

WAR WITHOUT, STRUGGLE WITHIN:  
CANADIAN MENNONITE ENLISTMENTS  
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by

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A thesis submitted to  
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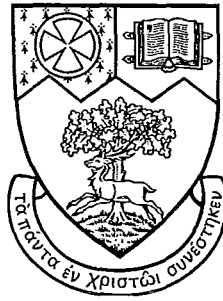
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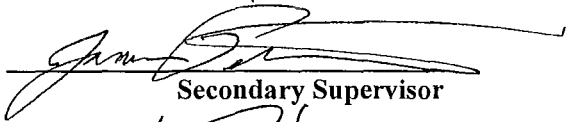
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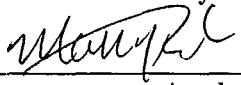
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## ABSTRACT

“War Without, Struggle Within: Canadian Mennonite Enlistments During the Second World War”

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Master of Arts, 2010

During the six years comprising the Second World War approximately 41% of the Mennonites called to serve the Canadian war effort did so by enlisting in the Armed Forces. Given their traditions of non-violence and refusal to serve militarily in their countries of habitation this was a major departure from their history of the previous four-hundred years. Having been divided in Russia seventy years earlier, the Canadian Mennonites had undergone very different experiences by the Second World War. Their differences were to cause divisions among the leaders that would lead to confusion among the young Mennonites being called to serve their government. Having begun to assimilate into the Canadian culture and without strong direction from their cultural and religious leaders, many of the young Mennonites responded positively to their government. With growing anti-Germanism in Canada and the desire of the Mennonites to be accepted as Canadians, nearly half of those called to serve shunned the traditional response of their cultural and religious heritage and enlisted in Armed Forces in the Second World War.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was in reading John Howard Yoder that I first began to appreciate the strong witness of the Mennonites, who in some ways have been “*die Stillen im lande,*” but who have also quietly served as a powerful witness to living the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

My thesis supervisor, Dr. Gord Heath, has made the process of classes, writing and editing, and all of the meetings in between, both relevant and enjoyable. I have similarly appreciated the company and fellowship of my fellow MacDiv historians, Mara Apostol and Jamie Robertson.

Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein, who I hope to actually meet someday. The Conrad Grebel College Archives, which was my refuge on a number of occasions.

My parents, and my sisters, Shawna and Stephanie, always support me, and I do not want to take that for granted. I love them a lot. Dad and Mom were great in listening, and giving me feedback and wisdom, as they do in all of the other areas of my life. My sister Shawna was my research assistant. She is a true historian and I appreciate her enthusiasm for this thesis.

My girlfriend, Taryn, has been wonderful and supportive, as always.

My grandparents, both Dirks and Andres, helped me in editing and in talking to their many friends, relatives and other various connections about my work, and making some important contacts for me as well. My Gramps, Art Andres, in particular, was my greatest ally in this research.

I also truly appreciate the witness of the many Mennonite men and women during the Second World War, both conscientious objectors and those who served in the Armed Forces, who made their decision thoughtfully, out of a willingness both to serve and to sacrifice. May those of us who would respond to such difficult times in the future similarly do so out of careful, intelligent and prayerful consideration.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AC2 - Aircraftman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class

CGCA - Conrad Grebel College Archives

CHPC - The Conference of Historic Peace Churches

CMBC - Canadian Mennonite Bible College

CMBS - Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies

CO - Conscientious Objector

MCC – Mennonite Central Committee

RCA - Royal Canadian Army

RCAF - Royal Canadian Air Force

RCMP - Royal Canadian Mounted Police

RCN - Royal Canadian Navy

## FOREWARD

I was at a meeting at a Mennonite Brethren congregation around the time I was beginning my research for this thesis when a church leader approached me and asked me what I was planning on writing about. After describing my thesis very generally, in phrases which I would soon learn to condense and mass produce, he told me that that would be a worthwhile topic. After all, he said, pacifism is a nice idea but there always comes a point at which you clearly have to stand up and fight.

When I look at my peers in my church, young Mennonites within draft-eligibility by the standards used in the Second World War, I believe that, faced with the same dilemma, the vast majority would not only enlist but would do so into combat units without a second thought. This is likely not true in every Canadian Mennonite congregation (and the differing attitudes towards non-resistance currently found between the MB and GC churches would make interesting research), but I suspect that I am not alone in my suspicions that the Canadian Mennonite witness to the peace position is not as strong in practice as it might seem to be in theory.

I hope that it does not come across that I am simply writing about Mennonites who fought in the Second World War. There are clearly elements of that, but to equate the figures with the combatants alone would be a mistake that would misrepresent the events. Let me say now that enlistment does not always equal combat. Some would argue that, as the Canadian Armed Forces stated during the war, regardless of your position in the army, whether medic, mechanic or machine-gunner, you were placing yourself in a position where you could be called on to fight. However, in reality, many of those who



enlisted and sought out non-combatant positions knew that they would likely never even be forced to pick up a gun.

My intention is to write about the departure from Mennonite tradition that is insinuated in enlistment in the military, whether in a combat role or not. That departure is one that continues to the present to the extent that it is apparent in some circles even without a large conflict to expose it. In my own community of Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON, I know of few Mennonites who would articulate a non-resistance position. On the other hand, I know numerous Mennonites who vocally express their support for combat (not merely military service) and would scoff at the suggestion that Jesus was implementing a practical example to follow in his own refusal to inaugurate or defend his Kingdom by force. It would be fascinating and, I believe, sobering if research were done into the current position of the Mennonites in Canada in regards to non-resistance, military service and combat.

This research has taught me that the line between those who follow the Jesus-focussed path of Menno Simons and the early Mennonites in regards to the peace position cannot be easily categorized. The line of adherence to the peace position is not cleanly drawn between conscientious objection and enlistment. With apologies to Solzhenitsyn, the line between adherence to, and ignorance of, the peace position is drawn down the middle of the conscience of every follower of Christ, Mennonites included. Not every CO truly cared to exemplify the non-violent ethic of Jesus. In the same way, the enlistees cannot be assumed to have been ignorant of peace position or rebellious against their cultural and religious tradition. Many made very intentional decisions based on their best understanding of the message of Christ, through the lens of their own view of their

Mennonite heritage. Their sacrifice, in some cases coupled with non-violence, was remarkable.

In the story of the Mennonites in the Second World War, I see elements of both the disintegration of Mennonitism in Canada, as well as signs that the spirit of the original radical reformers remains. Of course, it is easy to say that the departure from tradition of many of the Mennonites who chose to enlist indicates that the Mennonite *faith* tradition is sliding into the sea, even if the cultural elements cling to shores for the time being. It is true that there are many who no longer identify themselves with the Mennonite faith. Some of these men and women enlisted, nobly responding to their country while simultaneously making visible their lack of identification with the traditions of their forebears. That there is a departure occurring during the Second World War is, I believe, undeniable.

However, simultaneously, amidst the confusion and lamentable lack of unity, there are still elements that should not be ignored. There were brave ones who stood up to the disdain of many of their Canadian neighbours and simply acted according to what they understood to be the correct witness as the church, and despite the fact that there were those who, without conviction, were merely taking the opportunity to avoid danger, compromising the apparent integrity of the genuine conscience-driven objectors. Among these conscientious objectors there is the important task of affirming the mighty non-violent witness of Jesus which was carried to them through generations. Theirs is an encouraging example of a strong Mennonite faith tradition that was still visible during the war.

Less visibly but, I believe, just as crucially, a living faith tradition is also apparent among those who enlisted. This is seen in two ways. On the one hand, the enlistees exemplified another essential element of the non-violence stance of Jesus, which is sacrifice. As the early Anabaptists and Mennonites realized, the practice of non-violence is not the opportunity to sidestep danger. There needs to be the understanding that it must be coupled with sacrifice. Many of the Mennonites in the war had a strong sense of the necessity of sacrifice, that a theology of sacrifice is hollow without action. For some of these Mennonites, the best way to exemplify that sacrifice was through standing shoulder to shoulder with their countrymen and women in the face of apparent evil. Such theology translating into direct action *is* a traditional Mennonite response, even if its manifestation is not.

The second exemplification of Mennonitism among the enlistees is in those who continued to feel the conviction that non-violence was a crucial element to following Jesus but enlisted anyway. There were many who enlisted and made an effort to ensure that they would be able serve their country, but do so without partaking in violence. Some served in the medical corps, or as dispatch riders, or as mechanics, or in various other positions that did not violate their non-violent conscience. These Mennonites exemplified their faith tradition by realizing that there are principles that underlie the more apparent manifestations of traditional response; in this case, that the tradition of sacrifice and service and non-violence is necessary, but that avoidance of military service which is a traditional manifestation of these things, is not always necessary to reflect that. In coming to this realization they went against their faith traditions in order to respond to their faith.

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## INTRODUCTION

Late in the night of 10 June 1944 Halifax Mark III bomber D HX 316, "Dipsy Doodle" to the crew, was heading back home towards the English coast having completed a night attack on a target at Versailles-Matelots. The bomber, of the 424 ("Tiger") Squadron, Number 6 (RCAF) Group of Bomber Command, cruised six thousand feet above the Nazi-occupied French countryside while the crew scanned the night sky for any signs of activity. The cloud cover largely held at sixty-five hundred feet, allowing for relatively good visibility at their lower altitude.

Though the instruments betrayed nothing, mid-upper gunner Sergeant Peter Engbrecht, from his position above the midway point of the fuselage, made the first visual contact with German aircraft. A German Messerschmitt 110 fighter was seen to be making a level approach at the starboard side of the Halifax at a distance of four-hundred yards. Engbrecht saw the ME 110 loft a flare in their direction, illuminating the bomber in the night sky. The fighter closed in and opened fire on the larger aircraft immediately.

Having shot the flare towards the Halifax and continuing to proceed towards her, the fighter rapidly overtook it and unwittingly found himself suddenly silhouetted against its glowing, gradual descent. Upon spotting the fighter, Engbrecht had immediately ordered combat manoeuvres to the pilot over the intercom. As the now visible fighter closed in, guns tracing paths towards the bomber, the Halifax cut into an evasive corkscrew to the starboard side, towards the ME 110. A second fighter, an ME 109, appeared in the wake of the first, opening fire a moment later from the same range as his

compatriot. Simultaneous to his instructions to the pilot, Engbrecht opened fire on both aircraft, spraying four-hundred and fifty rounds at the fighters in a matter of seconds.<sup>1</sup>

As the first fighter reached a distance of two-hundred yards it cut into a dive, quarter down on the starboard side of the Halifax. The bomber continued to pull through the complete corkscrew, losing five-hundred feet of altitude in the process, as the ME 110 passed by underneath, giving the entire crew a view of the German craft as they rolled overhead. The second fighter followed the path of the first, as both were exposed to the mid-upper guns as Engbrecht in his turret rolled towards them. The rear gunner offered support with a quick burst of gunfire. As the first of the Messerschmitt dove out of control beneath the bomber it became apparent that his descent was no longer an evasive manoeuvre.

The second fighter roared past, glowing visibly from the engine before bursting into flame and disappearing into a patch of clouds. Moments later the clouds were illuminated with a flash. The flight engineer continued to scan the skies for further trouble as others in the crew watched the first German fighter continue to plummet five thousand feet to the ground where it exploded on impact. Their mission accomplished and the danger averted, the innocuously named “Dipsy Doodle” and her crew carried on towards their base in Yorkshire.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Combat Report Pro-Forma, 10-11 June 1944, 17A and 16A, Nanton Lancaster Society, Nanton, AB.

<sup>2</sup> Combat Report Pro-Forma, 10-11 June 1944, 17A and 16A, Nanton Lancaster Society, Nanton, AB; Peter Lorenz Neufeld, *Mennonites at War* (Deloraine, MB: DTS Publishing, 1996), 17. A detailed history of the Canadian bomber group of the Second World War is found in Spencer Dunmore & William Carter, *Reap the Whirlwind: The Untold Story of 6 Group, Canada's Bomber Force of World War II* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991).

From the 10-11 June 1944 skirmish Sergeant Peter Engbrecht would be credited with two fighters shot down. By the end of the war he would be officially credited with five and-a-half confirmed kills and two “probables,” although his personal count stood at nine. Engbrecht would be known as a Canadian war hero, awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal and decorated on the battlefield by King George. The only ace in the RCAF who was not a pilot, he would eventually be acknowledged with a Parliament Hill fly-past and parade.

Engbrecht’s story is notable among Canadian enlistees in the Second World War, not only because he distinguished himself from among the ranks but because of his background. Peter Engbrecht was a Mennonite, born of Mennonite parents and raised within the small, heavily Mennonite-populated town of Whitewater, MB. For over four-hundred years the Mennonite people had rejected the use of violence as contrary to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as they firmly adhered to the tenets of non-resistance. A wartime article in *The Toronto Star* highlighted the incongruity of Engbrecht’s background and military participation: “The paradoxical Peter Engbrecht is, all at once, a member of a religious sect which forbids participation in wars, of pure Germanic descent, and a member of the RCAF.”<sup>3</sup> The strong peace tradition of the Mennonite church seemingly made Engbrecht stand out as an anomaly in the Canadian Armed Forces. However, by the end of the war it would be apparent that the sight of Mennonites in uniform had become less incongruous than would have been expected by those familiar with their history and faith traditions.

During the Second World War a large number of Mennonites enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces. This was troubling to many who questioned the legitimacy of

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<sup>3</sup> Neufeld, *Mennonites at War*, 18.



such people *as* Mennonites. In the ensuing years the issue of the significant apparent departure from the foundational Mennonite tenets of faith was eventually shuffled aside, disguised by the visible moral victory of the alternative service offered by many other Mennonites during the war. However, the issue has continued to linger in the fading history of twentieth century conflict. The Mennonites in Canada during the Second World War were not united by their common confession of faith, but were divided along the lines of sacrifice, duty, theology and the practice of their traditional faith.

The traditional view of the Mennonites towards war and violence has been articulated with lucidity by the late Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder.<sup>4</sup> He described a form of pacifism which he called “the pacifism of the messianic community” which outlines his own understanding of the nature of Christ-centred non-violence itself. Something of a call to renewed faithfulness in their non-violent tradition, Yoder’s portrayal of this form of pacifism also conveys an image of the Mennonite community as it has attempted to be through the centuries. Affirming a complete dependence on the life, death and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, and a confession of his authority as “Messiah,” or “deliverer,” Yoder explained that a new moral option becomes available in a violent world, which for lack of a better term may be referred to as “pacifism.”<sup>5</sup> The form of pacifism that speaks to the Mennonite tradition is that of the messianic community, which is defined by its reliance on an ethical system that is only made available by the Messiah, Jesus, and is only viable through a community sharing in the same confession of faith:

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<sup>4</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972); *Nevertheless: Varieties of Religious Pacifism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1992); *The Christian Witness to the State* (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1992); *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Though the terms carry nuanced connotations, “pacifism,” “non-resistance” and “non-violence” will be used interchangeably within this thesis.

When we speak of the pacifism of the messianic community, we move the focus of ethical concern from the individual to the human community experiencing in its shared life a foretaste of God's kingdom. Persons may severally and separately ask themselves about right and wrong in their concern for their own integrity. That is fine as far as it goes. The messianic community's experience, however, is different in that it is not a life alone for heroic personalities. Instead, it is a life for a society. It is communal in that it is lived by a covenanting group of men and women.<sup>6</sup>

This notion of an active faith confession lived out not on an individual basis but in community was noticeable among the Mennonites in Canada leading up to the Second World War. By that point, this way of life had been common to this people group for 400 years. The Mennonite tradition of communal pacifism that Yoder articulated in the mid-twentieth century began with the Anabaptist movement during the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century.

In the midst of the religious turmoil in central Europe, in 1525 a group of radicals emerged in Zurich. Ulrich Zwingli, serving as priest at Zurich's Grossmünster, was also to serve as a catalyst for change in the Swiss city as the Reformation swept across the continent. Resolving to found his teachings on the gospel, he helped to shift the religious authority in Zurich from the papacy back to the scriptures. Young humanists from the area, weaned on the teachings of Erasmus of Rotterdam, were drawn to Zwingli and grew under his tutelage. However a few of the young followers soon began to feel that Zwingli's reforms, though referring back to scripture, fell short of a fully biblical foundation for the church, held back by connections to the state.

Under the cover of darkness on 21 January 1525 the "Anabaptist" movement, as it would come to be known from their practise of baptising believers, was born. On that night former disciples of Zwingli, led by Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz and George

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<sup>6</sup> Yoder, *Nevertheless*, 135.

Blaurock, baptized each other and committed themselves to follow the teachings of Jesus and live in ways different from the world around them. This was a major break from the church by this small group. The reformers, from Martin Luther to Zwingli, had been calling for *reform* of the Catholic church; the Anabaptists were calling for the *end* of the current church structure and a return to the model of the church of the New Testament.<sup>7</sup> The baptism of adult believers was symbolic of this major separation and was to be a key mark of these radicals.

Another element crucial to their teachings, and just as radical as that of adult baptism, was that of non-violence. In February of 1527 in Schleithem the Anabaptist leaders gathered together and formally agreed on the basic tenets of their understanding of the teachings found within the New Testament, laying out the *Schleithem Confession of Faith*. In seven articles they described their common confession. The sixth and seventh articles dealt with the issue of their relation, as Christians, to the state. The sixth article, longer than the preceding five, affirmed that those who followed the way of Jesus could not use violence to achieve any purpose. Instead, they must be willing to endure persecution, suffering and death. This flew in the face of the understanding of Christendom and the use of force and authority to increase the church that had been a mark of the church since the fourth century and was to largely continue with the Reformation.<sup>8</sup> Their willingness to endure suffering as Jesus had done was no abstraction. Felix Manz was the first Anabaptist martyr, executed by “the third baptism,” drowning, after re-baptism was declared unlawful. Soon after the Schleithem meeting, a month after Manz’s death, thirteen Anabaptists were arrested, questioned and tortured. Michael

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<sup>7</sup> W. R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Nashville: Broadman, 1963), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe’s House Divided, 1490-1700* (London: Penguin, 2004), 169.

Sattler, believed to have drafted the *Schleitheim Confession of Faith*, was tortured horrifically before being executed.<sup>9</sup>

The fledgling Anabaptists found themselves assailed from all sides as their teachings were condemned by both the Roman Catholic church and the main stream of the emerging Protestant church as well. The church in Rome and the Reformers were in agreement that the Anabaptists were heretics as they also promoted changing the accepted nature of the sacrament of baptism. The Protestant Reformers further convicted them for their belief that the church needed to be removed from connections to the state. In Zurich they had found that such a view of power separate from the world was not shared by Zwingli, let alone by the more severe Reformers such as Philip Melancthon and Luther, who at times promoted the destruction of the Anabaptists because they were politically subversive.<sup>10</sup>

Effectively leaving themselves open to persecution by teaching that they were not to align themselves with political powers, the Anabaptists became close-knit groups in the regions in which they cropped up. As Yoder's modern interpretation of their position states, theirs was a "life for a society," a messianic community. It was in their eagerness to commune closely, searching the scriptures together and commonly upholding each other in faith that they found themselves able to both live and die by their steadfast understanding of Christ's teachings in the New Testament. Though in their passionate, biblically-informed understanding they refused to defend themselves with the use of

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<sup>9</sup> Estep, *Anabaptist*, 37.

<sup>10</sup> C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites*, 5th ed., ed. Cornelius Krahn (Newton, KA: Mennonite Publication Office, 1957), 44-45.

force or to align themselves with governmental authorities, the Anabaptists continued to grow, upheld in their faith by their close sense of community.<sup>11</sup>

While the Anabaptist movement continued to grow in the first decade after the first baptisms of Grebel, Blaurock and the others, it was somewhat scattered, with different teachings arising throughout Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands. In 1536 a Roman Catholic priest named Menno Simons, after wrestling with the incongruities between Catholic doctrine and the Scriptures, publicly announced his new commitment to the teachings of Jesus and then joined with a group of peaceful Anabaptists with whom he found himself in agreement. Over the ensuing years Simons would help to clearly lay out the teachings of Jesus as he understood them. His teachings were simple and practical interpretations of the New Testament, which yet captured the radical nature of a life reflecting that of Jesus. Menno and his followers, who eventually became known as “Mennonites,” found themselves in opposition to the state churches in many of their practices and much of their doctrine. They emphasized true discipleship, lives of loving service by those who proclaimed Jesus as Lord. This was to be exemplified by both sacrifice and non-resistance, and believers were to uphold each other in their commitment to lives that were separate from the world around them. The rejection of the use of violence and allegiance with the state were major components of this separation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> That the Anabaptists refused to use violence and to take part in any form of governance is most commonly countered with reference to the tragedy at Münster in 1535. See MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 204-7. Münster is frequently cited, as it was during the sixteenth century, as an example of the fact that the Anabaptists were not truly pacifists and were actually a violent and bizarre sect. However, given that the incident was spurred by the teachings of a group who began to change their view of the tenets of Anabaptism by introducing new practices and by accepting the use of violence, the story of Münster is, arguably, indicative of a radical spin-off sect than of the larger Anabaptist movement.

<sup>12</sup> Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *An Introduction to Mennonite History: A Popular History of the Anabaptists and the Mennonites* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1967), 83.

The Anabaptist willingness to suffer rather than partake in violence was upheld and celebrated by the Mennonites through the centuries. Stories of Anabaptist martyrs were recounted by Mennonites as examples of the suffering which has taken place as people have been willing to accept the consequences of living as disciples of Jesus. The accounts of the Anabaptist (and later specifically Mennonite) martyrs willing to endure suffering at the hands of enemies rather than take up the sword are legion.<sup>13</sup>

Continuously persecuted, the Mennonites were forced to flee consistently throughout their history. Menno Simons himself moved from place to place throughout his life, eluding his pursuers while writing and teaching. The Mennonite groups which sprang up were soon forced to do the same. The Swiss Mennonites were persecuted in waves from 1671-1711, causing many to run. At other times, groups emigrated when they were pressured to join the military, which they refused to do. Those who fled often ended up in southern Germany and Prussia where they were welcomed because of their expertise in agriculture. Though many Mennonites remained in the Netherlands, some fled during the early persecutions and ended up in Schlesweig-Holstein, Germany. Others fled in the mid-sixteenth century during the Spanish occupation, largely ending up in East Friesland, Germany.<sup>14</sup>

Mennonite settlement in Poland was encouraged by King Wladislaw IV in 1642.

Though they prospered they were eventually persecuted in Poland as well, especially in

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<sup>13</sup> The story of Dirk Willems is frequently noted. Willems was captured and imprisoned as an Anabaptist in the winter of 1569. Managing to escape he was pursued as he fled across a thinly frozen river. Hearing one of his hunters break through the ice behind him and cry for help Willems turned around and rescued the man. Promptly arrested by the same, Willems was later burned at the stake. Such Anabaptist martyrs were held in high esteem by the Mennonites who saw their willingness to accept suffering at the hands of their enemies and display love rather than partake in violence as encouragement for their own continued faith in Jesus and belief in the necessity of the rejection the sword, Thieleman J. Van Bracht, *Martyrs Mirror: The Story of Seventeen Centuries of Christian Martyrdom, From the Time of Christ to A.D. 1660* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1938), 741-42.

<sup>14</sup> Dyck, ed. *Introduction*, 116-25.

Danzig, of which they were only relieved as Prussia gained occupation of Poland in 1772. Eventually, legislation demanding military service caused the Mennonites to leave once again. By the end of the eighteenth century, large numbers of Mennonites from Germany and Switzerland, some of whom had originally come from the Netherlands, found themselves in Russia, settled in a largely untouched, undesirable area, but free from persecution and free to practice their pacifism without fear of being forced into military service. Their close communities had managed to survive almost three centuries of continuous persecution and flight. By remaining in close fellowship and community with each other they had preserved their biblically-based faith and their doctrines of lives separate from those of the world around them. Their close communion with each other also led to the maintenance of a common culture. Their German background was the cultural stream which was maintained among the Mennonites and they would largely continue to speak German dialects among themselves in the ensuing centuries, regardless of the culture around them. Invited by Empress Catherine II to resettle in Russia, where they would found the Molotschna and Chortitza colonies, the Mennonites flourished, gaining the chance as a community to uphold further the principles of Christ-centred love and non-violence upon which their Anabaptist forefathers, Menno Simons and the many Anabaptist martyrs had founded their faith tradition.

During their time in Russia, though they prospered economically, the Mennonites found themselves becoming divided as they once again became confronted with the question of government wartime service. Their community split, with about a third of their number emigrating and ending up in North and South America. The remaining two-thirds would follow their brethren half a century later, but their different experiences in

the intermediary decades would shape them in ways that would cause their time in Canada during the Second World War to be tumultuous and divisive.

The history of the strands of Mennonites who would eventually settle in Canada at various periods in history has been well-documented. In contextualizing the Canadian Mennonites within their larger history, William Estep's *The Anabaptist Story*<sup>15</sup> is a comprehensive basis for studying the Mennonites, as is C. Henry Smith's *The Story of the Mennonites*.<sup>16</sup> Both take the confusion of the Reformation period and work out the Anabaptist, and later Mennonite, streams that quietly emerge in the ensuing centuries. This is essential in setting the stage for the story of the Canadian Mennonites in the twentieth century.

The period of Mennonite settlement in Russia has been well-documented from a variety of angles. Overviewed in the larger histories, such as Smith's work, Heinrich Goerz takes a more comprehensive look at this period in *The Molotschna Settlement*.<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Klippenstein's Ph.D. dissertation, "Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia a Case Study in Church-State Relations: 1789-1936,"<sup>18</sup> further illustrates the later stages of the Russian years, describing the changing nature of Mennonite relations with government. The experiences of the Mennonites in Russia is the background to the later conflicts between the *Kanadier* and *Russlaender* described in this thesis, which are incomprehensible without the earlier work of Goerz and Klippenstein in this area.

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<sup>15</sup> Estep, *Anabaptist*.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *Story*.

<sup>17</sup> Heinrich Goerz, *The Molotschna Settlement*, trans. by Al Reimer and John B. Toews (Winnipeg: CMBC, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia a Case Study in Church-State Relations: 1789-1936" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1984).



Bridging the gap between the Russian and Canadian experiences of the Mennonites are Frank H. Epp's *Mennonites Exodus*<sup>19</sup> and John B. Toews' more recent *Lost Fatherland*.<sup>20</sup> Both books document the First World War situation in Russia and the subsequent flight from the settlements there. While Toews goes into great detail, Epp covers a larger span of time as well as covering more of the areas of resettlement. Epp has also set the most significant standard for specifically Canadian Mennonite historical work with *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People*.<sup>21</sup> He followed this with *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival*.<sup>22</sup> Having passed away while compiling research for his third and final book in this series, T. D. Regehr took up the challenge with *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed*.<sup>23</sup> The three books serve as a detailed framework for the study of Canadian Mennonite history. These works are critical for this thesis, as there are different Mennonite groups that settled in different parts of the world, undergoing very different experiences. The specific history of those who ended up in Canada constitutes the basis for their reaction to the Second World War, which is detailed by Epp, Toews and Regehr.

Regarding the Mennonites during the Second World War, Guy F. Hershberger's *The Mennonite Church in the Second World War*<sup>24</sup> is a comprehensive look at the American Mennonites during the war. Hershberger was an important figure in the

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<sup>19</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen, 1962).

<sup>20</sup> J. B. Toews, *Lost Fatherland: The Story of the Mennonite Emigration from Soviet Russia, 1921-1927*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>22</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Guy Franklin Hershberger, *The Mennonite Church in the Second World War* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1951).

American Mennonite leadership during that time. In regards to the Canadian Mennonites there are a number of small publications. Works such as *That There Be Peace*<sup>25</sup> by Lawrence Klippenstein serve to highlight the work of the men in the alternative service camps during the war. While self-published church histories and the histories of heavily Mennonite-populated towns describe the war years in an intimate manner, John A. Toews' *Alternative Service in Canada During World War II*<sup>26</sup> is the most comprehensive of the various attempts to document the alternative service work. Such publications serve to provide important background to the atmosphere of the Mennonite church in North America during the war. While this thesis highlights the enlistees in Canada during this time, the importance of acknowledging these enlistees comes into focus through the dearth of information about them in most of this literature.

Two crucial works concerning the Canadian Mennonites during the war are David Warren Fransen's *Canadian Mennonites and Conscientious Objection in World War II*,<sup>27</sup> and Kenneth Wayne Reddig's *Manitoba Mennonites and the Winnipeg Mobilization Board in World War II*,<sup>28</sup> both MA theses. The former is descriptive of the entire movement towards conscientious objection by the Mennonites, including identifying some of the struggles that played into the Armed Forces enlistments. The latter takes a close look at the recruitment tactics of one of the mobilization boards during the war, highlighting an area that was to play into some of the Mennonite enlistments. Both of these works are well-researched theses, taking the time to broadly examine the events

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<sup>25</sup> Lawrence Klippenstein ed., *That There Be Peace: Mennonites in Canada and World War II* (Winnipeg: The Manitoba CO Reunion Committee, 1979).

<sup>26</sup> J.A. Toews, *Alternative Service in Canada During World War II* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, Ltd., 1959).

<sup>27</sup> David Warren Fransen, "Canadian Mennonites and Conscientious Objection in World War II" (M.A. thesis, University of Waterloo, 1977).

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Wayne Reddig, "Manitoba Mennonites and the Winnipeg Mobilization Board in World War II" (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1989).

surrounding their specific topics. They both touch on elements which are critical to the focus of this thesis, which have now been further examined and expanded.

Brian Unger's 1990 MA thesis, *A Struggle With Conscience: Canadian Mennonites and Alternative Service During World War II*,<sup>29</sup> must also be acknowledged. Unger takes a very different approach to his account of the Canadian Mennonites from that taken in this thesis. His perception is that the Mennonites were strengthened and unified through their experiences in the Second World War. While there were certainly segments of the Mennonite church in Canada who experienced this, this thesis argues that the Mennonites were largely divided and left in confusion by the end of the war. Part of the discrepancy lies in Unger's focus on the Mennonites in Ontario, as this thesis examines the Mennonites nationally. While there were segments of the Mennonite community in Canada which were strengthened by their wartime experiences, by and large the Mennonites were divided during this time.

The only significant document concerning the Canadian Mennonite Second World War enlistees is an article in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* by T. D. Regehr entitled "Lost Sons: The Canadian Mennonite Soldiers of World War II."<sup>30</sup> This article highlights the large number of enlistees and notes their plight among the Mennonite churches upon their return. A portion of this appears in his addition to the *Mennonites in Canada* series. Peter Lorenz Neufeld's posthumously published *Mennonites at War*<sup>31</sup> attempts to emphasize the importance of the Mennonite enlistees in the Second World

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<sup>29</sup> Brian Unger, "A Struggle With Conscience: Canadian Mennonites and Alternative Service During World War II" (M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1990).

<sup>30</sup> T. D. Regehr, "Lost Sons: The Canadian Mennonite Soldiers of World War II," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66, 4 (1992): 461-80.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Lorenz Neufeld, *Mennonites at War, A Double-Edged Sword: Canadian Mennonites in World War II* (Deloraine, MB: DTS Publishing, 1997).

War. More a personal compilation than historical work, Neufeld gathers the names of Mennonite veterans and tries to highlight the need to take a greater look into their largely untold story. Regehr's article and Neufeld's book served to give some early structure to this thesis, and later served to affirm some of the elements which have been developed to a greater extent in this work.

This thesis will take on the task of examining the foundations of the story of the Mennonites who enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces in the Second World War. It will display that the numbers of the enlistees may be more accurately determined than they have previously been and will show how experience of the later Russian immigrants coupled with the effects of Canadianization on their young people brought the Mennonites to a place of significant war participation as had never been seen before.

There have been a variety of sources which have been drawn upon in order to provide an accurate picture of the events surrounding the war. The letters between the various Mennonite church leaders play a crucial role as sources of information about the attitudes of the leaders before and during the war; their correspondences with Canadian government officials and with some of the enlistees themselves; the minutes from the meetings of the Mennonite leaders; newspaper articles from the war period, particularly from the smaller Mennonite towns; personal correspondences from the enlistees, whether significantly written to their leaders or simply to their families; combat reports from specific battles; resolutions passed by the Mennonite leaders during their meetings; finally, a series of interviews with Second World War Mennonite veterans, as well as their family members, conducted by the author.

While the interviews presented a fascinating and important perspective on the issues at hand, there are a few issues that must be acknowledged. First, as can be seen in the bibliography, there were only six interviews to go along with a few unofficial conversations. Furthermore, though some of the interviewees were originally from Manitoba, these interviews were only held with people currently located in southern Ontario. Therefore, while the interviews were not used as a basis, but as a supplement to the other primary source information, it must be acknowledged that there was not a wide sampling in the information garnered from these interviews.

The first chapter of this thesis will demonstrate the nature of the problem, which has largely been ignored by Mennonites since the war; that is, that a significant number of their people enlisted in the war. It will be shown that the figures that have been accepted over the past number of years are not entirely accurate, while outlining a more accurate method for determining the numbers and percentages. The Mennonite reluctance to acknowledge this history will be addressed, describing the shame that is placed on military service in the name of Mennonite tradition. It will be noted that there are elements of greater acceptance of violence among the younger Mennonites, but that the enlistment figures do not directly reflect this, given the variety of ways in which men and women enlisted for service.

The second chapter will show that bickering between the Russian-born and Canadian-born leaders, who had had radically different experiences during the previous World War, caused them to focus on their arguments while neglecting to provide adequate instruction for their young people. The Mennonite leaders who had been a part of the emigration from Russia in the 1870s, the *Kanadier* as they were known, and those

leaders who had emigrated after the First World War, the *Russlaender*, found that their half-century apart had affected them in rather different ways. While the *Kanadier* remained staunchly opposed to government service that had any connections to the military, accepting only civilian-led forestry work, the *Russlaender* had taken part in military-related service in the previous decades. Their experiences in doing so had been largely positive, and they saw their chance to work in the medical corps as an opportunity to heal the wounded as well as live sacrificially in the line of fire. Their disagreement on the matter of the forms of alternative service was to prove costly for the Mennonite peace witness in the Second World War. While arguing over the way in which they should approach the Canadian government, the leaders largely neglected their young people who they had resolved to instruct in the difficult ways of non-resistance. Their inattentiveness also saw them neglecting to address the issues of alternative service before the Canadian government until the war was already underway. It will be shown that these elements of neglect greatly contributed to the large numbers of Mennonite enlistees.

The third chapter will demonstrate that the Mennonites were eager to demonstrate their willingness to serve Canada. This was especially true of the young Mennonites, who had assimilated into Canadian culture to a far greater degree than was realized by their elders. Those of *Kanadier* background had grown up in Canada, and though part of a more conservative element of Mennonitism they were beginning to feel the pressures of assimilation which was so strong for immigrant people groups across the country. The *Russlaender* youth, though having been born in Russia before growing up in Canada, or having been simply the first generation born in Canada, were from a more liberal stream of Mennonites and found themselves highly susceptible to assimilation almost

immediately. Identifying strongly with their Canadian citizenship, by the Second World War many of these young Mennonites were troubled by the anti-German sentiment that was prevalent in Canada. With their German background, and many of their elders openly speaking highly of the clean, strong Germany that the charismatic leader, Hitler, was creating, some of the young Mennonites found themselves defensively leaning towards their Canadian citizenship rather than their Mennonite heritage. Convincingly pressured to enlist in the Canadian Armed Forces by their government, with minimal input to the contrary from their religious and cultural leaders many eligible Mennonites began to enlist.

As the war dawned in Canada and the question of service (and possibly conscription) arose, the Mennonite leadership rose to address the issue amongst themselves. There was an understanding that action needed to be taken by the unified leadership of the various Mennonite churches across the country. An important meeting was held in Winkler, MB, on 15 May 1939, at which nine out of the ten Mennonite denominations in Canada were represented. Through their sessions the leaders made four resolutions: To stand firmly on the biblical principle of non-resistance as they had received from their forefathers, to repent of their past neglect of their principles of faith, to teach the doctrines of non-resistance to the younger generations of Mennonites, and to remain loyal to Canada and exemplify their fealty through other forms of service.<sup>32</sup>

Though they were to make such unified resolutions immediately prior to the war, the Mennonite leaders were soon to find that they had waited too long. Their interactions with the Canadian government were to prove difficult, and more importantly their unified

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<sup>32</sup> David P. Reimer, *Experiences of the Mennonites in Canada During the Second World War 1939-1945* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen, 1946), 51.

front was soon to largely disintegrate. By the end of the war approximately 41% of the young Mennonite men and women who served Canada did so by enlisting in the Armed Forces, ignoring their long and well-established heritage of rejection of the state and rejection of connections to violence.

Though Mennonites have been hesitant to acknowledge it, in the Second World War almost half of those who were obligated to serve their country chose to do so in a way which ran contrary to their faith background. The lack of desire to acknowledge this segment of history is perhaps understandable. Though the surprising statistic of Mennonite enlistments in the war does not reflect a complete acceptance of violence, it does reflect a major and surprising departure from the traditions held firmly by Anabaptists since the sixteenth century. This thesis will demonstrate that there were indeed many Canadian Mennonite enlistments in the Second World War, while proving that the experiences of the Mennonites in Russia prior to their resettlement in Canada, combined with the pressures of Canadian assimilation, wrought an atmosphere in which many felt drawn towards serving in a capacity inconsistent with the traditions of their people.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE MENNONITES GO TO WAR

*I'm sure my experiences alone could fill a volume, some of them I shall never forget. First and foremost [my active overseas service] taught me not to be ashamed of my Mennonite faith, this is important to me even today.<sup>1</sup>*

Dick P. Sawatsky, Second World War veteran

*One would think that any person participating in war and violence is not a true Mennonite...No true Mennonite has ever condoned war.<sup>2</sup>*

Letter by a Mennonite in *Canadian Mennonite Magazine*

In Haslemere, Surrey, three hundred kilometres south of Peter Engbrecht's station in East Riding of Yorkshire, a different form of war action was being experienced by another group of Canadian Armed Forces personnel. The servicemen and women of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Canadian General Hospital had arrived in England on 1 June 1944. By 8 June, two days after the D-Day landings at Normandy, they had taken over from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hospital, the nearest hospital to the Canadian invasion of Juno Beach.

Bill Friesen, a Lance Corporal with the Canadian Army Medical Corps and a Mennonite, arrived at the new hospital site at Haslemere on 8 June and was immediately taken into the operating theatre, where he was ordered to stand in the corner of the room. Over the ensuing afternoon Friesen witnessed the army surgeons operating on men inflicted with various war injuries. After a number of hours of observing surgery on the "horrible shattered bodies of the war victims" he was asked whether or not he felt queasy or light headed. Responding that he felt fine even after having experienced the "sight, sound, heat and smell" of the operating theatre, Friesen, who had been clear upon

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<sup>1</sup> Dick P. Sawatsky, letter to Frank H. Epp, 14 January 1980, Conrad Grebel College Archives (CGCA), Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 4.

<sup>2</sup> Henry J. Funk, Letter in *Canadian Mennonite*, 21 December 1998, 7.

enlisting about his refusal to bear arms, was told that he would be an operating room assistant for the duration of the war.<sup>3</sup>

Not discharged until 17 July 1946, Friesen experienced two years of service in the Canadian Army Medical Corps, where he witnessed a very different side to the war than his fellow enlistees who had taken part in combat. Remaining stationed in England, helping to care for the scores of wounded soldiers arriving daily, Friesen was exposed to both the horrors of war in the broken bodies of the men who arrived at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Hospital (including a few German soldiers) and the joy of the recovery of many of the men.<sup>4</sup> Friesen walked away from his war experiences proclaiming that, if once again given the chance to enlist, "I'd go again to do the same thing."<sup>5</sup>

Lance Corporal Bill Friesen would be given the chance for further promotion during the war, although he ultimately chose to remain in his position. He would look back on his time of service fondly, having had some remarkable experiences at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Canadian General Hospital and contributed to the Canadian war effort.

The experiences of Sergeant Engbrecht and Lance Corporal Friesen were radically different during their mutual service of Canada in the European theatre of war. The two Mennonites had different perspectives on their service and on the use of violence. When called by his government, though refusing to take part in violence, Friesen recognized the importance in serving in a useful manner, enlisting in order to serve physical needs. Engbrecht sought out service before being summoned, eager to use force for the protection of the country that had provided safety and security for his

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Friesen, Pamphlet, Personal Collection, "Restricted Enlistment Dec 2/1943: Canadian Army Medical Corp."

<sup>4</sup> Bill Friesen, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 15 October 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Friesen, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 15 October 2009.

family. Despite their perspectives, which are different and distinctive, the two Mennonites are indistinguishable in their convictions and even in the form of their service in the official service records of the Canadian Armed Forces. The two exemplify the nuances of Mennonite military service in the Second World War.

### **Mennonite Enlistment in the Canadian Armed Forces**

The question of Canadian Mennonite enlistment in the Second World War has long been of interest to Mennonite journalists and historians. As early as 1942 it was becoming clear to some that there were an inordinate number of Mennonites who were enlisting in the Royal Canadian Army (RCA).<sup>6</sup> I. G. Neufeld, a historian of Mennonite faith and background, began to notice this trend in the middle of the war and made attempts to track it. Of particular interest to Neufeld was the Battle of Hong Kong which had been fought in December of 1941; there were reports of Mennonite combatants in the Canadian infantry battalions who had arrived in Hong Kong to aid the British troops.

Of the approximately 1,900 Canadian soldiers in Hong Kong, comprised mostly of regiments from Manitoba, 22 were Mennonite, all of whom were either killed or captured by the Japanese.<sup>7</sup> This constitutes a total of approximately 1.16% of the Canadian soldiers who were in Hong Kong at this time. According to census figures in 1941 the population of Canada was 11,507,000, of which 111,554 were Mennonite.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The figures used in this paper generally refer to men, as men were the targets of the draft and were the vast majority of those both being recruited and enlisted. However the research done by Helen Epp and Marlene Epp on the Canadian Armed Forces records suggests that there were 55 Mennonite women who enlisted as well. CGCA, Epp Collection. The figures presented throughout this thesis concerning the total numbers of Mennonite military enlistees include this group of women.

<sup>7</sup> Mennonites were determined simply through recognition of culturally Mennonite surnames. “[G]oing over the list I found 22 names which were definitely Mennonite or of that origin,” Abe Friesen, letter to I. G. Neufeld, 25 March 1942, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII 1940 War.

<sup>8</sup> Regehr, *Canada*, 431. Other reports give even lower figures for the total Mennonite population. In 1942 I. G. Neufeld held the number to be closer to 80,000 (I. G. Neufeld, “Mennonites and the War,” CGCA, Epp

These numbers describe the Mennonites as comprising 0.97% of Canada's total population. One of Neufeld's contacts noted:

This, considering the total at Hong Kong is quite a large percentage in fact: considering the population of Canada as a whole speaks well [sic] for the effort our young men are making. It is only the talk about Mennonites not going to war, that's causing whatever hard feeling there may be and not the lack of Mennonite recruits for regardless of what others may say our boys have joined up in as good a proportion as any other group.<sup>9</sup>

Such figures, though garnered from a single battle, raised the interesting possibility that Mennonites were taking part in the Canadian war effort in the Armed Forces in proportionately large numbers. The figures from the Battle of Hong Kong showed Canadian Mennonites as representing their people group in the Armed Forces, which obviously only included draft-eligible people, on a greater scale than they were represented within Canada as a whole. Such numbers were clearly disproportionate to the Mennonite war effort in its entirety, as it was well known that many of the men who had been drafted were currently serving at conscientious objector (CO) camps, having refused to serve in the Armed Forces and been granted CO status. The question was whether these figures were anomalous or indicative of a significant representation of Mennonites in the Armed Forces.

Neufeld began to search on a wider scale, but his efforts to procure numbers of the men enlisting in Canada were turned back. W. A. Tucker, an M.P. from Rosthern, SK, stated that it would be "impossible" to track down the numbers of those enlisted in the West, with which Neufeld had hoped to begin. He suggested that the difficulty lay in the fact that those who had enlisted would often write their religious affiliation as "United

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Collection, WWII 1940 War, I. G. Neufeld Papers, 4), and the Mennonite Yearbook showed that only 50,000 were actually members of Canadian Mennonite congregations. Regehr, "Lost Sons," 464.

<sup>9</sup> Abe Friesen, letter to I. G. Neufeld, 25 March 1942, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII 1940 War.

Church, Anglican or something else” in order to hide their apparent departure from the Mennonite faith.<sup>10</sup> The closest that Neufeld was able to come was the rough estimate, likely provided by Mennonite leader B. B. Janz, of 1,000 active service enlistments out of western Canada by the middle of the war. An M.P. from Fraser Valley, BC, George A. Cruickshank, concurred with Janz’s suggestion that there was a significant group of enlisted Mennonite men from western Canada, noting the mass enlistments in some of the heavily Mennonite populated towns in his province. He further mentioned that he personally knew a number of Mennonite families with two or three sons serving overseas.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, more and more Mennonite names would turn up in relation to military service throughout the war. On 11 April 1945, *The Morden Times* newspaper of Morden, MB, contained an article describing the activities of five brothers serving Canada in uniform.<sup>12</sup> Although the five Hoepfner brothers were not mentioned as Mennonites in the small article, their name and the fact that they were stated as being from the heavily Mennonite-populated Morden district was, to some, a giveaway as to the nature of their heritage.

In the eyes of the Canadian public at large, the Mennonites were refusing to do their part for their country; their loyalty to Canada was often called into question. They found themselves viewed with suspicion by their countrymen, a people group who largely kept to themselves, spoke German, and refused to participate in the war effort.

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<sup>10</sup> W. A. Tucker, letter to I. G. Neufeld, 19 March 1942, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII 1940 War, I. G. Neufeld Papers. This is presumably only for air force enlistments.

<sup>11</sup> George A. Cruickshank, letter to I.G. Neufeld, 5 April 1943, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII 1940 War, I. G. Neufeld Papers. Refer to Chapter Three – Canadian Mennonite Patriotism.

<sup>12</sup> “Peter Hoepfner, One of Five Brothers in Uniform, Home From the Sea,” *The Morden Times*, 11 April 1945, 1.

However, occasionally it was noted, as Neufeld was beginning to suspect, that the Mennonites were not entirely united in adherence to the path of their forefathers. On 17 September 1943, *The Globe and Mail* proclaimed the dual headlines, “Mennonite Youth Break With Pacifism of Fathers to Fight for Canada,” and “Younger Generation Discards Yoke of Pacifism as Old Beliefs Fade Out.”<sup>13</sup> The article boldly proclaimed that the non-resistant ways of the Mennonite people in Canada were coming to a rapid end, as the young Mennonites acknowledged the war and did their duty as Canadians, taking up arms despite the confused protests of their parents.

The article did not attempt to simply show that there were Mennonites who were willing to fight. Rather, it portrayed the non-resistance of the Mennonites as a whole as a thing of the past, with a new age of the patriotic bearing of arms being ushered in by the new generation:

The Mennonite people, as a whole, had sought for years to outlaw war. Now their young people will tell you that that is a very fine thought, “but we have to fight sometimes to be able to do it.” That’s when this new generation gets around to pointing to their record to show you that they are willing to fight; that they are entitled to be called Canadians, just like your neighbors; and the old-style beliefs of their parents are something that are slowly fading from the picture.<sup>14</sup>

While mostly focussing on the town of Herbert, SK, and in particular a Mennonite family in which five out of nine sons were fighting overseas, the article was emblematic of the fact that the shift in Mennonite wartime participation was becoming noticeable. The article pointed to the trend of military service by the Mennonites in Herbert as

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<sup>13</sup> “Mennonite Youth Break With Pacifism of Fathers to Fight for Canada, Younger Generation Discards Yoke of Pacifism as Old Beliefs Fade Out,” *Globe and Mail*, 17 September 1943, 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

representative of the growing pattern in the Canadian Mennonite community as a whole.<sup>15</sup>

It was not simply the more inquisitive Mennonites or select segments of the public that were taking notice. The Canadian government, who with the National Resources Mobilization Act of 1940 began to slowly implement a plan which would call forth larger numbers of their men for military service, began to pay closer attention to the state of their Mennonite draftees. Although the Mennonite leaders were attempting to outline their non-resistant intentions to the government, it was the actions of the young men on which the government was focussed. The mobilization boards across the country recruited men and paid close attention to the attitudes and patterns being displayed.<sup>16</sup>

While officially and publicly as staunch in their adherence to non-resistance as ever, their actual response to the mobilization efforts of the government described a different reality. The mobilization boards hoped to drive the wedge of disunity deeper between the official position of the leaders and the practical actions of the young, draft-eligible men, who were already showing a propensity towards departure from their traditional stance.

In Manitoba, the mobilization board headed up by Judge J. E. Adamson was particularly energetic in its recruiting efforts. Adamson carefully observed the concessions that many Mennonites were making, and he attempted to exploit them: "I am not overlooking the fact that a considerable number of young Mennonites have enlisted," he stated significantly in a speech in Steinbach before a group of Mennonite draftees, many of whom were about to apply for CO status.<sup>17</sup> The position of the Mennonites was

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Wayne Reddig's 1989 M.A. thesis for the University of Manitoba outlines the relationship between the mobilization boards and the Canadian Mennonites during the war.

<sup>17</sup> Reddig, "Manitoba," 101.

troubling to the boards, but the seeming willingness of the young men to enlist regardless was a point on which they wished to focus. For the government recruitment efforts there was simply the need to maintain a rift between the official non-resistance position propagated by the leaders and the actual wartime actions of the young people. Trying to sway their decision in advance of pleading their cases before the Manitoba board, Adamson stated to the Steinbach community:

I am told that many more [young Mennonites] would go if your leaders would permit them. That is no doubt true, because your Mennonite boys are not slackers and not cowards... To you Bishops, preachers, elders and fathers, I say, do not attempt to influence these young men. Leave them free. Remember it is their conscience and not yours. If you do influence them, you will do them a great injury and will put a black mark upon your own church. And to the young men, I say you need not be nervous here today. Only speak the truth. Do not say anything that you do not really, sincerely believe. Remember that it is your conscience. Remember that it is your country.<sup>18</sup>

The government had noticed that young Mennonites were susceptible to persuasion to enlist, and they knew that if their mobilization boards were to garner the support that they needed for the war effort this point would need to be pushed as far as possible. At the same time a sense of exasperation surrounded this understanding, as the recruiters tried to interact with a people calling for conscientious objection status for their young men, even as their young men appeared to be enlisting, if quietly, in droves. As Reddig notes, the government became frustrated that so many of the Mennonites who claimed to still be a part of the Mennonite church were enlisting, while the Mennonite church still proclaimed their non-resistance stance and were able to use this to keep many of their men out of the Armed Forces.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 109.



The witness to Mennonite attitudes during the war is not simply one that observes scattered exceptions to the Mennonite historical peace position. Rather, the Second World War testimony is one in which the actions of the Mennonites countered their own traditions to such an extent that it created confusion among the Mennonites as well as those observing them. In his letter to I. G. Neufeld, Cruickshank wrote, “[a]s you no doubt are aware a large number of young men from Yarrow and Abbotsford have volunteered for service and I do not see why the Mennonites do not publish this list as they are being very unfairly criticized at the present.” Cruickshank admirably bore witness to the way in which the Mennonites were serving their country in military service, ruling the fact that they did not make this more widely known.<sup>20</sup> *The Globe and Mail* somewhat more astutely commented that, as the peace witness of the Mennonites was crucial to their identity, rather than a sense of pride in their numbers of enlistments, “to the old [Mennonite] folks it is all very bewildering.”<sup>21</sup>

### The Figures

Bewildering as the apparent large number of enlistments may have been, the question remained: just how many Mennonites actually did enlist in the Canadian Armed Forces in the Second World War?<sup>22</sup> These figures are most clearly defined in

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<sup>20</sup> George A. Cruickshank, letter to I. G. Neufeld, 5 April 1943, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII 1940 War, I. G. Neufeld Papers. Refer to Chapter Three – Canadian Mennonite Patriotism.

<sup>21</sup> “Mennonite Youth Break With Pacifism of Fathers to Fight for Canada, Younger Generation Discards Yoke of Pacifism as Old Beliefs Fade Out,” *Globe and Mail*, 17 September 1943, 1.

<sup>22</sup> This question is occasionally the subject of vague speculation, which has been varied. Harry Loewen writes: “The story of [the Second World War] conscientious objectors (COs) has been told in numerous Mennonite publications. These COs have been models for other young people faced with the draft. Not so well known is the fact that just as many Mennonite young men served their country in the armed forces during World War II.” See Harry Loewen, *No Permanent City: Stories from Mennonite History and Life* (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1993), 181. Downplaying the significance of the numbers of servicemen one Mennonite historian states, “In World War Two, over 50 percent were conscientious objectors.” See Conrad Stoesz, “Some did protest war memorial in Altona,” *Canadian Mennonite*, 26 March 2001, 11. Mennonite Second World War veteran Herman Rempel simply comments: “Exact numbers or statistics about the numbers of Mennonite men and women who served in the Canadian Forces would be difficult to

juxtaposition to those of the alternative service workers as the two provide a proportionate picture of the total service of the Canadian Mennonites during the war.

After the war the figures of the alternative service workers began to emerge as the Mennonite leaders in Western Canada requested that the numbers of COs across Canada during the war be released. The response from Ottawa to the Mennonites a year after the war was that there had been a total of 10,867 COs.<sup>23</sup> Another government file later reduced the number to 10,851 while describing how they came up with this figure. They had initially granted 12,167 conscientious objection postponements, but 541 of these later offered their services to the Armed Forces, 500 had their CO status revoked, 227 chose to serve in non-combatant roles in the medical and dental corps through the arrangements of Order-in-Council P.C. 7251,<sup>24</sup> and 48 died.<sup>25</sup>

There were no official records concerning the exact numbers of Mennonites in alternative service, and the suggestions have been varied. T. D. Regehr, upon examination of the different figures that have been suggested, concludes that 63% of the total number of those originally granted conscientious objector status were likely Mennonites, bringing the total to approximately 7,500. This number had previously been generally accepted by historians, and continues to be through Regehr's affirmation (albeit tentative) of the reasonability of this estimate.<sup>26</sup> The number of 7,500 as an acceptable

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come by, but the second World War saw significant numbers as volunteers in the Canadian Forces." See Herman Rempel, "Mennonite Mavericks," ed. Julius G. Toews and Lawrence Klippenstein (Altona: MB: Manitoba Mennonite Centennial Committee, 1974), 146.

<sup>23</sup> Reddig, "Manitoba," 147-48. Arthur MacNamara, letter to John G. Rempel, June 19, 1946. NAC, "Department of Labour, National Selective Service" files, Record Group 27, Volume 991, 2-101-1.

<sup>24</sup> Toews, *Alternative*, 95.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 61; Regehr, "Lost Sons," 463.

<sup>26</sup> Regehr, "Lost Sons," 463-64. Regehr factors in Arthur MacNamara's estimate of Mennonites comprising 63-64% of the total of COs and the Department of Mines and Resources records indicating 75% of their COs as Mennonite as of 1941 (which Regehr also considered, according to the unlikely assumption that this

estimate of the total number of Mennonites serving Canada as COs has been used as a reference point with which to compare the estimates of the numbers of enlisted Canadian Mennonite men and women in order to detail the general actions of their group during the Second World War. However, these figures are not entirely accurate and bear some adjusting.

The only government figures provided after the war<sup>27</sup> concerning the numbers of Mennonite COs are provided in an estimate by Arthur MacNamara, Deputy Minister of the Department of Labour and Director of National Selective Service, in a letter to John G. Rempel. MacNamara states his understanding that Mennonites comprised 63-64% of all Canadian COs.<sup>28</sup> MacNamara's estimate was provided on 19 June 1946. On 11 April 1946 it had been noted by the Department of Labour that the official total of Canadian conscientious objectors (after subtracting the numbers of those who subsequently enlisted in combatant and non-combatant roles, the numbers of those who had later had their CO status revoked, and those who had died before serving) was 10,851. J. A. Toews further records that these figures were noted as early as 31 December 1945.

It is unlikely that MacNamara would include the figures of those who had not actually served as COs within his estimate of the number of Mennonites who were considered COs, since the 1,316 who were subtracted had lost their CO status.

MacNamara's estimate of 63-64% of COs was given on 19 June 1946, which was at least

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rate would continue throughout the war), eventually settling on 63%, though it was 63% of the 10,851 COs reported by the Department of Labour after the war rather than of the 12,167 original COs.

<sup>27</sup> There were estimates in the middle of the war. A report by the Department of Mines and Resources in 1941 showed that, at that time, Mennonites comprised over 75% of their numbers. See Regehr, "Lost Sons," 463. However, the enlistment dates of Mennonites shown in the Epp/CGCA lists (as graphed by Regehr, "Lost Sons," 466) portray Mennonite enlistments as increasing rapidly beginning in 1941. Also, recruiting by Canadian government intensified after conscription was enacted on 18 June 1940.

<sup>28</sup> Arthur MacNamara, letter to John G. Rempel, June 19, 1946. NAC, "Department of Labour, National Selective Service" files, Record Group 27, Volume 991, 2-101-1.

over two months (and potentially over five months) after the figures had been released by the Department of Labour, of which MacNamara was the Deputy Minister (and through which he was also the Director of National Selective Service). Given MacNamara's intimate knowledge of the alternative service program, and the fact that his own department had already released final figures concerning the numbers of alternative service workers some time earlier, it is probable that MacNamara was stating that 63-64% of the 10,851 COs were Mennonites. This brings the total number of Mennonites who served in the alternative service program in the Second World War to between 6,836 and 6,945.<sup>29</sup>

The figures beyond MacNamara's estimate suggest higher percentages (75% of COs in alternative service work camps in 1941 and 72% of the COs registered in Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina and Edmonton were Mennonite, two of the only sources of numbers beyond MacNamara's final estimate). Therefore, with MacNamara's suggestion that 63-64% (or 6,836-6,945) of the COs were Mennonite, it may be suggested that the actual figure is likely closer to the latter than the former, providing a final figure of approximately 6,945 Mennonite alternative service workers.<sup>30</sup>

The figures concerning Mennonite enlistments have been contentious over the years as well. A community with a historic faith and cultural identity rooted in non-

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<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, the figure of 7,500 COs which has been generally accepted by historians and other writers was based on an incorrect calculation. In *Mennonite Exodus* Frank H. Epp wrote, "The total number of Canadian conscientious objectors was 10,851. Mennonites constituted 63 percent of this number or 7,543 conscientious objectors." See Epp, *Exodus*, 331. As has been noted, 63% of 10,851 is actually 6,836. This number (7,543) was the basis of the rounded figure of 7,500 used by subsequent historians and writers.

<sup>30</sup> As with earlier numerical suggestions, the number of 6,945 Mennonite COs may still be questioned due to some potential inaccuracies. Mennonites who were granted CO status but who did not have traditional Mennonite names may not have been included in the figures. Most significantly, a number of young men who may have applied for conscientious objector status were granted postponements to military training and were never called on to enlist because of their work on the agricultural sector. However, these inaccuracies are true for the initial figure of 7,500 as well, and the figure of 6,945 allows historians to begin from a place of greater accuracy.

resistance is not readily prepared to discuss openly the possibility that there has been a mass departure from this religious and cultural identifying marker. Because of this, while much has been written by the Mennonites concerning the role of the conscientious objectors during the war years little has been written about the Mennonite servicemen and women.

However, in recent years there have been some efforts to begin telling the story of these Mennonites. Before his death in 1986, noted Mennonite historian Frank H. Epp began to compile information for the third book in his *Mennonites in Canada* series. Contained within the scope of his intentions for this third book was the unpacking of the experiences of the Canadian Mennonites during the Second World War. Epp realized that the mass enlistments of the Mennonites would be an important facet of his work concerning this period. Epp, with the help of his wife and daughters, was able to sift through the stacks of Canadian enlistment records in Ottawa. Sorting out the traditional Mennonite names and referencing them with the regions that they were from, the result was a list of the Mennonites who enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces in the Second World War, the first comprehensive look into the actual figures.<sup>31</sup>

It was thus estimated by Epp that 3,905 enlisted in the army, 316 in the air force, 232 in the navy and 55 in the women's corps. This total of 4,508 Mennonite enlistments in the Second World War is generally accepted by Mennonite historians, as is evidenced by the passing references to this figure in the few articles and editorials concerning this topic in Mennonite publications.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This major collection of data is available at the Conrad Grebel College Archives, and will hereafter be referred to as the Epp/CGCA lists.

<sup>32</sup> See Sigfried Bartel, "Lessons for today from Mennonite history," *Canadian Mennonite*, 22 October 2001, 5; Timothy Dyck, "Wrestling with peacemaking," *Canadian Mennonite*, 7 Feb 2005, 2; A. James

The most important works to date on the Mennonite enlistments in the Second World War, indeed the only comprehensive examinations of this subject, have been written by T. D. Regehr. His article entitled *Lost Sons: The Canadian Mennonite Soldiers of World War II*, as well as the chapter entitled “Wartime Alternative and Military Service” in his book *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed*, acknowledges the many Mennonite enlistments in the war. Within these works Regehr acknowledge the figures provided by the Epp/CGCA list, which he suggests are reasonable: “I do not know of any other calculations which report more accurately Canadian Mennonite military enlistments during World War II.”<sup>33</sup>

While the Epp/CGCA list is the framework within which it is possible to begin to examine the Mennonite enlistment figures, gaps in the list may yet be filled in. Peter Lorenz Neufeld claimed that his independent research in local histories, letters and newspapers turned up individual names which were not in the Epp/CGCA lists, as well as Mennonite surnames which were not noted by the researchers.<sup>34</sup> His own *Neufeld Supplementary List* was a compilation of names which he had come across that did not turn up in the earlier lists. There are some inaccuracies, as some of the names which he

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Reimer, “Weep with those who weep,” *Canadian Mennonite*, 12 February 2001, 6; Ellie Reimer, “Decision of conscience not respected,” *Canadian Mennonite*, 26 October 1998, 12; Ellie Reimer, “Some went to war, some served at home: A trustworthy soldier,” *Canadian Mennonite*, 26 October 1998, 12. An article by a Mennonite in the largest newspaper in St. Catharines, ON, a place still familiar with the many Mennonites who have settled there and in the surrounding regions, similarly referred to the figures of 7,500 COs and 4,500 enlistees while this thesis was being written. See Larry Cornies, “Distant Kin is a War Treasure,” *St. Catharines Standard*, 10 November 2009, A12.

<sup>33</sup> Regehr, “Number who enlisted based on careful research,” *Canadian Mennonite*, 18 January 1999, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Neufeld, *Mennonites at War*, 70. By way of example Neufeld mentions John Friesen, air force Flying Officer and recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross, as a name which was left off of the Epp/CGCA list. Neufeld was directed to Friesen, from Altona, MB, through personal correspondence with Art Braun, also of Altona, as he was directed to others through personal correspondence. See Neufeld, *Mennonites at War*, 26, 70, 134. Neufeld also notes the surname “Striemer” as a Mennonite family name not acknowledged as such in the Epp/CGCA lists. Neufeld’s own “Neufeld Supplementary List” contains five Striemers, of Waldheim, SK and Plum Coulee, MB, heavily Mennonite-populated towns. See Neufeld, *Mennonites at War*, 48, 70, 137.

included in the supplementary list are actually already in the Epp/CGCA list.

However, after removing the names which already appear in the Epp/CGCA list there is a total of 267 names from the Neufeld Supplementary list which may be added. With the 4,508 names from the Epp/CGCA list combined with the 267 names in the Neufeld Supplementary list not found in the former, there is a total of 4,775 Canadian Mennonite enlistments in the Second World War. With 6,945 conscientious objectors and 4,775 enlistments, this indicates that 41% of the 11,720 Mennonite active participants in the war effort in Canada, whether voluntarily or by virtue of the draft, served in the Canadian Armed Forces in the Second World War.

### **Reluctant Acknowledgment**

For a community which treasured its staunch non-resistant heritage, visible even in their interactions with the government during the Second World War, the young people who were partnering with the government in their willingness to serve in the military were seen as undermining the larger faith tradition. There was a sense of accusation, that these reckless young Mennonites were harming their own people.

This understanding fostered perceptions of the COs and the servicemen and women that ran contrary to the views of society at large. In the Mennonite communities the COs were thought to have sacrificed by not playing into the expectations of a society which was governed by a different value system, regardless of how their actions were interpreted by their fellow Canadians. Those who had enlisted had taken the easier route by conforming to societal expectations. They had weakly succumbed to the pressures of the world, rather than holding strong to the Mennonite confession of faith. The COs were seen as representative of the upholding of Mennonite principles of non-resistance, while

the enlisted men and women were viewed as departures from tradition and from the true Mennonite faith. Subsequently, within the Mennonite community the overarching perception, in direct contrast with the views of Canadian society at large, was that the COs had exemplified selfless sacrifice while the servicemen and women had not.

The two groups received very different receptions upon their return to their communities. "COs were welcomed back with open arms by church and community, the returning military men were not."<sup>35</sup> In contrast with the servicemen and women in Canada at large who were welcomed home with open arms by a proud and grateful nation, for the Mennonite servicemen and women homecoming was a matter of shame.

In some churches, the young men were not welcomed back into the fellowship. In other cases they were allowed to come back to the church only if they publicly confessed the sin of their acquiescence to the military, the rejection of the path of their forefathers. Some strongly Mennonite towns made it difficult for veterans to remain living in the community. After slogging through the atrocities and indignities of war many of the men were to experience a different struggle back home. Veteran Jake Neisteter remembered returning to Winkler, MB: "People shunned you. Veterans were the last ones to be considered for jobs. All the clothes I had after five years in the army were uniforms, but when I went to church in my uniform, they threw me out." He found that he was expected to apologize if he wished to join the church.<sup>36</sup>

The funerals of soldiers across Canada during the war often exemplified most clearly the reverence with which soldiers were held by the country for which they were fighting. Funerals for Mennonite soldiers were often similarly revealing. Often,

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<sup>35</sup> Henry Neufeld, "Peace Makers or Takers?" *Canadian Mennonite*, 7 December 1998, 30.

<sup>36</sup> Ellie Reimer, "Some went to war, some served at home: A trustworthy soldier," *Canadian Mennonite*, 26 October 1998, 12.



Mennonite communities simply did not know how to handle their returning dead, who had died for a cause for which they did not hold esteem. In his commission to document the ongoing history of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Manitoba Henry J. Gerbrandt acknowledged the way that their church struggled with the sacrifice which many of their young men had made:

Funeral services for boys who had died in battle were always embarrassing. Pallbearers or honor guards would be Canadian Legion men, and Mennonite ministers were somewhat tongue-tied, to say the least. One minister had the courage to be totally honest according to his understanding and conviction. When the coffin was lowered he intoned in a solemn voice, "...and death and hell were cast into the lake of fire."<sup>37</sup>

Al Reimer writes of his experiences as a young boy growing up in the overwhelmingly Mennonite town of Steinbach, MB during the war. The Mennonites who had enlisted were, in some cases, better left forgotten in the mind of the community, a fact not lost on the young enlisted men. Those who wished the young servicemen to be neglected were in turn sometimes met with the disdain of the enlisted men, as the rift in the community deepened. Reimer recounts an interesting interaction between his community and a young recruit:

I have an even more vivid memory of a young Mennonite soldier...standing arrogantly in our churchyard one Sunday morning in full military dress complete with a long, wicked-looking dress sword...basking in the envy of the older youths and defiantly returning the disapproving stares of older people...I guessed even then that he had only come to mortify his elders. And he had not miscalculated. Had a Martian suddenly dropped into our midst he could not have created a more startling or alien effect.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Henry Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith: The Background in Europe and the Development in Canada of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba* (Altona, MB: D. W. Friesen, 1970), 314. While the minister's point in this anecdote may be ambiguous, Gerbrandt's interpretation is that the minister spoke in condemnation of the serviceman.

<sup>38</sup> Al Reimer, "The War Brings its own Conflict to Steinbach," *Mennonite Mirror*, June 1974, 15.

For a people who had held so tightly to their peace traditions, separating themselves from any semblance of war or relationship with the government, the thought of their own children involving themselves was difficult to handle. Those who had enlisted even with the refusal to bear arms were often not seen any differently than those who had joined as combatants. The compromise of military service in any form was seen as the same breach of principle. In the past the Mennonite community had insulated itself so well from the society at large, from the government, and in particular from the military, that the trappings of military service were viewed as completely emblematic of violence, physical reminders of unfaithfulness to the message of Christ.<sup>39</sup> During the war, the sight of a military uniform (with a sword no less!) was shocking to Mennonite sensibilities. This would also serve to create confusion as to the decisions of those youth who chose to serve in the military in non-combatant roles, adhering to the principles of non-resistance, but compromising in the eyes of the older Mennonites who saw the wearing of a military uniform as inseparable from participation in violence.

The struggle with reminders of war or Mennonite participation therein was not isolated to the Second World War; the Canadian Mennonite community testifies to the struggle of those years by the repercussions that continue to be felt. As communities across Canada continue to sit quietly under the blanket of silence that covers the stories of military service in the war years, every stirring of acknowledgment is felt. The raising of cenotaphs in memory of those who died during the war has been an area of some interest in a few Canadian Mennonite towns. A war memorial in Winkler, MB which was dedicated in 1999 raised the ire of many residents who felt that it was inappropriate to

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<sup>39</sup> Veteran Bill Friesen remembered that, regardless of whether one was serving in forestry or the Red Cross, in the eyes of the Mennonite community it was "a terrible thing to have a uniform on," Bill Friesen, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 15 October 2009.

glorify sacrifices made in war.<sup>40</sup> In Altona, MB, a similar conflict had ensued with the installation of a war memorial in 1995. Letters in local newspapers as well as in Canadian-wide Mennonite publications were written to protest the memorial. As had been the case during and immediately after the Second World War, it continued to be felt by some that “the conscientious objectors who did not go to war were the heroes, not the war veterans.”<sup>41</sup> In such poignant ways the dissent and conflict that plagued the Mennonites across Canada during the war continues to show itself, and the pain experienced by some of the veterans, as well as the hurt of those who felt that their own faith tradition had been undermined by the veterans, remains.

In an editorial column in the *Canadian Mennonite* magazine, Ellie Reimer wrote of the conflict that is connected to military service in the Mennonite community, as well as acknowledging that the neglect of the servicemen continues:

We don't know what to do with Mennonite war veterans. For many years, it was a source of shame for Mennonite parents to admit their sons were on active duty in the war. And when they were killed in action, quite often the grieving families were left to mourn alone. When the fortunate survivors returned, there was little celebration and even less room in our Mennonite community for them. They were mocked and sneered at, shunned and excommunicated. Their sacrifices for their country were ignored. Fifty years is a long time to wait for recognition.<sup>42</sup>

For some it continues to be a difficult issue with which to cope. There are Mennonite Second World War veterans who proudly speak of their time in service of Canada, who take part in local Legionnaires groups, who display their war memorabilia around their houses. However, there are many veterans who find themselves still constrained by the

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<sup>40</sup> Out of 132 names on the Winkler Honor Roll only 27 are not traditional Mennonite names (although Frank Brown holds the figures at 126 men and women on active service who gave their addresses as Winkler, 108 of which had traditionally Mennonite names. See Frank Brown, *A History of Winkler: 1892-1973* [Altona, MB: D. W. Friesen], 116). Out of 106 names noted as having served in the Second World War from Altona, only six are not traditional Mennonite names. See Altona & District Cenotaph, Program, Official Dedication Ceremony, 29 July 1995.

<sup>41</sup> Conrad Stoesz, “Some did protest war memorial in Altona,” *Canadian Mennonite*, 26 March 2001, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Ellie Reimer, “Decision of conscience not respected,” *Canadian Mennonite*, 26 October 1998, 12.

pressures of the Mennonite community. They are burdened with the sense that they should be ashamed of their time of service and are unable to voice their memories and experiences.<sup>43</sup>

Mennonite Second World War veteran Herman Rempel wrote a short paper entitled “Mennonite Mavericks”, concerning his fellow Mennonite servicemen and women. Rempel described his paper as “an attempt...to persuade the reader not to be too judgmental of these Canadian Mennonites but rather to consider the contribution they made in their various roles. Many gave the supreme sacrifice which so far has never been publicly acknowledged by Mennonites officially.”<sup>44</sup> The perceived need to ask his readers not to condemn the veterans for their service may be perplexing and somewhat troubling to Canadians, but for Mennonite Canadians this is a reality from the war years which continues to survive.

### **The Ambiguities**

The enlistment of 41% of the Mennonites in service is, to the chagrin of some Mennonites, significant to note. At the same time the difficulties and ambiguities surrounding these figures must be acknowledged. In determining the number of enlisted Mennonites there are two particular factors which make a comprehensive list difficult to achieve. One is the fact that official identification of the Mennonites in the service

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<sup>43</sup> This was apparent in a series of interviews conducted by the author as some of the veterans expressed concerns about creating tensions in the community and one of the veterans requested that his name and any identifying features be withheld. It was felt that it would be better to not risk reawakening any resentment within the Mennonite community towards themselves by speaking of their war experiences. A few of the men mentioned that no Mennonites outside of their immediate family had ever asked them about the war. As Frank H. Epp began to collect information regarding the Mennonites in the Second World War Mennonite veteran Dick P. Sawatsky noted a similar sentiment, writing, “To my knowledge this is the first time anyone has asked for a personal contribution from us, the Mennonite boys who chose to go into active overseas service in World War II.” See Dick P. Sawatsky, letter to Frank H. Epp, 14 January 1980, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 4.

<sup>44</sup> Rempel, “Mavericks,” 148.

records is inconsistent at best. For one, the Armed Forces' records did not always include a place to state the faith background of its recruits. The RCAF files have a category noting the "religious affiliation" of its enlistments, wherein many of the Mennonite names are annotated as "Mennonite," "Dutch Mennonite," "Mennonite Brethren" or "Brethren." However the RCA and RCN records contain no such distinction.

Even when given the opportunity to state their faith position, some of the young men were not accurately represented. For one, as officers tried to categorize the new recruits in order to assign the correct chaplain to them it was often in the form of selecting from a list of denominations. Mennonite denominations were not included on these lists. At times Mennonite recruits were subsequently simply included by the enlisting officers in the lists of the Alliance, Anglican, Baptist, Roman Catholic or United churches.

In other cases where the Mennonites were given the chance to list their faith adherence to the Mennonite church some may have indicated otherwise. As I. G. Neufeld learned from W.A. Tucker during the war, many of the Mennonites, in the western provinces at least, were not officially acknowledging their background. Tucker observed that "most of [the Mennonite recruits] when they enlist seem to feel they are departing from the Mennonite faith and put themselves down as United Church, Anglican or something else."<sup>45</sup>

Because of the ambiguities in the army and navy lists in particular, as they compiled the lists of Mennonite servicemen and women, the Epps were forced to rely on

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<sup>45</sup> W. A. Tucker, letter to I. G. Neufeld, 19 March 1942, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII 1940 War, I. G. Neufeld Papers.

noting the names and regions of the enlisted persons in order to determine their Mennonite heritage. This left the process open to some inaccuracies, as some of the names may actually have belonged to a different cultural people group. The common Mennonite surname “Peters,” for example, while of German origin among the Mennonite peoples is also a common surname of North Americans of English heritage. Therefore it is possible that some of the “Peters” tallied as Mennonites were actually of English descent. By cross-referencing such names with the towns that they were from there was a higher likelihood of determining their background.<sup>46</sup>

In some instances the Mennonite names had been changed to assimilate into Canadian culture. I. G. Neufeld, for example, would sometimes publish his writings under the name “I. G. Newfield.”<sup>47</sup> The name “Andres” was also occasionally changed to the more anglicized “Andrews,” lending to the possibility that Mennonites who had changed their names were left from the Epp/CGCA lists.<sup>48</sup> However, those whose names were ambiguous on the lists had the heavily populated Mennonite towns as a cross-reference to the legitimacy of their inclusion, thereby reducing the likely numbers of non-Mennonites on the lists. Those Mennonites whose names were not traditional Mennonite

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<sup>46</sup> Helen Epp indicates the difficulties which she had with some of the names: “I usually took the Mennonite names of men who lived in such very ‘Mennonite places’ as Altona, Rosthern, St. Jacobs. However, ‘Martin’ is a [name] also used in other cultures than Mennonite, which then became a problem, and for me it was sometimes only guess work.” Helen Epp, e-mail to author, 4 November 2009. Although she acknowledges that it came down to “guess work” at times, her basic method for determining Mennonite background actually displayed a fairly high degree of certainty. Towns such as Virgil, Ontario or Yarrow, British Columbia, while insignificant in population at the time of the Second World War were flooded with numerous recent Mennonite immigrant families (119 and 160, respectively). See Epp, *Exodus*, 305-6. A name common to both Mennonites and another people group in such towns was regarded as likely Mennonite. According to T. D. Regehr, the Epp/CGCA lists were later reviewed by “older members of Mennonite communities and compared with the lists of servicemen published in various local histories.” The probable margin of error for the lists is suggested to be as high as 5% for western Canadian communities and 10% for older Mennonite communities in Ontario. See Regehr, “Lost Sons,” 465.

<sup>47</sup> I. G. Neufeld, “Mennonites and the War,” CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII 1940 War, I. G. Neufeld Papers.

<sup>48</sup> The Epp/CGCA lists do contain some such names which are not traditionally Mennonite but of whose Mennonite heritage the Epps were apparently aware.

names (either for reasons of marriage or because of a legal name change) did not have a point of cross-reference. Similarly, both those whose names were traditionally Mennonite and otherwise (Peters, Martins, etc.) who were living in places not overwhelmingly populated by Mennonites, were left out of the lists.

This may have contributed to the neglect of many Mennonites from the Epp/CGCA lists. Herman Rempel, from his own perspective as a Mennonite Second World War veteran, wrote of the many Mennonites who left the traditional Mennonite towns and villages:

It was, of course, not only the attraction of the outside world that caused young Mennonites to leave their traditional environment. It was common for Mennonites to raise large families. Not every one of the growing sons could, or for that matter wanted to be farmers. Land was not always available within Mennonite communities and consequently some of them were obliged to move to new and strange areas with their young and growing families...some of the young Mennonites found themselves accepting employment in the cities or in other new areas.<sup>49</sup>

It is likely that many such Mennonite enlistees with names simultaneously common to Mennonites as well as other cultures were neglected from the lists. And while it is therefore possible that there are errors both of inclusion and exclusion in the lists, the errors of exclusion, which had no manner of cross reference, were likely numerically higher than the errors of inclusion which did have residency in the Mennonite towns and villages as a point of reference.

The second major factor which renders identification of Mennonites enlisted in service to Canada difficult is the question of what actually defines a Mennonite. That some people of Mennonite background were hesitant to officially state their adherence to the Mennonite faith or acknowledge their Mennonite heritage is an indicator to some that

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<sup>49</sup> Rempel, "Mavericks," 147.

such people were, of their own volition, truly no longer Mennonites and should therefore not be included in the enlistment records.

War veteran Peter F. Barga's 1956 article entitled "Why I am a Mennonite" describes the fact that Mennonites are not easily identified. A visiting professor at the University of Alberta expressed his disbelief that Barga was an adherent to this group: "But how can you be? I always thought Mennonites wore black clothes and long beards, and certainly did not sanction higher education. You look like an average university student. You just can't be a Mennonite in good standing!"<sup>50</sup> Barga acknowledged that there were those who did match that description, but that there were many who were entirely different in thought and appearance as well.

While Mennonite beliefs are rooted in the Reformation-era teachings of the renegade Catholic priest Simons, some debate the exclusivity of following the spiritual teachings of Simons as a cut-off point for Mennonite identity. To many, Mennonites are as much an ethnic people group as a faith-based denomination. In an article in the *Mennonite Mirror* in 1985, Peter Lorenz Neufeld stated his case for Mennonitism as stemming more from a cultural identity than from theological conformity. Having grown up in a Mennonite church before leaving to join a United Church congregation in the 1950s, Neufeld resented the view that he had renounced his Mennonite heritage upon joining a different church. To Neufeld, Mennonitism is an ethnicity, rooted in "the genetic structure of a group of people who intermarry within that group for centuries."<sup>51</sup> In his thinking Mennonite identity cannot be removed, regardless of theological leanings.

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<sup>50</sup> Peter F. Barga, "Why I am a Mennonite," *Liberty*, May 1956, 42.

<sup>51</sup> P. L. Neufeld, "On Being Mennonite," *Mennonite Mirror*, January 1985.



Lorenz Neufeld tries to establish that by arguing for Mennonite heritage as stemming from identification with the Mennonite church children who are not yet baptized and therefore not yet members are not Mennonite either. If this is the case the question is whether there is an age by which a young person must be baptized in order to establish their Mennonite identity. This issue confronted the Mennonite church in the Second World War, as the mobilization boards attempted to determine who was, in fact, a Mennonite and could as such be legitimately granted CO status.

In the First World War the government recruitment efforts had forced them to address this issue, as would happen again in the Second World War. From the standpoint of the government, beyond an individual's actual ability to articulate his faith position, the issue often came down to baptism, which was the only clear way that a person's conscientious adherence to Mennonite beliefs could be established. However, as the baptism age was often twenty-one, this meant that many men were eligible for military service before they had reached the age of baptism, leaving them exposed to conscription.<sup>52</sup> A young man appearing before a mobilization board claiming to be a CO was sure to experience more difficulty if not baptized and not yet officially a member of a Mennonite church, regardless of his faith convictions. However in the end it was still the faith convictions, with membership used as an indicator, that decided who was a Mennonite in the eyes of the government.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Epp, *1786-1920*, 380.

<sup>53</sup> The Epp/CGCA list similarly made no distinctions in relation to church membership. After the list of Mennonite enlistments was compiled it was examined by various people. Comparing the lists made by Epp with local histories and records in Mennonite towns it has been estimated that there is a 5% margin of error for the communities in western Canada where the immigrants had more recently arrived in Canada, while a 10% margin of error was affixed to the earlier immigrants in Ontario. There was a greater chance of assimilation in the older communities, Regehr pointed out, and if there were a way to identify such assimilated Mennonites they should be stricken from the records. In this way it has been argued that the figure of 4,508 from the Epp/CGCA should be reduced. See Regehr, "Lost Sons," 465. The late Lorna

Mennonite leader David Toews realized that the issue of Mennonite identity was going to be an important issue during the war. In a letter to S. F. Coffman, the Mennonite church leader in Vineland, ON, around the start of the war in September of 1939, Toews acknowledged that baptism may seem like a clear indicator of Mennonite membership. However, he observed, this subject was more nuanced. There were Mennonite families living apart from the usual Mennonite settlements who yet observed traditional principles, though none of them were baptized into the Mennonite church. Toews takes an open view of who is a Mennonite: "I for one take the position that children of Mennonite parents are Mennonites and we can conscientiously say this before any authority."<sup>54</sup> It would be nearly impossible to determine which Mennonites were "assimilated" and which were still living in accordance with Mennonite principles. According to Toews the heritage is passed down by virtue of the parents.

By the very nature of the Mennonite hesitation to interact with the government, as well as their historic non-resistance convictions, the issue of people enlisting speaks of people *departing* in various ways from the *traditional* Mennonite faith.<sup>55</sup> A departure from the traditions by parents, which is then reflected in their children may be included in a discussion of the changing of Mennonite values, as the Mennonite heritage is traditionally passed down through the generations. Those who are a generation past an

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Bergey of the Conrad Grebel College Archives attempted to write those names off of the list who were not actually faith-practicing Mennonites. In the end she removed a total of 611 names. Her criteria for writing names off of the list are not known, and it is presumed that she removed those people who she believed to not be practicing the Mennonite faith.

<sup>54</sup> David Toews, letter to S. F. Coffman, 12 September 1939, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII 1940 War, Specia.

<sup>55</sup> Note that the departure from traditional Mennonite faith of the enlistees speaks to their departure from the *traditional* expressions of Mennonite faith (i.e. avoidance of government and violence). This does not presume to speak to a departure from *faith* of the enlistees.

apparent departure from Mennonite traditions are yet a reflection of a trend of generations of Mennonites drifting away from their heritage.

This would perhaps be unfair for people removed enough from the Mennonite heritage in their ancestry that they are not even aware of their history. However, the Mennonites in Canada during the Second World War remained largely intact, both in regards to the earlier conservative *Kanadier* Mennonites and the later more liberal *Russlaender* immigrants. While the departure from tradition found in the Second World War may reflect a crucial period of upheaval in the Canadian Mennonite community, during the war years their community remained relatively socially intact as a close-knit ethnic group within the broader fabric of Canadian culture.

The difficult work of ascertaining what constitutes a Mennonite “in good standing” as was the common refrain of the mobilization boards and the Mennonite leaders during the war years may thus be cast aside entirely. For the purposes of this thesis, and arguably for the purposes of further work in regards to Canadian Mennonite service in the Second World War, people of Mennonite heritage, regardless of faith convictions, may be considered Mennonites. The closest estimate of Canadian Mennonite enlistments in the Second World War thus remains 4,775.

### **A Violent Precedent**

The issue of the Canadian Mennonite enlistments in the Second World War is a question of the changing nature of the relationship of the Mennonite people with the state and with the larger culture surrounding their cloistered communities. While the enlistment figures may not be taken to show direct subscription to violence by many Mennonites, there were many who did reflect a changing perception of the acceptability

of violence. Where the historical belief had been that violence in any form was unacceptable according to the teachings and actions of Jesus, there was a sense that the line was beginning to blur among many of the young Mennonites. For many, this had begun during the later years in Russia, at the end of the First World War.

A precedent for armed response to conflict had been set a generation earlier on the steppes of Russia with the formation and activity of a Mennonite *Selbstschutz* (“self-defence” or “self-protection”). As historian John B. Toews surmises, it was the *Selbstschutz* that first saw the Mennonites depart from their consistent adherence to non-violent principles in large numbers: “[T]he *Selbstschutz* represented a massive participation in armed violence unknown to a group whose loyalty to the peace principle had remained intact for 400 years.”<sup>56</sup>

In response to the roving bands of anarchists in Russia, in particular one led by Nestor Makhno, the Mennonites armed themselves and did battle against the attacking forces. In total, the *Selbstschutz* would last from October 1918 to March 1919, involving up to three thousand men, inflicting hundreds of deaths upon the invading anarchists.<sup>57</sup> There were Mennonites prior to this who had enlisted in the Russian army and had taken part in combat, suggesting the beginnings of a change in perspective among the non-resistant settlers. However it would be the *Selbstschutz* that would exemplify large-scale

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<sup>56</sup> John B. Toews, “The origins and activities of the Mennonite *Selbstschutz* in the Ukraine (1918-1919),” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 46 (1972): 5. Toews’ article is the most significant comprehensive description of the *selbstschutz*. More recently, Lawrence Klippenstein’s article, “The *Selbstschutz*: A Mennonite Army in Ukraine 1918-1919,” *Надійшла до редакції* (10 September 2007): 175-205, provides even more information on the entire *selbstschutz* period with detailed footnotes. Harvey L. Dyck et al, eds. *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre: A Civil War Tragedy in a Ukrainian Mennonite Village*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2004, details the actions of the *Makhnovtsy* in one of their most brutal attacks on a Mennonite village.

<sup>57</sup> Although the total numbers are unknown, in one three-day battle alone, just prior to its disbandment, the *selbstschutz* killed 760 men. John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, KA: Faith and Life, 1982), 90-91.

participation in violence among the Anabaptist group. The actions of the *Selbstschutz* would end after a few months. However, the precedent of masses of Mennonites subscribing to the use of violence for the defence of their homes was one which would continue to have repercussions that would reverberate within the community, both in Russia and abroad.

In Canada, twenty years after the winter of the *Selbstschutz*, many of the Russian Mennonites who had endured the First World War and the ensuing eddies of conflict had resettled in Canada. There is evidence to suggest that some of these immigrants who had participated in the *Selbstschutz* were to bring a new legacy of the acceptability of violence into the Mennonite communities in Canada, particularly in their own families.

There were approximately three thousand men who participated in the self-defense units in Russia.<sup>58</sup> As they emigrated, many of them to Canada, they were to carry these experiences with them. Family structure has historically been a key to the maintenance of Mennonite traditions. Beliefs, traditions and social norms are passed down through the generations through families, which remain closely connected with other such Mennonite family structures. With the abrupt turnaround in belief and experience brought about by the rapid events of the *Selbstschutz* in the winter of 1918-1919 and the three thousand men involved, a new element was brought home into their families. Belief and practice in regards to non-resistance, which had largely gone hand-in-hand for centuries, were now thrown into confusion in many families of *Selbstschutz* members where Mennonite non-resistance was still proclaimed.<sup>59</sup> In others, non-

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<sup>58</sup> J. P. Epp, "The Mennonite Selbstschutz in the Ukraine: An Eyewitness Account," *Mennonite Life*, July 1971, 138.

<sup>59</sup> Neufeld, *Mennonites at War*, iii.

resistance teachings were abandoned in light of the realities of the violent action which had taken place.

In some ways, a culture of acceptance towards the participation in wartime violence had been adopted by the Mennonites in Canada. Whether this was due to the lack of authoritative leadership in addressing the issue in Russia and then Canada, or due to the familial influence of the former *Selbstschutz* participants themselves is unclear. As Tiessen suggests, it was likely a combination of the two. The presence of the Russian fighters in the churches influenced (whether intentionally or not) their children to participate in the Canadian Armed Forces. Meanwhile, the church and community leaders had difficulty addressing the decision to enlist when made by the children of these men, as they had not spoken against the related decision made by their fathers. Before the war the Mennonite leaders themselves saw the connection between the Russian experience and the decisions that were to be made by their youth. The point of intersection was seen as the way that the fighters had managed to equivocate the message of non-resistance in Russia without being strongly influenced in their own homes towards remaining steadfastly rooted in the peace tradition. They saw the danger of this recurring in the Canadian households, especially given the fact that it was the younger relatives of many of the fighters from the units in Russia who were now facing the question of adherence to the peace position. The attitudes from the home had the ability to affirm or seriously compromise the wartime reaction of the youth. One Mennonite bishop remarked before a large group of leaders that, "The pure gospel is still being preached from the pulpit, but how many homes have we where fathers are ashamed to call the family to worship, to

read the Word of God and to pray? Where shall we land? From where did the 'Self-defense Army' (Selbstschutz) originate?"<sup>60</sup>

As questions of taking up arms had been broached in the midst of attacks by the Machnovtzi in the winter of 1918 the Mennonites had enabled themselves to circumvent the non-resistance position. There were voices speaking clearly against the use of violence in any form and for any reason, as had been the doctrine of their forebears.<sup>61</sup> However, others argued that they continued to uphold their traditional peace position by rejecting war. Self-defense, on the other hand, must be categorized separately as a necessary evil which was not a compromise of the peace tradition. As Al Reimer stated, "Some of the most respected ministers led the way, arguing that non-resistance didn't apply in this dire emergency."<sup>62</sup> From there, the support of self-defense action escalated, culminating in the organization of almost three-thousand men into cavalry and infantry companies who were sent out to fight the anarchists who hoped to invade the colonies.<sup>63</sup>

The concept of self-defense as being separate in considerations of the peace traditions was a key part of the movement towards the Mennonites accepting violence in Russia. It was to play a role in the Canadian Mennonite enlistments one generation later in the Second World War as well. Judge Adamson and other mobilization board workers tried to emphasize that the war with Hitler was one of self-defense, in which the Germans were the aggressors who were attacking defenseless nations. If they were not stopped, they would eventually attack Canada as well. In light of this, Canadians who fought in the war were acting in self-defense. Because of the events in Russia, some of the

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<sup>60</sup> Reimer, *Experiences*, 49.

<sup>61</sup> Klippenstein cites Jacob Dyck, B. B. Janz, Jacob Krahn, Jacob Berg, J. H. Janzen, Peter Bergmann and David Janzen. See Klippenstein, "Selbstschutz," 177.

<sup>62</sup> Henry Neufeld, "Peace Makers or Takers?" *Canadian Mennonite*, 7 December 1998, 30.

<sup>63</sup> Klippenstein, "Selbstschutz," 184.

Mennonites were already of the opinion that taking up arms for such a purpose was not contrary to Mennonite beliefs, and therefore in some instances the task of the mobilization boards was not to convince the Mennonites that fighting in self-defense could be justified; they simply had to convince them that Canadian involvement in the war was out of self-defense.

The Mennonites in Russia had proven themselves capable of justifying their desire to take up arms against their aggressors. In Canada, they received help from the Canadian government. The mobilization boards were intentional in their efforts to convince the Mennonites that they were not compromising their beliefs as followers of Christ in defending Canada, but were upholding the virtues for which they stood. As part of his campaign in Manitoba, Adamson focussed on the question of what would need to be done if someone broke into one's home, or if Manitoba were invaded. As there were those Mennonites who agreed that if their own home were under attack they would do whatever it took to defend it, Adamson attempted to stretch that to include a willingness to defend Canada in the same way, which was then carried on into a willingness to do so before such defense became necessary on Canadian soil.<sup>64</sup>

To further emphasize the legitimacy of military participation for the Mennonites as Christians, Adamson had an acquaintance of his prepare a pamphlet describing the necessity of the defense of Canada by examining scriptural evidence justifying killing in the context of battle.<sup>65</sup> He also made use of extant materials which would emphasize the same point. He attempted to make everyone who applied as a CO first read a letter concerning whether killing in battle constitutes murder. The letter stated, "So a soldier,

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<sup>64</sup> Adamson's campaign carrying the theme "IF Manitoba Were Occupied" was displayed in newspapers such as *The Morden Times* and became well known throughout Manitoba.

<sup>65</sup> Reddig, "Manitoba," 141-42.



fighting not with any thought of personal vengeance but only in the interests of humanity and the sacred, inalienable rights of men, does not murder when he kills, but is God's minister and is doing an awful but a righteous service."<sup>66</sup>

The idea that in the present context of war participation was defensible in light of both Christian and Mennonite teachings was consistently emphasized among the Mennonites. The Mennonites in Russia had already presented the case that in matters of defense the use of force was not incompatible with the peace position, as they were not the aggressors and were merely attempting to protect those in danger. In this way they could justify the argument that they were not truly participating in war, and that was really the crux of their traditional non-resistance. This step towards accepting certain forms of violence in self-defense opened the door for the further step of undeniable war participation.

In Canada, the Mennonites were encouraged by their government and countrymen and women to participate in war. But they were also presented with the case that even war participation was not incompatible with their faith. On the contrary, it was a necessary duty as Christians. This view took root among some of the Mennonites who enlisted, and may have played a role in their decisions to enlist. Adamson had tried to emphasize that in the context of war, especially in a war in which the Allies were attempting to defend those countries which were under attack and incapable of defending themselves, killing was not contrary to the message of scripture. Rather, a soldier fights on a higher plane and does his duty for God. Some Mennonites began to agree with that point, subscribing to the view that fighting for one's country, as long as one does it with

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 144.

the correct motivation of desiring to help others and not out of a personal sense of vengeance, is a pursuit endorsed by God.

It may not be assumed that the advent of the *Selbstschutz* in Russia caused a willingness to subscribe to violence among many Mennonites, both in doctrinal attitude and enlistment action. However, by the Second World War there was a softening of the steadfast refusal to engage in fighting which was reflected in some of the Mennonite enlistments. The *Selbstschutz* contributed in part to this softening, regardless of the attitudes of its members by the time that they reached Canada. The compromise made in Russia was unmistakable a generation later, and it was reflected in a generation that was more easily swayed towards participation in, arguably, a global form of self-defense.

Peter Engbrecht had intended to enlist despite the protests of his congregation. In the end he was able to do so after consulting with both his bishop and his father. Engbrecht noted that, because his father had fought in both the Russian army and during the revolution, presumably in the *Selbstschutz*, it was difficult to prevent him from making a similar decision.<sup>67</sup> In stories of veterans that occasionally appear in Mennonite publications the pattern of relatives who had fought in Russia is difficult to ignore. There are few instances where veterans are mentioned in Mennonite publications, so the fact of association with *Selbstschutz* members may be incidental, but it bears mentioning nonetheless. Family histories of veterans often show similar patterns, with Russian army combat participation also mentioned by some.

Whether the *Selbstschutz* was indicative of attitudes that were already prevalent or whether it simply fostered an atmosphere which caused Mennonites to re-evaluate their non-resistance stance, the Mennonite fighting in Russia cannot be ignored in light of the

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<sup>67</sup> Neufeld, *Mennonites at War*, 17.

somewhat surprising events in Canada one generation later. With 41% of the young Mennonites enlisting in the Canadian Armed Forces it appeared as if the Mennonite peace position had begun to be compromised. As has been mentioned, the enlistment numbers themselves do not do justice to the nuanced perspectives of the enlistees, as many of those who enlisted did not subscribe to violence and many enlisted conscientiously while maintaining their non-resistance stance. However, among the enlistees were Mennonites who were emblematic of a shift in perspective concerning the acceptability of violence. This shift was not immediate but had been fostered by the actions of the previous generation who, whether they wished to or not, were unable to disguise the choices they had made twenty years earlier in Russia.

### **A Nuanced Perspective**

In the conversation on the mass departure from the traditionally accepted Mennonite response to war it is important to realize that the enlistments were varied and nuanced. There is found among the Mennonite servicemen and women a wide range of perspectives. While within the enlistees there were those who reflect greater subscription to violence and war among the Mennonites, the service carried out by the Mennonites within the Canadian Armed Forces reflects a far greater complexity.

That 41% of the Mennonites called to service chose to enlist does not serve as an indicator that almost half of the eligible Mennonites were now fighting for Canada. Many of the enlistees were intentional in their wishes to not fight. Many had not abandoned the basic principles of non-resistance and were not in favour of the war. A number of Mennonites who appear in the Armed Forces service records, including some who ended up fighting because they felt that they had no other options, considered themselves to be

conscientious objectors despite their service.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, many Mennonites who enlisted were clear about the fact that they would not under any circumstances bear arms, though they wished to help. In the Armed Forces' records listing the personnel, which the Epps went through to find the names of the Mennonite enlistees, there is no distinction between the various types of service.

Bill Friesen described the fact that his own platoon in the medical corps was made up of twenty Mennonites out of a total of forty-two men. Their unit was granted "restricted" status, meaning that they were not forced to bear arms in training. After they began to mobilize for their service in England, though they still did not have to bear arms, they were amalgamated into the rest of the army and were no longer identified by their restricted status. As Friesen relates it, though the men in his platoon considered themselves to be COs they were indistinguishable from the other men. His discharge papers, issued on 17 July 1946, state simply that he "Served on Active Service with the Canadian Army," making him and his Mennonite CO comrades in his platoon indistinguishable from any other member of the RCA.<sup>69</sup>

There are a number of ways in which the Canadian Mennonite enlistee experience may be divided. The first division is between those who were willing to fight and those who adhered to the Mennonite principles of non-resistance in their personal actions even within the Armed Forces. This is illustrated in the responses of Peter Engbrecht, who was willing to bear arms, stating that he decided to enlist because he realized that "Canada

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<sup>68</sup> One Mennonite Second World War veteran enlisted in the army and was part of an infantry unit despite his personal conviction of conscientious objection towards violence. He stated that, regardless of his convictions, he also felt that "you were in the army, and what the army did you gotta do." Name withheld by request, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 27 May 2009.

<sup>69</sup> Bill Friesen, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 15 October 2009.

deserved fighting for,”<sup>70</sup> and Bill Friesen who stated before the mobilization board that he did not want to fight but wanted to do whatever else it took to help out, which would eventually lead him into the restricted medical corps.<sup>71</sup>

Their process of enlistment in the Armed Forces had also followed divergent routes. Engbrecht had desperately wanted to join the Armed Forces once the war broke out. He was opposed by his home congregation, Whitewater Mennonite Church, who saw his hopes to join the fighting as directly opposing their pacifist stance. However, after consulting with his family and his Mennonite bishop, Engbrecht eventually made his own decision to enlist, which he did in March 1941. Similarly, Jake Froese of Virgil, ON, was so eager to volunteer for service that he, along with a few friends, tried to enlist at the age of 16: “They looked at our age and they said, ‘Just come back in a few years time.’”<sup>72</sup> He did and ended up in the European theatre of war serving as a scout in the infantry. In contrast to Engbrecht and Froese, many Mennonites waited until they were drafted to make their decision to enlist, whether in combatant or non-combatant units.

Friesen, for example, did not share this initial fervour. Waiting until the draft had been initiated by the Canadian government, Friesen responded to the call from the army in November 1941. At that point he and his brother chose to make use of their potential privileges as Mennonites by seeking out conscientious objector status. As they were from Ontario they were ordered to stand trial in order to prove their claim. However, at the trial, rather than seek conscientious objector status Friesen and his brother stated that they “did not come there to be tossed into jail or go to bush camp but...wanted to help relieve

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<sup>70</sup> Neufeld, *Mennonites at War*, 17.

<sup>71</sup> Bill Friesen, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 15 October 2009.

<sup>72</sup> Jake Froese, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 16 May 2009.

the suffering in the medical field.”<sup>73</sup> At that point the mobilization board officer left his seat and put his arms around the brothers, asking them if they really meant that. They did, and they were enlisted into the Royal Canadian Army in the Medical Corps on 2 December 1943.<sup>74</sup>

Among those who were unwilling to bear arms there was a wide range of routes taken to join the Armed Forces. Many of these enlistees had initially applied for conscientious objector status and ended up in the service due to varying circumstances and convictions. In some cases, conscientious objector status was denied to the young men. In other cases CO status was granted, but the individual chose to enlist in active service in either combatant or non-combatant units anyway. One Mennonite from St. Catharines, ON, began as a CO, but after realizing that he could not make enough money as a CO he enlisted in the army, although he still did not wish to kill anyone.<sup>75</sup>

Engbrecht and Friesen had differing views on the type of service that was acceptable as a Canadian citizen despite their common Mennonite heritage. Though they would find themselves in dissimilar scenarios with very distinct mandates, their enlistment would place them within the ranks of the Mennonites who had neglected to follow the traditionally accepted route of alternative service outside of the Armed Forces. Their dates of enlistment, overseas service and discharge from the army are described in the Canadian Armed Forces Records, along with their rank. Their status as Mennonites is noted by Mennonite historians by their name, hometown and information provided by themselves, by their families and by their local newspapers. In order to begin to correctly

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<sup>73</sup> Bill Friesen, Pamphlet, Personal Collection, “Restricted Enlistment Dec 2/1943: Canadian Army Medical Corp.”

<sup>74</sup> Epp/CGCA list.

<sup>75</sup> Name withheld by request, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 27 May 2009.

understand the nature of the Canadian Mennonite servicemen and women during the Second World War it must be noted that, rather than simply being distinguishable as the ones who neglected to follow the traditional path of the conscientious objectors, their perspectives were nuanced within their larger willingness to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces.

At the same time, their service in the Canadian Armed Forces, whether in the restricted Medical Corps or as a non-combatant mechanic in the navy or a scout in the army or a gunner in the air force, bears examining. While the Mennonite enlistees' experiences were varied and many of the men maintained a non-resistance perspective, the very fact of their enlistment is a major departure from the traditional Mennonite community, a historically significant shift in perspective. In early Anabaptist and then early Mennonite teachings, participation not only in armies but in any form of government service was thought to be contrary to following Christ. As Hans J. Hillerbrand writes, "The emphatic Anabaptist affirmation that no true Christian can participate in a government position, must be seen – in light of its early existence and uncompromising representation – as one of the major points of the 'Anabaptist Vision.'"<sup>76</sup> During the war, the Mennonite leaders were aware of this as they struggled to maintain their non-resistance faith confession in the traditional ways. Although some Mennonites were enlisting in non-combatant roles, many of the leaders, particularly but not exclusively the *Kanadier*, felt that enlisting and then attempting to be placed into a non-combatant role was not a viable solution. The very association with the government, and especially the efforts of the government in the war, was still regarded by many as full participation.

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<sup>76</sup> Hans J. Hillerbrand, "The Anabaptist View of the State," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 32 (1958): 94.

In a meeting of the Peace Problems Committee of the Mennonite Church the leaders appealed to the government's own perspective of active service, that service in the military was an all encompassing effort. The Mennonite leaders understood that

you have a variety of appeals for service such as – Postal army service, mechanics, ambulance corps, dental and medical corps, professional engineers, radio and wireless operators. In world war No. 1 many of those services were called non-combatant but we are advised in world war No. 2 there is no such a service department in the Canadian army and if you accept service in his Majesties' Army, Navy, or Air Force you are in the Military and subject to orders...we need to recognise once for all that there is no such a thing as doing service in any phase of the Military and yet be out because the War department has made it plain that we are either in or out and there is no such a thing as doing service without basic training and a call to any duty if an emergency arises.<sup>77</sup>

The Mennonite leaders during the Second World War recognized that there were many different ways in which Mennonites were enlisting. However, they regarded any form of active service as a departure from the traditional Mennonite stance. That stance was one of absolute refusal to serve in the military in any capacity; the fact that over 41% of those called into service in the Second World War chose to do so, regardless of the nature of their individual service, is a deeply important occurrence in the history of the Mennonite church, suggesting that some important social, cultural and political factors were at work.

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<sup>77</sup> "The Task We Face," Peace Problems Committee of the Mennonite Church, 1 October 1942, CGCA, Epp Collection, 1940 WWII Specia.



## CHAPTER TWO

### DIVISIONS AMONG THE CANADIAN MENNONITE LEADERS

*Perhaps half of our people would be willing to do some kind of non-combatant service, but a number of them refuse any kind of service...To me it seems the only way in which we might unite would be that in case of war we offer the government non-combatant service under church supervision, but I am not sure that we will even get that far.<sup>1</sup>*

David Toews, Canadian Mennonite leader

*They never talked to me at all.<sup>2</sup>*

Canadian Mennonite serviceman, regarding his Mennonite leaders

The Mennonite leaders in Canada failed their young men in two crucial ways before and during the Second World War. The Canadian leaders failed to establish alternatives to service in the Armed Forces through the government in advance of the war. This inability of the leaders to work out alternatives in a comprehensive manner before the war, despite the fact that their American Mennonite neighbours were at that moment providing an example of how to engage in dialogue with their government in an organized and timely manner, necessitated internal dialogue concerning such service during the war. At this point the differences within the Canadian Mennonites emerged as the different Mennonite groups clashed over issues of alternative service.

During the war, I. G. Neufeld commented that one of the two factors in the large number of enlistments in Canada was the Mennonite “participation in Russian war services in 1914-1918.”<sup>3</sup> He wrote that these factors “undermined amongst the Mennonites their cardinal doctrine of non-resistance, and have prepared them for a

<sup>1</sup> David Toews, letter to Walter H. Dyck, May 26, 1939, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 3.

<sup>2</sup> Name withheld by request, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 27 May 2009.

<sup>3</sup> I. G. Neufeld, “Mennonites and the War,” CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII 1940 War, I. G. Neufeld Papers, 7. The other factor was the “rapid assimilation of the Liberal Mennonites into the Canadian way of living.” Refer to Chapter Three – Canadian Mennonite Patriotism.

compromise in military matters.” The Mennonites who had left prior to this were inclined to agree with such an assessment, fearing compromise from their Russian-influenced brethren. Not addressed in advance of the war, the differences between these Canadian and formerly Russian Mennonites emerged strongly at a time when the Mennonites were most desperately in need of unity. The leaders would find themselves strongly entrenched in their own slants on Mennonite ideology to which they were reluctant to negotiate. Forced to engage each other the leaders were distracted from the necessary task of equipping many of their young men to seek out alternative service and to articulate a position of non-resistance. Due to both a lack of clearly established alternative service early in the war, and to a lack of education for the Mennonite men, many were subject to the wishes of their government due to the negligence of their leaders, which is reflected in many stories of Mennonites serving in the Armed Forces in the Second World War.

Mennonite leader Benjamin B. Janz was actively involved throughout the Second World War in dialoguing with young Mennonite men in the Armed Forces as well as the conscientious objectors. Many men found him to be a reliable man of influence with whom to present their complaints and problems, or to defend their decision to join the Canadian war effort. Peter Boldt, a Mennonite serviceman of Russian birth who had settled with his family in Calgary, AB, wrote to Janz from No. 3 Manning Depot in Edmonton, AB. Boldt wished Janz to know of his circumstances in the military camp, where he was being trained in the air force as an Aircraftman 2<sup>nd</sup> class (AC2).

After describing his life in the camp and his Christian witness among the other men, AC2 Peter Boldt wrote to Janz: “With regard to killing – I am as opposed to it as

ever and not a day goes by that I don't ask our Heavenly Father that I'll emerge from this fruitless struggle with my hands free from human blood. I feel confident that He will answer."<sup>4</sup> These are not the words that one would expect from an enlisted man. Boldt's objection to the war and to killing are more consistent with the views of the conscientious objectors who were simultaneously serving in the forests of British Columbia.

Throughout his letter it is apparent that Boldt considered his faith to be central to his life, as he referred to his testimony and actions among his comrades. He wrote of his hope that at least one life would be changed so that his time in the air force would have not been in vain. As a man who thoughtfully and intentionally considered his faith, who identified himself strongly enough with his Mennonite background to write to the Mennonite leader Janz, and who objected strongly to killing and noted the futility of war, Boldt would seem to have been a clear candidate for conscientious objection and alternative service.

Although he had enlisted in the air force, Boldt did consider himself to be a conscientious objector. He went on to state in his letter, "I am a real C.O. in uniform."<sup>5</sup> However, despite his convictions that killing was wrong and that the war was a vain pursuit, Boldt's application for conscientious objector status was rejected and he ended up serving in the air force from 1943 until 1946.

AC2 Peter Boldt found himself in the air force during the Second World War because after his CO status rejection, in his understanding, "my only other alternative was jail."<sup>6</sup> While Boldt was provided with no legitimate alternative to serving in the

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Boldt, letter to B. B. Janz, n.d., Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS), Benjamin B. Janz fonds, vol. 982 file 68.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Canadian Armed Forces during the Second World War, many of Boldt's peers among the Mennonites ended up in civilian-run alternative service camps. Boldt was a cultural Mennonite who was also able to articulate his position of faith based on the Mennonite expression of non-resistance. However, he found himself enlisted in the air force, writing to his Mennonite leaders to explain his situation.

There were many Mennonite men, over 6,900, able to take up alternative service in the forestry camps. However, among the Mennonite men who are on record as having enlisted in the military there are many who similarly saw themselves as COs. Like Peter Boldt, there were many who did not wish to fight but saw no feasible alternative to enlisting. With the extensive records that have been kept concerning the alternative service of the Mennonites in the Second World War it is easy to overlook the fact that many who wished for such service were neglected. This neglect was to play a large role in many of the cases of Mennonite enlistment.

### **Mennonites in Russia**

On the morning of 15 May 1939, at a meeting of the representatives of the Canadian Mennonite churches in Winkler, MB, B. B. Janz stood up to make a few comments before the assembly. After reporting on a few recent meetings among some of the historic peace churches Janz concluded his talk with some comments of his own regarding the work of non-resistance adherents. The minutes from the meeting capture Janz's message: "The non-resistant must be willing to aid and heal the enemy as well as friend, in peace or in war. Br. Janz questions whether or not we in Canada have

overlooked this too much.”<sup>7</sup> At this point the meeting moved on to a report concerning a visit by one of the delegates to some new Mennonite colonies in Brazil and Paraguay.

Janz’s seemingly innocuous statements, however, would echo sharply in the ears of the leaders. These words would soon create tensions and dissent that would escalate throughout the years of the war. Underlying Janz’s words of “aid and healing” in Canada was the question of alternative service, a matter of intimate historical and confessional importance to the Mennonite leaders. In the afternoon session Janz would be given the opportunity to further expound his views. Janz stated to the leaders:

The M.B. Church adheres to the principles of non-resistance but would be prepared, in case of need, for an alternative service, and that in the medical corps, thereby manifesting that the churches are willing to save life, but not to destroy it. Should the government require it they are willing to help nurse the wounded and to relieve pain.<sup>8</sup>

In theory the Mennonites in Canada in the late 1930s were a single body of faith. They shared a common cultural heritage rooted in Switzerland and the Netherlands from the time of the Reformation in the early sixteenth century and their common fundamental practices and beliefs continued to hold true. However, the Mennonite church in Canada was split with a fault line that was distinct and unmistakable to the Mennonites themselves. With Janz’s words the quiet hopes of many of the leaders had finally been voiced; for many other leaders their fears had begun to be realized. In stating a willingness to serve the needs of the wounded in accordance with the needs of the government Janz had brought to Canada a precedent, set in Russia, which countered a significant Mennonite faith tradition carried and maintained from their Anabaptist

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<sup>7</sup> Reimer, *Experiences*, 39.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

beginnings. His hopes of establishing medical services in the event of war suggested bringing the Mennonites under the auspices of the government, and specifically under the military. Mennonite tradition emphasized the need for adherence to Christ alone by separation from governmental authority, especially in relation to the military.

The Mennonites had been only too happy to accept the land that was offered to them by Russian Empress Catherine II (the Great) in 1786. Their large community had been flourishing in the Vistula Valley in Poland. The former swamps had been converted into rich farm lands by the industrious Mennonites and their community prospered. However, their success was met with suspicion when the Polish land was divided up and the Mennonites found themselves under the subjection of the Prussian authorities. New legislation intended to stifle their potential for continued development began to severely hinder their much needed continued expansion. With Empress Catherine's offer of expansive tracts of land on the south-western Russian steppes, along with religious freedom and economic incentives the Mennonites found a place to settle comfortably.<sup>9</sup> It was to be in Russia that they would experience their most prosperous period which, for many of them, was to last for over a century.

With ample space for growth and development along the Dnieper River and an ambitious, enterprising spirit the Mennonite colonies burgeoned into a community beyond that which they had achieved in the Vistula Valley. But just as they had found themselves under the ire of their neighbours and soon the government in Prussia, they once again found themselves a self-contained, foreign community viewed with suspicion. Their German culture remained largely uninterrupted by that of their more recently adopted land, which did not go unnoticed.

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<sup>9</sup> Epp, *Exodus*, 12.

With the rise of Alexander II to the leadership of Russia a number of reforms were to shake up the peaceful existence that the Mennonites had been experiencing. In particular the military reform framework was to contain important implications for the non-resistant Mennonites. From his intentions to reform the Russian military the tsar moved into attempts to bolster the size of army; on 4 November 1870 he announced the government's intention "to require military service of all classes in the nation."<sup>10</sup>

Realizing that their privileged status of exemption from the military might be in jeopardy the Mennonites sent delegations to begin to try to reason with the government. For two years, from 1871 until 1873 the Mennonites sent six delegations to St. Petersburg. The first delegation, stating their hopes for exemptions from the new military law, were immediately met with inquiries as to whether they would be willing to partake in service which would be alternative to active duty, such as medical service (*Sanitaetsdienst*). The delegation quietly noted that this was not acceptable.<sup>11</sup>

The ensuing delegations would be met with similar responses, as the government continued to refuse complete exemption from military service but offered alternative service under the auspices of the military in the *Sanitaetsdienst*.<sup>12</sup> The sixth and final Mennonite delegation left a petition, addressed to Alexander II. Their pleas were ignored, and they were left with the option to either serve in the military (in the medical corps if they chose) or follow the traditional Mennonite method of emigration.<sup>13</sup> Although many chose to leave Russia in the mid-1870s, two-thirds of the Mennonites remained, resigning

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<sup>10</sup> Klippenstein, "State Service," 45.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>12</sup> While under the auspices of the military, the *Sanitaetsdienst* was not strictly a part of the military. F. C. Peters shows that the medical corps service in Russia was different than that in Canada and the United States during World War II, whose units were military, whether combatant or non-combatant. See F. C. Peters, *Mennonite Life*, January 1955, 31-35.

<sup>13</sup> Klippenstein, "State Service," 56.

themselves to the fact that they would now have to serve in the military for the first time in their history.<sup>14</sup> Of those who emigrated from the colonies and made their way to North America, 7,442 ended up in Canada.<sup>15</sup> It would take almost another half century, but many of those who remained behind would eventually follow suit under more severe circumstances.

The second great wave of Mennonite immigrants to Canada from Russia would arrive in the 1920s. While both groups of immigrants had shared almost a century of community establishment on the Russian steppes, by the time that they were reunited in Canada after the Russian revolution they had separately undergone some of the most formative experiences of the Mennonite community since their settlement in Russia. While reunited in Canada they would become distinguished from each other by the names *Kanadier* and *Russlaender*, denoting the 1870s and 1920s immigrants, respectively.<sup>16</sup> The differences between the two groups that emerged through their separate experiences in Canada and Russia would create divisions that would leave them with conflicted leadership. This would have severe consequences for the Mennonite peace position during the Second World War.

The *Kanadier* feared that that which had been experienced by the Mennonites who had remained in Russia would similarly be brought to bear in Canada. By fleeing Russia when they did the *Kanadier* managed to avoid government service, thereby avoiding military involvement and association with violence. Their time in Canada

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<sup>14</sup> Epp, *Exodus*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> As Frank H. Epp notes, disparaging use of the names *Kanadier* and *Russlaender* escalated throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The *Kanadier* found the well educated and progressive *Russlaender* to be aggressive, domineering, arrogant and haughty from their years of upscale living in Russia, despite the ensuing years of persecution and poverty. The hardworking and traditional *Kanadier* were seen as unsophisticated, uneducated, simple and overly old-fashioned by the *Russlaender*. See Epp, *1920-1940*.



leading up to the second worldwide conflict of the century would be similarly largely free of government interference. The two-thirds who stayed in Russia, on the other hand, having resigned themselves to the fact that they would have to accept government involvement, were to go through some experiences that were new to the Mennonite people.

Provisions were made for the Mennonites who had remained in Russia with the implementation of a forestry service program (*Forsteidienst*), which helped to ease the tensions.<sup>17</sup> There were elements of military service in their work in the forestry camps, as they were subject to military discipline. However their first close involvement with the military did not occur until 1877.<sup>18</sup> The Russo-Turkish War found the Mennonites providing major medical services to the Russian army through the creation and funding of hospitals within the Mennonite colonies. The tsar thankfully acknowledged their efforts and encouraged them to continue in such service by reminding them that, although they were aiding the war effort, “the service we ask of you is not a military service; it is not opposed to your conscience.”<sup>19</sup>

As their young men were drafted and the communities found themselves increasingly forced to interact with the government the Mennonites wrestled with their thoughts on military service. They still strongly opposed the bearing of arms and feared that they were being drawn towards such a step, though they were proud of the services which they were rendering for Russia in the *Forsteidienst*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Klippenstein, “State Service,” 85-111.

<sup>18</sup> The Mennonites had had contact with the Russian military during the Crimean War during the 1850s, but that had been aid that they provided to the army on their own terms, not under military/government supervision. See Klippenstein, “State Service,” 32-36.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 129-30.

Though the dialogue with the government was constant as the Mennonites sought provisions for their faith convictions, their views were also affected in their continued alternative military service. Mennonites began to observe that perhaps military service should be considered more acceptable, and that their service in the forestry services was possibly not enough of a solution. A sense of patriotic fervour began to emerge among the Mennonites during the different conflicts in which Russia found itself.<sup>21</sup> There began to be elements of political ownership among the Mennonites, as they closely observed war with the Turks, participated in the medical units, and reacted strongly to the attack of the Japanese on the Russians, as even more men signed up for the Red Cross in search of closer involvement with the struggle at the front-lines.<sup>22</sup>

There were stirrings among the community about the fact that perhaps certain forms of violence were not entirely unacceptable. Some spoke of the fact that rather than a complete confession of non-resistance, those Mennonites who might choose to bear arms in self-defence or military service should not be condemned.<sup>23</sup> Such voices were a small minority among the Mennonites, but they were also being heard in ways which they had not been heard previously.

By the First World War the Mennonites had experienced interaction with the Russian government and military on a number of levels. State service had been increasing

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<sup>21</sup> John B. Toews' book *Czars, Soviets, and Mennonites* examines Mennonite thought in Russia in the early twentieth century, utilizing the Mennonite newspapers *Der Botschafter* and *Friedenstimme* to examine the state of the Mennonites in regards to the political and social turmoil surrounding them.

<sup>22</sup> The actions of the government were closely monitored by the Mennonites, who noted with approval the successes of the tsar. Mennonite writers referred to Russia as "our nation" and stated that "we are all Russians," a change from their consistently cloistered Germanism. See Klippenstein, "State Service," 130; Lawrence Klippenstein and Jacob Dyck, *Mennonites Alternative Service in Russia: The Story of Abram Dück and his Colleagues 1911-1917* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2002), 18-19. This assimilation to the surrounding culture would be mirrored in the attitudes of the Mennonites in Canada prior to the Second World War (see Chapter Three – Canadian Mennonite Patriotism).

<sup>23</sup> Klippenstein, "State Service," 148-49.

since the initial military reform of Alexander II. Their attitude towards government involvement and even military involvement had shifted in stages over the previous decades. During the war the Mennonites continued to be involved in various capacities, in the forestry services, medical corps and other branches of the military. It was not until the dust settled after the war that it became clear just how much the Mennonite mentality had changed. 12,000 men in total ended up enlisting. Out of the 12,000, six thousand actually found themselves on the front lines of the fighting in the hospital and ambulance corps service.<sup>24</sup> A small number joined military combat units.

Military involvement by the Mennonites had gone beyond what any of them had expected when they had chosen to remain in Russia. They had been given the opportunity to prove their loyalty to their country, and had found themselves more closely connected to Russia in the process. Their work for Russia during the different wars of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was acknowledged in their adoptive country. They felt closer, more patriotic ties to Russia. Although different from the traditional Mennonite stance they were yet able to justify the work that they had done and reconcile it with their continued belief in non-resistance. In some ways, service in the medical corps was regarded as a more tangible way to manifest their Mennonite doctrines of willingness to suffer as they experienced the same hardships as the men on the front lines, a view which would continue to be held by some of the *Russlaender* in Canada during the Second World War.<sup>25</sup> For the Mennonites who had remained in Russia after the

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<sup>24</sup> Epp, *Exodus*, 28. Other estimates hold the numbers at 6,000 in the *Sanitaetsdienst* and 7,500 in the *Forsteidienst*. See Esther Epp-Tiessen, *J. J. Thiessen: A Leader For His Time* (Winnipeg: CMBC, 2001), 44.

<sup>25</sup> Epp-Tiessen, *J. J. Thiessen*, 150.

conscription laws had come into effect, the experience with the government and the military was largely seen in a positive light.

When the *Russlaender* ended up in Canada the *Kanadier* realized that these Mennonites had undergone a major transformation in their years apart. They feared that their position as non-resistant Mennonites would be compromised by Mennonites who had been willing to make concessions in their years in Russia. As the war dawned on the Mennonite peoples in Canada the two groups eyed each other with suspicion. There were whisperings about the *Russlaender* among the *Kanadier* leaders. That their brethren regarded their own service in Russia favourably was unthinkable for the *Kanadier*.

More troubling yet was the possibility that these Russian Mennonites would try to impose their newfound viewpoint on the Mennonite church in Canada. The *Kanadier* leaders saw it as their own mandate to bring the *Russlaender* back to the true path of biblical non-resistance which they had seemingly been neglecting during their years apart. S. F. Coffman wrote to Moses H. Schmitt: "Some of those people are trying to introduce the Russian method into [North] America. We do not ask for such experiences. Our attitude differs from that and we may continue to take the position we have taken in the past. They may profit by our experiences."<sup>26</sup>

By the Second World War, the Canadian Mennonites, with a common confession of non-resistance in the name of Christ, were yet firmly divided as to the nature of non-resistance. The implications of their division would only begin to be felt by the midway point of the war as it became apparent that the strong tradition of avoidance of military participation had been compromised. The large numbers of Mennonite men enlisting in the Canadian Armed Forces would be a shock to the leaders who were too intent on

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<sup>26</sup> S. F. Coffman, letter to Moses H. Schmitt, 11 May 1939, CGCA, S.F. Coffman Papers.

bickering amongst themselves to care for the needs of their young, service-eligible men and women.

### **An Established Position**

The legal structure of the Canadian conscientious objector position was already in place prior to the Second World War. Military service exemptions for Mennonites had been stated and developed in Canada since soon after the first wave of Mennonites had emigrated from Russia. An Order-in-Council in 1873, often referred to as the *Privilegium*, had provided the Mennonites with complete exemption from military service in Canada, which would serve as the basis for their later service refusal status.

In the midst of the First World War, Canada reached a crisis when it became clear that more troops would be needed in the increasingly bloody conflict. The question of conscription became a major point of contention as the issue climaxed with Prime Minister Robert Borden's decision on 17 May 1917 to enact conscription.<sup>27</sup> The Military Service Act, 1917, with which Borden hoped to recruit between 50,000 and 100,000 men, was hailed as much needed by many leaders but met with consternation by young men across Canada. To the relief of the Mennonites, however, they soon discovered that the Military Service Act would not undo "for religious pacifists what the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had in Canadian law repeatedly given to them."<sup>28</sup> It was seen that men could escape the net of conscription if they were Mennonite, respecting the provisions of the 1873 Order-in-Council.

The Mennonites did, however, notice that the exemption clauses that were provided for them within the Act seemed to only provide for exemption from actual

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<sup>27</sup> J. L. Granatstein, and J. M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), 63-64.

<sup>28</sup> Epp, *1786-1920*, 375.

service as combatants, but would still require non-combatant military service. This would affect the Mennonites in Ontario where they were *exempted within* rather than *excepted from* the law. The government saw the Ontario Mennonites as separate from the earlier Mennonite immigrants in western Canada, and therefore unable to qualify for the full exception granted to the earlier Mennonite immigrants. At this point the Mennonites were clear about their refusal of all forms of service, combatant or non-combatant. A delegation of eight representatives from the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and the Amish Mennonites immediately made their way to Ottawa, under the leadership of Bishop S. F. Coffman, to speak with Borden and to reiterate their position. The Mennonites were informed that they would not be relieved of potential prosecution for non-compliance. At the same time they would be provided for under the *exception* clauses of the Act in that their claims of Mennonite identification would then free them from any liability.<sup>29</sup>

The Canadian Mennonites also had some struggles throughout the war with the language of “exception” and “exemption” in the provisions of the Act. Some Mennonites were excepted from the law, while others were simply exempted within the law, meaning that they would still be expected to perform non-combatant service. Some of the more educated Mennonites took it upon themselves to examine their legal rights, and to copy out the documents which were relevant to their exemption status under the government.<sup>30</sup> It would become clear to the Canadian Mennonites that the government would not easily

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<sup>29</sup> The importance of the difference between exemption and exception are noted in Fransen, “Objection,” 23, and Reddig, “Manitoba,” 34-36, and explained in Epp, *1786-1920*, 374-76, 384-85. Essentially, the Mennonites in Ontario were initially “exemptions in” the act, meaning they did not have to fight, but could still be called to do non-combatant service, whereas those who were “exceptions from” the act did not have to do even non-combatant service.

<sup>30</sup> Epp, *1786-1920*, 376.

and automatically provide for them; it would be up to the Mennonites to be vigilant in their relations with the government.

The Russian Mennonites of western Canada found themselves under the “exception” provisions of the Act, freeing them from all forms of service. But the Ontario Mennonites frequently found themselves placed under the “exemption” provisions, wherein they would have to serve in a non-combatant role. This was unacceptable to the Mennonites, who saw it as a case of aiding and abetting the war effort, participating in the crime of war.<sup>31</sup> The government had provided for this, but during the First World War there was frequently confusion between different branches of the government, some of whom understood the status which this people group held by virtue of the 1873 Order-in-Council, and some of whom seemed unaware of its existence.<sup>32</sup>

It became clear to the Mennonites that the government was not about to go out of its way to stand up for the rights they had granted this non-resistant group. As Frank H. Epp writes, “The government authorities were not about to disburse privileges and rights allowable under the law when the people themselves were not ready to claim or ‘fight’ for them.”<sup>33</sup> This spurred the Mennonites on towards watchfulness in their dealings with the government, and they learned to confront and dialogue with the Borden administration in an upfront manner, jockeying for their rights to uphold their faith principles, but showing respect to the authority of the government. As a letter from the Mennonites of the Ontario Conference to the government of Canada in Council states, “We, as a people, seek to adjust ourselves to the new state of affairs, willingly submitting

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<sup>31</sup> “An Appeal to the Government of Canada in Council,” 11 October 1917, Appendix, H. Jane Southgate thesis.

<sup>32</sup> H. Jane Southgate, “An Examination of the Position of the Mennonites in Ontario Under the Jurisdiction of the Military Service Act, 1917,” M.A. thesis, Wilfred Laurier University, 1976, 35-36.

<sup>33</sup> Epp, *1786-1920*, 375-76.

to the wishes of the Government in as far as we can do so without violating a law or principle of Christ.”<sup>34</sup>

Despite the confusion which was sometimes seen within the government in regards to the status of the Mennonites, and despite the fact that the Mennonites had to stand on guard for the privileges granted them, they realized that the government had been largely accommodating to their demands. In order to display their gratitude, the Mennonites, along with other peace groups, organized a group known as the “Non-Resistant Relief Organization” (NRRO). The purpose of the organization was simply to raise a special monetary offering. Epp relates that they wanted “to raise an offering of gratitude or a memorial gift for war relief as an expression of appreciation.”<sup>35</sup> The NRRO is exemplary of the headway that the Mennonites were making throughout the First World War in their relationship with the government. They were finding the balance between maintaining their status as conscientious objectors but also as grateful and conscientious citizens who wished to contribute to the relief efforts that were much needed during the war.

The Mennonites were able to solidify their position by working through the tenets of the Military Service Act, acknowledging their exception status but working diligently to also clarify the terminology of exemption. The war served as a good example to the Mennonite leaders that, while they would be granted a status separate from that of most Canadians in times of war, they would have to wrestle with the government in order to iron out the minutia of their position. By the end of the war the Mennonites were left with a warning in this regard. They had failed to unify their position across Canada before

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<sup>34</sup> “An Appeal to the Government of Canada in Council,” 11 October 1917, Appendix, H. Jane Southgate thesis.

<sup>35</sup> Epp, *1786-1920*, 376.



conscription took effect and because of this the government argued that Ontario Mennonites were exempted within the law rather than excepted from the law. There were some vague assurances given to the Mennonites that this could be worked around. However, by the end of the war the implications of this were somewhat clearer. Just prior to the end of the war in 1918 the Governor-General-in-Council announced clearly that immigrant Mennonites, those who were not descended of the immigrants who arrived in the 1870s or earlier, were not exempted from military service, even with the provisions of the Military Service Act.<sup>36</sup>

The implications that emerged for the Ontario Mennonites just before the end of the war, were that they would have to prove their faith position. Tribunals would judge a candidate's legitimacy as a conscientious objector according to how well he could articulate his stance. This was a troubling thought for the Mennonites who recognized that their cultural affiliations did not necessarily translate into knowledge of their traditional faith doctrines. The refusal to allow the Mennonites to be exempted on the basis of prepared lists would become a significant problem during the Second World War. H. Jane Southgate notes that, had the Mennonites unified before the conscription act was passed, they likely could have avoided becoming divided by the government in this way.<sup>37</sup> As she notes, it was up to the Mennonite leaders to have taken the initiative to ensure that the government knew of their common status as Mennonites despite their different histories of immigration into Canada, but they failed to do so.

By virtue of the fact that the government had upheld the promises that they had made to the Mennonites in 1873, the provisions provided for the Mennonites in the

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<sup>36</sup> Epp, *1786-1920*, 385.

<sup>37</sup> Southgate, "Examination," 74.

Military Service Act of 1917 solidified their legal standing as conscientious objectors. However, there was also disunity in the Mennonite position before the government which became apparent even weeks before the end of the war. The leaders knew that the government held them to different standards within the Canadian Mennonite community as a whole, which, despite the end of the war, necessitated careful examination by the Mennonite leaders. Given another conflict they would once again have to build on the framework of cooperation that they had been establishing with the government. While they did have to be wary of the legalese that was used by the government, and while they did have to continue to dialogue with the government, the Canadian Mennonites came out of the First World War in a strong position to maintain their status as conscientious objectors from all forms of active service. Their need was to unify as a single body, as the Americans had done, and to present their unified position to the government in advance of another conflict.

### **A Costly Delay**

As the gears of war began to grind to life once more in Europe in the 1930s and the American Mennonites began to prepare to establish their standing amongst themselves and before their government, the Canadian Mennonites had the advantage of the framework of an already established peace position before their government. However, by the end of the war, the numbers of Canadian Mennonite enlisted men would be remarkably high. The potential was for the Canadian Mennonites to push their advantage in order to maintain the status which they had enjoyed in the First World War, and to unify themselves so that their privileges would apply to all Mennonites in Canada. However, before and during the Second World War, the Mennonite leadership in Canada

would show itself to be conflicted and divided. Because of this they failed to present themselves in a unified manner to the Canadian government, which harmed their chances of securing their clear status as conscientious objectors in the eyes of the government. With their failure to establish their alternative service programs in a timely manner, the Mennonites left their young men without clear direction as to how to respond to the call to war. With a lack of useful alternative service work available, and with the Canadian government making it more difficult to claim conscientious objector status, Mennonite enlistments continued to increase after the early stages of the war.<sup>38</sup>

The Canadian Mennonites were not blind to the early mobilization efforts of the Americans, and they hoped that a unified effort would present a stronger case to the government. In fact, there were a number of meetings at which there was representation from different facets of Mennonite organizations of both countries. There were significant meetings on 10-11 March 1939 in Chicago, orchestrated by MCC, at which various Mennonite churches from North America, South America and Europe were present. The hope was that, by becoming familiar with each other's peace efforts, each group could better uphold their own.<sup>39</sup>

The American Mennonites proved to be driven by a sense of urgency to become prepared for the eventuality of another major war. Thus by the time that war in Europe was on the immediate horizon the Americans had consolidated their own position among themselves and had clearly presented their stance to the government.<sup>40</sup> By the time that

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<sup>38</sup> As shown by a graph denoting "Mennonite Enlistments in the Canadian Armed Forces," Mennonite enlistment was extremely slow from 1939 to 1940, but between 1941 and 1942 it increased dramatically. See Regehr, "Lost Sons," 467.

<sup>39</sup> Hershberger, *Church*, 10-11.

<sup>40</sup> American Mennonites were familiar with dialogue with their government through the Peace Problems Committee, as they intentionally contacted each new administration in order to create avenues for allowing the government to know the collective Mennonite stance on various issues at different points. By way of

Canada declared war on Germany on 10 September 1939 the American Mennonites had already organized themselves and their collective position before their own government, despite the fact that they were not to enter the war until 8 December 1941, over two years later. The American Mennonites anticipated the actions of their government and their own potential internal struggles well in advance of even Canada's entrance into the war, and therefore it was not simply the hesitation of the United States to join the war that granted the American Mennonites the time to organize themselves. Rather, there was an early sense of imminence among the Americans that fostered a harmony that was not similarly exemplified by the Canadians.<sup>41</sup>

In 1935 Guy F. Hershberger noted the choices with which their young men might soon be confronted and suggested ways to approach his own favoured response, which was peaceable alternative service.<sup>42</sup> Such early recognition, and more importantly acknowledgement, of the real possibility of another war was to prove essential to the successful mobilization efforts of the American Mennonites. Hershberger further stated

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example, Hershberger notes the intentions behind a series of letters which the Peace Problems Committee (which he would eventually join in 1959) had written to President Hoover's administration in 1927: "We owe it to the 'powers that be' to let them know our position on this question." See Hershberger, *Church*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that, as is the case with the Canadian Mennonites, the numbers of American Mennonite enlistments reflect high numbers in service in the Armed Forces. Of the 9,809 drafted men affiliated with a Mennonite group, 4,536 ended up in Civilian Public Service (the American wartime service for conscientious objectors) and 5,273 ended up in the Armed Forces. That is 46.2 percent in CPS and 53.8 in the Armed Forces. In the Second World War, the Americans were establishing their official wartime alternative service, while the Canadians were starting from an already well-established official position. Rather than regarding the American Mennonite figures in regards to those who opted to go along with military service when drafted, the Americans may be seen in light of the fact that their leaders were able to set a new precedent to allow many of their people the option to refuse armed service. See Hershberger, *Church*, 39.

<sup>42</sup> Theron F. Schlabach, "To Focus a Mennonite Vision," in *Kingdom, Cross, and Community: Essays on Mennonite Themes in Honor of Guy F. Hershberger*, ed. John Richard Burkholder and Calvin Redekop (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1976), 25.

that a specific plan had to be developed that could be pre-emptively proposed to the government, the necessity of which he elaborated in six points.<sup>43</sup>

The American Mennonite leaders succeeding in organizing themselves prior to the war in three essential ways: They prepared a systematic plan for alternative service;<sup>44</sup> they united themselves under the banner of their clearly stated and mutually affirmed confession of faith;<sup>45</sup> they were able to approach the American government well in advance of the war and with adequate resources for stating their case for alternative service.<sup>46</sup>

There are two essential practical derivatives which must be noted that came out of the American ability to unify their leadership under the common banner of a carefully affirmed peace position and alternative propositions to enlistment. First, because the leaders had a collective vision, they were able to look externally rather than being forced to confront each other, which would have necessitated an internal focus. Therefore, they were able to not only recognize the importance of educating their young people on Mennonite peace principles, they were also able to expend their energies on actually

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<sup>43</sup> The sixth point notes that a clearly elucidated, well organized and easily mobilized plan proposed before the outbreak of war was more likely to be accepted by the government, highlighting the urgency with which their prewar mobilization was approached. See Guy Franklin Hershberger, "Is Alternative Service Desirable and Possible?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* IX (1935): 33.

<sup>44</sup> The Peace Problems Committee and later the Mennonite Central Committee would play practical roles in developing plans for alternative service work. See Hershberger, *Church*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> The *Mennonite Peace Manifesto* was signed by 140 leaders representing eight different American Mennonite branches. See Hershberger, *Church*, 7. There were also other statements and documents attempting to outline the Mennonite peace position that continued to come out through the duration of the war. Good examples of this are Hershberger's works *Can Christians Fight?: Essays on Peace and War* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1940) and the later, more comprehensive, text *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1944).

<sup>46</sup> Mennonite representatives, along with delegates of the Friends and Brethren peace churches, met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House in 1937 in order to explain why they could not, in good conscience, take up arms in the event of a war. In early 1940, after the war had finally erupted, another delegation was sent to Roosevelt to describe the specifically defined proposals for alternative service that the Mennonites had developed should conscription be enacted. T. D. Regehr notes that the Americans were able, after their organized meetings and agreements, to declare "flatly" their refusal to participate in any activities related to the war, while still offering very clear methods of service that would not violate their conscience. See Hershberger, *Church*, 10; T. D. Regehr, *Canada*, 37-38.

doing so. While the leaders continued to enunciate their views on non-violence through various statements for their mutual benefit, they also began to make a concerted effort to educate their young people on what it all meant.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the leaders were able to present a comprehensive plan to their young people describing specific steps to take upon the enactment of conscription.

The second practical derivative flowed from the first, as the leaders realized that in order to educate and prepare their young people, they needed to have their alternative service arrangements in place with the government. The instructions to their young people hinged on their having conscientious objector service options officially in place. In order to do so, the Mennonite leaders presented a strong, unified front to the American government. The delegation sent to Roosevelt on 10 January 1940 to offer what Hershberger would call “concrete proposals for alternative service in case of conscription” was emblematic of the organized manner with which the Mennonites were able to approach their government. As Hershberger had written earlier, such straightforward and early initiative would offer the Mennonites the greatest possibility of the government agreeing to their proposals.<sup>48</sup> And success with the government meant that there would be a definite plan in place for their young people, who were already

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<sup>47</sup> Edward Yoder’s pamphlet “Must Christians Fight?” was written during the war for young Mennonites, many of whom were already in CO camps, to further help explain their position. Edward Yoder, *Must Christians Fight?* (Akron: Mennonite Central Committee, 1943). In September of 1939 the Mennonite Central Peace Committee proposed a plan containing specific steps. This plan would later be officially approved and supported by all of the Mennonite groups involved. In October 1940 there was a further leaflet created in order to more specifically direct the young potential draftees entitled *Counsel to Mennonite Young Men Regarding the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 As It Applies to Conscientious Objectors*. This was followed by another leaflet of the same name, prefixed with *Additional*, containing even more detailed instructions. Both were mailed to church ministers as well as placed in the *Gospel Herald*.

<sup>48</sup> Guy Franklin Hershberger, “Is Alternative Service Desirable and Possible?” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* IX (1935): 34.

being educated on Mennonite peace principles, by the time that conscription became a reality.

While the Americans had been organizing in earnest for almost four years, it was only at the Chicago meeting, half a year from Canada's entrance into the war, where the Canadian Mennonite leaders would wake from their inertial stupor. Fransen notes that the American sense of urgency, witnessed by the Canadians at the Chicago meeting, finally spurred the Canadians into action. He also writes that "The presupposition that all adherents of the peace church tradition needed to arrive at a unity of conviction, and that from this unity there should emerge concrete proposals for alternative forms of service, impressed itself on the leaders of the Canadian Mennonites."<sup>49</sup> On the eve of battle it had begun to dawn on them that they had some work to do.

The late entry of the Canadians into dialogue with the government for alternative service proposals would, however, have an effect on their ability to establish concrete alternative service possibilities for their men. The Mennonite delegations to President Roosevelt had spoken to him in 1937 about their refusal to participate in any form of service that might aid the war, and again in 1940, about the specific types of helpful relief work that they could offer. The government was given ample time to evaluate the Mennonite proposals. A Canadian equivalent to this crucial meeting was a Mennonite delegation with an appointment with Prime Minister King. However, unlike the Americans who met with Roosevelt during the relative calm of 1937, the Canadian leaders' meeting with King was on 10 June 1940, almost ten months after Canada's entrance into the war. By unfortunate happenstance this would turn out to be one of the most difficult and distracting days of the war for the Prime Minister.

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<sup>49</sup> Fransen, "Objection," 23.

The meeting with the Prime Minister occurred as the Nazis were on the verge of occupying Paris and the near disaster at Dunkirk was just ending. Even more pressingly, King had just been informed both that Italy had entered the war against the Allies and that his minister of national defence, Norman Rogers, had been killed in a plane crash. King was preparing to inform the House of Commons of both events, as well as speaking to Mrs. Rogers to let her know of the death of her husband, when he had to make a detour to visit with the Mennonite delegation. As Regehr understatedly writes, the Mennonite leaders were “seriously hampered by their own disagreements and by the government’s preoccupation with urgent military and political problems.”<sup>50</sup> With the war raging around them, by the time that they decided to speak, the small voice of the Mennonites had little hope of being heard.

Little was achieved in the meeting as the Mennonites remained uncertain of their fate upon the legislating of the new conscription act two months later. By presenting their proposals to King in the midst of the turmoil of the war, the Mennonites were shuffled aside and were unable to create a clear and consistent place for themselves in Canadian wartime policy. The conscription act (National Resources Mobilization Act [NRMA]) contained registration requirements for men across the country, and the Mennonites debated as to whether this applied to them. Their previous status from the 1873 Order-in-Council and from the First World War suggested that they might be exempted, but that had not been affirmed in their recent dialogue with the government. Worse yet, they still were neither unified nor seen as a unified body by the government.

The confusion felt by the Mennonite leaders was felt even more acutely by many Mennonite men. The men between the ages of 16 and 60, as Canadian citizens, were

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<sup>50</sup> Regehr, *Canada*, 42.



being told by their government to register according to the NRMA. As this was a first step in the enlistment process, the eligible Mennonites did not know what to do. After all, they were receiving a clear and direct order from their government. While it was apparent that registration was the first step in the conscription process, the Mennonite leaders were not providing their men with their own clear direction as to how to respond. Fransen saw the Mennonite men, and the youth in particular, as collectively “disturbed and confused as to what steps needed to be taken to ensure its exemption” upon the outbreak of the war.<sup>51</sup> By the time that conscription was beginning to take effect, they were no better off in regards to the instruction that they were receiving. Some were told by their leaders to register. Some refused to register as they felt that they were exempt. Some were instructed to write “Mennonite” across their registration cards, though, as many of these cards were rejected by the registrars, most were left without any notation.<sup>52</sup>

For men such as Peter Boldt there was no clear path. He failed in his application to receive conscientious objector status despite his ability to articulate his position.<sup>53</sup> Boldt ended up as an enlisted man in the air force, adding to the numbers of enlisted Mennonites despite his convictions. In fact, there were numerous cases where Mennonites, though able to state their reasons for objecting to military service, were refused alternative service. Peter J. Klassen, a farmer from Alberta, was taken into court by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in order to determine his eligibility for CO status. A cultural Mennonite who professed to have also been “saved,” Klassen was questioned for a week in Calgary by the RCMP. After refusing to enlist he was given the option to

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<sup>51</sup> Fransen, “Objection,” 41.

<sup>52</sup> Regehr, *Canada*, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Neufeld, *Mennonites at War*, 24.

pay \$25 or spend one month in jail. Electing to pay, he was suddenly and inexplicably sent to Peterborough, ON, made to enlist in the medical corps and to bear arms. Trying to salvage some semblance of the CO status which he had sought, Klassen wrote to B. B. Janz for help to at least be transferred to a non-combatant medical corps unit so that he would not have to carry a weapon.<sup>54</sup>

### Canadian Mennonites and the Struggle Within

In his introduction to the collection of meeting minutes in “Experiences of the Mennonites of Canada During the Second World War: 1939-1940,”<sup>55</sup> David Reimer laconically remarks, “[w]e regret to learn from the minutes of October 14 and 28, 1940, that the first and the latter immigrated Mennonites fell out on account of various experiences and opinions, and consequently two different divisions were being formed.”<sup>56</sup> This division, which would prove to be severe, would be well documented in the minutes and meetings held over the next few years of the war. The issue of alternative service would be the topic of contention. The Russian Mennonites, who had served in alternative service for the Russian government in both forestry and the medical corps, saw value in serving in any way that did not require them to bear arms. The Canadian Mennonites, on the other hand, had no such prior experience in serving under the supervision of the government. The concept of work within the military was particularly repugnant, as they felt that it was a compromise which could only lead to the further unthinkable compromise of bearing arms. The military needed to be regarded as a whole,

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<sup>54</sup> Peter J. Klassen, letter to B. B. Janz, n.d., CMBS, Benjamin B. Janz fonds, vol. 982 file 68.

<sup>55</sup> This book was written at the behest of the Committee of Directors of the Canadian Mennonites, of which David Reimer was the Secretary. The book contains descriptions of many of the meetings held by the Mennonite leaders and representatives of various committees. It is a compilation of meeting minutes, declarations, letters, statements and protocols of the leaders throughout the war years. Reimer, *Experiences*.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

with military combatant and non-combatant service equally unacceptable to people of the non-resistance tradition.

The depth of the gulf separating the two groups had become visible at a meeting held in Winkler, MB, on 15 May 1939.<sup>57</sup> It was here that the issue of alternative service had first arisen among the leaders. B. B. Janz, who was a firm leader among the *Russlaender* who had been instrumental in their mobilization in coming to Canada from Russia, made a report on behalf of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) church, which was largely made up of *Russlaender*. Recognizing the fact that their stance on combat would be questioned, Janz began by reiterating the MB desire to hold to the Mennonite principles of non-resistance. It was in his further suggestion, that they would be willing to take part in alternative service in a medical corps capacity,<sup>58</sup> that Janz began to stir up the controversy that would simmer among the Mennonites throughout the course of the war.

At the Winkler meeting other church leaders began to speak up, falling on both sides of the question of alternative service in the medical corps. Harold Bender, speaking on behalf of Bishop S. F. Coffman of Vineland, ON and the Old Mennonites, outlined their refusal to take part in any service that was connected to the military. As Reimer records Bender's response to Janz's suggestion, "Bender further emphasized that the Old Mennonite Churches are entirely opposed to any work in any organization which has anything to do with the conduct of war, such as the medical corps or a war industry."<sup>59</sup>

At this meeting the shape of the division among the leaders was clearly outlined. All of the representatives at the meeting in Winkler reaffirmed their collective peace

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<sup>57</sup> This meeting was largely the result of the Chicago meeting of 10-11 March 1939 at which the American organization had "finally inspired the Canadian leaders to move towards organizing their people." See Fransen, "Objection," 23.

<sup>58</sup> Reimer, *Experiences*, 41.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

position: “We thank God for the assurance that all the Conferences and Churches represented here stand firmly on the biblical principles of non-resistance as received from our fathers.”<sup>60</sup> The beliefs of both the *Kanadier* and the *Russlaender* in relation to non-resistance were not called into question during the war; both strongly affirmed their traditional Mennonite pacifist doctrines. Both groups also acknowledged the authority of the government of Canada in thankfulness for the freedoms that they enjoyed in their adoptive country. The question that split them was the extent to which they could serve Canada and participate in a war to which they as Mennonites were opposed. Both the *Kanadier* and *Russlaender* realized the necessity of alternative service for the Mennonites during the war as they refused to actually bear arms. However, the *Kanadier* continued to refuse to participate in any form of alternative service that was connected to the military in any way. For the *Kanadier* even the forestry service was unacceptable if under military supervision. The medical corps was even worse. Mennonites in the medical corps, even those not forced to bear arms, would be considered soldiers and would find themselves training alongside regular soldiers. They would be subject to military discipline. They would be on the front lines with other soldiers. And though the Mennonites would be saving rather than taking lives, when they bandaged up a wounded soldier they would potentially be sending him back just to pick up and gun again, whereby the Mennonites were indirectly contributing to more deaths.

The *Russlaender* had different views on the legitimacy of different forms of alternative service. They did not share the fear of the *Kanadier* of serving under military control. Their years of service in the *Forsteidienst* and the *Sanitaetsdienst* for the Russian government had softened their perspective on government-run service. The *Russlaender*

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 51.

therefore were not opposed to serving even within the medical corps, which would place them within the military. They were not opposed to their medical training being done in military camps and their service being done within the auspices of the military, as long as they were not required to bear arms themselves. The *Kanadier* saw this as a major compromise and feared that the *Russlaender*, with whom they were aligned before the government, would endanger their own position by their willingness to serve as they had in Russia.

The *Kanadier* leaders felt the need to influence the *Russlaender* to come back to their conservative, more traditional view. In some ways the *Russlaender* were seen by their more traditional compatriots as prodigal children who had drifted from the true Mennonite way; their years in Russia had caused them to drift away from both tradition and faith. As Harold S. Bender, an American Mennonite leader, advised *Kanadier* leader S. F. Coffman, "I think that it is important for us to keep in touch with [the *Russlaender* leaders] and to bring Christian pressure on them to seek to avoid any possibility of compromising our stand on non-resistance."<sup>61</sup> There was a sense of mistrust that the prodigal *Russlaender*, not really as Mennonite as the *Kanadier*, would yet position themselves in order to be seen as representative of the Mennonite stance, with a willingness to serve in a way that was actually counter to the traditional Mennonite doctrines.

The *Russlaender*, on the other hand, saw their position as a clearer representation of the true Mennonite stance. The medical corps allowed for suffering and the risk of death alongside the Canadian soldiers, compared to which the wilderness hardships of the forestry service were insignificant. The Mennonites spent much time speaking of

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<sup>61</sup> Harold S. Bender, letter to S. F. Coffman, 16 December 1938, CGCA, File: I – 3 – 2.4.

suffering and sacrifice; the necessity of both was acknowledged as firmly as that of non-resistance. At the same time it was acknowledged by many of the leaders on both sides that their young men were not displaying a willingness to sacrifice or to endure suffering. Staying at home during war emphasized their adherence to non-resistance but did not display their willingness to suffer. One *Kanadier* leader recognized this tendency as he remembered their experiences in the First World War: “During the last war our young men were allowed to remain at home and take advantage of good crops and high prices, and our English neighbors saw this. We Mennonites like to emphasize the sacrifices make, when really we make no sacrifice.”<sup>62</sup>

It was feared that the Mennonites had been and were continuing to falsely represent their own confession of faith. This was not just visible within their own walls, but was painfully visible to other Canadians as well. Bishop David Toews, a *Kanadier* and a key leader among the different Mennonite factions, stated,

our willingness to sacrifice has lessened...When the soldiers returned after [the First World War] we were told that many a widow’s son had fallen during the long struggle. Where were our young people? Many were found in dance halls where the returned boys met them and felt this deeply. If we do not live according to our profession what kind of relationship do we build up with our neighbors?<sup>63</sup>

The *Russlaender* saw the medical corps as an excellent form of service wherein the professed willingness of the Mennonites to sacrifice might be made manifest. B. B. Janz, one of the strongest advocates for service similar to that which had been offered in Russia, wrote:

We should not hesitate to do all we can to serve the principle of life, whether or not it is connected with danger to life or with other difficulties. Cowardice or comfort or any other excuses cannot play a role here or in any way influence conscience. We cannot, for example oppose alternative service as disciples of

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<sup>62</sup> Reimer, *Experiences*, 46.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 47-48.

Jesus...In caring for the sick we serve the principle of life. If someone again sends them into war, that is into death, this does not rest upon our conscience, for this we do not have to answer.<sup>64</sup>

The combined fearful suspicions which the *Kanadier* had of the *Russlaender*, who they perceived to have strayed from the path of their fathers, and the eagerness of the recent immigrants to seek alternative service regardless of the misgivings of their *Kanadier* brethren, rooted the two groups into firmly oppositional positions. These positions would emerge in the first meeting in Winkler, but they would only continue to increase throughout the war.

The *Kanadier* leaders anxiously monitored the *Russlaender*, troubled with the thought that they would jeopardize their traditional Mennonite stance, and specifically that “those responsible intended to propose a compromise with the government.”<sup>65</sup> These fears would turn out to be justified. This was most painfully apparent in November of 1940 when eight Mennonite delegates from across Canada began to conduct meetings with the Department of National War Services in Ottawa. The hope was that these meetings would finally clarify the type of service that the Mennonites could expect to do in lieu of active military duty.

The group met with Major-General L. R. La Fleche and Justice. T. C. Davies, the Associate Deputy Minister of National War Services. Already unable to come to a completely unified position before the government, the Mennonites presented two statements to the Department, one from the Conference of Historic Peace Churches (CHPC), essentially representative of the *Kanadier* stance, and one from the Military

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<sup>64</sup> John B. Toews. *With Courage to Spare: The Life of B. B. Janz (1877-1964)* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1978), 107-8.

<sup>65</sup> Fransen, “Objection,” 25, paraphrasing the words of Reverend Moses H. Schmitt writing to S. F. Coffman.

Problems Committee of Western Canada,<sup>66</sup> essentially the *Russlaender* position. The statements were somewhat muted in their differences, essentially both stating their intentions to take part in a non-military alternative service under civilian supervision.<sup>67</sup> La Fleche and Davis responded by offering a non-combatant service under military supervision. Unable to reach a consensus the meetings were concluded, with the Mennonites drafting another statement, this one altogether, somewhat more in line with the conservative views of the *Kanadier*.<sup>68</sup>

The delegation left Ottawa without achieving any verifiable results with the government, but at least apparently unifying their own position among themselves. However, B. B. Janz was not satisfied with the results of the talks. Rather than leave Ottawa with the rest of the delegates, Janz remained behind in order to meet once again with La Fleche and Davis. Janz presented the men with his own revised version of the statement issued by the Military Problems Committee of Western Canada. This statement would blatantly undermine that which had been submitted by the unified delegation, and would even stray from that which had been presented by the western Canadians at the start of the meetings.<sup>69</sup>

This was not the first time that the *Russlaender*, under Janz's leadership, had made offers to the government contrary to the intentions of the *Kanadier*. A proposal had already been made to local officials in Edmonton for the Mennonites to serve in a

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<sup>66</sup> Military Problems Committee of Western Canada.

<sup>67</sup> Fransen, "Objection," 95.

<sup>68</sup> "Report of the Delegation of the CHPC to the Department of National War Service, November 12 and 13 1940," MBBC, B. B. Janz Collection, File: A.S. – Mennonite Relief Peace Committee.

<sup>69</sup> The first draft submitted by the Military Problems Committee of Western Canada had suggested a willingness to take part in alternative service in forestry, first aid, ambulance and hospital work under civilian supervision. The united statement after the meetings was more restrained, offering service in forestry and agriculture. Janz's proposal stated an intention to serve in a Russian-style medical corps which could be supervised by the military. The forestry and agricultural options were neglected entirely. See Fransen, "Objection," 99-100; Toews, *Courage*, 110-11.



medical corps and be trained in military camps. The already nervous *Kanadier* leaders had scrambled to salvage their conservative position in front of the government when they had learned of this development.<sup>70</sup> The fears of the *Kanadier* that their Russian brethren would attempt to compromise their position with the government had turned out to be well founded, and the issues of unity, which both groups had feared would arise, had turned out to be as bad as they had expected.

### **Consequences of Internal Distractions**

One of the issues that Janz had stayed behind to work out with the government was that of prepared lists. Towards the end of the First World War the Canadian government had made it known that those Mennonites who had not immigrated in the 1873 wave or earlier would have to prove their status as a Mennonite in order to achieve exception from military service. Janz realized that many of the young Mennonite men who would be subject to conscription would be unable to articulate non-resistant convictions in a convincing manner. He ended a letter to Justice T. C. Davis after their final meeting by pleading for “a little consideration in the procedure in accepting [the Mennonites applying for conscientious objector status] by lists.”<sup>71</sup> Janz was well aware, as were many of the other leaders, that without automatic exception the numbers of their young men who would end up in military service would rise significantly.

Janz’s fears were shared by many of the other leaders. At the Winkler meeting the leaders had made four resolutions which they held to be important in preparation for the war. Among these was a statement concerning the desperate need for the principles of

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<sup>70</sup> Fransen, “Objection,” 94.

<sup>71</sup> B. B. Janz, letter to T. C. Davis, 1 December 1940, MBBC, B.B. Janz Collection, File: A.S. – Mennonite Relief Peace Committee.

non-resistance, which had been passed down through the centuries, to be taught more explicitly, as they were in danger of being lost. The leaders were united in their view that “We feel it to be urgently necessary to much more fully teach the doctrines of non-resistance in our churches and especially to our young people.”<sup>72</sup> There was an anxious sense that the Mennonites in Canada were ill-equipped in teachings on peace principles, despite their official doctrines and statements and traditions as a people.

Though the leaders had resolved in Winkler, albeit somewhat belatedly, to emphasize the necessity of teaching their young people, new priorities emerged in the ensuing days and months. For the *Russlaender* leaders, the need to voice their controversial views on alternative service to the government had gained critical importance; the *Kanadier* leaders were driven by their desperate need to silence them. The minutes of the meetings of their various committees and boards and churches show a consistent focus on the conflicting question of alternative service, batted back and forth between the Mennonite leaders. Meanwhile their young people were left in the dark, bereft of instruction in regards to both the peace tradition and how to respond to the advances of the government.

A minor meeting held on 13 September 1940, again in Winkler, exemplified the posture of the leaders towards instruction for their youth during the war. At the meeting, Bishop Toews reported to those present concerning a recent visit to Ottawa. He reiterated the need to hold to principles of non-resistance in the midst of the global crisis. He reported that Justice Davis had asked him what the Mennonites were prepared to offer at that point. The response: “we were not prepared to make an offer.”<sup>73</sup> The discussion later

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<sup>72</sup> Reimer, *Experiences*, 51.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

moved on to registration cards, “but nothing definite was decided.”<sup>74</sup> The question of alternative service was then brought up, “but things seemed somewhat indefinite.”<sup>75</sup>

Over a year and a half after the leaders had resolved to teach their young people non-resistant principles in a more concerted manner, one “supposition” of the leaders was that many of their young men would have to defend their faith position on an individual basis.<sup>76</sup> Presumably in response to this, the thoughts of the leaders then turned to their men. Secretary J. H. Funk records, “The question was also asked if youth instruction were in order during this time. (Special instruction in the principles of non-resistance is meant. – Ed.)”<sup>77</sup> Before turning to more debate on where each of them stood in regards to alternative service, Funk notes their response to the question of whether the youth were now being taught: “Opinions varied.”<sup>78</sup>

The confusion felt among the young Mennonite men was visible in many of the men who ended up in military training camps, confused as to how they had gotten there and plaintively writing to their Mennonite leaders to help them get out. The lack of training and instruction among the Mennonites was visible in two regards.

First, there was often confusion about the fact that there was the possibility of avoidance of military service as a Mennonite. For some of the men this possibility was not known or understood; if it was known it was still not known how one could go about seeking out this possibility or even that this possibility had to be sought out and would not simply be presented. Some of these men, raised in a rural context and in unfamiliar territory as they were moved along in the conscription process, simply allowed

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Editorial clarification added by David P. Reimer. Ibid, 67.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 67.

themselves to be unknowingly swept along until they found themselves at a military training camp.

Jacob Willms was ordered to report to the armouries in Calgary, AB, in May of 1943 after having gone through the compulsory registration process. Realizing that he was about to find himself on the way to active service in the military, Willms tried to avoid his call. Seeking help from B. B Janz, they soon received a letter from the Canadian military representatives in Alberta outlining their view of his situation:

Willms is under call to report to the armouries in Calgary on May 4<sup>th</sup> next. Willms has not represented himself as a conscientious [sic] objector and until your letter was received we had no intimation whatever that he was a Mennonite and a C.O. Even yet he has nothing on file to indicate that he wishes to claim this privilege. He simply filed a questionnaire showing that he was a truck driver and in accordance with our usual policy we gave him a postponement for approximately three months so that his employer might find a replacement for him. Under the circumstances we are at a loss to understand why Mr. Willms or anyone else should be aggrieved at what has been done and it is now too late for him to be considered a Conscientious Objector. We trust that he will not make matters worse for himself by deliberately remaining away from the Military Depot.<sup>79</sup>

Unable to register as a CO, Willms complied with his order and enlisted the following day. He would spend the next three years serving in the Canadian Armed Forces before being discharged in 1946. According to the official records naming the enlistees in the Canadian Armed Forces during the Second World War, Jacob Willms was simply another soldier. Once he had enlisted he was indistinguishable from any other enlisted man, whether wilfully enlisting or responding to conscription. In Willms' case, his desire to gain conscientious objector status, consistent with his Mennonite heritage, is not officially visible. Though a Mennonite who wished to refuse active duty in accordance with the privileges given to his people in Canada he ended up among the

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<sup>79</sup> J. P. McIsaac, quoted in a letter by B. B. Janz to Jacob Willms, 3 May 1943, CMBS, Benjamin B. Janz fonds, vol. 982 file 68.

numbers of Mennonites enlisted in the Armed Forces. His inability to follow the correct methods of registering for CO status reflects the failure on the part of his Mennonite leaders to educate him in the ways that would have enabled him to object.

The second area where a lack of training and instruction by the Mennonite leaders was visible was in the teaching of non-resistant beliefs. Many men were simply unable to articulate their non-resistant beliefs in a convincing manner when presenting their case for CO status before the tribunals. When summoned by the Canadian Armed Forces in 1944 Frank Tiessen, a Mennonite from Forestburg, AB, applied for postponement, including in his postponement application a request for conscientious objector status. Appearing before the mobilization board in Alberta, Tiessen wrote, "I tried my level best to convince them that I would not accept the weapon."<sup>80</sup> To his disappointment, the next month Tiessen was informed that he had been rejected in his application as a CO.

By the time that the NRMA was passed in 1940 the Canadian government was given power over her citizens in relation to determining their wartime status. Within the NMRA it was written: "the Governor in Council may do and authorize such acts and things, and make from time to time such orders and regulations, requiring persons to place themselves, their services and their property at the disposal of His Majesty in the right of Canada, as may be deemed necessary or expedient."<sup>81</sup> In this way the NRMA gave the government the power to conscript men according to its discretion.<sup>82</sup> For the Mennonites this was seen in the authority given to the mobilization boards. These boards

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<sup>80</sup> Frank Tiessen, letter to B. B. Janz, 8 May 1944, CMBS, Benjamin B. Janz fonds, vol. 982 file 68.

<sup>81</sup> Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken*, 142-43.

<sup>82</sup> The NRMA only gave the government the authority to garner the services of men within Canada. Those conscripted under the Act as it stood in 1940 were not required to serve overseas. However for Mennonites the issue in contention was that of military service, not the nature of the military service. Once enlisted, Mennonites were usually not opposed to serving overseas. See Regehr, "Lost Sons," 468.

had the power to accept or reject any application which came before them. For the Mennonites this posed a problem, as the boards were created in order to build up Canada's forces in a time of need, and the men who were on them were likely to be convinced of the necessity of enlistment for all eligible Canadians. Judge John E. Adamson of the Manitoba Mobilization Board was exemplary of this attitude.

Adamson, a Christian involved in the Anglican church, refused to identify with the Mennonite non-resistance stance. In a province that would eventually produce over 3,000 conscientious objectors, more than any other province,<sup>83</sup> he saw it as a personal goal to dissuade as many men as possible from their pacifist position and to convince them to join the war effort in an active manner. Because of this, there would be an ongoing battle between Adamson and the Mennonites of Manitoba throughout the Second World War. Because of the eagerness of the mobilization boards to recruit as many men as possible, combined with the authority with which they were endowed, it cannot be assumed that every Mennonite who was rejected as a conscientious objector by the mobilization boards was unable to give voice to his Mennonite conscience. There were likely some who presented a well-articulated case but were simply overruled by the mobilization boards.

Although the mobilization boards did hold considerable authority, and there is the possibility that some Mennonites with well-defined pacifist beliefs ended up serving in the military, most of those rejected for conscientious objector status were not forcibly coerced into service. Rather than an abuse of power, Adamson and the mobilization boards simply pushed the Mennonites to either stand firmly in their non-resistant beliefs or to abandon them.

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<sup>83</sup> Reddig, "Manitoba," 148.

For the Mennonite leaders themselves the biggest fear was that the lack of teaching that they had provided for their men would become evident as they faced the scrutiny of the boards. One of the major reasons that Janz had kept on returning to LaFleche and Davis in Ottawa, even after the official meetings that the leaders had with the government was because of his extreme concern for the young men in this regard. He hoped to be able to gain the same privilege for the *Russlaender* youth that the *Kanadier* held of being excepted *en masse*, rather than individually tried and tested.<sup>84</sup>

His inability to work out an agreement with the government for his young men would mean that his fears would be played out, as some men failed in their applications for CO status, failing to convince the boards of the sincerity of their position. In some cases the Mennonite leaders, realizing that they had not adequately prepared their young men in advance, tried to give them last minute instructions as to how to avoid military service.

At one hearing, Judge Adamson confronted the bishop of a man applying for conscientious objector status. Adamson questioned the bishop, David Schulz: “Do you make it a practice to urge these people to make claims as conscientious objector when you know in a great many cases that they are not?...That is the feeling that we get with a lot of these boys. If they were left alone by men like you – it is not their conscience that is speaking, it is what people like you say.” Schulz replied, “We do not want that, but sometimes they do not understand.”<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, in many cases it was precisely because the young men had been left alone by such leaders that their conscience was

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<sup>84</sup> As Fransen observes Janz “was disappointed with the refusal to allow exceptions to be granted on the basis of prepared lists. He feared that many of their young men would lack either courage or the ability to articulate their convictions.” See Fransen, “Objection,” 98.

<sup>85</sup> Fransen, “Objection,” 144.

unable to speak. The ability to articulate their non-resistant beliefs had not been instilled at all in many of the men.

One Mennonite Second World War veteran, who served in intelligence in the army, recalled his experiences before enlisting. He went to court to attempt to be approved for CO status before changing his mind and enlisting. As he recalled, though he was entirely opposed to fighting and considered himself a CO, he saw no choice but to enlist. His church leaders suggested to him that he should become a CO, but beyond that they did not provide any instruction for him. As he stated it, "They never talked to me at all." So he enlisted in the army. He would later say that there were "no alternatives as far as I was concerned."<sup>86</sup> The alternative service that the leaders had hoped to provide was insufficiently coordinated for the benefit of all of their men, as was the instruction which they had resolved to provide for them.

During the slow, inevitable progression towards what would become the second global conflict of the century, the Mennonite leaders in Canada, unlike their American counterparts, had failed to act early enough to bring about concrete solutions for alternative service with their government. Once Canada joined the war, and the leaders began to act, they were confronted with the reality that their internal divisions ran deeper than they had anticipated. Unable to unify amongst themselves they struggled to interact with the Canadian government, despite their hopes for building on the alternative service relationship which they had begun to establish in the First World War. Because of this, although there would eventually be an established alternative service option which would be relatively successful, many Mennonite men would find themselves in the army.

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<sup>86</sup> Name withheld by request, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 27 May 2009.



Some Mennonite men were simply not granted the alternative service which they sought out of conviction. Despite the willingness which the government showed to allowing Mennonites to serve according to their conscience, the Mennonite leaders were unable to ensure that their young men would be easily identifiable. For other men, though coming from a strong heritage and faith of non-resistance, there was insufficient teaching to ensure that they would be able to comprehend and personalize this tradition. The leaders made attempts to help some of their men who required help to stay out of the Armed Forces. There was a common cry that arose from many of the military camps, as Mennonite men, finding themselves enlisted against their wishes, made final pleas out of desperation to their leaders. One young Mennonite wrote a letter to B. B. Janz from a military camp in Calgary, AB:

I am writing to you about my being in the army instead of in Jasper Park [alternative service camp]. I hope you will get me out of this mess and into Jasper P.K. The officers were nice to me about it when I told them that I was (and still am) a C.O....They said they could do nothing about it...I am praying that you will get me out of here."<sup>87</sup>

Janz would prove unable to help the man, who would serve as a private in the army for the next four years, another unknown Mennonite in the Armed Forces, unable to prove himself as a conscientious objector, unable to garner the help that he needed from the Canadian Mennonite leaders.

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<sup>87</sup> Henry Dick, letter to B. B. Janz, 10 December 1942, CMBS, Benjamin B. Janz fonds, vol. 982 file 68.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CANADIAN MENNONITE PATRIOTISM

*Du bist ein Deutscher oder – nichts.  
[You are a German or else – nothing]*<sup>1</sup>

Line in a poem for Mennonites by a Canadian Mennonite Leader, 1936

*Every man and every woman in this country is either for Canada or for Hitler. Every man and woman, whether he or she intends it or not, is either helping Canada or helping Hitler. If there is something you can do to help Canada that you do not do, you are helping Hitler.*<sup>2</sup>

Judge John E. Adamson, Manitoba Mobilization Board

*I [am] a Christian first, a Canadian second and a Mennonite third.*<sup>3</sup>  
Second World War Veteran

In their continuous dialogue with the Canadian government throughout the war the Mennonite leaders treaded a fine line. The teachings of Christ to which the Mennonite people adhered were the ultimate authority, through which they maintained their understanding of the importance of non-violence. This non-violence tradition placed the Mennonites at odds with the Canadian government during the war as the Canadian Armed Forces sought to recruit Canadians to join the war effort. While the Mennonite leaders were opposed to violence and war they also recognized the biblical mandate to submit to the government.<sup>4</sup> The leaders understood that their attempts to refuse military-related service could be easily viewed with disdain and even suspicion by the government. As they wrote to various government officials in attempts to secure their wartime non-

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Janzen, "Die Geschichte vom toerichten Fiedelkasten," *Der Bote*, XIII (1936): 3.

<sup>2</sup> "Mennonites and War Work: Speech by Honourable Mr. Justice Adamson Delivered to the Mennonites at Steinbach, Manitoba, May 7, 1941," *The Western Canadian*, 29 May 1941. As quoted in Reddig, "Manitoba," 97.

<sup>3</sup> Jake Froese, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 16 May 2009.

<sup>4</sup> "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." See Rom 13:1 NIV.

resistance stance in the eyes of the government, they also hoped to display their willingness to submit to the authority of the Canadian government. In a letter to J. G. Gardiner, Minister of National War Services, bishop David Toews attempted to express this sentiment:

Our ancestors have from the beginning in more than 400 years adhered to the principle of non-resistance and peace. We adhere to these principles, but we are also taught that we must obey the government of the country in which we live. We certainly appreciate the opportunity to prove to our Government that we mean to be obedient and loyal citizens of Canada, whose institutions, laws and regulations we are ready to obey...we certainly will co-operate with our Government in order to have our young men put forth every possible effort to do work that will prove to be of actual benefit to our country.<sup>5</sup>

Service of "actual benefit" to the country was regarded by the leaders as alternative service, which would be valuable to the country but would not violate their principles of non-resistance. This sense of the necessity of displaying their loyalty to Canada was continuously displayed by the Mennonites; they realized the liberties and privileges granted to them in Canada, and they did not want to seem ungrateful or disloyal.

At the same time, during the pre-war years, the cultural background of the Mennonites began to come into play in regards to their loyalties. Many of the older members of the community found themselves drawn towards identification with the new, strong, clean Germany which was re-establishing connections with the Germanic peoples spread around the world. As anti-German sentiment in Canada mounted, the Mennonites were thus targeted as German (and even Nazi) sympathizers. Public opinion of the Mennonites suffered and they felt an increasing need to demonstrate their Canadian loyalties.

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<sup>5</sup> David Toews, letter to J. G. Gardiner, 11 June 1941, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 3.

It was not simply the leaders who wished their loyalty to be evident in their official stance before the government. Young Mennonites were likewise experiencing the pressure to display the fact that they were true Canadians. For the young Mennonites this need to exemplify their stance was, in many instances, somewhat different from that of their older leaders. By the Second World War the young Mennonite men and women in Canada had found themselves increasingly influenced by the Canadian culture around them. Barriers between the Mennonites and the surrounding populace were not strongly maintained and the young Mennonites found themselves more exposed to the world outside of their traditional community, through which they were becoming increasingly in tune with Canadian culture. As war dawned, and Canada responded to the call to fight against Germany, young Mennonites found themselves torn between two worlds. Without strong direction from their traditional leaders the Mennonite youth were left exposed to the pull of the Canadian call to arms. Faced with conflicting loyalties, or at least the appearance of conflicting loyalties, between their Mennonite heritage and Canadian nationality, many young Canadian Mennonites backed away from their traditions as many chose to explicitly serve their country rather than the tenets of their heritage.

### **Canadianization of the Mennonite Youth**

By the 1930s the Mennonite people in Canada were in the midst of an important period of cultural transformation. Though still largely congregated within certain small but heavily Mennonite-populated communities, the Mennonite people as a whole were spread out across the vast country. The Mennonites were not as culturally segregated from the rest of the country as they had been in the past.<sup>6</sup> For the *Russlaender* in

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<sup>6</sup> While culture is notoriously difficult to accurately define (maybe even more so in Canada) for the purposes of this paper the references to "Mennonite culture" and "Canadian culture," rather than explicitly

particular, it was a major transition from their enclosed Mennonite communities to the more open towns and settlements. The Mennonite colonies in Russia had managed to keep themselves largely separate from the surrounding Russian culture. The language and traditions of their adoptive country were eschewed in favour of retaining their German heritage. They cloistered their villages closely together within the Molotschna and Chortitza settlements and were largely self-sufficient. Outside influences were minimal. This was true for both the earlier and later emigrants from Russia.

In the decades prior to their final departure from Russia, there had been a push to bring more of the Russian culture into the communities, but with the physical separation that characterized the Mennonites' relationship with their culturally Russian neighbours, change had been slow and halting. However, this was to change as the *Russlaender* resettled in Canada. They were to find that the boundaries which they had easily established upon first settling in Russia, which had been largely well-maintained for the duration of their time there, were to be more difficult to create in Canada.<sup>7</sup> Frank H. Epp writes that, as they resettled in Canada,

the Russlaender became aware all too quickly that many of the protective boundaries for their way of life had vanished in the resettlement. Gone were the

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defined, are simply referred to in opposition to each other. In basic terms, they may be noted to be oppositional in this context by the fact that Mennonite culture contains strong pacifistic overtones while Canadian culture, stemming largely from its British influences, does not. Also oppositional is the Mennonite traditional hesitation to engage in government-related activities, which is a tendency not found in Canadian culture at large. This distinction is perhaps best illustrated by the Canadian Mennonites themselves who referred (and in some instances continue to refer) to the people/society outside of their own traditional communities as the "English," denoting non-Mennonites rather than necessarily people and traditions of English descent.

<sup>7</sup> The trend is common among ethnic groups that resettle in Canada. Sociologist Leo Driedger notes that, "The emphasis on immigrants amalgamating into a monoethnic culture has influenced Canadian thinking greatly during the past. It is the product of an evolutionary perspective that assumes that ethnic groups are constantly changing from their present minority cultural and structural status to join the majority culture, which in Canada is represented by the British. This theory tends to be deterministic and assumes that the temptation to join the majority will be too much for any minority group to resist." See Leo Driedger, *The Ethnic Factor: Identity in Diversity*, McGraw-Hill Ryerson Series in Canadian Sociology (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1989), 40-41.

colony, the village, the community organization, and the schools on which they had depended so much. Little could be done about the Canadian scattering and the loss of the traditional defenses.<sup>8</sup>

I. G. Neufeld noted that it was these Russian Mennonites who, upon coming into this different environment in Canada, began to adjust themselves to Canadian modes of living. Neufeld identified these Russian immigrants, as well as some of the more progressive members of the 1876 Russian immigrant group, as liberal Mennonites who were strongly influencing the Canadian Mennonites as a whole. During the war he stated, “The pace of assimilation of the Liberals into the Canadian way of living is extremely fast.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1936, C. A. Dawson, a sociology professor at McGill University, wrote *Group Settlement: Ethnic Communities in Western Canada*, containing a section on the settlement of the Mennonites. Dawson observed that the Mennonites in Canada were experiencing a time of transition. Their earlier period of maintenance of traditional ways of living and the centralized location of faith practices was beginning to blur into a somewhat less homogeneous group. Dawson’s chapter concerning what he called the “secularization of the Mennonites” speaks to his perception of the ways that this was happening by the mid-thirties. He wrote:

We have watched the evolution of a new community pattern, the adoption of new agricultural techniques, and of Canadian manners of living. These are but accompaniments and indications, however, of a deeper change – the change from a theocratic community dominated by devout sectarians, to a secular community in which the church takes its place beside many new secular institutions. In this new situation the wishes of individuals are differentiated more sharply from traditional group objectives, and a wider range of utilitarian and hedonistic interests claim their attention. In spite of the initial solidarity of their isolated rural settlement, the Mennonites have not been able to shut out worldly influences.

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<sup>8</sup> Epp, *1920-1940*, 519.

<sup>9</sup> I. G. Neufeld, “Mennonites and the War,” CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII 1940 War, I. G. Neufeld Papers, 5.

These latter continue to enter the sectarian citadel at front and rear, bewildering and grieving the old, emancipating and individuating the young.<sup>10</sup>

This growing divide between the old and young in the Mennonite communities was highlighted by Dawson. By the 1930s there were numerous ways in which secular influences were filtering through even the rural and isolated Mennonite settlements, whether government services or private organizations and clubs.<sup>11</sup> Despite protests from many of the older members of the communities, such organizations played a role in the cultural shift among the Mennonites. For many, their professions also caused them to interact more closely with the “English” as they did their business. Farmers, for example, found themselves subject to the larger agricultural industry on a more personal level than had been the case in Russia. As Dawson had noted, there was a growing sense of individualism that was chipping away at the traditionally group-oriented structures of both social and business interactions.

Language also played a large role in assimilation of the Mennonites prior to the war. The preservation of the German language was crucial for the preservation of culture among the Mennonite people, and there were efforts to maintain German among their children and at their churches.<sup>12</sup> However, they were fighting the tide of assimilation with the broader Canadian culture which was slowly beginning to creep across the Mennonite

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<sup>10</sup> C. A. Dawson, *Group Settlement: Ethnic Communities in Western Canada*, Canadian Frontiers of Settlement Series, edited by W. A. Mackintosh and W. L. G. Joerg (Toronto: Macmillan, 1936), 137.

<sup>11</sup> Within Manitoba alone Dawson points to “the Boy Scouts, Tuxis, Canadian Girls in Training, the Women’s Institute, the Manitoba Teachers’ Federation, the Manitoba Consumers’ Cooperative Association, the Junior Red Cross, the Seed Growers’ Club, and the Agricultural Society” among other organizations as examples of secular institutions that were taking hold in Mennonite communities. See *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Those who hoped to draw non-English speaking immigrants like the Mennonites into the Canadian way of life realized that language was a major factor in the success of such endeavours. In dealing with this issue Newton W. Rowell acknowledged, in 1908, “The problem of reaching and dealing with [non-English speaking] immigrants, of evangelizing and Canadianizing them, is one of the greatest possible difficulty.” This was followed by proposals to take greater pains to introduce English into the immigrant communities. See Newton W. Rowell, *The Church and Immigration* (Toronto: Canadian Council, 1908), 11.

communities. Despite their attempts to retain the use of German and *Plattdeutsch* (Low-German), English began to be increasingly prevalent in the Mennonite communities.<sup>13</sup> This was especially true among those in businesses which required interaction beyond the Mennonite communities, as well as among the children. The younger generations, though often raised speaking in the traditional languages, which they encountered at home and at church in particular, also found themselves learning English at school. This in turn led to a natural, gradual decrease in the need for the traditional languages.

As they were taught English, the younger generations gained access to the language of the country at large, while their parents were largely confined to the languages of the Mennonites. The teaching of English was emblematic of the larger school context of Canadian culture which was presented to the students. With an increased awareness among the students of the world outside of their cultural communities, many students found themselves drawn towards the more urban centers as they grew older. This in turn was leading towards their rural friends and relatives gaining greater access to the urban centers, further introducing outside influences. Many of the young students also began to seek out postsecondary education opportunities at universities around the country, from which they returned to their communities as leaders and teachers.<sup>14</sup> Through these and other channels (introduction of secular newspapers,

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<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey G. Reitz argues that, in Canada, language retention among ethnic minorities is critical for the maintenance of a separate ethnic identity: "Language is important to ethnic communities not merely as an expression of traditional ethnic culture; the data suggest that ethnic language retention is a cornerstone of the ethnic communities themselves...Language loss is a well-founded concern of ethnic community leaders, however difficult might be its prevention." See Jeffrey G. Reitz, "Language and Ethnic Community Survival," in *Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Canada: A Book of Readings*, ed. Jay E. Glodstein and Rita M. Bienvenue (Toronto: Butterworth, 1981), 126.

<sup>14</sup> In his study on Hasidic Jewish attempts to curb assimilation into Canadian culture, William Shaffir notes the importance which the school system plays in the assimilation of a religious group into secular culture.



increased interest in Canadian politics) the Mennonites, and in particular the young Mennonites, found themselves adapting to Canadian modes of thought.

It was no accident that the Mennonites found there to be major pressures to blend in this way. As a country which was still relatively young after the First World War and struggling to find its identity, there were various voices speaking into the shaping of Canada. The concept of nation building continued to be a crucial issue for the country at this stage in its development, as it had been for some time. With different ethnic and religious groups immigrating, settling together and attempting to maintain their identity, there were questions as to how to break down these self-contained groups into the greater national community.

As it was seen that the maintenance of cultural identities among immigrant groups lent to divisions among the Canadian national fabric, after the First World War Canadian nationalism was strongly promoted. In 1922, W. G. Smith wrote that “[a] nation is, after all, a community of people...under one civil government...It may thus include persons of different racial origins, who are also united in these common purposes and are loyal thereto. Nationalism should, therefore, designate devotion to the whole nation rather than

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He writes: “To ensure its persistence the religious community must actively address itself to the assimilative influences in the larger society which threaten especially the young. These influences are typically regarded as corruptive and antithetical to the community’s way of life. Aware of the public school’s influence over the students, members of religious communities become concerned about the conflicts their children will encounter when exposed to these schools’ curricula. In response to this concern active efforts are initiated to retain a measure of control over the secular educational process.” See William Shaffir, “The Organization of Secular Education in a Chassidic Jewish Community,” in *Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Canada: A Book of Readings*, edited by Jay E. Goldstein and Rita M. Bienvenue (Toronto: Butterworths, 1980), 158; By the 1930s this emphasis on refraining from exposing children to the influences of a “public” or “secular” education, which Shaffir identifies as crucial to maintaining the persistence of a religious community, was not found in the Mennonite communities. Shaffir identifies the Hasidic Jews as a religious ethnic community; this is comparable to the Mennonites whose religion is similarly intertwined with their ethnicity.

any part thereof.”<sup>15</sup> That such nationalistic fidelity to Canada, above personal racial, cultural and religious backgrounds was necessary for the future of the country, was largely accepted. It was thus necessary to facilitate the acclimatization of such people groups within the country. Smith went on to state: “The task is now quite evident, and to it all genuine Canadians, young and old, are required to give their energy. This task is assimilation, which means Canadianization...Canadianization is the glorious though difficult task of blending the diverse elements of the various peoples of our Dominion into the unity of national life.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus the Mennonites, a group which had survived through the centuries through its unwillingness to adapt to the surrounding cultures of their various places of settlement, found itself in a growing country intent on blending its people groups into a homogeneous nation. In the interwar period, in the first half of the twentieth century, a tumultuous time during which time many more Mennonites were arriving from Russia, the Mennonites began to succumb to the pressures of Canadian assimilation. Dawson noticed this three years prior to the start of the war. However, it would be during the course of the Second World War that the extent of this assimilation would become most visible.

### **Mennonite Germanism and the Question of Loyalty**

Even as the younger Mennonites were becoming more culturally Canadian in the 1930s, an interesting phenomenon was simultaneously occurring between Germany and the German diaspora. After two decades of economic depression and political shame after World War I and the Treaty of Versailles, the downtrodden German state was beginning

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<sup>15</sup> W. G. Smith, *Building the Nation: A Study of Some Problems Concerning the Churches' Relation to Immigrants* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1922), 154.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

to experience a rise in confidence, hope and a new sense of national pride. With the young leader Adolf Hitler displaying strength as he solidified himself in his new role as *Führer* and Reich Chancellor, the Germans were imbued with “an astonishing faith in the future of their country.”<sup>17</sup> This new pride in Germany began to manifest itself among the many Germans spread across the globe, the *Volksdeutsche*,<sup>18</sup> many of whom had retained strong cultural ties to the Fatherland.

The most helpful work in discussing the relationship of the Mennonites in Canada to Germany during the years leading up to the war is Frank H. Epp’s Ph.D. dissertation, “An Analysis of Germanism and National Socialism in the Immigrant Newspaper of a Canadian Minority Group, the Mennonites, in the 1930s.” By examining the reactions to Germanism, Nazism and Hitlerism of the 1930s in the German language Canadian Mennonite publication *Der Bote*, Epp was able to analyze the sentiments expressed during this period.

Through the 1930s political Germanism was the topic that was discussed most intensely in *Der Bote*, and of this seventy-one percent was favourable to political Germanism.<sup>19</sup> Though the topics and articles varied, the fact was that the Mennonites, who were strongly culturally and even racially German, found themselves drawn into the political conversation as well. They began to identify themselves more openly with Germany, writing proudly of its rise to prominence and disparagingly of those who would detract from its achievements. Some Mennonite writers acknowledged the fears that

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<sup>17</sup> Shirer, William L. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Vol. 1 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 253.

<sup>18</sup> *Volksdeutsche* is a term denoting people of German descent who retain their German heritage despite living abroad.

<sup>19</sup> Frank H. Epp, “An Analysis of Germanism and National Socialism in the Immigrant Newspaper of a Canadian Minority Group, The Mennonites, in the 1930s” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1965), 116. Epp quantified his calculations by column inches.

many were expressing about Hitler and his apparent fascism by calling attention to the fact that employment was on the rise and that the country was being “cleaned up.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Hitler appeared to many Mennonites in Canada as he appeared to many German nationals, as a strong leader bringing much-needed social reform and reorganizing a country that had been in disarray since the First World War.

Some of the well known Mennonite leaders in Canada during the war years found themselves among those who, in the years leading up to the war, responded favourably to Hitler and the way in which he was conducting himself in Europe. After returning from the Third Mennonite World Conference in Amsterdam in 1936, David Toews reported on the atmosphere in Europe. Toews stated that there was a generally positive feeling towards Hitler, and that it was in fact difficult to find anybody who spoke badly of him. Asked whether people were overly taken with Hitler, Toews responded that, despite some apparent misgivings about him in other regions, those who were observing him from their vantage point in Europe were giving a more accurate report; the intelligent and largely Christian crowd who affirmed Hitler, he wrote, surely knew best.<sup>21</sup> Provided with such reports from their leaders and others, within the Mennonite community “the rise to power of Adolf Hitler in 1933 was seen by some as the hour of rebirth, the day of salvation for Germany.”<sup>22</sup> This rebirth was heralded by a renewed interest in identification of the *Volksdeutsche* with their rejuvenated Fatherland.

Some German leaders in Canada, in particular German consul Heinrich Seelheim, held strong views of the strength of the German race and the need to be maintain their Germanism in Canada. Seelheim and others in Canada subscribed to the belief that the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>22</sup> Epp, *Exodus*, 323.

*Volksdeutsche* needed to unite in loyalty to the Fatherland. There was a push to emphasize cultural and racial German identity, wherein virtue and strength were to be found, while remaining somewhat separate from other cultures which would corrupt their inherently German virtues.<sup>23</sup>

The overt Germanism that was seen in many of the German-Canadians translated further into Nazism for some during the 1930s. Seelheim identified strongly with the Nazis and was actively in favour of a National Socialist movement in Canada.<sup>24</sup> The Nazi movement in Canada was actively promoted by the *Deutsches Auslands-Institut* (German Foreign Office), through whom Nazi propaganda was distributed and recruitment efforts were made overseas.<sup>25</sup>

Some Mennonites were taken in by the movement of German strength and unity. Dr. Walter Quiring, a Russian Mennonite who was boldly National Socialist, wrote numerous articles that were featured in *Der Bote*. Quiring's articles in the years leading up to the war loudly and persuasively tried to convince his Mennonite readers of the necessity of their loyalty to Germany and the new ideologies stemming from the Nazis. As Jonathan F. Wagner writes, within Quiring's writings in *Der Bote* were to be found the most fanatical of Nazi ideologies: "rabid anti-Semitism, pseudo-scientific racism, intense German nationalism, and pervasive, paranoid anti-communism."<sup>26</sup> Well-known Mennonite leaders also contributed articles to *Der Bote* that promoted Nazi concepts of German national identification and racial supremacy.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Epp, "Analysis," 111.

<sup>24</sup> Seelheim joined the Nazi party in 1934. Jonathan F. Wagner, *Brothers Beyond the Sea: National Socialism in Canada* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1981), 38-40.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 47-48.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>27</sup> B. H. Unruh, "Zur Aufklarung," *Der Bote* XI (1934): 3; C. F. Klassen, "Gegen die geistlose Judenhetze," *Der Bote*, X (1933): 2; J. H. Janzen, "Deutschland's Erwachen," *Der Bote* X (1933): 4;

Such overwhelmingly positive political reports among the Canadian Mennonites about the state of affairs in Germany were not to last. By 1939, the negative rhetoric concerning Germany in *Der Bote* had risen and the positive had fallen until they were at approximately the same level.<sup>28</sup> The overt German militarism and Hitler's fascist ideologies clashed strongly with Mennonite ideals, and even Hitler's attacks on communism and Germany's economic revival were unable to sway many from beginning to disparage the direction being taken by cultural homeland.

Quiring represented a voice that was present in Canada among the Mennonites in the 1930s whose radical views were not widely held. However, the Mennonites were to find that their Germanism and the pocket of Nazism that remained among their people were not to go unnoticed among their neighbours. The fact that there were radical voices among the Mennonites who continued to support Hitler, even as most were becoming disillusioned with him, did not help the perception of the Mennonites among the general populace.

Despite the fact that the Mennonites were beginning to come to realizations about Hitler and the nature of the German state that were more closely approximating those of their fellow Canadians they found themselves subjected to anti-German sentiment from the Canadian public. Canadians increasingly viewed their German-descent neighbours with suspicion.<sup>29</sup> The public had noticed the German nationalism that had cropped up in

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Janzen, "Geschichte," 3. ; David Toews, "Einige Reiseeindruecke," *Der Bote* XIII (1936): 1; B. H. Unruh, "Um die deutsche Sache," *Der Bote* XIV (1937): 2.

<sup>28</sup> Epp, "Analysis," 119.

<sup>29</sup> While not always subject to aggression by their neighbours, the Mennonites were at least understood to be struggling with the issue of National Socialism and were therefore regarded with suspicion. I. G. Neufeld, in a letter to *The Leamington Post*, noted that, "A recent issue of your paper carried several articles and letters dealing with the Mennonites and their alleged sympathies with the Nazis. A front page column challenges the loyalty of these said Mennonites, stamping them as traitors." See I. G. Neufeld, "Mennonite Supporter Writes from Ann Arbor," *The Leamington Post*, 30 May 1940, 2. Historian Watson

some circles, including among the Mennonites. The annual “German Day” which some German leaders in Canada had promoted had seen the swastika featured prominently among the celebrations of the Germans on the streets of towns in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The varying affirmative comments on Hitler and Nazism in the Mennonite publications, while not representative of the Mennonites as a whole indicated to Canadians that they had reason to mistrust this German-speaking people group. The loyalties of the Mennonites began to be called into question.

Perhaps realizing the effects that their words of support for Germany were having on their public image leaders began to try to emphasize that they were not disloyal Canadians. David Toews began to emphasize that the Mennonites certainly had German heritage but were not defined by such as Germans.<sup>30</sup> He also defended Rosthern, SK, from the accusation that 35% of their Mennonite voters were National Socialists.<sup>31</sup>

Despite such protests the public image of the Mennonites suffered. Suspicions of Mennonite disloyalty mounted. The close-knit communities were seen as potential pockets of political and even military German resistance within Canada’s own borders.<sup>32</sup> Different Mennonite communities across the country found themselves the targets of attacks by angry groups of citizens. Two churches in Alberta were burned, presumably

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Kirkconnell noted in 1939 that, “It is evident that Mennonite opinion has been in a turmoil, and that National Socialism has been tending to split that religious community wide open.” See Watson Kirkconnell, *Canada, Europe, and Hitler* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), 133.

<sup>30</sup> Toews also found himself under scrutiny by the RCMP as a potential Nazi sympathizer. See Fransen, “Objection,” 150.

<sup>31</sup> Epp, *Exodus*, 324-25.

<sup>32</sup> This was not the first time that the Mennonites had been drawn in by Germanism. In Russia the Mennonites had similarly found themselves attracted to Germany before the end of the First World War. As German troops moved through Mennonite-occupied German lands they received rousing welcomes from the Mennonite communities, with a strong show of nationalism from the settlers. See Klippenstein, “Selbstschutz,” 177-81. Their revealed loyalties did not go unnoticed by the local Russians who did not forget the duplicity of the Mennonites once the German forces left. Mennonites were to suffer even more severely during the period of anarchy following the war for their collaboration with the Germans.

targeting their congregants as German sympathizers.<sup>33</sup> The vacation bible school program for children at the Virgil Mennonite Brethren Church in Ontario was examined by police on suspicions that it was actually a “Hitler Youth” training centre.<sup>34</sup> The Niagara United Mennonite Church, also in Virgil, found itself subject to scrutiny as locals suspected its members of subversive activities. Rumours spread of “dynamite and machine guns being found stored at the Mennonite Church...and spies being arrested at Virgil,”<sup>35</sup> as well as Nazi rallies being held in the church. Police were sent in to investigate the claims, though they were unable to find any evidence to support the allegations. The church members, offended at the perceptions of the community that had led to such an investigation, responded with a letter stating their avoidance of any political activities, as well as their “earnest desire to be useful, law abiding citizens of Canada.”<sup>36</sup>

B. B. Janz, noting especially the burning of the churches in Alberta, recognized the necessity of addressing the issue of Mennonite political loyalties. Janz had long combated the desires of his people to join with the ideologies of the renewed fatherland. As the Nazis had been increasing in power and support Janz wrote an article entitled “Does Menno Simons come under the National Socialists?” emphasizing the fact that the

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<sup>33</sup> Fransen, “Objection,” 102, 106.

<sup>34</sup> “Community Involvement: Mennonites and the War Issue,” in *Memoirs of the Virgil-Niagara Mennonites: History of the Mennonite Settlement in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, 1934-84*, ed. C. Alfred Friesen (Fonthill, ON: Niagara Yearbook Services Ltd., 1984), 146.

<sup>35</sup> “Unfounded Rumours,” in *Memoirs of the Virgil-Niagara Mennonites: History of the Mennonite Settlement in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, 1934-84*, ed. C. Alfred Friesen (Fonthill, ON: Niagara Yearbook Services Ltd., 1984), 41.

<sup>36</sup> Niagara United Mennonite Church Members, petition to the Honourable Attorney General 29 April 1939, Niagara United Mennonite Church (NUMC) Archives, Virgil, ON.



militant Nazis held to beliefs incompatible with those of the Mennonite peoples, as clearly exemplified in the non-resistance teachings of Simons.<sup>37</sup>

Janz also took pains to clearly outline his thoughts to non-Mennonites. He wrote an article that appeared in *The Lethbridge Herald* which he entitled “Am I a National Socialist – God Forbid.”<sup>38</sup> Janz and others realized both that the Mennonites needed to be reminded not to be seduced by National Socialism and that the Canadian public simultaneously needed to see that Mennonites were devoted Canadians as well. I. G. Neufeld similarly wrote a letter to *The Leamington Post*, published on the front page, which stated the loyalties of the Mennonites to Canada. He felt that the English-descent Canadians should observe that the Mennonites were completely devoted to their country of residence.<sup>39</sup>

David Toews took another angle, as in his many letters to various ministers and government officials he was always sure to clearly iterate the dedication of the Mennonites to their Canadian homeland.<sup>40</sup> Some letters were written for the sole purpose of expressing this understanding. In a letter to W. A. Tucker, the M.P., Toews indicated that they had been feeling the criticisms levelled against their people, especially in regards to identity and loyalty. Feeling that they were being unfairly treated by the public and by the police he wrote, “You will understand that our people are confused. They are

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<sup>37</sup> B. B. Janz, “Kommt Menno Simons unter die Nationalsozialisten?” *Der Bote* XI (1934), 1.

<sup>38</sup> B. B. Janz, “Canadian Mennonites Loyal to New Fatherland Leader Coaldale Colony Declares,” *The Lethbridge Herald*, 1 June 1940, 14. The *Herald* used their own title for the article.

<sup>39</sup> I. G. Neufeld, “Mennonite Supporter Writes from Ann Arbor,” *The Leamington Post*, 30 May 1940, 1.

<sup>40</sup> David Toews, letter to W. A. Tucker, 15 July 1940, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 3; David Toews, letter to J. G. Gardiner, n.d., CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 3; David Toews, letter to J. T. Thorson, 20 October 1941, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 3; David Toews, letter to J. G. Gardiner, 22 November 22 1940, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 3; David Toews, notes on meeting of Mennonite meeting in Winkler, May 17 1939, Epp, WWII Mil Serv 2, CGCA.

not enemy aliens in any respect whatsoever, they have not been born in Germany and have never been German citizens.”<sup>41</sup>

The Mennonites struggled to combat the perceptions of their fellow Canadians, which the leaders acknowledged in their personal correspondences and in their meetings. Of course they were hindered by the elements of their community who were indeed sympathizing with the Nazis and were faithful to their German bloodlines over their own country of residence.<sup>42</sup> As they attempted to smooth over their image, their difficulties in doing so were compounded by the question of military service. The Mennonites had trouble convincing outsiders that their intentions in refusing service were noble, and that in their refusal they yet remained faithful to Canada, that they wished to serve and not to merely reap the benefits of citizenship. They were accused not only of siding with the German enemy but of also profiting from the war by remaining at home rather than fighting. Responding to Toews’ complaints about their treatment because of public perceptions, M.P. H. W. Winkler wrote plainly:

there is such an antipathy unfortunately growing in Canada against the Mennonites generally, due to the growing belief that they are merely a class of would-be profiteers who want to remain home and make money and who are only interested in the Mennonite Church when war comes along and because it gives them an excuse to rush to the shelter of the Church. We know there are such people, and unfortunately it is difficult for the Mennonites to divide the goats

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<sup>41</sup> David Toews, letter to W. A. Tucker, 15 July 1940, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 3.

<sup>42</sup> The leaders brainstormed together in their meetings as to how they could change the prevalent perceptions among the “English” across Canada, and they realized that in some ways they were fostering those views by their own actions. The words of a Dr. Wiebe of Winkler was noted in the meeting minutes on 15 May 1939: “We Mennonites like to emphasize the sacrifices we make, when really we make no sacrifice...He also pointed to a number of cases where the churches had not done their duty, and this was, in his opinion, sufficient reason to arouse resentment against the Mennonites. This meeting could do something through a proper representation to give our neighbours a true conception of our people.” See Reimer, *Experiences*, 46-47. The perceptions of the Mennonites were also hindered by questions of war profiteering, as many of the farmers grew wealthy due to the increased demand for their crops during the lean war years.

from the sheep. So many of the Canadian people are inclined to judge the Mennonites generally as being “goats.”<sup>43</sup>

Winkler was correct in his assessment of the general views of the public towards the Mennonites. They faced resentment for their seeming willingness to enjoy the benefits of Canadian living without offering anything back. An editorial included in the *Taber Times* in the midst of the war entitled, “Should Canadians Have to Die to Keep Mennonites in Security?” cut to the heart of the issue:

The Mennonites have recently said that Canada offered them the freedom they could find in no other part of the world – but it seems they are willing to sit back and enjoy all their freedom and at the same time refuse to accept Canadian ways of living and are unwilling to fight and if necessary die for this freedom...How much longer must true blooded Canadians die to insure [sic] liberty and freedom to those who lack a sense of their obligations.<sup>44</sup>

The Mennonites were being accused of being less than Canadian. The talk of the importance of realizing their true-blooded German heritage that had been emphasized by some leaders during the period of excitement for Germany prior to the war was now haunting them. In their prewar attempts to recapture their German identity, and their wartime attempts to secure alternative service rather than fight for Canada, the Mennonites were seen as illegitimate citizens enjoying the privileges of Canadian living as “true blooded Canadians” died.

For some English-speaking Canadians, the German-speaking Mennonites were seen as an affront to the sacrifices being made by Canadians against the German threat in Europe. In a filmed interview for the Canadian documentary “The Pacifist Who Went to War,” Henry Bergman tells the story of his Mennonite father walking down the streets of Morden during the war when he and another gentleman of German descent began a

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<sup>43</sup> H. W. Winkler, letter to David Toews, 30 July 1940, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 3.

<sup>44</sup> “Should Canadians Have to Die to Keep Mennonites in Security?” *The Taber Times* (1940-41), CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 3.

conversation in Low-German. A woman of Anglo-Saxon descent walking past, recognizing that the men were speaking a German dialect, walked up to Bergman's father and spat in his face.<sup>45</sup>

This sense of condemnation of the Mennonites as identifiable with the Germans was true for Mennonites of all ages. School children in the public schools, many of whom spoke English, found themselves taunted and targeted by other children in the schoolyards, labelled by the other children as "Nazis."<sup>46</sup> In Virgil and Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON, an area populated with many Mennonites as well as people of English-descent, "Many of the Mennonite children received verbal abuse from classmates at schools in the community. Some even had to physically fight off attacks by older children with strong anti-German feeling."<sup>47</sup> From the children in schoolyards to their parents walking down the main streets of their hometowns, the anti-German sentiment experienced by the Mennonites was pervasive in Canada.

Because they were being directly targeted for their German connections and seeming lack of patriotism, the leaders were eager to show that though their young people would not bear arms they were very willing to do service. The way that they were perceived by others was important to the Mennonites, as they so strongly valued the freedoms that they were granted in Canada and intended to remain in this country. It was

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<sup>45</sup> This woman apparently was unaware, as Bergman points out in a filmed interview, that this man had two sons, one in the RCAF and one in the RCN who were currently overseas serving in the Canadian war effort. See *The Pacifist Who Went to War*, prod. Joe MacDonald and dir. David Neufeld, 51 min., NFB Canada, 2002, DVD.

<sup>46</sup> Aaron Kopp describes the fact that this was a common occurrence during his childhood in Duchess, Alberta, despite the fact that his brother, Cornelius, was serving in the RCAF. Aaron Kopp, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 29 September 2009.

<sup>47</sup> "Community Involvement: Mennonites and the War Issue," in *Memoirs of the Virgil-Niagara Mennonites: History of the Mennonite Settlement in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, 1934-84*, ed. C. Alfred Friesen (Fonthill, ON: Niagara Yearbook Services Ltd., 1984), 146.

hoped that their service during the war would show that despite their personal convictions they still intended to do their duty as citizens, even if in a different manner. In trying to gain ground for the Mennonites in alternative service work during the war, Toews wrote letters trying to secure alternative service options through the federal government, while being careful to explain that it was out of loyalty that they wished to serve, not out of disloyalty that he was requesting alternative service options. He pointed to their record of relief work while acknowledging the way that the Mennonites were being perceived: “We know perfectly well that public opinion is against us and we would not like to cause trouble to our Government. I believe our record shows that we have been loyal citizens of Canada and we are doing all we can to relieve suffering.”<sup>48</sup>

For some of the Mennonites the fear was that they would be targeted by Canadian authorities.<sup>49</sup> However, the Mennonites were largely recognized and understood by the Canadian government; for most it was a more personal matter of perceptions among their respective communities and neighbours. Toews recognized that it was the perceptions of the general public that were important for their people in Canada. He wrote, “The difficulty with us is not so much the Government in Canada, as public sentiment.”<sup>50</sup>

Toews and others equated service with public perceptions. If it could be seen that the Mennonites were doing their part for Canada, especially during the war years, they would be more readily accepted as full-fledged Canadians, regardless of their cultural

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<sup>48</sup> David Toews, letter to F. C. Blair, 13 July 1942, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 4.

<sup>49</sup> Initially suspected as being Nazi sympathizers by people in their community, after having their church searched on suspicions of having had a political riot, Nazi rallies and hiding weapons, the members of Niagara United Mennonite Church wrote: “This latest act...of profane invasion by the police of our church, leaves upon us the impression that these hostile feelings are being shared by the authorities, as the police would not have acted without orders.” See Niagara United Mennonite Church Members, petition to the Honourable Attorney General 29 April 1939, Niagara United Mennonite Church (NUMC) Archives, Virgil, ON.

<sup>50</sup> David Toews, letter to Walter H. Dyck, 25 May 1939. CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 3.

background and continued traditions and language. Realizing that they were already granted some freedoms in regards to alternative service he continued in his letter that, important in changing the views of the Canadian public, “perhaps half of our people would be willing to do some kind of non-combatant service.”<sup>51</sup> He understood that if people observed their willingness to do some form of service more directly involved in the war then some the pressure against them would be relieved.

Janz agreed with this sentiment. He further believed that the nature of their service needed to be more than alternative service in the forestry units. He fought a long battle to try to open up the medical corps for alternative service, even as some of the leaders disagreed with him. Janz, who felt the pressures of the public mounting against the Mennonites, most visibly with the burning of the two churches in his home province of Alberta, equated a very visible form of service, such as overseas work in the medical corps, with the Mennonites proving themselves as Canadians. He would work hard throughout the war to make such service a possibility. This point was clear among the leaders. The Mennonites greatly wished to show their sincere dedication to Canada, and they were willing to serve during the war to exemplify this.<sup>52</sup> This point would be true for the younger Mennonites as well, although for many it would be manifested in a way not facilitated, encouraged or even, in some ways, anticipated by their leaders.

### **Response of the Young Mennonites**

With a headline that read “Board Pleased as Five Mennonites Join Active Army,” a wartime article in Saskatchewan explained the reason that five Mennonites had chosen

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> The leaders consistently reiterated the need to show that, “we love our country, are good citizens, and want to work for the highest welfare of our country.” See the minutes of the meeting of the historic peace churches, 10-11 March 1939, CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 2.

to enlist in the army. The young men were described as having been convinced that “the call of King and country is the one thing which matters most today.”<sup>53</sup> Despite the non-resistance tenets of their faith and cultural background the Saskatchewan War Services Board found that the men were “anxious to fight for their country.” These Mennonites were not alone in their intentions. There were many eligible Mennonites that enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces wishing to exemplify their loyalty to Canada.

The Mennonite leaders had expressed their need to counter the anti-German sentiment that they were experiencing. For them it meant encouraging their service-eligible men and women to serve Canada in traditionally Mennonite ways. At the same time the young Mennonites were being faced with a legion of pressures of their own. They understood the anti-German feelings with which they were faced throughout the country at least as well as their leaders did. And just as the leaders realized that service for Canada was the way to quell such thoughts, so the young members of their community were coming to similar conclusions. However, they were also in a different position than their leaders. The years of cultural assimilation which the younger generations of Mennonites had been experiencing in Canada gave many of them a rather different perspective from the older Mennonites.

The leaders approached the crisis of the Second World War, including both their relationship with the government in regards to faith-related privileges, and their image among their fellow Canadians due to their own Germanism and pacifism, from their perspective rooted in Mennonite cultural and faith traditions. Many of the young Mennonites followed suit. However, many young Mennonites approached the Second

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<sup>53</sup> “Board Pleased as Five Mennonites Join Active Army: Judge Embury, Chairman of War Services Tribunal, Thanks Men and Wishes Them Success; Many Refused Leave,” n.d., CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII Military Service 3.

World War from their perspective as Canadians, rather than as Mennonites, after their years of influence by the culture at large. This was not experienced to the same extent by their leaders as it was the younger generations, especially those who went through their education in Canada, who were most heavily impacted by “English” culture.

The young Mennonites were generally more closely connected with Canada than their older community members. For many it was the land where they had received their education and for some it was even the land of their birth. Despite the close-knit nature of the individual Mennonite communities and the strong heritage of the Mennonite community as a whole, studies show that cultural and religious groups in Canada will eventually assimilate and amalgamate.<sup>54</sup> This is especially true with the addition of a few elements, such as the introduction of the local language into the ethnic group and the use of local educational structures, both of which were largely true for the Mennonites by the 1930s.

The Mennonites, whether they had been accepted into Canada in the 1870s or earlier, or were among the later wave of immigration in the 1920s, had been saved from lives of persecution and hardship by their opportunity to resettle. Canada was a place where they were able to live in peace and seclusion with prosperity. There was a strong sense of gratefulness for this fact among the Mennonites of all ages. The Mennonites who had fled from Russia as adults understood very well the freedoms which they were able to enjoy in Canada. In an article in *Der Bote*, H. Goertz, perhaps partially trying to combat the Germanism that was cropping up in that publication, wrote about Mennonite loyalties to Canada:

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<sup>54</sup> Driedger, *Ethnic*, 40-41.



[W]e owe Canada our love and gratitude. But we don't want to love our adopted homeland, Canada, merely out of a sense of duty. When we consider that we enjoy continually the protection and frequently the assistance of a humanly friendly government; when we cast a glance at the cultural and religious life of this land, which, along with much that is incomprehensible to us, also shows much true, living Christianity; when, finally, we have the opportunity to steep ourselves in the rich treasures of the English language and English literature; then we soon find much that appeals to us and makes it easy for us to feel more and more at home.<sup>55</sup>

The Mennonites held a deep gratitude to Canada, realizing that they had finally found a country that would accept them for their beliefs. Despite the fact that many Mennonites held a fascination with Germany during its spectacular resurrection during the 1930s, most Mennonites recognized Canada as their homeland.<sup>56</sup> It was thus painful for them to encounter ridicule and even a certain amount of persecution in some sectors because of their perceived disloyalty towards Canada.

The crux of the loyalty issue for many people was that true Canadians would serve their country in its hour of need. The Mennonites were genuinely grateful for their country, and the young Mennonites, in particular, considered Canada to be their homeland. The most explicit need that Canada had during the Second World War was for servicemen. The suspicions concerning the Mennonites and their willingness to serve Canada's wartime needs were closely connected. In his observations concerning the perceptions of the Mennonites T. D. Regehr couples the two issues, writing that "Police

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<sup>55</sup> Kirkconnell, *Hitler*, 130.

<sup>56</sup> Even ardent pro-German propagandists in Canada recognized this steadfast loyalty, which they tried to manipulate. Mennonite Nazi supporter Walter Quiring wrote: "It is an unfortunate error to assume that anyone in the Reich could approve of disloyalty of our people towards Canada. No, it is self-evident to every one of us that a Canadian citizen of German origin owes his loyalty, his state-loyalty, to Canada. But there is still another kind of loyalty...I can very well be loyal to the Canadian or Brazilian or Paraguayan STATE, and at the same time be loyal to my German NATIONALITY." See Kirkconnell, *Hitler*, 132-33.

surveillance in German-speaking Mennonite communities was increased, and pressure was exerted on the young men to enlist.”<sup>57</sup>

The pressure to enlist was not one which was simply generally aimed at the Mennonites. The young Mennonites could clearly understand what kinds of expectations lay on them as their peers began to respond to the call for servicemen and women. Moreover, they were specifically targeted by the mobilization boards. It was not that the Canadian government was renegeing on its promises to the Mennonites; officially their opportunity for non-combative alternative service was maintained. Rather, it became a personal issue as many of the judges on the mobilization boards urged their fellow Canadians to respond to the needs of their country. The mobilization boards appealed to the sense of nationalism which the Mennonites held, in order to sway their consciences towards accepting enlistment as a viable service option.

Kenneth Reddig’s thesis concerning the efforts of the mobilization board in Winnipeg to sway the Mennonites towards active service illustrates the pressures that the Mennonites were under. Reddig describes Judge J. E. Adamson’s agenda to influence the Manitoba Mennonites towards a greater willingness to enlist. Of vital importance is a speech which Adamson delivered to the Mennonites in Steinbach on 7 May 1941. Adamson, a shrewd debater and a skilled orator, as well as a committed Christian involved in the Anglican church of Canada, was strongly and stubbornly convinced of the righteousness of the Canadian cause in the war. He forcefully and convincingly presented the case that the Mennonites should not back away from their duty of service to Canada in whatever way was most needed by their country.

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<sup>57</sup> Regehr, *Canada*, 41.

Adamson was careful to raise issues which were sensitive to the Mennonites. Knowing that they were concerned about their status in front of their fellow Canadians, in his Steinbach speech he stated that, "Already there are rumblings of discontent against your refusal to take a part. It is said that in proportion with your numbers and your wealth you have not even done your share for the Red Cross. What are you going to do about this...What you do is going to be closely watched by people who are critical of you today."<sup>58</sup> His answer, delivered to a people already painfully aware that they were being judged by critical countrymen and women, was clear: respond to the call to enlist.

In regards to a Canadian perspective, the logical step for a Canadian was for young people to enlist in the Canadian Armed Forces. This ran contrary to the traditional Mennonite perspective. However, for many of the young Mennonites, not well educated in the peace tradition, their reasoning began to fall in line with that of Adamson and other such recruiters. Many young Mennonite men became convinced that it was their duty to pay back the country that had provided them and their families with safety and comfort. Adamson had argued, as Reddig notes, that "the national cause was on a higher plain than that of personal conscience and religious scruples."<sup>59</sup> He had presented to the young Mennonites the suggestion that their priorities were slightly askew, that they needed to serve their country, which was, after all, Christian, and not their own smaller religious ideals. Their Christian duty was to defend those in need, which was more important than clinging to their perceptions of their own traditional doctrine, which would not hold up in

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<sup>58</sup> "Mennonites and War Work: Speech by Honourable Mr. Justice Adamson Delivered to the Mennonites at Steinbach, Manitoba, May 7, 1941," *The Western Canadian*, 29 May 1941. As quoted in Reddig, "Manitoba," 100.

<sup>59</sup> Reddig, "Manitoba," 98.

the face of the just cause being upheld by their Christian nation.<sup>60</sup> For many, this meant that their priorities were shuffled to place either their broader Christian faith, their nationality, or both, above their traditional Mennonite faith.<sup>61</sup> For some, their Christianity, traditionally coupled with their Mennonite heritage, became coupled with their nationality instead.

Among many of the accounts of Mennonite veterans, both those who enlisted in combat units and those who enlisted and chose to serve in non-combat roles, there is a recurring theme of emphasis on the importance of serving the country which had given so much to their respective families. Adamson hoped to remind the Mennonites that they certainly wished to be counted as true members of the country that had provided an opportunity for a new life. For many of the Mennonite enlistees, whether influenced by Adamson, or more commonly through their own sense of priority, this made excellent sense. Henry Pancratz and one of his brothers, Bill, chose to serve in the air force during the war. Their parents had experienced the miseries of war and anarchy in Russia before emigrating in 1923. Henry felt strongly about the need to honour Canada for the new life granted to them. His decision to enlist was based on this need to serve his country: "I and my brothers always felt that Canada gave our parents a new life and an opportunity to live in peace and harmony and raise a family in the best country in the world, and

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<sup>60</sup> "A perfect Christian might say he would rather lose his own life than take the life of his would-be murderer, but no true Christian can say he would stand by and see a murderer take the life of a child rather than take the murderer's life. Your country calls you to join in this crusade to save lives." See "Mennonites and War Work: Speech by Honourable Mr. Justice Adamson Delivered to the Mennonites at Steinbach, Manitoba, May 7, 1941," *The Western Canadian*, 29 May 1941. As quoted in Reddig, "Manitoba," 98.

<sup>61</sup> This may have been true of many Mennonites who found their views concerning war service to be different from that of their church. Peter Lorenz Neufeld, a strong proponent of military service though an ethnic Mennonite, describes himself as "first and foremost, an unhyphenated Christian and an unhyphenated Canadian." See Neufeld, *Mennonites at War*, iv.

therefore [was] worth fighting for.”<sup>62</sup> Pancratz realized that this placed him in opposition with the Mennonite faith, and he weighed his options accordingly, holding his duty to Canada as of greater importance than adherence to the historic Mennonite position.<sup>63</sup> He stated that, as enlistees, “we often found ourselves at variance with Mennonite tradition and/or religious beliefs. However, I take the position, ‘To each his own.’”<sup>64</sup>

While most Mennonites in Canada were not subject to Adamson’s argumentation, they were faced with the same issues. For many Mennonite enlistees it came down to the view that Canada, a moral, Christian country, had provided for the Mennonites a number of times in their hour of need and was now in need of their help. If they were true Canadians, they would provide that help. Jake Neisteter, an army veteran, had been condemned by his community in Winkler upon returning from the war. Neisteter defended his actions as he noted the duty that he felt he had to serve the country whose benefits were enjoyed both by himself and his fellow community members. Neisteter is quoted as saying, “Patriotism means different things to different people. But how can you just accept all the good things about living in Canada, and then when they ask for help, you say, ‘Sorry, I can’t do that.’”<sup>65</sup>

One Mennonite veteran, recounting his reasons for enlisting, emphatically stated, “I am a Canadian.” He had felt that Canada had been so good to Mennonites, while the

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<sup>62</sup> Loewen, *Permanent*, 184.

<sup>63</sup> This choice of nationality over cultural and religious tradition was noted by others observing the decisions of the Mennonites during the Second World War. An article in *The Globe and Mail* noted that some of the young Mennonites were inverting their traditional priorities in this way. The article stated that, “You could call it patriotism, but it is more than that. It is really a throwing off of the yoke.” See “Mennonite Youth Break With Pacifism of Fathers to Fight for Canada, Younger Generation Discards Yoke of Pacifism as Old Beliefs Fade Out,” *The Globe and Mail*, 17 September 1943, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Loewen, *Permanent*, 184.

<sup>65</sup> Ellie Reimer, “Some went to war, some served at home: A trustworthy soldier,” *Canadian Mennonite*, 26 October 1998, 12.

Mennonites refused to defend it, refused to do anything for Canada. He commented, “I don’t believe that we don’t owe our country anything.”<sup>66</sup> As it was service in the Armed Forces that the country was seeking from its people, to offer other forms of service was not actually serving Canada, because other forms of service were not the needs which were explicitly identified by the government.<sup>67</sup>

### Canadian Assimilation and the Sense of Adventure

A factor that bears mentioning in relation to the Canadian sensibilities of the assimilated Mennonites is their willingness to enlist on the basis of their youthful energies and the romantic appeal of war. Many of the Mennonite veterans relate that part of their motivation for enlisting had to do with the appeal of the rugged glamour of war.

The glamour of war was expressed by Canadians prior to the two major wars in which the young country had been involved prior to the Second World War. This perceived glory had played a part of the nation-building process in Canada. Dr. Gordon L. Heath notes the support shown by Canadians for the South African War, the first major conflict in which Canada was involved since gaining its independence. Focussing on poems in the Protestant press during this period he notes the strong tendencies of the Canadians to glorify their war participation.<sup>68</sup> To the soldiers were ascribed the epithets “Canadian heroes,” “valient [sic] soldiers,” “noble contingents,” “true men.”<sup>69</sup> There was a glory that was perceived to be inherent in serving one’s country in battle. This was

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<sup>66</sup> Name withheld by request, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 27 May 2009.

<sup>67</sup> “Though the majority [of draft-eligible Mennonites] served in alternative projects, many were not happy. Had the war continued a little longer, serious trouble would have developed. Canadianization had taken its toll.” See Gerbrandt, *Adventure*, 320.

<sup>68</sup> Heath establishes that Canadian Protestants at this time had strong imperialistic tendencies. He demonstrates that this imperialism was a part of their Canadian nationalism, and that this was also intertwined with religious sentiments. See Gordon L. Heath, “Passion For Empire: War Poetry Published in the Canadian English Protestant Press During the South African War, 1899-1902,” *Literature and Theology* 16, 2 (2002): 127-47.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* Poems cited by Heath.

infused with the view, held through the ages and around the world by young men of varied nationalities and ethnicities, of the excitement, adventure and fascination with which the concept of war is endowed. This had been true in Canada during the first large-scale conflicts of the century and was to prove to be true again.

In their assimilation with Canadian culture the young Mennonites proved susceptible to this line of thinking. Second World War veteran Herman Rempel writes that in Canada, “Many a young man was torn between his allegiance to his Mennonite background and the exciting lure of the outside world.”<sup>70</sup> During the war this was true of the appeal of the adventure of overseas service. One veteran notes that he was guided by his hope of achieving glory by enlisting and serving in the army: “I was going to be a hero, I was going to go overseas.”<sup>71</sup> This mentality was common among many of the young men. Some imagined the possibility of serving as motorcycle dispatch riders and other such positions that were perceived as exciting and adventurous.<sup>72</sup>

Some of those who started out as COs eventually rejected the CO camps in favour of the more exciting prospect of military enlistment. Cornelius Kopp started as a CO but became bored by life in the camp at Jasper Park, AB, so he left in order to enlist.<sup>73</sup> This perception among many Canadians that fighting for Canada was an exciting possibility was promoted in wartime propaganda. During recruiting for the war the Canadian Armed Forces emphasized the glamour of military service. Recruitment posters read, “Here’s the ACTION you’ve been wanting,” above images of soldiers advancing over hilltops on motorcycles with their bombers cruising menacingly overhead.

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<sup>70</sup> Rempel, “Mavericks,” 147.

<sup>71</sup> Jake Froese, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 16 May 2009.

<sup>72</sup> *The Pacifist Who Went to War* prod. Joe MacDonald and dir. David Neufeld, 51 min., NFB Canada, 2002, DVD.

<sup>73</sup> Aaron Kopp, interview by Nathan Dirks, McMaster University, 29 September 2009.

Judge Adamson realized that many of the young Mennonites would be as susceptible to the appeal to their sense of adventure as other Canadians: "I am not overlooking the fact that a considerable number of young Mennonites have enlisted...your Mennonite boys are not slackers and not cowards. They like adventure and honour as well as other boys, and their love for Canada, their native land, is as great as that of other boys."<sup>74</sup> Reddig writes that in relating to the young Mennonites Adamson generally "appealed to their sense of adventure. He tried to present them with a picture of military life which was grand and glorious."<sup>75</sup> The fact that it was understood that such strategies would be effective spoke to the level to which the young Mennonites had fallen in line with the larger culture.

It is impossible to determine the actual success of the promotion of such assimilation for the mobilization boards. However the Mennonite swing towards falling in line with the "other boys" is suggested in the numbers of enlistments coupled with the consistency with which the desire to display loyalty towards Canada is found in the stories of the Mennonite veterans. Motivations such as the appeal of the adventure of war were secondary factors pointing towards the greater reality of the trend of Mennonite assimilation with Canadian modes of thought, reflected in their enlistments.

I. G. Neufeld, in the midst of the war, noted what he perceived to be the major factors in the mass enlistments. To him, even in the midst of the war, one of them was the "rapid assimilation of the Liberal Mennonites into the Canadian way of living."<sup>76</sup> Neufeld

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<sup>74</sup> "Mennonite and War Work: Speech by Honourable Mr. Justice Adamson Delivered to the Mennonites at Steinbach, Manitoba, May 7, 1941," *The Western Canadian*, 29 May 1941. As quoted in Reddig, "Manitoba," 101.

<sup>75</sup> Reddig, "Manitoba," 100.

<sup>76</sup> I. G. Neufeld, "Mennonites and the War," CGCA, Epp Collection, WWII 1940 War, I. G. Neufeld Papers, 7. The other factor was the Mennonite participation "in Russian war services in 1914-1918."



concluded that because of this, “to-day [sic] the Mennonites have ceased, or are in the process of ceasing, to be pacifists!” While his sobering conclusion is subject to debate, it is certain that the assimilation of the Mennonites to Canadian culture at least influenced a large number of their service-eligible young men to serve in a capacity inconsistent with their Mennonite heritage.

The young generation of Mennonites during the Second World War were not as educated in their historic peace position as their leaders acknowledged that they should have been if they were to stand on the same principles as their forefathers. Presented with strong arguments for nationalism, to which they were highly susceptible having grown up with the English language and a Canadian perspective in school, Adamson convincingly argued that which was in the minds of many, that the Mennonites had their hearts in the right place but needed to re-evaluate their conscience. For many Mennonites, whether having heard Adamson’s articulation of the nationalistic reasons for enlisting or not, there was a priority shift that began to occur. As valuable as the Mennonite heritage was, they found themselves holding less stringently to the peace position. Their duty to their country as full citizens, and in some cases as conscientious Christians, grew in importance.<sup>77</sup>

As much of the older Mennonite culture in Canada was expressing itself in identification with Germany, even to the extent of notable Nazi support during the 1930s, many of the younger Mennonites, who had slowly been assimilating with Canadian culture, found themselves at a crossroads. Differences between the older and younger members of the Mennonite community were evidenced by the willingness of the latter to

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<sup>77</sup> The frame of thought of the Christian duty to further the cause of Canada, a national bastion of Christian faithfulness for the world to witness, is seen in Canadian literature at the turn of the twentieth century and in response to Canadian military involvement in both the South African War and the First World War.

break with tradition in favour of mainstream Canadian culture. Dawson referred to this as the emancipation of the young.<sup>78</sup> However, this carries negative overtones of the role which Mennonite culture was playing in the lives of the youth. The reality was that there were reasons for the enlistment-eligible people to be leaning towards their Canadian identity over their German-based Mennonite heritage that did not necessarily reflect a complete rejection of their faith tradition as much as their cultural heritage. The Mennonites found themselves subjected to the scrutiny and the ire of their neighbours for their German connections. The young Mennonites, who found themselves both less inclined towards support of Germany and more inclined towards compliance with Canadian thinking than the older generations, were drawn towards the opportunity to exemplify their commitment to Canada. Many did so by enlisting. As T. D. Regehr observes, “While there is no conclusive scientific or statistical data on the subject, the evidence drawn from the enlistment records and from the recollections of veterans suggests that the overwhelming majority of the young Mennonite men who enlisted did so because they wanted to respond patriotically when their country called on them in its hour of need.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Dawson, *Group*, 137.

<sup>79</sup> Regehr, “Lost Sons,” 472.

## CONCLUSION

By the Second World War the Mennonites in Canada were on a trajectory that was leading them inexorably towards more significant war involvement than their people had ever experienced. The quiet exterior of the Mennonites across Canada, who referred to themselves as “*die Stillen im Lande*,” or “the quiet in the land,”<sup>1</sup> belied a community that was less unified and somewhat more assimilated into mainstream culture than their common confession seemed to suggest. With almost half of those called to serve their country choosing to do so in the same manner as their fellow countrymen and women, rather than in the historically acceptable ways of their cultural forefathers, the young Mennonites exemplified a major shift in the Mennonite faith tradition.

The leaders scrambled to maintain their wartime faith heritage, and to some extent that heritage was maintained. Over half of the Mennonites called on to serve did so in the alternative service programs which were still granted to the peace churches. Mennonites have been able to point proudly to the fact that the majority of their young people maintained the traditional stance of the church through alternative service. However, for a people with foundations related to the complete rejection of both the use of violence and connections to the state, and who looked proudly to their history of sacrificial suffering rather than the compromise of these ideals, the fact that it was only just over half of those called who responded in a traditionally non-resistant manner must be addressed.

The issue of Mennonite enlistment was glossed over after the war. The service of Mennonites in the alternative service camps was a tangible example of the way that they had sacrificed and served during the war. They were the most visible people group

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, “From ‘die Stillen im Lande’ to ‘Getting in the Way’: A Theology for Conscientious Objection and Engagement,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 25 (2007): 171.

represented at these camps. They were lauded by forestry officials for their hard work at the camps, as well as their discipline and excellent behaviour.<sup>2</sup> Their work for the benefit of Canada in its hour of need, while yet refusing to compromise their own beliefs was worthy of recognition, and was another example of the long tradition of conviction and sacrifice. As the alternative service work of these men, in the end, was viewed so positively by the government, it was easy for the Mennonite community across the country to acknowledge them. However, in some ways the alternative service work in which the Mennonites engaged allowed them to neglect to acknowledge the many enlistments with which they had so much trouble reconciling themselves.

The record of the meetings that took place between the Mennonite leaders during the war is exemplary of this trend. Soon after the war, David P. Reimer compiled the minutes of the various meetings into an official book at the behest of the leaders of the Mennonite churches. The preface to the book states:

Since the Second World War, with all its adversities, belongs to the past, and since so many opportunities confronted the ones who actually have proven that non-resistance could be converted into deeds, it was being agreed...to compose this little book, wherein our descendants may find traces worthy of remembrance, concerning our faith and belief of non-resistance; and whereas the many experiences were being encountered, testify thereof.<sup>3</sup>

Though they were correct to recount the services rendered by many who did exemplify the Mennonite faith and belief in non-resistance, the trend which would be set was simultaneously to neglect the experiences of those who did not particularly reflect the traditional ideals of non-resistance. Already they were beginning to neglect to acknowledge openly the divisions which were made manifest during the war. They

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Klippenstein, ed., *That There Be Peace: Mennonites in Canada and World War II* (Winnipeg: The Manitoba CO Reunion Committee, 1979), 87, 95; Regehr, *Canada*, 54; Toews, *Alternative*, 110-11.

<sup>3</sup> Reimer, *Experiences*, 3.

remembered the victories of alternative service, but not that during the war these leaders were greatly troubled by the many who eschewed such service in favour of enlistment.

Chapter one demonstrated that 41% of those called into service for Canada during this conflict did so through the Canadian Armed Forces. Simple dismissal of the enlistees as not true Mennonites, whether by their contemporaries or by historians, is a failure to acknowledge the real issue at hand. The Mennonite community experienced a major period of flux between the later emigration from Russia and the Second World War that was reflected in changing perceptions of what was acceptable as a Mennonite. While it is essential for the traditional convictions upheld by many in the alternative service camps to be remembered, it must be coupled with an understanding that nearly as many of the same background followed a different path into the Armed Forces.

This chapter also showed that though there was a trend towards the acceptance of violence among some of the Mennonite enlistees, these servicemen and women by no means exemplified a complete departure from the Mennonite peace tradition. The various forms which their enlistments took demonstrated in some instances a desire both for sacrificial service and the continued rejection of violence. While for some enlistees the idea of sacrificial service held appeal, in the Mennonite tradition it was those who were willing to stand up for the ways of their forefathers who exemplified true sacrifice. Therefore, in direct contrast with Canadian culture as a whole, upon returning home after the war the servicemen and women were largely looked down upon by their Mennonite communities, while the alternative service workers, sneered at by the Canadian public, were upheld as exemplary of sacrifice by the Mennonites.

The second chapter illustrated the ways in which the traditional forms of exemplifying the peace position of the Mennonites was made difficult through a lack of clear direction from the leaders. Prior to the Second World War, the Mennonite leaders found themselves in a position where the elements were in place for them to maintain their peace witness as a nationwide community in Canada. Their historic position before the Canadian government, in regards to their *Privilegium* in 1873, had already been established as their status as a traditional peace church was known. The government's understanding of the Mennonite peace stance did not cause the government to go out of its way to accommodate them. However, the precedent had been set for their refusal to accept military service, with firm ground for subsequent generations to stand on in their battle to remain apart from military proceedings. In the First World War, this was exemplified as the Mennonite leaders warily watched the moves made by their government. When it was demanded that the men between the ages of 16 and 65 register themselves using national service cards, a precursor to conscription, the Mennonite leaders responded with clarity to both their own men and to the government that they would not allow themselves to be subject to service.<sup>4</sup> When the language of "exception" and "exemption" raised suspicions, they examined their facts vigorously from a legal standpoint and then brought their findings before the government as a group, united in their convictions and well informed as to their rights.<sup>5</sup> Their experiences in the First World War taught them that they had rights in regards to their peace tradition which could be upheld before the law and before their government.

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<sup>4</sup> Epp, *Exodus*, 369.

<sup>5</sup> Fransen, "Objection," 23; Reddig, "Manitoba," 34-36; Epp, *1786-1920*, 374-76, 384-85.

Twenty years later, with the outbreak of another global conflict, the Mennonites found themselves once again in a position to re-establish their peace tradition before the government. They had been warned at the end of the previous war about the tact that would be taken by the government to try to equivocate on their exemption status, as the government had made it clear that they considered the earlier and later immigrants to carry unequal rights.<sup>6</sup> The Mennonites had been warned of this at the end of the previous war. However, unlike the First World War, the leaders did not make the most of their time to research their position and present it to the government with ample time. Though their American counterparts scrambled well in advance of the war to ensure that they would be able to present a strong case to their government, dialoguing with them in the calm before the storm, the Canadians waited too long. By the time that they were somewhat ready to try to re-establish their position before the government, the war had already started and their quiet voices were not heard.

The turmoil that resulted from their inability to establish themselves caused the Mennonite leaders the added grief of establishing a reasonable position before the government. It was at this late hour that it became clear that even this would not be an easy task, as the divisions among the leaders themselves ran deep. The different experiences of the Mennonites of the Russian emigration wave of the 1870s, the *Kanadier*, and those of the 1920s, the *Russlaender*, lent credence to the assessment of the Canadian government that the two groups should be considered separately. Their variant views on the acceptability of alternative service within the Armed Forces caused

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<sup>6</sup> Epp, *1786-1920*, 385.

bickering that would be a distraction from the task of finding viable service solutions for their young men and women.

The young Mennonites found themselves in a position where they were not receiving clear direction from their leaders as to how to approach the service which they were loudly being called into by their government. Though they were very much consumed by finding solutions to this service, their oppositional views prevented the leaders from actually bringing much in the way of practical solutions. This is not to say that there were no options for the Mennonites, as the records of the alternative service camps clearly exemplify the option that was found by nearly 7,000 Mennonites. However, there were thousands of others for whom the lack of direction and aid from their leaders prevented them from exploring a similar route.

Another manifestation of the lack of direction from the leadership was in their inability to educate their young people in the ways of the non-resistance. This is reflected both in the fact that numerous Mennonites were not allowed to serve as COs in the alternative service camps, unable to convince the mobilization board judges that they had true non-resistance convictions, and in the fact that many truly did not have non-resistance convictions and were happy to serve in any way deemed necessary by their government. The chance to educate the younger generations in the traditional ways of peace had passed as thousands of the Mennonites flocked to enlist, eventually coming home to communities which would struggle to accept their decision, ostracizing them and pushing them further from a crucial element of their own faith heritage.

While the divisions between the *Kanadier* and *Russlaender* were problematic in providing education in the peace tradition as well as service solutions for all of their



young people, the assimilation of the Canadian Mennonites also played a key role in their willingness to enlist. As the third chapter demonstrates, there were contrasting elements at play before the war, as many Mennonites were retreating into their traditional culturally German background with the rise of the Third Reich, while others pulled away from their background as they merged into Canadian culture. The young people in particular found themselves drawn into Canadian modes of thought. In this the *Kanadier* and *Russlaender* were on similar trajectories despite immigrating half a century apart. The conservative *Kanadier* were finally beginning to succumb to the pressures of assimilation which sociologists noted to be imminent in such people groups in Canada, while the liberal *Russlaender* were similarly assimilating despite having arrived far later.

That many Mennonites were retreating into their own heritage had an ostracizing effect on many of their younger people, who recognized that Germanism was viewed with suspicion and even anger by their countrymen and women. That some Mennonites even approached the realm of Nazi sympathizing somewhat legitimized their suspicions. Some young Mennonites felt compelled to prove their Canadian loyalties in light of the dubious loyalties of some of their community members, which played into the hopes of the government while flying in the face of those held by their Mennonite leaders.

Beyond simply ignoring the Anabaptist refusal to engage in activities of the state, some of the Mennonites chose to enlist with a sense of the necessity of war. Despite their long history of rejection of the sword, for some their more immediate history of embracing violence in the period of anarchy in Russia was more impacting. Both the embracing of the will of the state as well as violence had made their way into the Mennonite church in Canada.

While the temptation for the Mennonites has been to ignore what is perceived as the somewhat ignominious side to their involvement in the war, it is irresponsible to regard the large number of enlistees as simply a rejection of Mennonite principles. It must not be overlooked that many of the young Mennonites, not sufficiently provided for by their somewhat ill-prepared and quarrelling leaders, took their matters of conscience into their own hands and provided their own solutions to the problem of non-resistance, duty and sacrifice. These Mennonites are not easily identifiable in any official manner, but they must be acknowledged nonetheless. Arguably, the men who attempted to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces as conscientious objectors to violence best exemplified Mennonite tradition, combining the objection to violence with a willingness to sacrifice. Where they did not embody their Mennonite heritage was in doing so largely as individuals, rather than as a community of fellowshiping and mutually supporting believers. Their inability to do so, however, is indicative of the fact that the Mennonite church in Canada during the Second World War was not prepared to act as a community, let alone as a community which was willing to exemplify both sacrifice and non-resistance.

The Mennonites have a long and storied tradition since their beginnings with the quiet rise of the Anabaptists in the midst of the Protestant Reformation. Their acceptance of the teachings of Jesus as both practical and necessary, in the midst of a world which largely finds them counterintuitive and unreasonable, has caused them to tread a difficult path over the centuries. Theirs is a history of the inability to reconcile themselves to the government, followed by flight, as well as persecution and flight. This was true of the Mennonite people in Russia in the 1870s, as many fled upon the realization that they

would have to compromise their convictions were they to remain. The two-thirds of their population who remained chose to do so in the knowledge that they would have to make some adjustments in what they deemed acceptable. Almost seventy years later the choices they made would be reflected in a Mennonite community in Canada which was willing to make choices which, though they did not reflect the tenets of the traditional faith of their people, reflected the path on which they had begun to tread in Russia. While their decisions are surprising in light of their history as a whole, in light of their more immediate experiences they are less so. The Mennonites in Canada during the Second World War were a product of their own choices both in Canada and in Russia in the previous decades. Though their many enlistments in the Armed Forces during the war would not seem to cohere with the ideals of their traditions, they are certainly representative of the state of the Mennonite people in Canada in the mid-twentieth century. It took another World War for that to be brought to the forefront, and even then it was allowed to fade back into the recesses of history. Without such a conflict to once again tease out such elements, the question that remains is to what extent the peace tradition truly remains intact among the Canadian Mennonites.

APPENDIX A

McMaster Research Ethics Board

<b>McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)</b> c/o Office of Research Services, MREB Secretariat, GH-305/H, e-mail: <a href="mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca">ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca</a> <b>CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH</b>			
Application Status: New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addendum <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/> Project Number 2009 062			
<b>TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:</b> A Study of Canadian Mennonite Combatants in World War II			
<b>Faculty Investigator (s)/ Supervisor(s)</b>	<b>Dept./Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>E-Mail</b>
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The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB:			
<input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved as presented without questions or requests for modification. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved as revised without questions or requests for modification. <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below:			
<b>COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing approval is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and approved before any alterations are made to the research.</b>			
Reporting Frequency:		Annual:	Other:
Date: <i>May 2, 2009</i>		Dr. D. Maurer, Chair/ Dr. D. Pawluch, Vice-chair:	

## APPENDIX B

### A Study of Canadian Mennonite Combatants in World War II

#### Questions

**Investigators:** Nathan Dirks, Shawna Dirks

**Principal Investigator:** Nathan Dirks

#### Pre-War Questions

Where were you born and where did you grow up?

If your family history is Mennonite, do you know whether your family is of Russian-Mennonite or Swiss-Mennonite background?

Did your family attend a Mennonite church (church name)?

Were you taught about Mennonite history or Mennonite beliefs (pacifism in particular) growing up?

How, if at all, did Mennonite culture and beliefs influence you growing up?

Did you hear about the troubles confronting the Jews in Europe before the war? Did that impact your decision to fight?

What were the factors that influenced your decision to join the Canadian Armed Forces?

- Did you want to help people who were suffering in Europe?
- Did the Canadian government recruiting efforts impact you?
- Did many of your friends who were not Mennonites join the armed forces?
- Did many of your Mennonite friends join?

Did your family, community or church attempt to influence you to not fight in the war?

After you joined the armed forces, did your family support you? Did your church support you?

Did your church ever threaten to remove you from the church for your participation in the war?

#### War Questions

What was your training like before the war? Where was it held?

What part of the military did you join (regiment, division, etc.)?

Did your own German-Mennonite background ever become an issue among those with whom you served?

What was your rank? Did you ever feel the desire to try to ascend in the ranks?

What was your own role in combat situations? Was there a reason that you were selected for this specific role?

### **Post-War Questions**

Did you feel that fighting in WWII was the option that best suited the Canadian government?

In your own thoughts, did you feel affirmed in your decision to fight in the war or did you regret it?

Did your family, community and church support you as a soldier when you came home? Were you treated as a hero for your efforts in the war? Were your efforts acknowledged?

Did you wish to remain in the Mennonite church when you came home?

Did your church welcome you home, or did they give you any trouble because you joined the war? How did most Mennonites treat you when you got home?

Have you noticed non-Mennonite WWII veterans being treated differently than you in their family, community or church in the years since the war?

Are you a member of a veterans association, either locally or nationally?

What does your church do on Remembrance Day every year?

What were your feelings during and after the war about the Mennonite conscientious objectors in Canada?

How do you feel that the conscientious objectors were treated during the war and after the war by the Mennonites?

What are your thoughts today about the Mennonite peace position?

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