

Chapter 9 - Theodore Goes to War

The Concept of Total War

Total War 1914-1918

When Canada entered the First World War on August 4, 1914 the country entered into a period that can only be described as one of “total war.” A total war exists when the entire resources and population are mobilized towards the war effort, and during a total war, the war effort takes priority over everything else.¹ Between August, 1914 and November 1918 almost every Canadian of every age, every gender, every occupation, and every social and economic status was involved in Canada’s war effort.

One of the most obvious results of the concept of a total war was the large number of young men who enthusiastically enlisted in the army. (Canada had neither an Air Force nor a Navy at that time.) By the end of 1915 approximately 330,000 men enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force.² In spite of the fact that Canada had a population of about eight million people, the number of volunteers was insufficient to maintain the strength of the regiments and conscription was introduced by the government in 1917. Conscription was widely unpopular. Of the more than 400,000 men called to serve 380,510 applied for an exemption.³ In the end only 48,000 conscripted soldiers were added to the forces overseas while more than 50,000 conscripts remained in Canada.⁴

It is estimated that approximately 37% of the Canadian men and women who went overseas during the first world war were either killed or wounded, and Canada’s war dead amounted to about 61,000.⁵ As with every other community, Theodore had its share of volunteers

and conscripts and other casualties of the war, those who were taken prisoner, those who were wounded, and those who were killed.

The concept of “total war” removed the traditional distinctions between soldier and civilian to a large degree because both groups directed their energies and resources toward the national war effort. During the years between 1914 and 1918 people in every part of the country aided the war effort by volunteering their time, money, talents, possessions, and knowledge. Volunteering became a meaningful and practical way for everyone to contribute to the national war effort. During this time there were numerous items in the Theodore news column describing the fund raising and other activities undertaken by Theodore’s volunteers.⁶

Canada’s total war against Germany brought major changes to the country’s economy. Canada’s national debt, for example, reached \$1,665,576,000 because of the war, and the income tax was introduced to pay the \$164 million needed per year to pay off the debt. When the war was over, many returning soldiers found that there was no work for them and there was a long period of high unemployment.⁷ In Theodore the war not only brought some degree of prosperity, but also some related social changes as well.

Total War 1939 -1945

Theodore’s second half century began as the country was once again engaged in a World War. The concept of “Total War” war was still a major factor during this second conflict. In the summer of 1940 when Theodore celebrated its first half century by holding a major fund raising event for war charities. Brigadier General, Alex Ross, of Yorkton, addressed the assembled crowd with these words:

When most people think of war they think of it as soldiers, sailors, and airmen fighting. But to-day this war is a fight by every citizen. Certain men are honored and privileged to carry the King's arms, but those on the home front have their part to play as well. That nation which has the moral stamina to stand to the end and make sacrifices that nation is going to win the war. No matter what sacrifice is demanded of us we should be prepared to meet it. We may be far away from the sound of guns, but we're already feeling the economic grip. We must resist the enemy and we must win by a very wide margin this can only be done by training ourselves to meet any emergency.

The enemy fights in many ways, but one of his best weapons is those who refuse to accept responsibility and are alarmed by the reputed Power of the foe. Fear breeds panic and breeds disaster. We should not lose our sense of balance. We know and realize that Hitler's power is great. But we have pride in ourselves and in our country and we will not allow ourselves to become downcast. In this manner of keeping our faith, in perseverance we are going to win and be true to the heritage of the pioneers whose memory we honor on this occasion.⁸



World War II Posters Depicting the Concept of Total War

Notes:

1. "How was WWI a total war?" *Yahoo.com*. Retrieved 14 September 2016 from <https://answers.yahoo.com>
2. "First World War (WWI)" *Historica Canada*. Retrieved 14 September 2016 from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/first-world-war-wwi/>
3. "First World War (WWI)" *Historica Canada*. Retrieved 14 September 2016 from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/first-world-war-wwi/>
4. "Canada and the First World War" *Canadian War Museum*. Retrieved 14 September 2016 from <http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/>
5. "First World War (WWI)" *Historica Canada*. Retrieved 14 September 2016 from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/first-world-war-wwi/>
6. "Volunteering in the First and Second World War," *Wartime Canada*. Retrieved 14 September 2016 from <http://wartimecanada.ca/essay/volunteering/volunteering-first-and-second-world-war>
7. "Canada's Economy Effected by WW.I," *Canada's Total War in WWI*. Retrieved 14 September 2016 from <https://sites.google.com/a/share.epsb.ca/canada-s-total-war-in9-wwi/canadian-industry-in-wwi>
8. "General Ross Heard To Advantage At Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 August, 1940.