

Remembering war time contributions at home

BY MICHAELA LUDWIG
Innisfail Province

While thousands of men fought overseas, the battle to survive and make it through each day continued on here at home, too.

Many women worked, cared for children single-handedly and prayed each day that their husbands, fiancés or boyfriends would make it home safely. Men who chose not to enlist farmed or worked in wartime industries.

Wartime industries

The Department of Munitions and Supply was formed in 1940 with a mandate to maximize wartime production. Not only did the Department rigidly control the use of raw materials, but it also shifted industries' focus from producing civilian goods to producing goods for the military. Similarly, in 1941, the National War Labour Board was formed for the purpose of stabilizing wages; its aim was to control production costs.

Canadian industries produced billions of dollars' worth of goods annually, spurring the rapid expansion of many secondary industries—primarily those related to defence and transportation. The steel industry, for example, modernized and expanded considerably during the Second World War, opening new mines across the country. The conversion of

existing industrial enterprises and the rapid addition of new facilities meant that, at times, quality control suffered. Canadian military equipment, vehicles, and accoutrements were initially deemed inferior to those produced in the United States, which boasted a much larger and more experienced military industrial complex.

Women at home

As the Second World War progressed, women shouldered an ever-larger burden of responsibilities. They continued to fulfill what most thought of as their appointed domestic roles and responsibilities, and many of them continued to work in traditional occupations such as teaching, nursing and bookkeeping. As more and more men left jobs, businesses and farms for the fighting overseas, women found themselves stepping into a host of new environments and situations previously dominated by men. Women took over the operation of farms and businesses and went to work in factories, tackling physically demanding work.

Isobel Carter and Tina Jorden, both residents of Innisfail, were new brides during the Second World War.

"My husband, Harvey, joined in 1939 and I didn't see him again until 1945," recalled Isobel. "It was like being total strangers again when he came back."



INNISFAIL PROVINCE PHOTO by Carla Victor

RECALLING TOUGH TIMES - Tina Jorden, left, and Isobel Carter sit together in Jorden's room at Autumn Glen Lodge recently, recalling stories about what life was like for the wife of a soldier.

When Harvey left to join the war effort, Isobel was left to care for the couple's first child, Wayne, who was just six months old at the time.

"I raised him by myself," she recalled, adding that they had their second son, Jim, two years after Harvey returned.

Isobel said Harvey being away for so many years wasn't good. Although he did write letters home, she said they had to get to know each other all over again.

"He was with his buddies for six years, so it took time to get adjusted again," she said.

While Harvey was overseas, Isobel moved in with her in-laws and worked at a dry goods store in town. She continued to work at the post office after he returned.

Isobel joined the Legion Ladies in 1959, and has been a member ever since. Both she and Tina had a lot of friends that had husbands who joined

the war effort, and Isobel said they would get together a few times a month during the war.

"Quite a few husbands from this community went," Isobel recalled.

Tina said her husband, Ron, came to Canada from England in 1925 and the fall of France during the Second World War was "pretty scary."

"He went out and enlisted the next day," Tina said.

Ron served in the army for about seven or eight months, but in the end an irregular heartbeat and a weak heart forced him home. But with so many men away fighting, Ron took teaching jobs to help cover the shortage.

"I think there was an uneasy feeling in the country during the war," Tina said. "We didn't know when it was going to end."

Isobel said there was a mailman that delivered news and telegrams from the war.

be allowed to serve. Women had previously served the military, but they did so as members of the Red Cross and were limited to nursing roles.

Some expressed concern that women's continued involvement in the military and other non-traditional occupations would threaten traditional family values. This would lead to the breakdown of marriages and family structure and a rise in childhood delinquency. Following the war, women were forced to relinquish their newfound roles, responsibilities, and positions to accommodate the tens of thousands of men who expected to return to their jobs and the traditional role of the family breadwinner.

The Canadian military disbanded the women's Army, Navy, and Air Force divisions in 1946. The CWAC was reconstituted in 1948 and operated until 1964; Navy and Air Force women's divisions were re-established in 1951, and both remained in place until the unification of the three branches of the military in 1968. Following unification and a four-year hiatus, women were once again permitted to serve in the land forces (Army). Since that time, women have progressed through the ranks and, commencing in the mid to late 1980s, they have been permitted to serve in front line and combat roles.

Harvey made it to Corporal status with the Calgary Highlanders squadron and passed away in 1984. Ron was a private during his time in the military and passed away in 2005. Isobel, now 93, and Tina, now 94, both continue to live in Innisfail.

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