

BC'S 1944 "ZOMBIE" PROTESTS AGAINST OVERSEAS CONSCRIPTION

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The climax of Canada's Second World War conscription crisis came in November 1944, when Prime Minister W.L.M. King ordered 16,000 home defence conscripts overseas. Canada seemed about to replay the First World War's crisis of French versus English. However, the first large demonstrations against conscription came, not in Quebec, but in British Columbia; not from French Canadians, but from English-speaking home defence troops stationed at Vernon. Press reports of the large scale of that demonstration sparked half a dozen further home defence soldiers' demonstrations across British Columbia. One of these, at Terrace, became an outright mutiny.

Within hours of the Vernon demonstration, British Columbia's Pacific Command sought to contradict the press claim that "nearly 1,000 men" had marched through the city's streets shouting anti-conscription slogans. As well as issuing its own version to the press, military command held an immediate inquiry into the Vernon march and the press story that it sought to refute. By contrast, in Terrace, the high command uncritically passed on to its superiors the most exaggerated rumours of an armed mutiny. The explanation for the difference between the senior officers' actions probably lay in their perceptions of the troops' ethnic origins and these troops' earlier behaviour while stationed at Vernon in the spring of 1944. The home defence soldiers at Terrace were assumed to be French Canadians or Central Europeans. Resistance there confirmed the officers' prejudices concerning who was and who was not loyal. At Vernon the troops were seen as "English" and, therefore, loyal – only awaiting a political decision to send them overseas. English Canada itself – as Quebec journalist and nationalist politician, Andre Laurendeau, had insisted – was deeply divided over the issue of conscription.¹

¹ Michael Beheils, ed., *The Essential Laurendeau* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1977), 101.

Published accounts of the 1944 Vernon demonstration have relied almost wholly on the memories of senior officers and their reports, filed at the Department of National Defence (DND),² although other *contemporary* sources present differing, and often conflicting, perspectives. National newspapers have been used only marginally.³ Contemporary records of the home defence conscripts themselves – which survive in both newspaper accounts and in the records of the military enquiries – have not been used at all.

The reporting of the November 1944 demonstrations was closely bound up with attempts by military officers to control a situation by controlling its reportage. Consequently, we need to deal more directly with these varied sources in an effort to reconstruct both the initial event – the Vernon demonstration – and the attempts to control the reporting of it.⁴

Few have written as much about the 1944 conscription crisis as Professor J.L. Granatstein. In an early account, he mentioned only adverse reaction in Quebec to the King government's change in policy.⁵ However, in his more recent and fullest account, he scarcely

² Reginald H. Roy, *For Most Conspicuous Bravery: A Biography of Major-General George R. Pearkes* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), cites both his interviews with General Pearkes and Department of National Defence (hereafter, DND), documents written at the time by Pearkes; see also his article, "From the Darker Side of Canadian Military History: Mutiny in the Mountains – The Terrace Incident," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 6, 2, (Autumn 1976): 42–55, citing the testimony of officers given at the military court of inquiry into the Terrace protest. C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939–1945* (Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1970), 469–81, quoting an unnamed senior officer from the 15th Brigade, 476.

³ Roy, *For Most*, 212, quoting the *Victoria Times*, 6 April 1944, and *Montreal Gazette*, 24 April 1944. Stacey, *Arms*, 479, quoting the *Ottawa Citizen*, 26 February 1945.

⁴ These efforts went beyond just "setting the record straight": censorship was explicitly discussed. See Roy, "From the Darker Side," 47, citing Directorate of History, Adjutant-General's File BDF 45-34, Letter of Wilfred Eggleston to the Ministry of National Defence, 7 December 1944. The sudden and unexpected nature of the events in BC army camps took the high command by surprise. Its efforts to call in the official censors all came after the demonstrations had already been widely reported on radio and in newspapers. J.W. Pickersgill and D.F. Foster, ed., *The Mackenzie King Record*, vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 253–4. Discussion of censorship only began *after* the demonstrations, on 29 November, and resulted in a decision to have restrictions on the press and radio continue to be voluntary.

⁵ J.L. Granatstein, *The Politics of Survival: The Conservative Party of Canada, 1939–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 181: "Rioting erupted in Montreal and Quebec. Almost exactly the same language appears in his *Conscription in the Second World War* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1969) 65: "There was some rioting in Quebec City and Montreal." In taking this perspective, Granatstein was in line with others of that period. For example, Ralph Allen, *Ordeal by Fire, Canada, 1910–1945* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 469:

Union Jacks were burned at Rimouski and Chicoutimi and two thousand aroused French Canadians marched through Montreal, breaking the windows of the National Selective Service office and several banks. More windows were

mentions Quebec protests, instead focusing on those in British Columbia.⁶ This changed perspective seems to accord better with the primary evidence. Neither contemporary newspapers nor the parliamentary debates – nor even King's own diary – gave the few demonstrations in Quebec nearly the attention they gave those in British Columbia.⁷ Even Quebec City's own newspapers devoted more coverage to the protests in British Columbia than to any in the city itself.⁸

The part Vernon Military Camp played in these events is my focus here. Events in the spring of 1944 at Vernon Military Camp hold the key to understanding why the largest demonstration turned into a mutiny at Terrace. As well, the attitudes of senior officers towards news reporting at Vernon contrast strikingly to their response to the reporting at Terrace.

THE ORIGIN OF "HOME DEFENCE" CONSCRIPTION

With the fall of France in June 1940, Canada became Britain's largest remaining military ally against Germany. The minor and passive role that Prime Minister King had intended for Canada could no longer be sustained, given events and the reaction of most English Canadians to the danger that the Nazis posed to Britain. Without major debate, Parliament passed the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA) that month, introducing conscription for the defence of Canada. In Montreal, Mayor Camilien Houde called upon French Canadians to refuse obligatory service. He was immediately interned, and no significant nationalist voice was raised in his support.⁹ If home defence conscription was not popular in Quebec in 1940, it was accepted as a wartime necessity.

broken in Quebec City at the offices of the local English-language newspaper and the home of Louis St. Laurent.

Protests in British Columbia were never mentioned.

⁶ J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises, A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), 230: "there were some demonstrations in Quebec City."

⁷ *Edmonton Journal*, 25 November 1944; *Regina Leader-Post*, 25 November 1944; *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 25 November 1944; *Toronto Telegram*, 25 November 1944; *Ottawa Journal*, 25 November 1944; *St. John Telegraph-Journal*, 25 November 1944. House of Commons Debates, 19th Parliament, 5th Session, 27-8 November 1944, pp. 6,632-6,637. Pickersgill and Foster, *Mackenzie King*, 244-56. King was especially relieved to hear that there were no French-Canadian units at Vernon (245). In a way that the protesters probably could not have imagined, King took a perverse delight in their actions, repeatedly telling others and his diary that these actions proved that the senior officers had lied to him (252, 253).

⁸ For example, see the Quebec *Le Soleil*, 24 November 1944, where the protest in the city was placed on page 3; 25 November 1944, the Vernon demonstration was given a banner headline on page 1, as well as another headline for the actual story; 27 and 28 November 1944, front page coverage for the other demonstrations in British Columbia and for the ongoing Terrace protest.

⁹ J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), 101-2. Brian Nolan, *King's War: Mackenzie King*

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and occupation of two Aleutian Islands between December 1941 and February 1942 abruptly brought the war closer to British Columbia. By the end of 1942, the 6th and 8th Divisions comprised the Canadian army's Pacific Command, 65 per cent of whom were "Home Defence" (hereafter, HD), or NRMA troops. The terms used for home defence conscripts show how the general public regarded them. Referred to popularly as "conscripts" or "draftees" (borrowing an American term), by far the most pejorative term for them was "zombie." Borrowed from popular horror movies of the 1930s, the label implied that the conscripts had no will of their own – no will to volunteer for overseas duty.¹⁰

In February 1942, in response to both external military and internal political pressures, Prime Minister King announced a national referendum to release his government from its pledge not to send conscripted men overseas. By an overwhelming vote, Quebec rejected King, while the rest of Canada gave its approval. Whether HD troops went overseas would henceforward depend upon the government's interpretation of need.

During the summer and fall of 1943, Canadian troops began taking heavy casualties in Sicily and Italy. At the same time, it was clear that a Japanese invasion of British Columbia was now a very remote possibility. In the fall of 1943 the 8th Division was disbanded in order to release 14,000 "General Service" (GS) troops for transfer to Europe. The 6th Division picked up the HD troops from the disbanded 8th.

THE DRIVE TO "GO ACTIVE"

What purpose, then, did the remaining division of Pacific Command serve? As one who had seen active service himself in the First World War, winning the Victoria Cross, General George Pearkes was keen to prepare his troops for combat.¹¹ As Canadian casualties mounted in Europe, "conversions" became ever scarcer. In 1942 18,274 HD troops volunteered for overseas service. In 1943 the number of volunteers

and the Politics of War, 1939-1945 (Toronto: Random House, 1988), 48-51. See also, Philip Stratford, ed., *Andre Laurendeau: Witness for Quebec* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1973), 43-4. Andre Laurendeau recorded his own bad conscience in not speaking out on Houde's behalf. First there were excuses: "he had changed tack too fast, too often ... Of course, he had clever explanations for his erratic course, but his cleverness was beginning to pall"; then justifications: "To choose the moment of France's greatest distress to refuse to collaborate in policies that were intended to avenge her had, it seemed to me, something repugnant about it"; and finally confession – he himself registered under the NRMA: "I came out of there feeling that I had just contradicted myself and perhaps betrayed myself."

¹⁰ The most notorious label, "zombie," was obviously intended to be an insult. While the November demonstrators at time took it up as almost a badge, it retained its critical connotation in almost every other usage.

dropped to 6,560; in December of that year only 294 HD volunteered to become GS. Knowing that the "Second Front" in Europe would be opened in the spring or summer of 1944, DND sent out incessant calls for more volunteers. This pressure created a dilemma for Pearkes. Was he supposed to be training *units* for combat – which entailed one set of priorities – or recruiting *individuals* to leave their units for overseas service?

Pearkes sought to reconcile the two positions by proposing that a whole brigade "go active," with the promise that the men would fight together as a unit rather than be fed into combat as individual replacements. His choice was the 13th Brigade stationed at Vernon Military Camp. It had already distinguished itself, Pearkes felt, in the re-occupation of the Aleutian island of Kiska. He believed that the opportunity to serve as a unit, combined with vigorous appeals to the men's patriotism, would suffice to convert the majority of HD men to active service.¹²

The situation must have looked very different to Pacific Command's HD troops. The disbanding of the 8th Division appeared to confirm the popular view that there was no longer any real threat to British Columbia. Wartime restrictions on civilians had eased. The enforcement of a night-time "dim-out" (or "black-out") had been lifted. Several thousand HD men had taken "farm leave" to help harvest crops. In many cases such leave was extended – at the request of the Department of Agriculture – to relieve shortages of farm labour. Hundreds more had been released to meet other manpower shortages in sections of the economy critical to the war effort.¹³ In the 13th Brigade's Régiment de Hull, for example, there were 180 men who had received no military training although they had been in the army for up to two years.¹⁴

Also influencing the atmosphere in the predominantly HD units was the "CanLoan" program to relieve the British army's acute shortage of junior commissioned officers. Pearkes recruited such officers for "loan" to the British. He was well aware that the result was to take

¹¹ For example, Pearkes attempted to establish a jungle training centre, with the expectation that at least one brigade of the 6th Division would go on active service in the Pacific theatre. He sought to recruit and train a Chinese-Canadian force for use against Japan. In both of these endeavours and in several similar projects, he was thwarted by his superiors in Ottawa. Roy, *For Most*, 178-210.

¹² Roy, *For Most*, 212-5.

¹³ These mixed messages continued right into the peak of the military manpower crisis: see General McNaughton's announcements, as reported in the *Vancouver News-Herald*, 24 November 1944, that 9,000 HD men would be formed into non-combat work companies to be deployed on national projects in Canada and possibly overseas, and that "several hundred" skilled workers would be allowed to leave military service, going on reserve, while they facilitated such essential war production as munitions.

¹⁴ Roy, *For Most*, 210-1.

away the volunteer officers who were keenest to see overseas.¹⁵ These transfers could only serve to confirm the impression that those remaining in the 6th Division would never see active service.

In April 1944 the officers at Vernon Military Camp began a drive to “convert” as many HD soldiers as possible. HD men from other units who had already volunteered were transferred into the 13th Brigade. Junior officers in the brigade were told to identify “hard core” conscripts, men who were not only expected never to volunteer themselves, but who also might prevent others from doing so. They were progressively transferred out of the military camp, to a separate tent camp, jeeringly referred to as “Zombierville.”¹⁶ Senior HD non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who did not volunteer were reduced in rank. Officers were ordered to interview every HD soldier to determine the reasons each gave for refusing to “convert.” No fewer than three holders of the Victorian Cross (including Pearkes himself) visited the camp to urge HD men to reconsider.¹⁷ The most widely publicized and most recent recipient was Major Paul Triquet of Montreal’s Royal 22nd Regiment. Within weeks of receiving his medal, Triquet was on a tour across Canada, boosting Victory Bond drives and, in British Columbia, urging French-Canadian HD troops to convert. Everywhere he went, his arrival was front-page news.¹⁸ In Vernon, he urged men to convert to enable a whole unit to “go active” in order to fight overseas together.¹⁹ While there had been an ongoing campaign to persuade or pressure HD men to go active, it reached an entirely new level of intensity at the Vernon camp.

The war diary of the Régiment du Hull gives a unique insight into this campaign from the perspective of an enthusiastic junior officer. On 3 April he reported the return of the unit’s commanding officer with “the good tidings from Ottawa.” “It had been decided to give Le Régiment de Hull a chance to go overseas with its brigade if sufficient NRMA personnel would enrol for active service. The campaign of enlightenment is to start immediately. After nearly five years of anxious

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ On the treatment of those transferred out, see National Archives of Canada, Record Group 24 (hereafter NAC, RG 24), vol. 15,183, 4th Canadian Infantry Training Battalion (formerly “Régiment de Hull”), War Diary, 12 April 1944.

¹⁷ Roy, *For Most*, 211-3. See also the War Diary for the 4th Canadian Infantry Training Battalion (Régiment de Hull), NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,183, 3 April, 4 April, 12 April, 13 April, and 29 April 1944.

¹⁸ For examples, see *Le Droit*, 3 and 22 April 1944; *Vernon News*, 13 April 1944; and *Ottawa Journal*, 11 May 1944.

¹⁹ Triquet’s tour was not without controversy. The Vernon branch of the Canadian Legion condemned the federal government for “prostituting” the Victoria Cross by sending a distinguished soldier to beg home defence conscripts to go active. *Vernon News*, 20 and 27 April 1944. As noted below, his tour was also controversial, for different reasons, in Quebec.

waiting it seems too good to be true."²⁰ The war diarist took a dim view of those NRMA men who did not share his enthusiasm. "The shock was almost too much for some of our braves who rushed to the wall for support. Apparently the effort of signing three MFM 2's four times is too much for them."²¹ He certainly did not underestimate the task: "Recruiting commenced slowly like a mighty locomotive trying to get up steam. It looks like a hard nut to crack, this home defensive mentality."²² When Major Paul Triquet arrived to support the enlistment drive, the diarist hailed him as "our hero."²³ The creation of a segregated tent camp was welcomed – "A special reservation was opened to-day for the more obdurate and recalcitrant souls among the NRMA personnel whose presence in the Unit is a detriment to recruiting. It welcomed some sixty of these to-day and is known as 'Tentville' or 'Zombeeville' [sic]. There, the departed will be instructed in the fine art of home defence."²⁴

What appeared to the enthusiastic war diarist as laudable encouragement to serve one's country overseas appeared as something very differently to public opinion in parts of French Canada. Ottawa's *Le Droit* reacted strongly against a report that General Pearkes had told HD men that their patriotic duty was to go active, and that Vernon camp commander Brigadier Macklin had refused to allow NRMA troops to take part in a parade to promote the latest war bond drive. In an editorial entitled, "Ce mode de recrutement est-il autorisé?" the paper insisted

il n'est pas permis de dire que ces quinze mille conscrits
n'accomplissent pas leur devoir: ils sont répondu à l'appel des
autorités militaires, sachant très bien qu'ils étaient conscrits pour
toute la durée de la guerre, et qu'ils pouvaient être envoyés n'importe
où, à la discretion du gouvernement ...

²⁰ Although this was a francophone unit, its war diary was kept in English until a few weeks before it was disbanded. NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,183, 4th Canadian Infantry Training Battalion (formerly Régiment du Hull), 3 April 1944.

²¹ *Ibid.* 9 4 April 1944.

²² *Ibid.* 9 5 April 1944.

²³ *Ibid.*, 11 April 1944. Triquet's visit to the Quebec City area resulted in a front-page story, two columns wide, with a photo in *Le Soleil*, 1 April 1944. Hull's chapter of the St. Jean Baptist Society, with 600 members present, voted to congratulate Triquet for the award of the Victoria Cross, as "notre héros national." When Triquet arrived in Ottawa, *Le Droit*, 22 and 24 April 1944, put the story on its front page, with a two-column headline, welcoming him as "premier héros canadien-français et deuxième Canadien à mériter la plus haute décoration militaire au cours du présent conflit." By contrast, the anti-war and anti-conscriptionist newspaper of the Bloc Populaire Canadien, *Le Bloc*, referred to Triquet as "l'agent conscriptionniste," 29 April 1944.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 April 1944. The jeering tone became successively more pronounced with each new contingent sent out of Vernon Military Camp: 14, 19, and 25 April 1944.

Ces soldats obeissent a la loi du pays, et personne n'a le droit de venir leur dire publiquement qu'ils manquent de fierté nationale et qu'ils n'accomplissent pas tout leur devoir.²⁵

Responding to complaints about the treatment of HD soldiers, on 12 May the Quebec City Council passed the first of several motions about the treatment of French-Canadian soldiers in British Columbia. The councillors unanimously called for a royal commission to look into events at the Vernon army camp. "Plusieurs de nos jeunes gens ont déclaré qu'ils avait signé à cause de la pression et à l'intimidation exercées contre eux à Vernon pour les faire signer dans la force active.... L'enrôlement forcé pour le service actif ne fait que créer du mécontentement qui sera préjudiciable à la bonne entente."²⁶ However, when a strongly nationalistic Liberal Member of Parliament from Quebec attempted to bring the matter to the attention of the House of Commons, he was cut off by the Speaker.²⁷

After HD troops had been sent to "Zombieville" during the recruiting drive, many of them were transferred to Les Fusiliers du St. Laurent and sent to Vancouver Island for an arduous training exercise. They alleged that they were subject to several forms of pressure: offers of alcohol and cash payments to go GS, demotion of NCOs who refused, isolation from other troops – first freezing in a tent "Transit Camp" and then "dans les bois de Courtenay" – and the refusal of

²⁵ *Le Droit*, 24 April 1944. Freely translated:

it is not permissible to say that 15,000 conscripts have not done their duty: they have responded to the call of the military authorities, knowing very well that they have been conscripted for the duration of the war and that they can be sent anywhere, at the government's discretion ... These soldiers are obeying the law of the land and no one has the right to come and publicly tell them they lack a love of country and have not done their whole duty.

The editorial also pointed out that only a minority of the troops at Vernon were French Canadian.

²⁶ *L'Evenement Journal*, 13 May 1944. Freely translated:

Several of our youth have declared that they signed because of the pressure and intimidation exerted on them at Vernon to make them sign on for active service. The forced enrollment for active service can only create discontent which will be prejudicial to good relations between French and English.

Reports of treatment meted out at Vernon were reinforced in early May by accounts given by young men who had signed on for active duty and were on leave in Quebec, prior to embarkation for England. See also the *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*, 13 May 1944, which reported that the council was not unanimous in its support of the resolution.

²⁷ Jean-Francois Pouliot (Temiscouata), 16 May 1944, House of Commons Debates, 19th Parliament, 5th Session, 1944, p. 2,951. He would vote against the King government when it changed its policy on conscription for overseas service in November. In fact, he then accused the government of being ready to send "reinforcements" even to Ethiopia, to continue British control there after the war was over. See House of Commons Debates, 19th Parliament, 5th Session, 1944, vol. 6, 27 November 1944, 6,635-6. *Le Droit*, 3 May 1944, in an editorial entitled, "Psychologie nationale," had earlier held Pouliot up as representing the truly Canadian outlook in his devotion to Canada as his only homeland.

medical attention.²⁸ By the fall of 1944 they had been transferred to Terrace.

In Vernon the recruitment drive was wound up on 1 May. From his experience at Vernon Military Camp, Pearkes came to understand more clearly the depth of feeling against overseas service. He described the gaps in unit strength as "wounds" that would need time to heal, but continued to believe that if such troops were ordered to go, then, as good soldiers, they would obey their orders.

Pearkes was buoyed and perhaps confirmed in his convictions about the latent willingness of HD men to serve overseas by the impact of the Normandy landing. In June 1944 over 2,000 HD soldiers in Pacific Command "converted," in a total of 3,259 for Canada. However, by August "conversion" figures were down 60 per cent, and by October – as Canadian casualties mounted steeply – only 967 more "conversions" were received.²⁹

THE KING CABINET'S DECISION TO SEND CONSCRIPTS OVERSEAS

On 1 November King replaced Defence Minister Colonel J.L. Ralston with General A.G.L. McNaughton, who pledged to raise the necessary replacements by yet another campaign to persuade HD soldiers to volunteer for general service. After three weeks, however, he realized he could not reach his own target. Consequently, on Wednesday, 22 November, King's Cabinet issued a Privy Council Order for 16,000 HD men to be sent overseas.

News of the Cabinet decision travelled quickly, if unevenly, across the country to British Columbia's army camps, preceded by a running wave of rumour. At the military inquiries after the HD demonstrations, officers repeatedly pointed out that the way in which the information reached their troops affected their response. Many men knew before their officers. The first hard news – received on Thursday, 23 November – was that the Cabinet had decided to send HD conscripts overseas. In his report on the HD disturbances in British Columbia, General Pearkes stated: "First reports indicated a satis-

²⁸ Protests in Quebec about events at Vernon Military Camp continued through the summer of 1944. Councillor Joseph Matte read a letter of protest signed by 133 HD men protesting their treatment at Vernon and Courtenay. While Defence Minister Ralston denied that NCOs had been demoted for refusing to "go active," DND records show that he was incorrect. See *Le Droit*, 30 June 1944; *L'Evenement Journal*, 20 May and 1, 8, and 29 July and 29 September 1944. According to E.L.M. Burns, *Manpower in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1956), 123, "In April 1944, the Adjutant-General gave approval to a 'gloves-off' recruiting effort, to persuade the remaining HD men to convert to GS."

²⁹ *Ibid.*

factory reception of the news, reactions varying from passive acceptance to definite expressions of satisfaction that the matter was finally decided.”³⁰ Perhaps a day later came the information that only 16,000 men would be sent and that they in would be drawn from units in Pacific Command. According to Pearkes, “The troops appeared to be almost unanimously in favour of Conscription, if all NRMA were taken, but expressed themselves emphatically against Partial [sic] Conscription.”³¹ The response of many HD troops themselves came in a series of demonstrations starting in Vernon on Friday, 24 November. Over the next three days there were demonstrations in Prince George, Courtenay, Chilliwack, Nanaimo, Port Alberni, and – most serious of all – Terrace.

HD RESPONSE: VERNON

According to senior officers, about 200 men from Vernon Military Camp marched into the town of Vernon, paraded in a relatively orderly manner, and then returned to the camp after military police told them to do so. In the opinion of General Pearkes and other high-ranking officers, the other demonstrations were sparked by exaggerated radio and press reports of the scale of the Vernon protest. Specifically, Pearkes insisted at the time and subsequently that press reports of nearly 1,000 men marching in Vernon had set off the other disturbances.³² A close examination of unit war diaries and local press reports of the Vernon demonstration shows that the general and his senior officers had underestimated the scale of protest.

The war diary for the Headquarters (HQ) of Vernon Military Camp was the most succinct in its reporting: “Riot in Vernon, 200 Home Defence troops parade through town at night. Provost ordered streets cleared. Riot subsides.”³³ Here, at least, is apparent confirmation (or perhaps the origin) of Pearkes’s view that only 200 marched. The short passage also conveys the sense that order was not seriously

³⁰ NAC, RG 24, vol. 2,655, HQS-35-45, vol. 6, Pearkes to Secretary DND, 5 December 1944.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Roy, *For Most*, 229–323, and his article, “The Darker Side,” 47. The latter used no sources from Vernon, relying only on the evidence presented to the Terrace court of inquiry about the impact of the news on men there.

³³ NAC, RG 24, vol. 17,332, HQ Vernon Military Camp, vol. 16, 24 November 1944. The camp’s war HQ diarist was habitually terse in his entries. Most took up only a line, usually noting the weather and little else. The full entry for 24 November 1944 was as follows:

CWACS left for Salmon Arm at 0920 hours having completed their stay in Vernon.

Robson released from detention. Sunny and cold. Riot in Vernon, 200 Home Defence troops paraded through town at night. Provost ordered streets cleared.

Riot subsides.

That was relatively loquacious for this diarist. More common was his entry for 20 December: “Dull and cold. Midland Regt. leaves for Eastern Concentration Area.”

shaken – the “riot” turns out to be a “parade” – and that order was promptly restored by the provost corps (i.e. the military police).

By contrast, the war diary kept by the Canadian School of Infantry at Vernon told quite a different story. It mentioned “a parade of about five hundred.”³⁴ Not only is the number of men marching larger, there is no use of the term “riot,” and the lack of any property damage was made explicit.

The battalions serving in Vernon Military Camp in November 1944 were the Prince of Wales Rangers (PWR), the Royal Rifles of Canada (RRC), and the 1st Battalion, Midland Regiment (MR). The PWR diary reflects a similar tone to that of the School of Infantry but doubles the number of men. “A minor disturbance occurred this evening when 1000 soldiers paraded through the streets of Vernon.”³⁵ The RRC diary entry for 24 November provides only a general description. “Troops from this camp staged a demonstration in Vernon tonight against the Conscription issue. Practically no damage was done, and on the whole, the parade was fairly orderly.”³⁶ The MR’s diary entry is even shorter, but more significant: “Approx 900 men (NRMA) from different units paraded through the streets of Vernon in protest against conscription. Very few Midlands participated.”³⁷ What makes the entry so significant is that the original typed entry (quoted above) had been amended by pen to change the figure 900 to 300. The pen used appears to match that used by the officer of the day, who was responsible for signing off the war diary. Taken together the war diaries reflect a relatively benign view of that Friday evening’s events. The higher one was in the chain of command, the smaller one’s estimate of the number of men involved. In at least one case there was a substantial disagreement over the estimate.

Ensuing entries that mention the demonstration reveal the same forgiving tone, though with evident undercurrents of warning that it was not to be repeated. In the camp HQ war diary the only relevant subsequent comment came the following day: “No further ‘Home Defence’ trouble reported.”³⁸ In the battalions, the officers made it clear that there was to be no repetition. At the Saturday company parades, the commander of the Prince of Wales Rangers was reported as saying that “the participants didn’t fully realize the seriousness of their acts. The first time would be overlooked but any further occurrences would be dealt with severely.”³⁹ The commander of the

³⁴ NAC, RG 24, vol. 16,910, S.17 Canadian School of Infantry, 25 November 1944.

³⁵ NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,150, Prince of Wales Rangers, 24 November 1944.

³⁶ NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,231, Royal Rifles of Canada, 24 November 1944.

³⁷ NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,118, Midland Regiment, 24 November 1944.

³⁸ NAC, RG 24, vol. 17,332, HQ Vernon Military Camp, vol. 16,25 November 1944.

³⁹ NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,150, Prince of Wales Rangers, 25 November 1944. See also vol. 15,231 for the Royal Rifles of Canada, 30 November 1944.

Midlands “congratulated the men ... on their good behaviour during the recent demonstrations by NRMA personnel in this area. Very few men of the Regt. took part in any demonstration and by their actions were a credit to this Unit.”⁴⁰ This judicious mix of benign neglect, praise, and warning seemed effective.

Despite the protestors’ threats to mount “a bigger and more furious demonstration” on Saturday, subsequent actions came to little. Snow and cold kept everyone off the streets for the rest of that weekend. Provosts prevented a group estimated to number between 100 and 200 from parading in the town on Monday. The last evidence of resistance was a brief “sitdown strike” by two companies of the PWR on Wednesday morning.⁴¹ All three battalions departed for overseas service without further incident.

REPORTING THE VERNON DEMONSTRATION

Local press reporting of the Vernon demonstration reflects a complex interplay between the provincial and local press as well as between the individual reporters in Vernon and military authorities. The *Vernon News*, a weekly, appeared on Thursdays; its coverage of the Friday demonstration came almost a week after the event. Local reporters, however, filed stories of Friday’s events with both the provincial and national daily press. Two local reporters were called before the military inquiry into the Vernon demonstration to defend their accounts. The *Vernon News* reporter had to give evidence before his own story was published in the local paper. Consequently, when *the Vernon News* story finally appeared, it was already reacting to criticism from military authorities that the news media, and above all CBC radio, had exaggerated the extent of the demonstration. The process of defending their reports was thus bound up in all but the very earliest press accounts from Vernon.

George Dobi, reporter for the *Vernon News*, appeared before the military inquiry, as did a Mr. Atkinson, a part-time reporter for the *Vancouver News-Herald*. The officers were clearly interested as much in the *origin* of the CBC report about the Vernon demonstration as they were in what either reporter could add to understanding the events of that evening. Both men denied being the source of the radio report. While the newspapers provide far more detailed accounts of the events in Vernon than even the military court of inquiry, they cannot be seen as wholly independent sources of information.

⁴⁰ NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,118, Midland Regiment, 30 November 1944.

⁴¹ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 28 November 1944. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2,655, HQS-3545-vol. 6, 5 December 1944, General Pearkes to the Secretary, DND.

The first press reports in the provincial and national daily newspapers, on Saturday 25 November, are the earliest stories but not the fullest. The two most detailed accounts – the military court of inquiry on 27 November and Dobi's story in the *Vernon News* on 30 November – are in some measure retrospective, reflecting reactions to military authorities' attempts to control events by controlling the news. In order to reconstruct the event, I begin with the earliest reports to appear in print and then note the expansions and explanations of the later accounts.

The most widely quoted early report came from the Canada Press Service, with a dateline of Vernon, 24 November. Not only the provincial press, such as the *Victoria Times*, but also major dailies across the country ran it (with minor variations) in both French and English.

Vernon (CP) Striking down a captain who tried to intervene, several hundred draftees marched through the streets of this town Friday ... threatening for a time to "tear down" the new Canadian Legion hall there ... Home Defence troops, variously estimated from 300 to 900 in number, gathered in the military camp here and marched into the main streets of the town ... No French-Canadian units are stationed at the Vernon camp.⁴²

The report concluded by stressing that authorities had restored order: "Military and city police had arrived on the scene by this time and after a few minutes the men dispersed quietly and returned to camp." The spark that set the movement in motion was said to be a radio report that these would be the first troops sent to Europe under the government's new policy.

On the same day, a rather different version of events appeared in the *Vancouver News-Herald*. Its source was "Special to the News-Herald," presumably Atkinson. Under the banner headline, "Vernon Troops Hold Anti-Draft Parade," the story began, "Pushing aside a captain who tried to intervene, several hundred draftees marched through the streets here Friday night shouting 'down with conscription.'" ⁴³ The demonstration lasted about an hour, concluding in a "protest meeting" in Polson Park, "after which the men dispersed to camp without serious disorder or any damage being done."

Since much of the military authorities' ire was sparked by the first national press reports, I now briefly consider how the events in Vernon were relayed across the country. Like the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, the *Montreal Gazette's* front-page top headline shouted about "1,000

⁴² *Victoria Times*, 25 November 1944.

⁴³ *Vancouver News-Herald*, 25 November 1944.

Marching Men.” The opening words of the first sentence qualified this to “nearly 1,000 soldiers from Vernon Military Camp paraded through the streets.”⁴⁴ Almost exactly the same text (under more muted headlines) appeared in Saturday editions of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Toronto Globe and Mail* (headline: “Draftees Demonstrate, Officer Struck Down”), and the Quebec *Le Soleil*.⁴⁵ Perhaps surprisingly, the latter made no mention of whether the protesters were French- or English-speaking. In Ottawa, the *Citizen* ran the Canadian Press story, with some significant additions: “For an hour – the men – estimated variously to number from 300 to 900 – paraded four abreast through the streets of Vernon.”⁴⁶ *Le Droit* followed the *Citizen*’s version closely, both as to the numbers involved and the fact that “Ils sont en majorité de langue anglaise avec un certain nombre de soldats de langue française. Aucune unité canadienne-française n’est cantonnée au camp.”⁴⁷ However, it was not the qualifications as to numbers – buried deep in lengthy stories – that had the most impact on Pacific Command, but the nice round number of 1,000 appearing so prominently in the headlines.⁴⁸

The military court of inquiry was convened at Vernon Military Camp on Monday, 27 November. It sought to gain a general view of events from officers who had encountered the march and private soldiers who had heard about, observed, or participated it.⁴⁹ The most senior officers to testify, including Lieutenant-Colonel Bolton of the Prince of Wales Rangers, reported their varying estimates of the numbers involved and their own attempts to exert some control over the men after the march – during the protest meeting at Polson Park. Bolton arrived at the park near the demonstration’s end, estimating that about 100 men were involved by that point. Other officers testified to about 150 leaving the camp as a group (although two NCOs offered numbers as low as 75 and 50), later collecting others in town for a total of around 250. Civilian witnesses put the numbers marching in town

⁴⁴ *Montreal Gazette*, 25 November 1944.

⁴⁵ *Winnipeg Free Press*, 25 November 1944; *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 25 November 1944; *Halifax Chronicle*, 27 November 1944; and *Le Soleil*, 25 November 1944.

⁴⁶ *Ottawa Citizen*, 25 November 1944.

⁴⁷ *Ottawa Le Droit*, 25 November 1944. Freely translated:

The majority are English-speaking with a certain number of soldiers of French language. No French Canadian unit is stationed at the camp.

⁴⁸ The *Toronto Star* and the *Montreal Le Devoir* Saturday editions had no Vernon story. Neither published on Sunday. The *Star* on Monday (27 November 1944) reported the event, giving the number of men involved as “about 200.” *Le Devoir*’s first story came on Tuesday (28 November 1944), responding at length to the English-language press’s comment on the event.

⁴⁹ Another, more minor, incident involved an enlisted man on a separate accusation of swearing during the march. NAC, RG 24, vol. 2,655, HQS-3545, vol. 7, Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry in Vernon, 27 November 1944.

between 300 and 900, the police and a legion official reporting the low number, the *Vernon News* reporter offering the highest estimate.

Of the half-dozen private soldiers who were questioned, the four who admitted to participating said that they had gone into town on leave as individuals to go to the movies or to go skating and only joined the parade for a time before dropping out. Most were understandably cautious about identifying themselves with what had now been clearly defined as a breach of military discipline, and they sought to distance themselves from the other demonstrators. Lance Corporal S. Smithers responded as follows:

- Q. You say you heard the demonstrators say "Down with Conscription." As you were a member of this parade are you sympathetic to these demonstrators?
- A. I'm not exactly for or against. It's one way of knowing what the boys feel and how to let the Government hear about it.
- Q. Do you agree that this method of demonstrating is [a] proper way to bring this to the attention of the Government?
- A. Yes.⁵⁰

Private Maisonville of the Prince of Wales Rangers said this:

Brig. Beattie made a statement in the paper that the boys were only too eager to go overseas if the Government passed conscription. They also resented the Canadian Legion and wanted public sympathy and ... this was the only way to show their feelings to the authorities.⁵¹

The inquiry's conclusions represented a highly selective reading of the evidence. It estimated that about 100 men had left the camp as a group and had picked up followers in town to reach a total of around 300, which had dwindled to 200 when the marchers reached Polson Park. On the hearsay evidence of one witness, the inquiry stated that rumours of a march had circulated up to twenty-four hours prior to the demonstration. The men had been "shouting defiant and seditious slogans in violation of A. A. 7 [Army Article 7]."⁵²

George Dobi's account of the previous Friday's events appeared on 30 November in the *Vernon News* as almost an anti-climax. Addressing the controversy over numbers, he judiciously mixed his report of the military estimate with a cautious defence of his own estimate. "Military authorities ... estimated 200 men, which would be possible in the last stages of the demonstration, but not at the opening. At this time there were close to 500 men."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

HD RESPONSE: TERRACE

Among the post-Vernon demonstrations, only the one at Terrace crossed the line separating broadly “questionable conduct” from mutiny. For three days between 1,500 and 1,600 men refused to obey officers on or off the base, broke into weapons stores, paraded with arms between the town and the base, and forcibly sought to prevent any units from leaving. Senior officers were aware that they lacked the force to discipline NRMA troops: all available ground units were also NRMA.⁵³ Consequently, one asked for airforce overflights to intimidate the rebellious.⁵⁴ The RCAF was the most quickly available force and one of the very few in which GS personnel predominated. However, with the rapid end of all other protests in the province, officers eventually persuaded the Terrace soldiers to accept the orders to board trains for transfer to eastern departure points.

The story of the Terrace mutiny has been told elsewhere.⁵⁵ What this account adds are the links to the earlier recruitment drive at Vernon, the protesters’ stated reasons for resisting authority, and a comparison of senior officers’ responses to these two most serious HD demonstrations against compulsory overseas service.

By November 1944 the Terrace army camp contained the 15th Brigade, comprising the 19th Field Ambulance, Royal Canadian Ambulance and Medical Corps, and three battalions: the Fusiliers du St. Laurent, the Prince Edward Island Highlanders, and the Prince Albert Volunteers (PAV) – an ironic name for a unit of conscripts! Absent from the camp in the crucial days at the end of November was “Polar Bear Force,” about 300 men from the PAV who were on a cold-weather exercise at Williams Lake. Also absent from Terrace in the critical days when the news of the government’s decision reached the 15th Brigade were the base’s senior officers, who had been called to Vancouver. A headquarters already disorganized by a rapid succession of transfers in and out had only relatively junior officers available

⁵³ This had been one of General McNaughton’s arguments for relying on volunteering: if NRMA troops resisted, then there would only be other NRMA troops to use against them; or militia units would have to be called out, disrupting the war economy. John Swettenham, *McNaughton*, vol. 3 (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969), 58. See also Pickersgill and Foster, *Mackenzie King*, 252, for McNaughton’s discussions of this with the Prime Minister.

⁵⁴ It was the acting officer commanding at Terrace, Lieutenant-Colonel B. Hendrie, who called for “a large flight of bombers” in hopes of intimidating the protesters: “I had no reserve outside of passive resistance, until I could get strength by some guns.” NAC, RG 24, vol. 2,654, file HQS-3545-vol. 5, “Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry assembled at Terrace,” 3 December 1944. Both McNaughton and King were horrified at the idea, fearing that the protesters might open fire on the aeroplanes. Also Pickersgill and Foster, *Mackenzie King*, 255.

⁵⁵ Roy, “Mutiny in the Mountains,” 46-55.

to respond to the most serious breach of Canadian military discipline in the Second World War.

The announcement that conscripts would be sent overseas reached Terrace during the afternoon of Thursday, 23 November, first by radio then confirmed by telegram from Pacific Command. The first sign of resistance occurred in the early afternoon of Friday, 24 November, before the Vernon demonstration had begun. At 1330 hours, the war diary of Les Fusiliers du St. Laurent recorded that B and C Companies refused to parade.⁵⁶ (At the subsequent military inquiry, these men were identified as from the Régiment de Hull, transferred from Vernon.) That afternoon the various "acting" officers met and decided to take no action in the belief that this would prevent further trouble. They gave orders for the wet canteen to remain open and posted guards on the ammunition dumps of the various units.

Late on Friday night, after news of the Vernon demonstration had reached Terrace, persons unknown broke into the ammunition stores of Les Fusiliers and took 50,000 .303 rifle rounds as well as grenades and three-inch mortar shells. After receiving notice of this, the unit's acting commanding officer, Major Henri Thuot, ordered the regimental police to guard the remaining supplies. When they refused, he called on officers to stand guard.

The next day virtually no one mustered for parade after breakfast. Lieutenant-Colonel W.B. Hendrie, the officer commanding the nearby Mountain Warfare School, arrived in the morning and, after reviewing events with base officers, decided to take over acting command himself. He gave a series of orders to protect cash, arms, and liquor from the mutineers but told officers to do nothing unless civilians or private property were molested. Saturday afternoon the protesters staged an armed march. It began from the camp of Les Fusiliers at the top of the hill overlooking the other camps and Terrace, and it wound its way through the former, picking up men as it went. Most of the men were armed and bore several banners reading: "Down with Conscription" and "Zombies Strike Back." While the march dispersed without incident, mutineers went around all units threatening any who would not join them.

On Sunday the men attended Church Parade peaceably. Thuot and other battalion commanders used this opportunity to ask the protesters to meet with them to state their grievances. Company representatives met with the officers and submitted typed lists of their complaints. In the afternoon parties of mutineers went round the sergeants' huts demanding that they either drop their stripes and join the protest or "go active." Major Thuot advised the sergeants in his

⁵⁶ NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,069, War Diaries, Fusiliers du St. Laurent, 24 November 1944.

unit to comply in the hope that if they joined the protesters they would have a moderating influence. That evening the base command received the order to begin to prepare the men for the move to eastern Canada ports of embarkation.

On Monday morning the base commanders decided to send an advance party of fifty enlisted men and two officers from the PAV to Prince George. The PAV were selected because they were thought to have the most loyal men and were furthest from Les Fusiliers. When the mutineers got wind of this plan, they attempted to catch the party, but fourteen men and two officers managed to get away on the train. The mutineers took out their anger by intimidating the remaining officers and men of the PAV. That evening the base senior officers arrived back from Vancouver. They determined to hold parades the following day at the regular times regardless of how few men mustered. On Tuesday, General Pearkes's special order was posted around the base: hand in weapons, sergeants resume rank, and all ranks obey officers. The response to parades was best amongst the smaller units (such as the Pipe Band), least amongst Les Fusiliers. Officers had some success collecting arms from the men's huts, especially as the most militant of Les Fusiliers and the Highlanders were at a meeting. These weapons were removed to an RCAF base several miles away, and ammunition was dumped into the river. Wednesday saw more men turning out for parades. Most of the PAV departed, despite continuing threats. Eventually even the most militant finally packed and left. By Thursday almost all men in all units had returned to parade, and preparations for a Friday departure to eastern ports of embarkation were under way.

THE "REASON WHY":

HD MEN AT VERNON AND TERRACE

For the other demonstrations only press reports of shouted slogans and a few reports of conversations with the protesters give any indication of the men's reasons for their actions, at Vernon and Terrace the protesters left more extensive explanations for their demonstrations. At Vernon both the press and the unit officers took note of the men's stated reasons for their actions. At Terrace, the duration of the protest and the appearance of some organized structure allowed the men to compose formal statements of their grievances.

By far the most frequently reported slogan in all of the November HD demonstrations, not surprisingly, was "Down with Conscription." However, other slogans or shouts that recurred, sometimes in slightly different forms, in the Vernon demonstration and in most of the others. "Down with the Legion" and "Down with the Government" reflected

the common HD hostility to the Canadian Legion's campaign for conscription for overseas service and with the King government for changing its policy.⁵⁷ A variation of the last was "Down with the Government, We Want Total Conscription." The other commonly recurring slogan was some variation on "Conscript Wealth," "Let Them Conscript Wealth Too," or "Conscript Wealth and Industry as well as Manpower."⁵⁸ This was commonly read by newspaper commentators as an indication of some sort of left-wing politics among the Zombies. The *Kelowna Courier* commented:

Among the English-speaking draftees one can hear many remarks smacking of class warfare, ideological struggle and party politics. "We can win this war right here at home," meaning the war for "economic democracy," and similar phrases were common enough during the riots staged by the Zombies who have been indoctrinated one way or another regardless of considerations of race or religion.⁵⁹

The Vernon protesters left accounts of their reasons both through the press and the men's own written statements. Reporters spoke to the Vernon demonstrators in Polson Park at the conclusion of their

⁵⁷ The Canadian Legion had been on record since 1932 as favouring conscription for overseas service. In the tense atmosphere of November 1944 several legion branches in British Columbia were pressing local governments to endorse their call. For examples, see *Kelowna Courier*, 25 November 1944, and the Kamloops *Sentinel*, 22 November 1944.

⁵⁸ These slogans were reported as used in Vernon, Nanaimo, Prince George, and Terrace in several newspapers: *Prince George Citizen*, 30 November 1944; *Victoria Times*, 27 November 1944; *Vancouver Sun*, 27 November 1944; *Winnipeg Free Press*, 27 November 1944; *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 26 November 1944. Francophone newspapers reported the French equivalents – "Conscrivez les richesses et l'industrie autant que les hommes" and "Qu'il conscrivent la richesse aussi": *Quebec Le Soleil*, 25 November 1944; and *Ottawa Le Droit*, 27 November 1944. These were probably translations of the English-language Canadian Press story. The *Prince George Citizen*, 30 November 1944, after reviewing the slogans of the English-speaking protesters, noted of the francophone protesters in Prince George, "It is conjecture that similar sentiments were shouted in French."

⁵⁹ *Kelowna Courier*, 7 December 1944. See also *Le Devoir*, 27 November 1944, which concluded from the slogans chanted that the men must be supporting the CCF and, therefore, could not have been French Canadians. The initial response of the CCF in Parliament to the NRMA had been that wealth should be conscripted before manpower. However, by 1944, CCF leader M. J. Coldwell took the stand that "we did not make the sending overseas of conscripted men conditional upon the conscription of industry and wealth." Walter D. Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: the National CCF, 1932-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 231. On the party's earlier pacifism, see Thomas P. Socknat, "The Pacifist Background of the Early CCF," in *Building the Co-operative Commonwealth*, ed. J.W. Brennan, 57-67 (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1984). The Communist Party, after 1941, was more pro-war than the CCF: it formed "Communist-Labour Total War Committees" to campaign for a "yes" vote in the 1942 plebiscite on conscription for overseas service. Its support for the King government's war policies was so whole-hearted, it not only supported the "internment" of Japanese-Canadians, but also called for the continuation of discrimination against them after the war. See Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism* (Toronto: Methuen, 1988), 190, 196, 200-9.

march, reporting both strong statements and a measure of disagreement about them. George Dobi recorded the longest of these statements and noted the dissent that it provoked.

“We want total conscription of wealth and materials as well as manpower,” declared their spokesman. He called on Canada to fight a Russian type of war. “Why should we be the 16,000 appeasers for the rest of Canada? Half of this country is jitter bugging while the other half is fighting.” “It would be alright if we were fighting for Canada and not the money makers of the country. Give guys like Henry Ford a \$1.50 a day and our rations and see what he would say.” “Men wearing GS badges in Canada are just as much Zombies as we are. I have seen officers draw straws to see who would be the unfortunate soul to go overseas.” “We got the horse laugh when we returned from Kiska because there were no Japs there. It is all a bunch of lies that we were forced at the point of a tommy gun to get on the scramble nets for the landing. The people of BC were glad to have us here in 1941. Now they want to get rid of us so they can get the jobs.”

Another person, whom Dobi described as “not so discreet,” interjected, “If we go overseas it will be in shackles.” The first speaker then demanded that this person add that he was giving his personal opinion, asserting that “the purpose of the parade was to press for total conscription.”⁶⁰ However, a report in the *Vancouver Sun*, concerning what appears to be the same conversation, added that the interjector “was greeted by loud voices of agreement.”⁶¹ Apparently there was some division among the Vernon protestors between those who opposed going overseas under any circumstances and those who were willing to go overseas if there were a “total conscription” of wealth and industry.

After the Vernon protest, the commanding officer of the Prince of Wales Rangers met with company representatives to discuss grievances. The unit war diary described these men as “individuals from each company who purported to convey the opinion of the NRMA soldiers of the battalion.” This meeting resulted in the men drawing up a set of resolutions that were given to the commanding officer and read out to the assembled unit.

1. NRMA soldiers do not want conscription for Overseas service, and will not submit to it.
2. The views of NRMA on conscription have been continually misrepresented by the Press and on the Radio. They resent the

⁶⁰ *Vernon News*, 30 November 1944. The *Halifax Chronicle*, 29 November 1944, also claimed to have interviewed soldiers from both sides of the debate but did not print anything resembling direct quotations.

⁶¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 26 November 1944.

statements published in the press emanating from high ranking officers in Pac. Comd. [sic] concerning their attitude to conscription – which statements they regard as being dishonest and unfair.

3. Reports as broadcast by CBC news on 29 November 1944 that on [sic] 25 per cent of NRMA personnel are concerned in current protests on conscription issue are not true, since the fact is that NRMA Soldiers are of one mind on this issue.
4. It is requested that these expressions of opinion be forwarded through the normal channels to reach the Minister of National Defence and that some form of public acknowledgement be made.⁶²

Despite the first resolution's declaration that the men would not submit, the unit left Vernon in December for Halifax. While some men were slow in turning up after embarkation leave, almost all of them had boarded ship for Europe by 3 January 1945.⁶³

As at the Prince George demonstration, the Terrace protesters made up several banners, all of which were in English: "Down with Conscription," "Total Conscription or Nothing," and "The Zombies Strike Back."⁶⁴ The written statements from the Terrace demonstrators were strikingly different. The first, from the Highlanders, was primarily concerned with setting the record straight.

We are protesting against Conscription in any form, partial or total ... We are absolutely against any form of Conscription for overseas service. We feel that your letter [as officer commanding] of yesterday posted in the huts does not convey our true feelings in the matter of Conscription and request that such letter be amended accordingly. We wish to read in the newspapers or hear over the radio that Ottawa has been informed of our stand on the Conscription question.⁶⁵

The nine-point statement from the PAV protesters dealt mainly with what the men would and would not do during their "strike." Only the first and last points touched on their motives and goals: "1. No conscription for [sic] our reason for strike ... 9. We want a definite state [sic] of the situation."⁶⁶

⁶² NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,150, War Diary, Prince of Wales Rangers, 30 November 1944, app. 8.

⁶³ Ibid., 1 December 1944; 3 January 1945.

⁶⁴ Someone amongst the NRMA men even took photographs of some of the banners as well as the march into the town of Terrace. NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,143, 1st Battalion, PAV, 25 November 1944; and "Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry assembled at Terrace," vol. 2,654, HQS-3545-vol. 5, exhibit.

⁶⁵ Ibid., exhibit.

⁶⁶ NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,143, 1st Battalion PAV, serial 1059, fol. 4, 27 November 1944.

The statement from Les Fusiliers was far different from either of these.

1. We want the government and the public to know that we are not in favour of conscription, contrary to the actual belief brought [sic] by statements in the Press.
2. We want to return to the Province of Quebec, since the danger of invasion on the Pacific coasts [sic] is over.
3. We want means of safety (weapons) to be left to the men until they are in the Province of Quebec.
4. We want to make known that if it is decided otherwise, we will continue to act as we do, no matter what arrives [sic].⁶⁷

The senior officers chose to read Article 2 as a request to return to Quebec for embarkation leave before going overseas. However, this seems a narrow and self-serving reading. Officers, even in the midst of a mutiny, did not want to admit that these soldiers were refusing to go overseas, demanding their own immediate demobilization, and claiming a right to carry arms to enforce their own terms. The statement contains no undertaking to go overseas but, rather, a demand to return to Quebec to be demobilized, since home defence duty on the West Coast was no longer necessary. Small wonder that many of Les Fusiliers took their embarkation leave as the occasion to desert – their own “private” demobilization.

From the evidence of their slogans, reported conversations, and the few written documents, there seem to have been a variety of motives beyond the HD demonstrations of 1944. The obvious common theme in all of them was opposition to conscription for overseas service and condemnation of whoever seemed to support it – their own senior officers, the Canadian Legion, the King government. Beyond this common ground emerged a variety of “agendas.” As the *Kelowna Courier* had noticed, some of the Zombie slogans reflected “class warfare” or at least political party influence. At the height of the Second World War the Canadian Communist Party had committed itself very strongly to support an all-out war effort and also the King government as the means to that end. Communists attacked the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation for its slogan “Conscript Wealth as well as Men.”⁶⁸ The common Zombie use of versions of that slogan showed a willingness to express political as well as personal opposition to the King government’s decision to send conscripts overseas. Some

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, exhibit.

⁶⁸ Stewart Smith, *Comrades and Komsomolkas* (Toronto: Lugus, 1993), 191, is most explicit, but see also William Beeching ed., *Yours in the Struggle, Reminiscences of Tim Buck* (Toronto: NC Press, 1977), 338–9, and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 161–2.

men seemed to have a left-wing political agenda, while others were determined not to go overseas under any circumstances.

At the Terrace inquiry, the start of the trouble was pinpointed as stemming from B and C Companies of Les Fusiliers. When Major Henri Thuot, acting commander of Les Fusiliers, was asked about the origin of the protest, he said, "My suspicions are in the NCOs who were demoted in the Regt. de Hull and sent to our Regt. on replacing NCOs from this unit sent to the Regt. de Hull."⁶⁹ Captain W. Racine testified at the inquiry: "There had been some dissatisfaction chiefly led by men formerly of the Regt. de Hull."⁷⁰ Major Thuot reported the men themselves citing their treatment at Vernon as the root of their anger: "They told us in Vernon, that we were not fit to wear the King's uniform, and now they want us to fight in the King's uniform."⁷¹

The key to why the most serious challenge to military order in Canada during the Second World War came at Terrace lies in understanding the experiences of the men in B and C Companies of Les Fusiliers. They had been placed under extreme, individualized pressure to convert in April at Vernon Military Camp when they were in the Régiment de Hull. Their NCOs had been demoted. They had been segregated into a tent camp, "Zombieville," the objects of general derision. Subsequently they were transferred to Courtenay and sent on a wilderness training exercise that they considered to be further punishment for not volunteering. Then they were shipped to the cold and isolated Terrace Army Camp for the winter.⁷² Having put up maximum resistance and endured what they considered to be severe punishment for it, they would not quietly accept being ordered overseas.

THE "REASON WHY":

OFFICERS AT VERNON AND TERRACE

When senior officers sought to explain private soldiers' resistance to overseas service, they commonly resorted to ethnic characterizations linked to the issue of loyalty. At Vernon, after the relative failure of the spring campaign to convert HD troops, Brigadier Macklin used ethnicity to explain away the contradiction he clearly felt in what he saw as "British disloyalty." If the men were really "British," then they could not be so disloyal as to contradict their officers by refusing to volunteer to go overseas.

⁶⁹ NAC, RG 24, vol. 2654, f. HQS-3545-vol. 5, "Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry assembled at Terrace, BC on the 3 December 1944," page 7, question 32.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

The great majority are of non-British origin – German, Italian, and Slavic nationalities of origin probably predominating. Moreover most of them come from farms. They are of deplorably low education, know almost nothing of Canadian or British History and in fact are typical European peasants, with a passionate attachment for the land. A good many of them speak their native tongues much more fluently than they speak English and amongst them the ancient racial grudges and prejudices of Europe still persist.⁷³

Was Macklin really in a position to judge whether troops under his command spoke Ukrainian or German better than they spoke English? Presumably, if the men had the benefit of studying “Canadian or British history,” then they would not have held what Macklin considered inappropriate “ancient racial grudges and prejudices” and would have volunteered for overseas duty. In making ethnicity an explanation, Macklin projected his own prejudices onto men whose motivations he did not understand. While such ethnic characterizations were common coin at that time and were used by opponents of conscription as well, senior officers in British Columbia were using such characterizations to judge soldiers’ “loyalty” (defined by their willingness to serve overseas) before and after the demonstrations of November 1944.⁷⁴

At Terrace, only a week before the protest began, Major-General R.O. Alexander had completed an inspection tour of the camp. His report provides invaluable background not only about conditions at

⁷² “In all of Canada, there was probably no army camp of its size as remote from the mainstream of Canadian life as Terrace.” Roy, “Mutiny in the Mountains,” 42.

⁷³ Granatstein, *Broken Promises*, 206. Presumably, if the men had had the benefit of studying Canadian or British history they would have held the appropriate “ancient racial grudges and prejudices” and volunteered for overseas duty.

⁷⁴ For example, when Andre Laurendeau argued that not everyone outside Quebec favoured conscription, he wrote, “In several provinces, English Canadians and especially those of foreign origin (constituting 20 per cent of the total, let us not forget) are just as strongly opposed to conscription as are French Canadians.” Beheils, *Laurendeau*, 101. In his “Inaugural Speech” to the Congress of the Bloc Populaire, as reported in *Le Devoir*, 4 February 1944, he expanded on this theme: “Amongst the ranks of newly arrived Canadians, who had been promised bread and peace, we can detect equally passionate resistance. They did have external peace during the depression years, but not bread. Now they have bread but not security.” *Ibid.*, 118. King’s minister of agriculture, Jimmy Gardiner, voiced similar sentiments:

Saskatchewan and Alberta people are naturally different from those in other parts of Canada. A very large number of them left Europe sometime within the last fifty years to get away from war, and they never are satisfied that any government in this country should send their sons back to Europe to fight. I have a great deal of sympathy with them. They finally come to the conclusion that they are going to get away from it all and come to a new continent where they do not have wars, and they are no more than established here until within one generation they are required to go back to Europe twice and fight. They naturally resent this.

Norman Ward and David Smith, *Jimmy Gardiner, Relentless Liberal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 283.

the camp, but also about a senior officer's perceptions of the men there. He noted that about 95 per cent of the NCOs and men were HD. In spite of their names, the units were not territorially based. In particular, he noted that the Prince Edward Island Highlanders included "a large number of men of Central European descent." The camp headquarters had suffered from rapid turnover in command, which left it disorganized. At lower levels, most of the "good NCOs, who were volunteers, had left." Moreover, the departure of Polar Bear Force had left "inferior men in the unit."⁷⁵ Thus, at Terrace, senior officers saw many of the HD troops as men whose loyalty could not be relied upon for ethnic reasons, their being either French Canadian or Central Europeans. Unlike the HD men at Vernon before 24 November, many of those at Terrace had already been characterized by senior officers as potentially disloyal.

At the Terrace inquiry all officers, except those from Les Fusiliers, identified that regiment as the source of resistance. While Major Thuot acknowledged that resistance had begun in his regiment, he believed that the leaders of the organized protest had come from the Highlanders, who used Les Fusiliers to threaten other units. The only support for Thuot's position came from the PAV unit war diarist, who noted, speaking of the Tuesday crowd trying to block the PAV's departure, that "the man who seemed to be leading the mob seemed to be a PEI Highlander but there were more Fusiliers than there were PEIS in the mob."⁷⁶

Aside from unit officers all wanting to say that the leaders must have been in someone else's unit, we have the daily war diaries of the regiments. The war diarist of the PAV certainly saw the protest not merely in terms of which unit's men acted, but also in terms of ethnicity. On the evening of 24 November, he noted that "there have been reports of French Canadian soldiers in our lines attempt [sic] to coerce and threatening our men with violence but so far all is quiet."⁷⁷ His observations on the "zombie parade" the next day continued to take note of ethnic distinctions:

Where the Canadiens had been booing and cheering and laughing, they [Highlanders] would not look you in the eye and there were not so many of them; then there was a smattering of Bde and Signals personnel and last of all about fifty PAVs, they were not armed and looked very sheepish indeed.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Roy, "Mutiny in the Mountains," 45.

⁷⁶ NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,143, 1st Battalion, PAV, 28 November 1944.

⁷⁷ NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,143, 1st Battalion, PAV, serial 1059, fol. 4, 24 November 1944.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 25 November 1944. Oddly enough, Major J.S. Wright testified at the inquiry that "The temper of the men seemed quite good – most of them were laughing and seemed to be in quite cheerful spirit," without excluding his own Highlanders from that description.

By Tuesday order was again being established, which the war diarist attributed to two factors: "The men have also begun to realize that they are being dominated by the Frenchmen and that there are liable to be serious repercussions and they want no part of it."⁷⁹

At the inquiry, Captain R.J. McNeil of the Highlanders reported one of his men calling for support when the officer tried to tour the unit to recall the men to duty: "Let's throw them out of the hut like the Frenchies did."⁸⁰ By contrast, a senior officer from Terrace told Colonel C.P. Stacey (later a noted official historian of the Canadian Armed Forces in the Second World War), who sailed to Europe with the men of the 15th Brigade, "it was not French-Canadian soldiers who were chiefly concerned in these disorders ... The organizers were predominantly men of Central European origin from the Prairies, including a certain number of Germans."⁸¹ Thus before, during, and after the Terrace mutiny, senior officers routinely used ethnic characterizations to explain discontent – and, ultimately, "disloyalty" – in the camp.

At Vernon the senior officers' primary concern about the reporting of the demonstration had been to minimize its scale and seriousness. According to General Pearkes there were only 200 protestors, and their actions could be dismissed as "horse-play." At Terrace, where the HD troops were seen, even before the protests, as potentially disobedient due to their ethnic backgrounds, senior officers were quite willing to pass on the most exaggerated rumour as fact.

The most spectacular of those rumours has also proven to be the most durable.⁸² Reginald Roy's article on the Terrace mutiny sets it out clearly:

⁷⁹ Ibid., 28 November 1944.

⁸⁰ NAC, RG 24, vol. 2,654, file HQS-3545-vol. 5, "Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry assembled at Terrace, BC on the 3rd December 1944," p. 24.

⁸¹ Stacey, *Arms*, 476. Stacey does not name the officer, who might conceivably be Major Thuot. Were that the case, this would be a repetition of Thuot's evidence before the inquiry. However, it is possible that Stacey would not consider a major to be a "senior officer."

⁸² Until Reginald Roy's article (1976) and book (1977) clearly identified the anti-tank gun story as a rumour, there was some leeway for historians to report it as fact, following the evidence of General Pearkes. Thus in Granatstein's *Broken Promises*, which only came out in 1977, we find the familiar version retold: "At Terrace events got completely out of hand on 24 November, French-speaking soldiers of Les Fusiliers du St Laurent, joined by some men of the Prince Edward Island Highlanders and the Prince Albert Volunteers, armed themselves and mounted anti-tank guns to command the approaches" (232). But it is hard to let a good story go, so subsequent accounts have shifted to more ambiguous wordings – allowing "gun" to be construed as "anti-tank gun" or possibly "Bren gun" – to retain the incident's impact: "At Terrace in British Columbia – inland from Prince Rupert – a brigade of NRMA men mounted guns on the single rail line and announced that they were on strike." J.L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire, Canadians and the Second World War, 1939-1945* (Toronto: Lester and Dennys, 1989), 231. And: "More terrifying by far, at Terrace, remote in the mountains behind Prince Rupert, a brigade of NRMA

Moreover there were strong rumours, believed by many, that the Fusiliers had mounted 6-pr. [6 pounder] anti-tank guns and mortars in their lines. Since their camp was situated on high ground overlooking several other camps and the village itself, this served to intimidate further those remaining loyal to their officers.⁸³

Amongst the "many" who believed this rumour was General Pearkes. In his 5 December 1944 report on the HD demonstrations, he wrote of the Terrace men, "They mounted 6 pdre [sic] guns on the terrace above the city."⁸⁴ Pearkes persisted in presenting rumour as fact, although the inquiry turned up no evidence to support it.

What the unit war diaries and the witnesses at the inquiry did mention was the theft of rifle and Bren gun ammunition as well as grenades and three-inch mortar shells. There were rumours of Bren guns mounted at the top of the hill, which served to intimidate any soldiers from mustering out in the open. But no diarist or witness before the inquiry recorded seeing or hearing anything beyond rifles and Bren guns (sometimes referred to as "machine guns").⁸⁵ While at Vernon, Pearkes was concerned to downplay events as much as possible; when he reported on Terrace, even the most exaggerated rumour became fact.

CONCLUSION

Senior officers insisted that the reported scale of the Vernon demonstration had provoked the others. They argued that these reports, whether on radio or in the press, were false. A review of the primary evidence suggests that the scale reported by the media was reasonably accurate. Moreover, at Terrace a limited protest had already begun before the Vernon demonstration was under way. The origins of the Terrace protest, however, were very much connected to Vernon Military Camp – not the November demonstration, but the spring recruitment drive to coerce HD men to "go active."

The senior Canadian officers, in responding to events in Vernon and Terrace, revealed their preconceptions about the manpower crisis. While at Vernon, the officers strove to minimize the scale and nature of the protest, at Terrace, they readily passed along, uncritically, the

soldiers mounted guns on the single rail line and declared they had gone on strike."

Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1990), 221.

⁸³ Roy, "Mutiny in the Mountains," 48.

⁸⁴ NAC, RG 24, vol. 2,655, HQS-3545-vol. 6, 5 December 1944, General Pearkes to the Secretary, Department of National Defence.

⁸⁵ See, for example, NAC, RG 24, vol. 2,654, file HQS-3545-vol. 5, Major Thuot: "At this time, rumours were current that bren guns were mounted on the top of the hill and that the men had been told that anyone who appeared on the parade ground would be fired upon."

most extreme rumour. The key to their contrasting responses may have had to do with assumptions they made about ethnicity. In Vernon, the troops were seen as being "English," and so were presumed both loyal and obedient; in Terrace, the most troublesome troops were identified as French or Central Europeans, and it was believed that neither their loyalty nor their obedience could be counted upon.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ NAC, RG 24, vol. 15,143, file 1059, War Diary, 1st Battalion, Prince Albert Volunteers, 24 November 1944, the leaders are identified as "French Canadians"; 28 November 1944, "The men have also begun to realize that they are being dominated by the Frenchmen"; vol. 2,654, file HQS-3545, vol. 5, Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry assembled at Terrace, BC, on 3 December 1944," in particular the testimony of Captain R.J. McNeil, Lt. Meek, and Lieutenant A. Watson, all from the Prince Edward Island Highlanders.