

## Chapter 9 - Theodore Goes to War

### Soldiers Experiences

#### Recruitment and Conscription for the Great War

Two days after the First World War began *The Yorkton Enterprise* carried the news that the local militia unit the 16<sup>th</sup> Light Horse “B” Squadron was mobilizing and that all the members were to report to headquarters at Yorkton.<sup>1</sup> It was also reported that many young men from the Yorkton area were already enlisting.<sup>2</sup> Although, there was often considerable excitement in Theodore when the troop trains halted at the station on their way to Valcartier, Quebec, and the troops got a hearty send-off, life in Theodore seemed to have gone on normally for some time.<sup>3</sup> It wasn't until the early months of 1915 that young men from Theodore began to enlist in the battalions that were being raised in the province.

One of the primary reasons that Theodore was not represented in the first contingents sent from Yorkton was the fact that many of Theodore's residents were excluded from enlisting by the Militia Act of 1904. This act stated that only male inhabitants between the ages of 18 and 45 who were not exempt or disqualified by law, and who were British subjects could enlist.<sup>4</sup> As was pointed out in a previous chapter, Theodore's population was made up of many people who had immigrated from the United States, Scandinavia, and the regions of the Austrian Empire that were now considered enemy territory. It is, therefore, not surprising that there was very little mention of the war in the “Theodore” news column of *The Yorkton Enterprise*.

A second important reason why enlistment from Theodore was relatively low was the simple fact that Theodore was an agricultural community. For the Canadian government the production of food was considered to be so important to the war effort that when conscription was eventually introduced, there were exemptions for farmers, farmers' sons, and even farm labour.

During the early months of 1915 the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* noted that, "Quite a number of our boys are among the Yorkton contingent which left Yorkton on Monday evening for the front. This battalion in being attached to a Winnipeg brigade to go as artillery. We wish the boys good luck and a safe return."<sup>5</sup>

It was often the practice in Theodore to have a farewell party for the newly enlisted young men just before they left for the training camps. Mrs. Wylie for example, gave a farewell party for Richard Mercer and her son, Walter, on the evening before their departure.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes, when there was a large number of recruits leaving Theodore at the same time, a more formal and elaborate departure celebration was held. A relatively large number of young men from Theodore joined the 214<sup>th</sup> battalion in the spring of 1918, and Theodore's correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* described their departure from Theodore in the following words.

On Saturday morning the local platoon of Wildcats left for Wadena on the 11 a.m. train. They were escorted to the station by the brass band and the Cadets, where about 200 people gathered to see them off.

On Thursday evening the ladies entertained the soldiers in the barracks. They spent the evening playing games and music was furnished by the band and a male quartette. Ice cream and cake were served. Mayor Thomas was in the chair and Private Trow thanked the ladies on behalf of the soldiers.<sup>7</sup>

As the First World War dragged on the number of volunteers gradually decreased. In the fall of 1916 the government began to plan for an inventory of all men between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five. On 15 December, 1916, the government issued the following directive:

PUBLIC NOTICE is hereby given under the authority of the "War Measures Act, 1914," that during the first week in January, 1917, an inventory will be made by the Post Office Authorities, of every male between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five, residing in Canada.

National Service Cards and addressed envelopes for their return to Ottawa have been placed in the hands of all Postmasters for distribution amongst the persons required to fill in such cards. Every male person of the prescribed ages is required to fill in and return a card enclosed in an envelope within ten days of its receipt.

Any person who fails to receive a card and envelope may obtain the same upon application to the nearest Postmaster.<sup>8</sup>

In Theodore a wide variety of opinions on the National Service Cards was expressed. The correspondent to *The Enterprise* declared the exercise to be a failure as it failed to accurately reflect the number of young men available for military services.<sup>9</sup> After the cards were returned to Ottawa lists of names were sent to military recruiters across the country, but the men sent out to recruit in the Theodore area were not able to get any to add to the list of soldiers.<sup>10</sup> Across Canada the number of recruits obtained by this method was negligible.<sup>11</sup>

Following the failure of the National Service Card scheme the government of Canada began to plan for conscription. Again, the topic was widely discussed in the Theodore area. There were strong opinions on both sides. Some young men took very kindly to the proposal, while other took it very seriously, especially the part where late or recent marriages were not to be considered when granting an exemption to conscription. There were even a few who advocated fleeing the country but did not know where they could go.<sup>12</sup>

The Canadian government introduced the Conscription Act on 29 August 1917, and it was quickly passed by Parliament. On 18 October, 1917, *The Yorkton Enterprise* announced to its readers that “All Single Men Between 20 and 34 Are Soldiers Now.”<sup>13</sup> There were, of course, many who could be exempted from war services, and many in communities tribunals were set up to determine whether or not an individual should be exempted from serving in the military. Individuals living in Saskatchewan seeking an exemption had until 10 November, 1917 to submit an application for exemption.<sup>14</sup> After his application for exemption had been processed the individual seeking the exemption had to present his case to a panel of two judges: one appointed by a board of selection named by Parliament, and the other by the senior county judge.<sup>15</sup> In the Theodore-Springside area the judges were Henry Turner of Springside and William Wylie of Theodore.<sup>16</sup> In Saskatchewan the tribunals began sitting on 10 November 1917 with the clearly stated expectation that all applications would be disposed of in plenty of time for calling the first draft of about 25,000 men to the colours by December 10th.<sup>17</sup>

There were many reasons why an individual might seek an exemption from military service but in the Theodore area it seems that the primary reason to seek such an exemption was that the individual as needed at home on the farm. At the hearing held in Theodore in November 1917, forty-four of the fifty-two men seeking an exemption from military service gave being needed on the farm as the primary grounds for their exemption. Other reasons included: brother killed at the front, not being a British subject, and medical reasons. Only twelve of the fifty-two men seeking an exemption from military service received it.<sup>18</sup>



# Recruits Wanted

FOR THE  
**Yorkton Company Unit**  
 OF THE  
**188th Battalion C.E.F.**

**Everyone Knows 'the Need For Men**  
**The Call Cannot Longer Go Unheeded**

Have you decided to enlist yet? If you're not quite certain drop in and see Capt. C. P. Tisdall at the Armoury, or write him about it. He will give you full information and advise you whether you should join or not.

If you have decided, come over to Yorkton, and join the best detachment in area "C". We want to raise a full company in Yorkton and district, so if you're coming, come quick, and bring your friends. If we are successful Yorkton will be made headquarters for a Yorkton Battalion.

You will be quartered in a steam-heated barracks, with shower baths and all modern conveniences, and will have as your companions some of the finest boys who ever donned a uniform. You will be better looked after at Yorkton than if you enlist in some of the battalions at city training centres.

If you can't come, it is up to you to help some way, so do a little recruiting for your country, and use your influence with some of the boys you know who haven't enlisted yet.

Full information re pay, enlistment, etc., supplied gladly by writing Capt. C. P. Tisdall, O. C., Yorkton Company Unit, 188th Battalion, C. E. F.

**God Save The King**

# OVERSEAS SERVICE

## SCALE OF PAY

		PAY PER DAY	FIELD ALLOWANCE PER DAY CENTS	TOTAL PER DAY
SERGEANTS CORPORALS PRIVATES	AGE 18 to 45 years	\$1.35	.15	\$1.50
	HEIGHT 5 feet 2 inches min.	1.10	.10	1.20
		1.00	.10	1.10

## MONTHLY SEPARATION ALLOWANCE

TO THE WIFE OF A

**SERGEANT \$25.00 - CORPORAL \$20.00 - PRIVATE \$20.00**

A widowed mother, if her son is unmarried and is her sole support, gets same separation allowance as a wife. Enlisted men, in addition to pay and separation allowance, are CLOTHED AND FED.

## FROM PATRIOTIC FUND

IS PAID MONTHLY IN CASE OF NEED

**FOR WIFE \$5.00 TO \$10.00 - FOR EACH CHILD \$1.50 TO \$6.00**

The Government will grant a PENSION when the circumstances justify it.

Many employers throughout Canada are guaranteeing **PREFERENCE IN EMPLOYMENT** to returned soldiers.

## HOW TO ENLIST

Apply Headquarters any Regiment or any Recruiting Office, or write for information to

**CITIZENS' RECRUITING ASSOCIATION**  
**MCGILL BUILDING, MONTREAL**

NATIONAL PRINTING COMPANY LIMITED, MONTREAL

World War I Recruiting Posters

It appears that the tribunal continued to meet throughout the winter, hearing claims for exemption from military service and sometime granting them. In the spring of 1918 a number of the young men from Theodore were called to the colours and departed for Regina.<sup>19</sup> One or two individuals who did not report for military service were arrested by the end of May.<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that no derogatory comments about the conscripts could be found in the Theodore news columns. And that those who departed in May, 1918, were given a farewell dance similar to the sendoff given to every other soldier who departed for the war.<sup>21</sup>

### **Recruitment during World War II**

The early years of World War II did not see the same kind of recruiting frenzy that had occurred twenty-five years earlier, and it wasn't until the spring of 1942 that the local news column in *The Yorkton Enterprise* mentioned recruitment when a number of men from the village went to Yorkton to look over the military train of exhibition there.<sup>22</sup> By the following fall, however, recruitment efforts in Theodore were in full swing. One recruiting event was described as follows:

A military invasion of Theodore took place last Friday afternoon, when a long line of jeeps, armoured cars, trucks and motor cycles rolled into town and the public was given an opportunity to discover where the government funds are being spent. All who saw the display of arms and equipment were much impressed. Part of the train journeyed on to Wynyard for the night. but some 80 officers and men took possession of the town hall where they cooked their meals and spent the night. Married men of the Village were deeply interested in watching the preparation of supper for the men - especially the speed shown in cooking meat and, vegetables with gasoline torches, and the efficient manner in which everything was done; especially the speed shown in placing a well-cooked meal on the boards. They are still telling their wives about it in hopes that it may have a beneficial effect in the local kitchens. The train departed on Saturday morning and was followed by two truck loads of recruiting officers accompanied by an examining physician, who spent some time here on business.<sup>23</sup>

## Notes:

1. "16<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Mobilizing," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 6 August, 1914.
2. "16<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Mobilizing," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 6 August, 1914.
3. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 August, 1914.
4. Champ, Joan. "The Impact of the First World War on Saskatchewan's Farm Families," *Western Development Museum*. 2002.
5. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 17 June, 1915.
6. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 June, 1916.
7. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 June, 1916.
8. "National Service," *The Toronto World*, Toronto, Ontario. 27 December 1916. p. 6. downloaded 10 September 2016 from <https://news.google.com/newspapers>
9. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 4 January, 1917.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 March, 1917.
11. Nicholson, G. W. L., *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War*. p. 220
12. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 14 June, 1917.
13. "All Single Men Between 20 and 34 Are Soldiers Now," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 October, 1917.
14. "All Single Men Between 20 and 34 Are Soldiers Now," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 October, 1917.
15. "Conscription Crises of 1917" Wikipedia  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscription\\_Crisis\\_of\\_1917](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscription_Crisis_of_1917)
16. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 22 November, 1917.
17. "All Single Men Between 20 and 34 Are Soldiers Now," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 October, 1917.
18. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 22 November, 1917.

19. "Theodore," *Yorkton Enterprise* 16 May, 1918.
20. "Theodore," *Yorkton Enterprise*. 30 May, 1918.
21. "Theodore," *Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 May, 1918.
22. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 April, 1942.
23. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 29 October, 1942.