

Mobilising Canada: The National Resources Mobilization Act, the Department of National Defence, and Compulsory Military Service in Canada, 1940-1945

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Article abstract

Compulsory military service took on the most organized, long-term form it has ever had in Canada during the Second World War. But few historians look beyond the politics of conscription to study the creation, administration or impact of a training system that affected more than 150,000 people. Faced with the Mackenzie King government's policy of conscripting manpower only for home defence, and their own need for overseas volunteers, Army leaders used conscripts raised under the National Resources Mobilization Act to meet both purposes. This paper explores the Army's role in creating and administering the compulsory military training system during the war, the pressures put on conscripts to volunteer for overseas service, and the increased resistance to volunteering that resulted by 1944. The consequences of the Army's management of conscription came very much to shape the political events that took place in 1944, and cannot be fully understood outside that context.

Mobilising Canada: The National Resources Mobilization Act, the Department of National Defence, and Compulsory Military Service in Canada, 1940-1945

DANIEL BYERS

COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE, LIKE WAR ITSELF, IS AS OLD AS CANADA.¹ It was only during the First World War, however, that it was introduced in any sustained or systematic manner, to raise infantry reinforcements for overseas. It came too late to have a significant military impact, but the result was a bitter wartime election, and memories of conscription as a divisive political issue.² Conscription reappeared in the Second World War, but as a more organised, long-term system, under the authority of the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA), 1940. The NRMA gave the federal government massive powers to mobilise human and physical resources, although they were limited to "Canada and the territorial waters thereof."³ Under the NRMA, over 150,000 men underwent training or service on home defence duties, a remarkable number for such a small and "unmilitary" country as Canada. Almost 60,000 remained in service by late-1944, when the issue of sending them overseas precipitated a political crisis nearly as serious as that of the First World War.⁴

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1 Formal systems for organising and training compulsory forces existed as early as the 1670s under French rule. See George F.G. Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers, 1604-1954: The Military History of an Unmilitary People* (Toronto, 1954), 1-25, and J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto, 1977), 5-21.

2 See Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 22-132.

3 "The National Resources Mobilization Act, 1940," 4 George VI, Chap. 13, *Acts of the Parliament of Canada, 1939-1940* (Ottawa, 1940), 43; hereafter cited as NRMA.

4 A total of 157,841 men were enrolled for four months' training between March 1941 and July 1945. This figure does not include some men called up from October 1940 to March 1941 for shorter training under the NRMA, although most completed the full training after 1941. Statistics in the National Archives of Canada (NA), Record Group (RG) 24, Records of the Department of National Defence, Vol. 18715, File 133.065 (D360), "NRMA STATS-1939/45 by DVA,

Perhaps because of the political importance of conscription, its personal side has been largely forgotten. R.M. Dawson, C.P. Stacey, J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman all provide excellent accounts of the politics of conscription during the Second World War.⁵ But few historians have investigated the actual creation, administration or impact of the training system set up under the NRMA, or the experiences of people subjected to it. Dawson's early work on the conscription crisis was critical of the Army and the large training organisation built up in Canada during the war, without describing the system itself. E.L.M. Burns produced a study of manpower statistics that was also mildly critical of the NRMA, but again without discussing its specific workings. As the official historian of the Army, Stacey defends its role in the conscription debate, but he still focuses mostly on events at the Cabinet level. The most recent study by Granatstein and Hitsman is now 20 years old. It provides a brief survey of the compulsory training system, but its conclusions are backed by only limited evidence. Besides the importance of looking at the NRMA in its own right, studying how it was put into practice can add to our understanding of the political debates that went on during the war, by setting out the administrative and social issues that lay behind them.

The aim of the present paper is to give a brief introduction to these issues, as revealed by the records of the Department of National Defence and other government agencies that administered the NRMA. It focuses first on the creation and build-up of the training system itself during the first half of the war, before going on to address two central issues that emerge from studying the NRMA: the use of the training system to pressure NRMA men to volunteer for overseas service, despite their home defence status, and their resistance to such service, particularly during the events leading up to the final crisis over conscription in 1944. As the paper argues, both the system that emerged, and its problems, resulted from the Army's attempt to adapt to its own purposes a programme that was originally imposed for political reasons. As soldiers, their

War Service Records d/10 Jan 50," and Vol. 18829, File 133.065 (D740), "Second World War statistics received from War Service Records 26 Jan 66: RCN war 1939-45 Appointments and Enlistments period 1939-46 incl; Cdn Army General Service." Also Canada. Department of National Defence, National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa, Directorate of History (hereafter DHist), File 111.13(D6), "Return of NRMA on strength by religion, province or place of residence as of 11 Oct 44."

5 Major works on conscription in the Second World War include R. MacGregor Dawson, *The Conscription Crisis of 1944* (Toronto, 1961); J.L. Granatstein, *Conscription in the Second World War: A Study in Political Management* (Toronto, 1969); C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Toronto, 1970), especially Part VII; and Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 133-244. Major-General E.L.M. Burns also provides a useful discussion in *Manpower in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Toronto, 1956), as does J.M. Hitsman in a narrative used for the preparation of the official histories of the Canadian Army. See NA, RG 24, Vol. 6926, AHQ Historical Section Report No. 63, "Manpower Problems of the Canadian Army in the Second World War," 17 August 1953.

job was to accept the decisions that were made and create a system that would operate within these parameters. The result was a compulsory military training system that was built up to make as efficient use as possible of its manpower, both at home and overseas, with consequences that would come to have a significant impact at the political level by 1944.

At the start of the Second World War, few Canadians foresaw the huge contributions that their country would make to the war effort. Throughout the winter of 1939-1940, federal policy was guided by the principle of "limited liability," which focused on providing food and material aid to the Allies.⁶ Canada's major military contribution was the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP), negotiated late in 1939. Under the BCATP, a large training organisation was to be built up for pilots in Canada, and the main effort overseas was expected to be in the air, as well, rather than the large ground forces that had aggravated the conscription issue during the First World War. In fact, it is even possible that Mackenzie King's Liberal government would not have sent the single volunteer Army division that did sail for England in December 1939, if British authorities had suggested the BCATP a few days earlier.⁷

After April 1940, the entire situation changed. In rapid succession, most of Western Europe fell to German forces. Italy declared war on the Allies. By late June, France negotiated a humiliating peace with Germany, and British armies were forced off the continent. The prospects seemed bleak. Canada rushed all of its available supplies to Britain, and began planning for a much greater war effort, both overseas and in military production at home. It was in this atmosphere that the NRMA was hurriedly drafted and passed in mid-June, after consultation with Opposition leaders. The Act was directly modelled on a similar British measure, the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, 1940,⁸ and its wording was very broad, granting the government the power to

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

6 A recent article on this subject is Paul Marsden, "The Costs of No Commitments: Canadian Economic Planning for War, 1939," in *A Country of Limitations: Canada and the World in 1939*. Norman Hillmer, Robert Bothwell, Roger Sarty and Claude Beauregard, eds. (Ottawa, 1996), 199-216.

7 The best survey of the early months of the war effort is Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 6-31 (see especially his comment on the First Division), and also his *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol. 1, Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* (Ottawa, 1955). A more recent and broader account of the war effort is J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* (Toronto, 1975).

8 "The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, 1940," 3 & 4 Geo. 6, c. 20, *Halisbury's Statutes of England* 33 (London, 1941), 541-42.

necessary or expedient for securing the public safety, the defence of Canada, the maintenance of public order, or the efficient prosecution of the war, or for maintaining supplies or services essential to the life of the community.⁹

The more specific purpose of the Act was revealed in section three, which declared that none of these powers could be used to require persons to serve in any armed force outside of Canada.

Unfortunately, few records have survived to reconstruct the political decisions that were made at this time. Most of our knowledge is based on Mackenzie King's records and diary.¹⁰ As E.L.M. Burns and J.L. Granatstein both argue, the broader powers in the NRMA were nothing more than "window dressing" to hide its true purpose of authorising conscription.¹¹ Certainly, the NRMA came to be identified very quickly with compulsory service. But it may have been intended to do more than this when it was first passed. In this connection, it is worth remembering the context in which it was drafted. As Granatstein and other authors admit, a number of public groups pushed to expand Canada's war effort in light of events that spring (in fact, the Bill was introduced in the House of Commons one day after France announced its capitulation). Calls were made to increase participation in many ways. A Department of Munitions and Supplies was established in April to improve war production, and King drafted the NRMA itself after a visit from Conservative leader R.B. Hanson, who called for "legislation putting at the disposition of the State all the manpower and material resources of the nation."¹² King's model for the NRMA, the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act in the United Kingdom, was even more explicit. There, conscription for military service was already in place, and the new measure merely extended that government's powers to industrial manpower and a broad range of other social and economic controls.¹³

In his account of the NRMA, J.W. Pickersgill stresses King's desire to prevent panic and steady public opinion in the spring of 1940. The NRMA would do this by setting out explicit powers that the government possessed but had not yet exercised under the existing War Measures Act.¹⁴ King himself called

9 NRMA, 43.

10 W.L.M. King, *The Mackenzie King Diaries, 1932-1949* [Transcript] (Toronto, 1980), especially 14-20 June 1940.

11 Burns, *Manpower*, 116-17, and Granatstein, *Canada's War*, 100.

12 King, *Diaries*, 17 June 1940. Also quoted in Granatstein, *The Politics of Survival: The Conservative Party of Canada, 1939-1945* (Toronto, 1967), 60, and *Canada's War*, 98.

13 "Emergency Powers (Defence) Act," and Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 140.

14 J.W. Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record, Vol. 1, 1939-1944* (Toronto, 1960), 94, as well as King's own comments in his *Diaries*, 17 June 1940 (during meeting with R.B. Hanson). See also Stacey's discussion of the creation of the NRMA in *Arms, Men and Governments*, 32-33, and Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 140-44. The War Measures Act was passed at the start of the First World War to give the government broad powers to direct the war effort, and re-enacted on the outbreak of war in 1939.

attention to the psychological aims of the NRMA while shepherding it through Parliament.¹⁵ Meetings of the Cabinet War Committee (CWC), Canada's equivalent of a "War Cabinet," also emphasised that the NRMA was intended not only to enforce conscription, but to control "wealth," and to move manpower around the country for industrial and other purposes.¹⁶ Thus, although the NRMA quickly came to be merely an authority for compulsory military training, this was not necessarily its only purpose in the dark days of June 1940. The NRMA, and the speed with which it was passed, reflected the larger expansion of Canada's war effort at this time. It was a compromise that gave the government any conceivable power that it might need, while at the same time making it clear that the NRMA would not be used to introduce overseas conscription. The prevailing atmosphere of crisis also helps to explain the lack of attention paid to specific policies or problems before the final decision was made to institute conscription for home defence shortly afterwards. These considerations were left for the Army to work out, and for it to deal with the consequences over the next few years.

In addition to a lack of records on the drafting of the NRMA, there are few sources on the decision to proceed with compulsory training under it. The Defence portfolio was left vacant by the death of Norman Rogers in an airplane crash on 10 June. J.L. Ralston did not take over formal responsibility for the Department until 5 July. By then, plans for a "National Registration" had been set in motion, to find out how many men were available for training.¹⁷ On 12 July, a new "Department of National War Services" was created to run the registration and to handle the details of calling up men afterwards.¹⁸ On the Army's side, Major-General H.D.G. Crerar was recalled from overseas in July to become Chief of the General Staff, the government's highest military advisor.¹⁹ One of his first duties was to begin planning for the compulsory military training system that would be required under the NRMA.

15 See the debate on passage of the NRMA in Canada. Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates of the House of Commons*, Vol. 1, 1940 (Ottawa, 1940), 852-976.

16 NA, Manuscript Group (MG) 26, J4, Papers of Prime Minister W.L.M. King, Vol. 424, Minutes of the Cabinet War Committee, 17 June 1940. King put more emphasis on the conscription aspects of the meeting in his own account (*Diaries*, 17 June 1940). See also records emphasizing the broader aspects of the Act in NA, RG 19, Records of the Department of Finance, Vol. 296, File 101-53-101; W.C. Clark to Ralston, "Statement by Hon. J.L. Ralston," and notes for Ralston, all dated 18 June 1940.

17 NA, RG 19, Vol. 3581, File N-02, reports of the "Temporary Committee on National Registration," 24 and 25 June 1940.

18 "The Department of National War Services Act, 1940," 4 George VI, Chap. 22, *Acts of the Parliament of Canada*, 69-71.

19 On Crerar, see Paul Dickson, "The Limits of Professionalism: General H.D.G. Crerar and the Canadian Army, 1914-1944," PhD thesis, University of Guelph, 1993, 299-321. Also NA, MG 30, E 157, Papers of General H.D.G. Crerar (hereafter Crerar Papers), Vol. 1, File 958C.009 (D15), "CGS files 1940-1941. Matters to appointment as Vice Chief of the General Staff, June 40-July 40," telegram, Chief of the General Staff to Crerar, 2 July 1940.

Crerar quickly set to work to bring a sense of order to the Army's operations after the June crisis. The NRMA was one area that needed much reorganisation. As Crerar put it:

On my arrival I found the Government happily committed to compulsory training and, indeed, service but with a very superficial scheme for training and utilizing the manpower so called up. It was too late to change the basis of the training scheme which had already been announced but I made it plain that the best we could hope for after six weeks training of the individual (incidentally, with practically no weapons to train with) was to make these men "military minded." I also stressed to the Minister that this scheme must be regarded as purely an interim measure and that in the course of the next few months the Government would need to face the entire problem of the future organization of military service for Canada.²⁰

The problem of lack of equipment would not soon be solved, but under Crerar's direction the Army had the outlines of a specific programme ready by late August. Training would be carried out in special camps to be built in smaller cities across the country. The Department of National War Services would be responsible for calling out 30,000 men between the ages of 21 and 24 each month. These men would be treated as civilians until they arrived in the camps, but would then be under full military authority until they left again. After the completion of training, each man would be officially posted to a local militia battalion.²¹

The summer months saw a flurry of activity as the Army scrambled to prepare the infrastructure necessary for the scheme. In most cases, this meant constructing entire camps in a matter of weeks. By the end of August, headquarters was planning for the first class of recruits to arrive on 9 October. This meant that crews were still constructing huts and other facilities after the camps opened, since basic building supplies were not delivered until as late as mid-September.²² In all, 1,150 buildings of various types sprang up in just a few weeks.²³ In addition, arrangements were made to conduct train-

20 Crerar Papers, Vol. 1, File 958C.009 (D12), "CGS files 1940-1941 – Personal Correspondence Lt-Gen Crerar - Lt-Gen McNaughton. Period Aug 40 to Mar 41," Crerar to A.G.L. McNaughton, 9 September 1940.

21 NA, RG 24, Vol. 6570, File 1161-1-5, "Procedure of National Defence Department Mobilization Act," Vol. 1, circular letter, Adjutant-General to all District Officers Commanding, 20 August 1940, plus attached documents.

22 Ibid., George H. Cassels, Deputy Adjutant-General (Mobilization) (hereafter DAG (M)), to all headquarters Directorates, August 23; Director of Engineering Services to DAG (M), 30 August 1940; Adjutant-General to all District Officers Commanding, 30 August 1940; letters from District Officers Commanding, Military Districts Nos. 1, 4, 5, 6, 12 and 13, 1-4 September 1940; and DAG (M) to Adjutant-General, 4 September 1940.

23 NA, MG 27, III, B11, Papers of J.L. Ralston (hereafter Ralston Papers), Vol. 68, "Construction Projects, 1942: Work carried out since commencement of war," Major-General E.J.C. Schmidlin, Quartermaster-General, to Ralston, 11 March 1941.

ing in both official languages, particularly in Ontario and Quebec.²⁴

Since the primary aim of the 30-day training system was political, several efforts were also made to involve the public in its operation. One of the most interesting examples was a telegram from J.L. Ralston to the mayors of the 39 communities where the camps would be located, asking for their help in supplying musical bands for training and entertainment. Most of the replies were favourable, and several towns arranged to furnish musicians or instruments. In the words of one mayor: "We are glad to offer this contribution. We gather from your message that you want those boys to feel that there is somebody who is interested in them and in what they are undertaking to do, and shall do our utmost to meet your desires."²⁵ In addition, local commanders arranged for press representatives to attend the formal opening of many of the camps.²⁶

A host of other minor problems arose after the opening of the 30-day programme. But for the most part recruits arrived without incident and quickly got down to work. Training itself consisted of basic drill, athletics, marksmanship, and general familiarisation with the Army, the only things that could be taught in such a short period. Trainees who objected to bearing arms on religious or conscientious grounds received other tasks to perform. By the end of the third training period, General Crerar pronounced himself satisfied with the work, which was at least equal to that of soldiers in regular militia units.²⁷

Even before the first camps were organised, however, Crerar was hard at work seeking an expansion of the 30-day programme. As early as the start of September, he submitted new plans to his Minister, on the basis, he told a friend, "that this present scheme of compulsory training and service must be considered as an interim arrangement for in fact it solves none of our military

24 NA, RG 24, Vol. 6570, HQ 1161-1-5, Vol. 1, reports of District Officers Commanding, Military Districts 4 (Montreal area), 5 (rest of Quebec) and 12 (Saskatchewan), 2-4 September 1940, as well as memo, DAG(M) to Director of Military Training, 11 September 1940. Also NA, RG 24, Vol. 80, HQ 1161-1-18, Vol. 1, H. DesRosiers, Acting Deputy Minister (Army), to J.R. Hurtibise, summarizing French-language training arrangements to 16 July 1941.

25 Gerard Lacourciere, Mayor, Ville de Megantic, to Ralston, 20 September 1940. See also original telegram dated 18 September 1940, included with circular letter, Adjutant-General to District Officers Commanding, 19 September 1940; "Replies as at 25-9-40"; draft memo, Adjutant-General to Minister, 16 October 1940; Adjutant-General to Minister, 7 November 1940; as well as letters from various mayors, 19 September-3 October 1940, all in NA, RG 24, Vol. 6571, HQ 1161-1-5, Vol. 3.

26 NA, RG 24, Vol. 6570, HQ 1161-1-5, vol. 2: telegrams, Adjutant-General to District Officers Commanding, and Commander Military District 4, to Department of National Defence, both dated 8 October 1940.

27 Ralston Papers, Vol. 68, "Compulsory Training, 1942: 4 months Training. Order of Call. N.R.M.A. May-June 1941, May 1942," Crerar to Ralston, 10 March 1941. See also Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 147.

problems and introduces several new and complicated ones.”²⁸ Crerar repeated these sentiments in a public speech in October, arguing that training had been limited due to a lack of proper weapons and equipment, although he also stressed the broad educational value of a “short training period [that] enabled a larger number of young Canadians to gain a proper conception of their national obligations within a given time.”²⁹

Still, Crerar was concerned to rationalise planning both at home and overseas. He submitted a new training plan along with his larger Army programme for 1940-1941, which called for a large expansion of overseas forces. To complement this, Crerar pushed strongly for a four-month compulsory training plan in Canada. The Army would be reorganised to create an “Active” or volunteer force, and a “Reserve” that would come to be composed mostly of conscripts. NRMA recruits would be put into the general training stream, alongside overseas volunteers. The new “A” and “R” men would all do two months of basic training, followed by two months of more specialised advanced training. The plan was approved by the CWC in January, after months of debate, and went into effect in March.³⁰ The final number of men trained under the 30-day plan was about 75,000, after deductions for medical and other reasons.³¹

Planning for the new four-month scheme was also closely related to larger manpower issues which were being faced at this time.³² Crerar emphasised that four months was the minimum required for proper training. Existing NRMA

28 Crerar Papers, Vol. 19, File 958C.009 (D338), “Personal Correspondence July 1940-June 1941,” Crerar to Major-General R.O. Alexander, District Officer Commanding Military District No. 2, 11 September 1940.

29 Crerar Papers, Vol. 25, File 958C.009 (D426), “General Crerar’s personal papers – Addresses and Memoranda by General H.D.G. Crerar”: “The Military Problem,” speech to Canadian Club, 23 October 1940. On lack of equipment, see also Colonel E.L.M. Burns, Assistant Deputy CGS, to Crerar, 29 October 1940, in Crerar Papers, Vol. 1, File 958C.009 (D13), “CGS files 1940-1941 – Observations on Canadian Requirements in Respect to the Army,” and Crerar’s comments to the Cabinet War Committee, 26 July 1940, in NA, MG 26, J4, Vol. 424.

30 Crerar Papers, Vol. 1, File 958C.009 (D7), “CGS files 1940-1941 - Personal Correspondence with Major-General P.J. Montague, October 1940 to June 1941,” Crerar to Major-General P.J. Montague, 8 February 1941, and Vol. 1, File 958C.009(D12), “Personal Correspondence Lt-Gen Crerar - Lt-Gen McNaughton. Period Aug 40 to Mar 41,” Crerar to Lt.-Gen. McNaughton, 4 March 1941. See also NA, MG 26, J4, Vol. 424, Minutes of the Cabinet War Committee, for the following dates: 1, 3, 9, 10, 23 and 31 October 1940; 5 and 29 November 1940; 4 and 18 December 1940; 2, 8, 24, 27 and 28 January 1941; and 26 February 1941.

31 NA, RG 24, Vol. 6571, HQ 1161-1-5, Vol. 4, “N.R.M.A. Recruits: Record of thirty-day Recruits,” enclosed with circular letter, Adjutant-General to District Officers Commanding, 5 April 1941.

32 The compulsory military training programme, the overseas Army and manpower for war industry were all intimately related in the discussions that took place in the Cabinet War Committee over the winter of 1940-1941. For more specific sources, see CWC Minutes for the dates listed in note 30, above.

and General Service training facilities could be combined, and money saved. More importantly, the total numbers called up would be about one-quarter of the 30-day plan, causing fewer disruptions to war industry. The number of "R" men trained during 1941 would also be just enough to provide replacements for Active men and units that Crerar wanted to send overseas, to expand the Army there.³³ In fact, shortly after the new scheme got under way "R" recruits were made liable for permanent service, and began to be posted directly to home defence units after their training was completed.³⁴ Thus, Crerar's programme was nicely calculated to meet the concerns of politicians trying to balance public calls for an increased war effort with others opposed to conscription, while at the same time placing his own plans for the wartime Army on a more rational footing.

By April 1941, the basic wartime structure of the NRMA was set out. The most significant change over the next three years came as a result of the government's conscription plebiscite of April 1942, which released it from previous pledges not to conscript men for overseas service. The plebiscite came after spectacular German advances in North Africa and into Russia in the summer of 1941, and Japan's entry into the war in December. Increased fears of attack on Canada and calls for greater efforts overseas were reinforced by new debates in the CWC over manpower and plans to continue expanding the overseas Army.³⁵ The story of the plebiscite itself is well known. The result was an amendment to the NRMA repealing restrictions on compulsory service in section three, to make "R" recruits subject to wider service. King refused to exercise this power, however, until it became necessary at some future date.³⁶

In addition, the events of early 1942 made the planners seem remarkably prescient. As Japanese forces advanced across the Pacific, public pressure to

33 On the NRMA and the larger Army programme, see the following sources from the Ralston Papers: Vol. 37, "Appreciations - Chiefs of Staff": "The Canadian Army" (memorandum for Ralston by Crerar), 3 September 1940, and Crerar to Ralston, 24 and 25 September 1940; Vol. 37, "Appreciations - Military Gen. (Secret) 1940-42," Ralston's notes on "Plans," 27 September 1940; Vol. 68, "Speech File, 1941": DND circular, 9 December 1940, Crerar to Ralston, 26 January 1941, and "Text of Prime Minister Mackenzie King's Statement on Changes in the Compulsory Military Training Program," 3 February 1941; and lastly, Vol. 68, "Military Camps and Training, 1941," Crerar to Ralston, 15 March 1941. Also CWC minutes in note 30 above, Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 148-50, and Dickson, 321-32.

34 Ralston Papers, Vol. 115, "Manpower National Selective Service, miscellaneous material re preparation of Army programme - proposed organization, April 1941-April 1943," Crerar to Ralston, 23 April 1941; NA, MG 26, J4, Vol. 424, CWC Minutes, 23 April 1940; and Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 150-52.

35 See NA, MG 26, J4, Vol. 424, CWC Minutes, for the following dates: 19 and 26 November 1941; 1-3, 10 and 16 December 1941; 31 January 1942; 4, 18, 20 and 26 February 1942; and 5, 6 and 18 March 1942. Also Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 156-65.

36 Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 165-80, provide a good survey of these events.

improve Canada's defences led to huge increases in home defence forces. Dozens of artillery and anti-aircraft units were added to coastal defences, and infantry units mobilised for a third home defence division, in addition to two that had been authorised during 1941. NRMA recruits proved to be the only source of manpower from which to create such units. For a few months they were posted directly from basic training camps, and they completed their advanced training with operational units.³⁷

The availability of NRMA recruits may have made it easier to accede to public demands for increased home defences in 1942. Indeed, the huge build-up in Canada has often been criticised for contributing to the later shortage of manpower overseas.³⁸ Many of the men required to create new units were still volunteers, 120,000 of whom were serving on various home defence duties by late-1944. As several authors remind us, though, most of these recruits did not meet physical or other requirements for overseas service and, when the crisis came in 1944 infantry were what was especially needed.³⁹ By then, most suitable volunteers had already been "combed out" of home defence units, and domestic establishments greatly reduced. It is difficult to see how the government could have completely resisted public demands for action on Canadian defence during 1942, and in these circumstances the NRMA came to be a valuable asset, allowing expansion to take place in Canada without drawing away larger numbers from the overseas reinforcement stream than might otherwise have been the case.⁴⁰

Another, more significant reason why the NRMA became part of the larger training system during 1941 was a discovery made under the original 30-day system. As Crerar reported in March, in the camps "a considerable number of recruits have volunteered for the armed services and have been accepted for active units."⁴¹ By the end of the second 30-day period, about 15 per cent of trainees had volunteered for the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) or the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), and another 10 per cent for overseas service within the Army.⁴² Under pressure from the CWC, provision was made in the four-month

37 For summaries of this expansion, see RG 24, Vol. 6921, AHQ Historical Section Reports No. 1, "Fixed Coast Artillery Defences on the Pacific Coast," No. 2, "The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Pacific Coast," and No. 4, "The Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Atlantic Coast"; and DHist, "AHQ Report (D3)": "The Employment of Infantry in the Pacific Coast Defences (Aug 39 to Dec 43)."

38 In particular, see Dawson, *Conscription Crisis*, 32-33, as well as Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 216-17 for a less judgemental critique.

39 Burns, *Manpower*, 132-33, and Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 451-53.

40 Concerns over both public opinion and the actual adequacy of Canadian defences were evident in the CWC. See NA, MG 26, J4, CWC Minutes, 18 and 20 February and 5, 6 and 18 March 1942.

41 Ralston Papers, Crerar to Ralston, 10 March 1941.

42 Ralston Papers, Vol. 68, "Speech File, 1941," Crerar to Ralston, 26 January 1941.

training plan for men to volunteer for the RCAF or RCN while in the Army camps, and they were permitted to volunteer for overseas Army service at any stage in their training.⁴³

One particular comment by Crerar in May 1941 summarises the thought of many Army planners on the NRMA by that time, and its role both within the Army and as a larger political tool. These comments are thus worth quoting at length:

The decision to retain the "trainees" in the Service for an indefinite period after they have finished their four months in the Training Centres has been well received. I believe that a high proportion of these 21-year-olds will volunteer for overseas and those which do not will be introduced into Coast Defence and Internal Security Battalions. All these rather represent several bites at the cherry – the cherry being conscription for service anywhere. On the other hand, this progressive process is educating the public to what may well be the inevitable and I believe that if this comes to pass, the final stage will be taken with a minimum of fuss by all concerned. In the meantime, and certainly for the balance of this year, we are assured of all the man-power we require either as reinforcements or for new units in overseas formations.⁴⁴

As Crerar explained in another letter, there were also practical reasons to combine the two groups in the same training centres: they would have to serve together on home defence anyhow, and costs for training would be lower, in both money and manpower.⁴⁵ But Crerar clearly saw the importance of the NRMA as a means to fulfil home defence responsibilities, and even to find some of the volunteers necessary for maintaining the Army overseas.

Over the next two years, this additional "benefit" of the NRMA was made into an official part of the training system. The results would be very important for individual recruits, who had to live on a daily basis with the Army's conscious efforts to encourage volunteers. The best-known account of what NRMA men experienced in the training camps comes from Ralph Allen, a war correspondent for the *Globe and Mail*, who went on to be editor of *Maclean's*. As he wrote in a popular history about the period:

Inevitably and quickly the existence of two such armies side by side led to frictions and differences of the ugliest kind. In their training camps it was the habit – and in many cases the deliberate policy – to mix the R Men and A Men in

43 See CWC Minutes mentioned in note 30. Copies of Army documents drafting and circulating the regulations appear in NA, RG 24, Vol. 6571, HQ 1161-1-5, Vols. 3-6 (especially final draft circulated by Adjutant-General, 7 December 1941, in Vol. 5).

44 Crerar Papers, Crerar to McNaughton, 19 May 1941. Also Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 151, and Dickson, *Limits of Professionalism*, 322-23.

45 Crerar Papers, Vol. 19, 958C.009 (D338), "Personal Correspondence July 1940-June 1941 – Major-General H.D.G. Crerar," Crerar to Major-General C.F. Constantine, 22 May 1941.

fairly close ratios and hope that by moral pressure and sometimes by actual physical violence the A Men would help persuade the R Men to “go active” too. Between the two groups there were small distinctions in such things as cap badges and service ribbons and quite often larger ones in their treatment by their officers and noncommissioned officers. Officially there was no discrimination against the R Men and none has ever been officially admitted, but as an Active Service volunteer – who at that time shared the general prejudice against the R Men – the present writer can testify from his own experiences that there was. So can thousands of other ex-servicemen.⁴⁶

It was also at this time that the name “Zombie” was applied to NRMA men, after the popular “undead” movie monsters, who mindlessly obeyed their masters’ commands without feeling or opposition. The term soon went into general use.⁴⁷ Allen himself provided further descriptions of the conditions that “R” men faced in two novels, *Home Made Banners* (1946) and *The High White Forest* (1964). In both books he used the same fictional composite of one basic training centre to set out the pressures “R” men were subjected to. These included discrimination in training and treatment received in the camps, and deliberate encouragement by officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) of emotional and physical abuse levied by other trainees.⁴⁸ Barry Broadfoot provided a few similar allegations in his 1974 oral history collection, *Six War Years*.⁴⁹

Until recently, historians have had few sources with which to substantiate these charges. From the records kept by the Army at the time, however, it is clear that the potential of the four-month training system was realised from the beginning, and active efforts were made to take advantage of it. Complaints also began to trickle in almost as soon as the new training centres opened. Most of those preserved by the Army were anonymous or came from friends or relatives, suggesting trainees’ fears of reprisals, or frustration with the procedures for registering problems inside the camps. Taken together, the written records of the Department of National Defence provide enough evidence to support Allen’s and Broadfoot’s claims and to help reconstruct the actual daily pressures that NRMA men faced.⁵⁰ At the same time, it is useful to remember that

46 Ralph Allen, *Ordeal by Fire: Canada, 1910-1945* (Toronto, 1961), 393-94.

47 *Ibid.*, 394.

48 Ralph Allen, *Home Made Banners* (Toronto, 1946), 38-75, and *The High White Forest* (New York, 1964), 170-94. The characters and situations described in the two books are very similar, and are obviously based on the same example. See also Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 154-56, for discussion of this issue.

49 See Barry Broadfoot, *Six War Years, 1939-1945: Memories of Canadians at Home and Abroad* (Toronto, 1974), 3-4 and 334-35.

50 For this paper I have relied mostly on the written sources quoted in the following paragraphs. This is partly because I have not yet had the opportunity to conduct personal interviews as part of my research. Considering their status during the war, it is not easy to locate former NRMA

it is no more realistic to assume that all recruits were treated the same way, or that everyone was treated poorly,⁵¹ than it is to ignore the opportunities for abuse that were inherent in the system.

Planning for the exploitation of the new four-month training system began as early as March 1941, when the Adjutant-General, Major-General B.W. Browne, pointed out the number of NRMA men who had “gone active” under the 30-day plan. “I have advocated all along basing our military effort in reinforcement requirements on the Reserve Army,” he added, “and I am convinced that this course is the best to pursue.”⁵² In July, he drew District commanders’ attention to “the excellent recruiting results” that arose from parading “A” and “R” men together in public groups from the day they arrived in training camps, to call for volunteers:

It has been found that the Active Army personnel present encourage the first volunteers from the “R” recruits, with the result that more “R” recruits step forward to offer their services It is suggested that this method be adopted generally, in all Training Centres, as “R” recruits, whose hold on civilian life has already broken and whose change of status from Home Defence to Active Army involves no financial or other problems, should prove to be a fresh source of recruits for the Active Army.⁵³

A month later, commanders were reminded that another class of recruits were about to finish their training, and were told to remind them “beyond any possibility of doubt” that they would be posted automatically to home defence units unless they volunteered for Active Service.⁵⁴ The following month, commanders were told that early returns of “R” men volunteering for Active

recruits through the typical channels. The availability of a body of written evidence also enables me to test Ralph Allen’s vague claims by applying a more narrow and rigorous definition of “pressures” and “abuses” faced by NRMA recruits during their training, using specific examples recorded at the time, rather than 50 years after the events. I would be grateful for any assistance from *Journal* readers in locating former NRMA recruits.

51 For example, two recent accounts of the decisions made by individual soldiers to volunteer for Active Service indicate that they were influenced by factors other than potential or actual abuse in the training camps. Driver René Bisson, cited in Serge Durlinger, “The Patriotism of Local Identity: Verdun, Quebec Responds to the Second World War,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, 31 May, 1996, p. 10, and Hugh McVicar in his own article, “‘Backdoor to War’: A Canadian Infantryman at Hochwald and Xanten, February-March 1945,” *Canadian Military History* 4 (Autumn 1995): 75.

52 NA, RG 24, Vol. 6571, HQ 1161-1-5, vol. 4, Adjutant-General to Chief of the General Staff, 27 March 1941.

53 Ralston Papers, Vol. 68, “Compulsory Training – NRMA, 1942: pressure on recruits to go active, regulations. April 1941-March 1942,” Adjutant-General to District Officers Commanding, 17 July 1941.

54 *Ibid.*, Adjutant-General to District Officers Commanding, Districts Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12 and 13 (12 August 1941).

Service ranged from 0 to 78 per cent in the camps, with an average of around 20. Browne ordered reports from all Districts on the methods being used to convince men to volunteer, so that a more formal programme of persuasion could be prepared.⁵⁵

Released in November 1941, the recruiting plan called for camp commanders to hold regular parades to ask for converts from the time men arrived at basic training centres, in addition to individual discussions with NRMA men. Junior officers and NCOs received similar instructions, and "A" and "R" recruits were put into the same training platoons, with open competitions to see which ones had the highest proportion go "Active." Trainees were also bombarded with posters and other appeals to their sense of duty, and even chaplains were asked to help in their sermons. Above all, the "importance of continuous effort to achieve the desired results" was stressed, although commanders were also reminded that direct coercion of "R" recruits was "strictly prohibited."⁵⁶

In spite of this prohibition, it is clear that the degree of adherence varied from one camp to another. Such pressures began from the moment that NRMA trainees arrived in the camps. A good account of what went on in one training centre appeared in the following letter from a camp commander in Cornwall, Ontario:

On 21st January, 1942, at 1400 hours, an appeal to the "R" recruits to go "Active" was made by me. It was explained to the men that they were in the army for the duration of the war. The benefits of going "Active" were explained. Those who were willing to go active were told to form up ten paces in front of their respective companies. About 190 men responded immediately. Five minutes later on, the men were told that a long week-end would be granted to all those who were "Active." About twenty-five more men responded . . . The following day, about 25 more men went "Active." Out of a camp of 1020 men, only 47 remained in the "R" class.⁵⁷

When these efforts failed to convince the final 47 recruits, the commander assigned them to all the routine tasks of the camp, including cleaning, sentry duty, fire patrols and kitchen fatigues. Yet he felt justified in adding that "This Centre has nothing to hide as to its recruiting activities, and it is again pointed out that no pressure whatever is exerted on men to go active service."⁵⁸ A similar report came from the commander at Chatham, although he admitted that

occasionally strong methods are sometimes used by Active Service men in the same companies and platoons when officers and NCO's are not present . . .

55 Ibid., Adjutant-General to District Officers Commanding, 26 September 1941.

56 Ibid., Adjutant-General to District Officers Commanding, 4 November 1941.

57 Ibid., Lt.-Colonel R. Larose, Officer Commanding, Canadian Army Basic Training Centre #31,

Cornwall, Ontario, to District Officer Commanding, Military District No. 3, 5 February 1942.

58 Ibid.

This sort of thing is of course discouraged as much as possible, but in spite of orders in this regard, incidents do occur.⁵⁹

In this case, buttons were cut off a private's greatcoat, and a rifle bolt stolen and hidden. The men responsible for these actions were eventually found and punished.⁶⁰

More serious claims were made in September 1941 by two men at the Cornwall training centre mentioned above. They submitted formal affidavits alleging, in the words of one man, that they had enlisted for Active Service only after "all sorts of vexations, reprimands, [and] harsh punishments, all inflicted without any reason or right and solely with a view to putting pressure on me and to having me enlist against my will in the Active Force."⁶¹ Leaves were said to be routinely and openly denied to "R" men. More importantly, two soldiers threatened this NRMA man, in front of 20 other witnesses and two NCOs, and "upon the offer of these two soldiers to carry out their threats, all went out of the room and . . . I was then beaten to the point of becoming unconscious and having to be taken to the Camp Military Hospital where I received medical attention for a whole day."⁶² Even then, the recruit added that he only went Active after the company's commander and its sergeant-major both told him that such actions would continue unless he volunteered.⁶³

The Cornwall case resulted in a formal inquiry.⁶⁴ It had to be re-investigated after the Adjutant-General rejected the first report for not treating the case seriously enough. The eye injury that caused the recruit's hospitalisation was never satisfactorily explained. Still, both men ended up retracting their statements and refused to follow up on their allegations. Without more information, it is difficult to tell whether this was due to a lack of truthfulness in the claims or pressures put on the men to drop them. But the case is more believable in light of similar ones described by Allen. During the first few training periods, several camps reported results of up to 100 per cent of "R" recruits

59 NA, RG 24, Vol. 80, HQ 1161-1-18, Vol. 2, Lt.Col. E.M. Ansell, Officer Commanding, No. 12 Basic Training Camp, to Col. W.H. Kippen, Military District No. 1, 19 February 1942, plus attached documents.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., statements by J. Albert Lefebvre and Joseph Robert Miville (quoted), 7 September 1941 (original French documents and English translations both on file).

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., Reports from District Officer Commanding, Military District No. 3, 8 and 11 October 1941; Adjutant-General to District Officer Commanding, 30 October 1941; Adjutant-General to Ralston, 12 December 1941; Ralston to J.T. Thorsen, Minister of National War Services, 18 December 1941; as well as other documents on file.

converting to Active Service, which is not surprising if methods such as these were in regular use.⁶⁵

Other complaints suggested how liberally instructions were taken at the end of basic training, when only volunteers moving on to advanced training centres could choose which branch of the Army to join. Camp commanders were told to remind NRMA men that they would be put wherever the Army wanted (usually the infantry) unless they went Active. Several reports came in of men who found themselves in engineer, artillery or other units, without knowing that they had volunteered by doing so. In one or two cases, the problem was due to a lack of understanding of English instructions by French-speaking trainees. But this was by no means the only cause of the problems, which occurred across the country.⁶⁶ Probably the most bitter criticism was forwarded from the Prime Minister's Office. The two authors of the letter were "indignant concerning the manner in which we were so rudely informed that our status as trainees [*sic*] has been changed to sappers," and described the Prime Minister in less than glowing terms.⁶⁷

Pressures to enlist continued throughout advanced training for "R" recruits. One man reported his experience in a letter intercepted by censors. As he put it:

The Commanding Officer has openly boasted that he intends to make it as tough as possible for those who do not intend to join Today we were given a chance to again signify what branch of the service we wished to entered [*sic*]. Those who did not volunteer were taken on a route march without equipment and also without our water bottles. This is in line with their policy of tough stuff I don't mind going away [to a home defence unit] but the thing that makes me so mad is the "Shit" that we will have to take between now and the time we

65 Not surprisingly, Cornwall had the highest conversion rates, with 100 per cent of recruits in two successive training periods going Active. A year later all but one "R" man did the same. Peterborough saw 100 per cent of "R" men go active in the summer of 1941, Newmarket and Kitchener reported 98 per cent and Chatham reached 90 per cent. Information on these camps is in the following War Diaries in NA, RG 24: Vols. 17189-17190, No. 31 Canadian Army (Basic) Training Centre [CA(B)TC], Cornwall, 2-5 July and 11 August 1941, and 21 April 1942; Vol. 17195, No. 32 CA(B)TC, Peterborough, 16 September 1941; Vol. 17168, No. 23 CA(B)TC, Newmarket, 26 July 1941; Vol. 17145, No. 10 CA(B)TC, Kitchener, 16 September 1941; and Vol. 17149, No. 12 CA(B)TC, Chatham, 26 November 1941.

66 Examples include NA, RG 24, Vol. 80, HQ 1161-1-18, Vol. 1, Camille Chouinard to Hormidas Chouinard, 27 June 1941, and précis of letter from Hormidas Chouinard to Ernest Lapointe, 2 July 1941. Also *ibid.*, Vol. 2, District Officer Commanding, Military District No. 3, to Department of National Defence, 3 September 1941; Marcel Lacroix, Adrien Boudreault, Raymond Berube, et al. [to DND], 9 September 1941; Lt.-Colonel J.N. Turgeon, Officer Commanding Canadian Army Basic Training Centre No. 53, Lauzon, Quebec, to Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General, Military District No. 5, 24 September 1941; and Major-General R.O. Alexander, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Pacific Command, to DND, 9 October 1941.

67 *Ibid.*, M. McCabe and J. Leclair to King, 25 July 1941.

are supposed to leave So far they have got about a third of the Company. I haven't done anything yet and I am at my wits end. God only know[s] how long the rest of the gang can hold out.⁶⁸

The man's camp and company commanders both denied the claims when the letter was forwarded to them for comment.⁶⁹

Complaints and reports about the pressures experienced by "R" recruits continued over the next couple of years. There were never enough specific accusations to follow up on, and they were routinely denied or downplayed by local commanders. But common complaints included discrimination in granting passes to leave camp, extra duties required of "R" men at training centres, and verbal or other abuse of trainees.⁷⁰ Ralph Allen also suggests that leaves were often granted to recruits only as a group, on condition that everyone volunteer for overseas service, a claim confirmed by some Army records.⁷¹ The consequences of a small minority of "R" recruits resisting such pressures were left for them to work out for themselves. There is no evidence that any form of discrimination was practised against recruits who were disciplined for offences committed in the training centres, and impressionistic evidence indicates that problems like absence without leave and desertion were just as common for "A" and "R" recruits.⁷² Yet even without Allen's accusations of abuse, it is clear that at least some mistreatment occurred within the four-month training system, although it is still difficult to judge its exact extent.

Once recruits were posted to home defence units, the types of pressures

68 *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, letter from Camp Borden (author's name severed by censors), 9 July 1941.

69 *Ibid.*: Major W.E. Macklin and Lt.Col. J.P. Girvan, A-10 Infantry (Advanced) Training Centre, to Camp Headquarters, Camp Borden, 31 July 1941.

70 *Ibid.*, Vol. 2: Lieut.-Col. P.L. Park, Officer Commanding 15th Field Regiment, RCA, to Headquarters, RCA, 4th Division, 3 December 1941, Deputy Minister (Army), to Adjutant-General, 16 March 1942, and Lieut.-Colonel G. Francoeur, Officer Commanding, Canadian Army Basic Training Centre No. 44, St. Jerome, to Headquarters, Military District No. 4, 24 March 1942. Also *ibid.*, Vol. 3: Robert Phaneuf to Minister of National Defence, 18 January 1942; Major J. Henri Labrie, Commanding Officer, Canadian Army Basic Training Centre No. 55, Rimouski, to Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General, Military District No. 5, 2 February 1942; Norman Smith, Editor, *Ottawa Journal*, to Adjutant-General, 21 May 1943, plus attached items; anonymous letter from "N.R.M.A. Personel" [sic], 13 June 1944; and Assistant Private Secretary, DND, to Adjutant-General, 22 September 1944.

71 All four of the training centres where over 90 per cent of men went Active in 1941 (note 65, above) admitted to promising weekend leaves to recruits. See NA, RG 24, War Diaries, Vol. 17189 (Cornwall), 1 July 1941, Vol. 17195 (Peterborough), 11 July 1941, Vol. 17168 (Newmarket), 11 July and 23 August 1941, and Vol. 17145 (Kitchener), 1 September 1941.

72 Unfortunately, there is no systematic information available on offences committed or punishments awarded in training centres. My conclusions here are based on a thorough reading of War Diaries for all 39 of the basic training centres in existence for the first two years of training under the NRMA.

on them to volunteer were less obvious. As the proportion of NRMA members increased, it became more and more difficult to distinguish between Active and Reserve soldiers. But there were still subtle differences. "Members (HD [Home Defence])," as NRMA soldiers were known, had no choice about where they could serve, and most found themselves in isolated defence posts in British Columbia, eastern Quebec or Atlantic Canada. The impact of being forcefully posted thousands of miles from one's home and family for up to four years can only be imagined. Language added to the difficulties for many French-speaking NRMA soldiers and recent immigrants, who were posted to predominantly English-speaking parts of the country. Others rejoined the training centres to perform routine duties such as cleaning or general labour. After December 1941, "Members (HD)" were clearly distinguished from Active Service volunteers by prohibitions against wearing certain badges on their uniforms.⁷³ During their years of service, NRMA recruits did have the right to become NCOs, and the number who did so increased as time went on and Active Service reinforcements were weeded out of home defence units. Theoretically, they could even exercise command over General Service soldiers, but Army leaders discouraged it as much as possible, and most were assigned to mundane administrative tasks. Policies worked against those NRMA NCOs who decided to volunteer for Active Service, since all NCOs had to relinquish their ranks before going overseas. Active Service NCOs were usually reinstated in their ranks, but NRMA volunteers had to start over as privates.⁷⁴ The one advantage that NRMA soldiers had over General Service soldiers was that they could obtain leaves and take courses to upgrade their skills more easily, since there was no threat of being called away at the last minute to join an overseas reinforcement draft. By late-1944, 8,676 NRMA men were on extended leaves of a few weeks to several months to work in agriculture, lumbering, coalmining and other occupations defined as "essential" by civilian regulators. Numbers were higher during seeding and harvest times in the spring and fall.⁷⁵

73 For the first year, NRMA men were restricted from wearing the "Canada" patch used by most Canadian soldiers. This ended in December 1942, when the better-known "GS" badge was introduced for General Service volunteers. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 429.

74 For general policies see RG 24, Microfilm Reel C-5270, File HQC 7959-3, "Policy re N.R.M.A. N.C.O.s," particularly circular letter by Adjutant-General, 22 April 1942, and undated documents titled "Draft Memorandum" [July 1944], and "Policy re N.R.M.A. N.C.O.s." [summer 1944].

75 General regulations for leave appear in Ralston Papers, Vol. 68. "Compulsory Training - NRMA, 1942," Adjutant-General, for Minister of National Defence, to G.O.C.-in-C., Atlantic Command, G.O.C.-in-C., Pacific Command, and District Officers Commanding, 31 March 1942. See also Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 411-12. For the figure of 8,676 men on leave in 1944, see Queen's University Archives, C.G. Power Papers, Box 39, "General Staff Memoranda, October-November 1944": "Report of Cabinet Committee on Army enlistment for General Service," 6 November 1944.

Nevertheless, NRMA recruits continued to volunteer for Active Service. By the start of 1944, 32,700 had converted to Active Service in the Army, along with 5,700 who joined the RCAF or RCN. The NRMA provided roughly 10 per cent of all the Army's overseas reinforcements from its inception in 1940.⁷⁶ Thousands more chose to enlist after receiving their notices to report for training, but before entering the formal NRMA system.⁷⁷ The number of NRMA soldiers in home defence units increased, along with their responsibilities. When expansion peaked in 1943, 60 per cent of the three divisions and other operational units in Canada were "R" recruits.⁷⁸ The highlight of the home defence effort came in August, when four infantry battalions participated in recapturing the Alaskan island of Kiska from the Japanese. The event was notable for two reasons: it was the first time that Canadian troops took part in an operation under U.S. command, and it marked the first use of NRMA soldiers in a combat role. To the embarrassment of many, the island turned out to be abandoned. But the NRMA soldiers were praised by Canadian and American commanders for their level of training and for their conduct during the operation.⁷⁹

By April 1944, attention returned to the situation overseas, and a more direct recruiting drive opened among home defence men. In a new attempt to encourage volunteers, complete units were to be sent overseas, as opposed to the usual anonymous reinforcement pools. One brigade from each coast was nominated to mobilise. But they would go only if they achieved a full strength of Active volunteers. On the west coast, where more information is available, the proportion of NRMA recruits was eighty percent by then, and ranged as high as 95 per cent. Commanders quickly realised that the chances of any unit going 100 per cent Active were slim. The four infantry battalions of British Columbia's 13th Brigade were each assigned two further home defence battalions serving in the area from which to draw volunteers, in order to reach

76 Statistics in Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, Appendix "T," 599-602.

77 According to Hitsman, "Manpower Problems," 143, the fact that many men volunteered to avoid compulsory service was made public in April 1944, although it had already been known for some time. Another study concluded that slightly more than one-third of all volunteers enlisted after receiving call-up notices but before reporting for NRMA training. See also Burns, *Manpower*, 120.

78 Reginald H. Roy, *For Most Conspicuous Bravery: A Biography of Major-General George R. Pearkes, V.C., through two World Wars* (Vancouver, 1977), 178 and 203, and Burns, *Manpower*, 134.

79 On Kiska, see Stacey, *Six Years of War*, 492-505, Roy, *Pearkes*, 184-96, and Galen R. Perras, "An Aleutian Interlude: Canadian Participation in the Recapture of the Island of Kiska," MA thesis, Royal Military College of Canada, 1986. Perras' MA is more useful for details of the actual training and experiences of participating units than his PhD thesis, "Stepping Stones on a Road to Nowhere? The United States, Canada, and the Aleutian Island Campaign, 1942-1943," University of Waterloo, 1995, which focuses more on the political and military background to the operation.

their full quota of active recruits. Recruiting quickly got under way.⁸⁰

At first, hopes were high for the 13th Brigade, since it had recently returned from operational service on Kiska. But results proved disappointing. NRMA conversions averaged only a few per day in each unit, in spite of transferring the most entrenched "R" men out of the Brigade, and taking away NCO ranks from a considerable number who had come to hold such positions. Three successive Victoria Cross winners exhorted the men to volunteer, including Major Paul Triquet, a recent francophone recipient, who spoke to the Régiment de Hull. Almost every method was used to find volunteers, although the Brigade's commander denied using open coercion:

We have used every form of persuasion that could be thought of – interviews, discussions, sermons, films, speeches. We have appealed to their pride, to their manhood, to their patriotism and even to their self-interest. But we have NOT [capitals in original] used threats or intimidation nor subjected these men to extra fatigues or menial duties.⁸¹

The senior Roman Catholic chaplain was another of the many people who interviewed NRMA recruits, but "reduced more than one man to tears without succeeding in persuading the man to enlist."⁸² The methods attracted considerable public comment, especially in Quebec City, where the municipal council passed a motion calling for a full Royal Commission to look into the campaign in British Columbia.⁸³

In all, 793 men in 13th Brigade and 491 from other west coast units went Active during the April campaign, compared to 278 General Service men already in the Brigade and 1,102 posted in from other units. A total of 177 officers and 2,664 other ranks went overseas when the Brigade left in May, including "practically every G.S. soldier below the rank of Sergeant"

80 Information in this paragraph from DHist, File 322.009 (D50), "Brigade Groups – Pacific Comd – Org & Admin – Sep 43/Sep 44," Brigadier W.H.S. Macklin, Commander 13th Canadian Infantry Brigade, to G.O.C.-in-C., Pacific Command: "Mobilization of 13 Bde on an Active Basis." Also Ralston Papers, Vol. 81, "Recruiting for Overseas 1944: Camp Vernon, B.C., Pacific Command, April-June," Adjutant-General to Minister, 25 April 1944, as well as Roy, *Pearkes*, 209-16, and Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 204-205.

81 DHist., Macklin, "Mobilization of 13 Bde," 14.

82 *Ibid.*, 7.

83 See Ralston Papers, Vol. 81, "Recruiting for Overseas, 1944: Camp Vernon, B.C., Pacific Command, April-June": Deputy Adjutant-General to Adjutant-General, 15 May 1944, plus enclosed clippings; Director of Army Recruiting to Minister, 20 May 1944; J.L. Ralston to F.X. Chouinard, City Clerk of Quebec, 1 June 1940; and undated notes and draft statement on the issue [June 1944]. Also documents on Vol. 81, "Recruiting for Overseas, 1944: in British Columbia. Newspaper Clippings, April-May," and Vol. 82, "Triquet, Major Paul V.C., 1944: re use of Triquet, Victoria Cross, for recruiting April."



(photo courtesy of National Archives of Canada)

An intelligence section corporal illustrating the load carried into combat by Canadian troops at Kiska: A Thompson sub-machine gun, 200 rounds of ammo, 35 oz. water bottle, Bowie knife, rations, bedroll, shovel, haversack containing personal effects, a tent, poles and 61 pegs, and extra clothing. Total weight 85 lbs. Canadians in the Kiska operation used mostly American equipment, for ease of re-supply.

from Pacific Command.⁸⁴ The numbers were not wholly disappointing, almost half of the recruits being converts, but it was clear that these numbers would continue to decline as the least firmly opposed NRMA men volunteered. The results of recruiting on the east coast were even less encouraging. In the absence of a formal brigade organisation, three separate battalions were nominated to mobilise, provided they reached a strength of at least 500 volunteers each (roughly half the formal strength of a battalion, and more for a typical home defence unit). None of the three battalions reached their quota. The Dufferin and Haldimand Rifles managed to persuade 196 recruits to go Active, while the Régiment de Joliette's campaign ended almost before it began, with only two recorded converts. The Régiment de Montmagny was eventually permitted to go overseas despite falling short of its quota, after absorbing General Service volunteers from the Régiment de Joliette. The 13th Brigade also reached England, where it became a training formation, devoted to bringing later reinforcements up to combat efficiency. The Brigade's original members went on to various operational units in Western Europe. One further battalion, the Victoria Rifles of Canada, tried the same recruiting experiment in August. It sailed for England with 499 volunteers in November, 90 of whom were drawn from other units on the east coast.⁸⁵

Another consequence of these events was a notable rise in tensions between NRMA and General Service recruits across Canada. Besides a few lesser complaints, there had been little evidence of open animosity before 1944.⁸⁶ The commander of 13th Brigade, Brigadier Macklin, drew attention to the changes that took place in his own formation during April, in a comment that has been extensively quoted since then:

If there ever had been any outward distinction between the volunteer and the N.R.M.A. soldier in these units it had long since disappeared. I had hoped that it would not re-appear but this hope was not fulfilled. The instant the announcement was made that 13 Infantry Brigade would mobilize on a volunteer basis the active personnel mentally ranged themselves in a body on one side and the

84 DHist., File 322.009 (D50), Major-General George Parkes to Major-General H.F.G. Letson, Adjutant-General, 13 May 1944.

85 On developments on the east coast, see the following War Diaries in NA, RG 24: Vol. 15054, Dufferin and Haldimand Rifles, April-May 1944; Vol. 15184, Régiment de Joliette, April-May 1944; Vol. 15189, Régiment de Montmagny, April 1944; and Vol. 15279, Victoria Rifles of Canada, August-December 1944. Also Hitsman, "Manpower Problems," 149-51, and Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 430.

86 R.H. Roy provides a good overview of this subject in "Morale in the Canadian Army in Canada During the Second World War," *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 16 (Autumn 1986): 40-45.

N.R.M.A. ranged themselves on the other, and the gulf between them widened and deepened daily.⁸⁷

G.R. Pearkes, the overall Pacific coast commander, also admitted to one case of a "very minor brawl" between one General Service man and an NRMA recruit during the recruiting campaign.⁸⁸

The situation worsened when a national recruiting drive was launched at about the same time. Advertisements were directed at NRMA men who refused to convert to Active Service.⁸⁹ In June, a disturbance involving 100-200 men in Petawawa was linked to a fight between an NRMA and a General Service soldier,⁹⁰ and these tensions erupted into the open on 18 July at Currie Barracks in Calgary. A Canadian Press story reported a scuffle between about 150 NRMA and General Service recruits, during which "rifles and bayonets were brandished."⁹¹ Further investigation revealed that the incident had been sparked by an encounter between two NRMA sentries and an inebriated General Service soldier. Ten or 20 men entered the NRMA hut the next night, tipping beds and breaking windows while as many as 50 companions looked on. There was no actual exchange of blows and no weapons raised, but the incident was the most open example of such tensions recorded during the war. Several Calgary witnesses reported that bitterness had increased since Canadian troops entered combat in Europe, and relatives and friends of General Service trainees began suffering casualties. Other slights were said to have contributed to the tensions, including the greater ease with which NRMA men could obtain leave or take vocational courses, and events as minor as one group being driven in trucks while others had to march, or being served soup when General Service men were not. NRMA recruits shared some of the blame, reportedly referring to General Service volunteers as "General-" or "Government-Suckers."⁹²

87 DHist., Macklin, "Mobilization of 13 Bde," 10. See also Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, Appendix "S," 591-98, Roy, *Pearkes*, 213, and Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 204-206.

88 DHist., Pearkes to Letson, 13 May 1944.

89 See Roy, *Pearkes*, 217-18, and Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 207.

90 Ralston Papers, Vol. 81, "Petawawa Disturbances, 1944: Statement on incident, Court of Inquiry," especially draft "Statement - Petawawa Disturbances."

91 See clippings, *Ottawa Journal*, *Ottawa Citizen* and *Montreal Gazette*, 20 July 1944, all in Ralston Papers, Vol. 79, "Currie Barracks Disturbances, 1944: Report, Messages, Orders, Clippings, July," as well as *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 21 July 1944, in NA, RG 24, Vol. 2197, HQ 54-27-63-38, "Disturbances Between G.S. and N.R.M.A. Personnel, A-16 Currie Barracks, Calgary, 18-7-44."

92 For the story of events at Currie Barracks, *ibid.* (especially proceedings of Court of Inquiry, 20 July 1944). Roy, "Morale," 44, also comments on the general rise in tensions at this time.

The best example of intensified feelings at this time was a song that was originally thought to have started the disturbance in Calgary. It was called "Salute to a Zombie," and was sung to the tune of "My Darling Clementine." It was heard in the canteen at Currie Barracks a few weeks before the events there, and another copy arrived at Department of National Defence in July, forwarded from a soldier in British Columbia:

SALUTE TO A ZOMBIE

I'm a Zombie, I'm a Zombie,
I'm a Zombie. Yes, I am.
I'd much rather be a Zombie
Than an Active Service Man.

I'm a Zombie, I'm a Zombie,
I'm a Zombie, till I die,
Active Service makes me nervous,
So I'll never go and try.

I was a Zombie, I was a Zombie,
I was a Zombie, and its [sic] right,
While in Col. Ralston's Army,
I'll never have to go and fight.

I was a Zombie, I was a Zombie,
I was a Zombie I'll allow.
Tired of B.S., I put up a G.S.
So I'm in the army now.

So I joined Active Service,
Sailing over with the tide,
I can walk along the street now
And never have to go and hide.

Now come listen all you Zombies
You drink our wine, you drink our beer,
But you won't turn G.S.
For a handcuffed volunteer.

That's the end of our story,
All you Zombies, please take heed,
Why not join the Active Service,
Help us out, where ere there's need.

MOBILISING CANADA



(photo courtesy of National Archives of Canada)

NRMA soldiers march through Terrace during the "Mutiny" there, November 1944.

Apparently the song expressed sentiments that went beyond Calgary. As the British Columbia soldier reported, "this is what we find on the table when we go on meal parade."⁹³ It was quite average, emphasising the "shame" of being a Zombie, and resentment at sharing the Army's benefits with NRMA men but not the costs of service overseas, ending with a call for the "Zombies" to go Active. But undoubtedly it had its own impact on men subjected to it in training camps and home defence units.⁹⁴

Another problem identified during both the mobilisation of 13th Brigade and the Calgary incident was the increasingly firm reluctance of NRMA men to go Active. Voluntary recruiting had declined in general throughout 1943 and 1944, at the same time as casualties were rising. D-Day (6 June) led to even greater need, but reinforcements failed to meet requirements, particularly for infantry units. The NRMA was the only large source of potential reinforcements remaining, but they could be sent overseas only if they volunteered. Several explanations were advanced during the April recruiting campaigns to explain the declining numbers. Although they are obviously coloured by the Army lens through which they were viewed, in the absence of more direct evidence they help to give us at least some idea of what drove men to resist the many pressures on them to convert to active service.

According to 13th Brigade's commanding officer, one major reason why NRMA men would not go active was a high proportion of French-speaking and "non-British" NRMA recruits. "Non-British" elements were especially criticised for lacking a firm commitment to Canada, and being too strongly tied to the land, an area where government directives clashed (overseas service and production of food were both emphasised as contributions to the war effort). French-Canadian opposition to conscription had more traditional explanations, considering their longer history within Canada and the recent memory of conscription during the First World War. In one 1944 report, however, it was found that the breakdown of NRMA men was closer to the general population than the report of 13th Brigade would lead one to expect, suggesting that opposition to conscription went beyond the particular racial or ethnic explanations that were advanced at the time.⁹⁵

93 NA, RG 24, Vol. 2197, HQ 54-27-63-38, "Salute to a Zombie," forwarded to Adjutant-General by O.J. Waters, Private Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, 18 July 1944.

94 Many examples of these songs and poems can still be found in various sources. For published ones, see Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 221, and Phylis Bowman, *We Skirted the War* (Port Edward, B.C., 1975), 68-69.

95 "Report of Cabinet Committee on Army enlistment for General Service," op.cit. According to the memo, of 42,000 NRMA suitable for infantry service in late 1944, 16,300 or 39 per cent came from Quebec, 10,250 (24 per cent) from Ontario, 2,600 (6 per cent) from the Maritimes, 10,000 (24 per cent) from the Prairies, and 2,850 (7 per cent) from British Columbia. Of the total of 60,000 serving or currently under training, 17,000 (28 per cent) spoke English, 12,000

Another trend that Brigadier Macklin detected was strong opposition to overall conscription policies. Considering what many NRMA men faced on training and home defence service, it is not surprising that those who resisted pressures to convert criticised the equivocal policy that had put them there. The large number of deserters that reportedly existed in Canada also came in for criticism, as did policies regarding leave. Both seemed to contradict constant claims that overseas service was the most important contribution people could make in the war. "I am convinced that thousands of NRMA soldiers will resolutely decline to enlist as long as the prospect of farm or other leave is dangled before them like a carrot before a donkey," Macklin wrote.⁹⁶ The existence of large home defence formations at such a late stage in the war also seemed to contradict the need for men overseas, and many recruits were said to be resisting pressures to go Active in hopes of forcing the government to send all able-bodied men overseas, rather than evading the issue.⁹⁷ Macklin's comments were confirmed by similar explanations from the east coast battalions involved in the April campaign.⁹⁸

Despite the obvious biases of observers like Macklin, there is other evidence to support his conclusions and to suggest why many NRMA men did not go Active. During the Currie Barracks case, one recruit volunteered the information that his father was sick, and he was the only person left to work the family farm.⁹⁹ The same explanation was given for problems in Chatham mentioned earlier in this paper. A somewhat more systematic body of evidence exists for 115 NRMA recruits in southwestern Ontario, who were interviewed in May 1944 to find out why they would not enlist. Over half gave personal explanations such as their own health or that of family members, pressure from parents or spouses to remain near home, and personal fear of or distaste for the Army. Many disliked infantry service in particular, the only option available to them (and also the one with the most obvious risks) as policies for volunteering from the NRMA were tightened during the war. Of the others, many refused to answer at all. Some pointed to large numbers of men who were still earning money and apparently avoiding

(20 per cent) French, 14,000 (23 per cent) both languages, and 15,000 (25 per cent) were listed as "of other races." The report concluded that not more than 37 per cent of the NRMA were of French origin. By this count French-speaking and "other" groups were over-represented compared to the larger population, but not overly so. See also Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 207, and Burns, *Manpower*, 124.

96 DHist., Macklin, "Mobilization of 13 Bde," 13.

97 *Ibid.*, 14. See also the appendices to Macklin's report, which give the views of various subordinates.

98 NA, RG 24, War Diary, Vol. 15054, Dufferin and Haldimand Rifles, 20 May 1944, and Vol. 15184, Régiment de Joliette, 10 May 1944.

99 Court of Inquiry, 13.

military service working in war industry, or the hope of forcing the government to send all of the conscripts overseas.¹⁰⁰

As the summer of 1944 went on, it became clear that there would be fewer and fewer NRMA enlistments. At the same time, the campaign in Europe continued to absorb scarce reinforcements. By autumn, retraining schemes were introduced to find infantry from volunteers in other Army branches overseas. Public criticism increased, and the crisis reached the Cabinet by October. J.L. Ralston was forced to resign as Minister of National Defence on 1 November, after opposing further delays in sending NRMA men overseas. By late November, the government admitted the desirability of sending 16,000 NRMA infantry overseas, which was done by order-in-council on 23 November. For a few days, some NRMA soldiers in British Columbia staged open demonstrations against the decision, and several thousand recruits went absent without leave before their units left for England. In the end, a total of 9,667 NRMA men reached the front as conscripts, two-thirds following the abrupt end of hostilities in May 1945.¹⁰¹ A total of 2,463 saw duty in operational units, 69 were killed, 232 wounded and 13 taken prisoner.¹⁰²

With the end of fighting in May came the rapid dismantling of the compulsory military training system. On 1 May, the CWC temporarily suspended the calling up of men under the NRMA, and the decision was confirmed a few

100 Of the 115 men interviewed, 21 said they needed to remain in Canada to help ailing parents or their families, the majority to maintain farms. A further 17 declared that they had volunteered but been rejected by one of the services, or that their health was too poor to withstand intensive training. Twelve more would not enlist due to pressure from parents or spouses (seven of these were under 20 years of age). Seventeen men refused to answer at all, and 11 more simply said that they would not go active for any reason (four were accused of being "anti-Canadian" by interviewers). Sixteen of the interviewees disliked the Army or opposed enlisting as infantry. Seven men explained that they wanted to stay in Canada and earn money as long as other men were able to do the same thing. Five more supported conscription, but said they wanted to force the government to send everyone overseas. Of the last nine recruits, three decided to go active, three reportedly planned to volunteer as soon as family problems had been put in order in Canada, two agreed to reconsider, and the last was an American citizen who was prepared to enlist as long as it would not affect his citizenship. See documents regarding A-29 Canadian Infantry Training Centre, 9-12 May 1944, on DHist, File 161.009 (D8), "N.R.M.A. - MD 1 Nov/Dec 1944." I am indebted to Dr. Carl Christie, the former Senior Research Officer at the Directorate of History, who gave me access to this restricted file on condition that data be used only in anonymous aggregate form.

101 Figures on DHist, File 112.3H1.009 (D37), "NRMA Service in NWE." On the fall 1944 crisis and sending the NRMA overseas, see Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 434-80, Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 207-34, and Reginald H. Roy, "From the Darker Side of Canadian Military History: Mutiny in the Mountains - The Terrace Incident," *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 6 (Autumn 1976): 42-55.

102 Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 481-82, and Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 234.

days after.¹⁰³ One year later, regulations for registering and mobilising manpower were revoked, and a general amnesty proclaimed for all outstanding cases of failure to report for military training under the NRMA.¹⁰⁴ Despite the large numbers of men mobilized, trained and forced to spend up to four years as unwilling soldiers, the system itself was quickly forgotten. This is true as much for historians as for the public. The NRMA is remembered mostly as a political measure that helped contribute to a Cabinet crisis in 1944. The experiences of the 150,000 men who served as NRMA recruits, and countless more people who were affected by it, remain largely unrecorded.

In addition, it is clear from studying the NRMA at the Army level that its problems, and especially the crisis of the fall of 1944, were not solely the fault of the military. Given a political decision to institute compulsory training only for home defence, military leaders made the plan work as well as possible. That they were also trying to maintain a large Army overseas contributed to the pressures and tensions that we have seen within the training system, and those who survived the experience probably emerged even more distrustful of the Army than they had already been. This may help to explain the quick death of conscription as a realistic defence policy for Canada after the war.¹⁰⁵ The availability of the NRMA as a spur to voluntary recruiting also helped to encourage the creation of an overseas Army that proved to be larger than its ability to maintain itself. In turn, the breakdown of the NRMA as a source of volunteers helped lead to the crisis of 1944. By then, a large home defence organisation had been built up, which made it easy for opponents to criticise the Army for not being able to find as few as 16,000 infantry for overseas. As Ralston and his planners knew, however, there were really few suitable people who were willing to volunteer by 1944. At the same time, the close proximity of so many trained NRMA men may have discouraged Army planners from considering other possible options during the final crisis. In the end, the peculiarities of Canada's compulsory military training system under the NRMA came very much to shape the terms of the debates that took place in 1944, and the decisions that were made as a result.

103 NA, MG 26, J4, Vol. 425, CWC Minutes, 1 and 8 May 1945.

104 NA, RG 13, Records of the Department of Justice, Vol. 2122, File 151133. W.R. Jackett to Deputy Minister, plus draft Order in Council, both dated 10 August 1946, and DHist, File 73/902, Order in Council P.C. 3264, 14 August 1946.

105 On post-1945 events, see Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 245-63, which is based on an earlier article by Granatstein, "'Strictly on Its Merits': The Conscription Issue in Canada After 1945," *Queen's Quarterly* 79 (Summer 1972): 192-206.