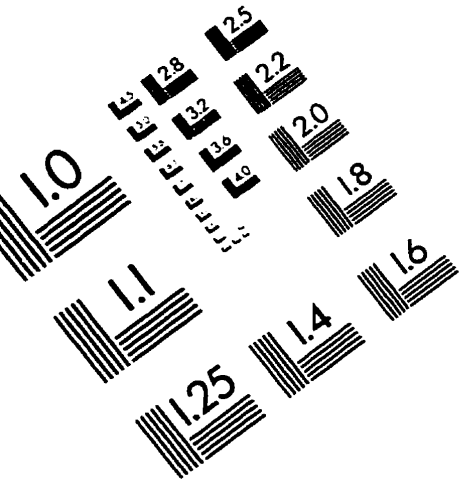
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