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**“A Share of the Sacrifice”:
Newfoundland Servicewives in the Second World War**

by

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**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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St. John's, Newfoundland
May 2001**

Abstract

Historical interest in the roles that women assumed during the Second World War has been growing since the 1980's but has tended to focus on the experiences of women in the armed forces and war defense industries. The experiences of servicewives, a much larger group of women who accepted equally demanding roles in the war effort, have yet to receive significant academic attention. This case study of Newfoundland servicewives focuses specifically on the women who were married to Newfoundlanders serving in British forces during the war. These women represented the majority of servicewives residing in the colony at this time and the only ones for whose welfare the Newfoundland Government assumed a degree of responsibility. This thesis examines the problematic relationship which existed between Newfoundland servicewives and the Commission of Government throughout the wartime period; the construction and manipulation of servicewives' public image in the local press; servicewives' living and working conditions during the period of their husbands' military service; the policies and regulations which attempted to control servicewives' sexuality for the sake of the war effort; and servicewives' expectations for and disillusionment with the Government's scheme for post-war rehabilitation. The role which servicewives assumed in the colony's war effort and the influence that this experience exerted on established gender systems in Newfoundland is also highlighted throughout the text.

Acknowledgments

A research project of this kind could never have been completed without the cooperation and participation of many individuals. The guidance and support offered by Dr. Linda Kealey throughout the researching and writing process is gratefully acknowledged, as are the generous contributions of Dr. Shannon Ryan and Dr. Joe Cherwinski.

Appreciation is extended to all those graduate students and faculty in the Department of History at Memorial University who shared their time and ideas. A debt is also owed to Fran Warren and Bev Evans-Hong for the assistance they provided on numerous occasions.

The financial support received from the School of Graduate Studies at Memorial University is gratefully recognized.

Calvin Best, Tony Murphy and the rest of the staff at the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador are thanked for their cooperation and patience. Larry Clark's significant contribution to the thesis is also fondly remembered.

Finally, a special thank you is extended to all the women who so generously shared their memories of the wartime experience. Their participation in this project proved invaluable and is most sincerely appreciated.

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Chapter One

Introduction and General Historiography

I would earnestly ask those who have not already done so, to share in this great National sacrifice. Do not stand in the way of your men, if they are able to take their part in this life and death struggle, but rather encourage them to join their fellow Newfoundlanders. This, indeed, would be your greatest gift to Newfoundland.¹

The rousing message was delivered by Lady Walwyn, the Governor's wife, as part of a massive recruitment drive in May 1941. Her speech, following that of her husband, appealed to Newfoundland women to encourage "their men" to enlist - to "share" in the National sacrifice by selflessly offering up this, their "greatest gift". The tone of the discourse deliberately inferred a sense of public relevance to women's domestic roles. Wives' influence was recognized as affecting the war effort and, thereby, leaking outside the traditional confines of the home. While certainly never implying a sense of equality with their husbands' roles, the rhetoric described the supportive roles which women assumed in the home as instrumental to the war effort's success. By sacrificing the support and security which their husbands represented, wives could now significantly affect the destiny of the nation. Though perhaps exaggerating the extent of their authority over husbands' decisions, the sentiment subtly empowered women's position within the home and Newfoundland society nonetheless.

Tacked alongside the wartime experiences of other Newfoundland women,

¹ "Lady Walwyn Broadcast", 27 May 1941, MG 635, Box 6, W.P.A. Speeches, PANL.

servicewives' role can easily take on a somewhat pallid demeanor. They were issued neither military uniforms nor turbans and overalls. Their images did not appear in local newspapers with humorous captions beneath. Nor did anyone worry whether they would still be women after the war was won. They were always women - the gauge against which all femininity was measured. As wives and mothers, they occupied the most female of "female" vocations and worked within the most gender specific sphere. Why then are their particular wartime experiences relevant? What could an understanding of their wartime role contribute to our understanding of the history of the period? Simply put, their experiences are the most relevant because they marked the base line around which all gender systems revolved. Single women who enlisted in the military or took jobs in defence industries represented the exception, not the norm. Theirs was a heady spin on a revolutionary ride, but that it ended as quickly as it began was neither surprising nor unpredictable. Closer to the middle, servicewives' experiences challenged gender assumptions in a quiet and unassuming manner. They chipped away at traditional stereotypes beneath a rather surreptitious guise. Yet they challenged these systems nonetheless, and perhaps impacted upon them more significantly.

Historians have only gradually begun to focus on the question of how gender figured in the story of the Second World War. Initially, the sheer task of recovery dominated historical examinations. But having finally proven that indeed "we were there", feminist historians then turned to the problem of explaining exactly what the war experience meant to women. Did the experience revolutionize women's status in society

or did it simply represent a temporary gain with no lasting transformative effect? Earlier studies tended to depict the war as an unconscious catalyst of change, thrusting women into new and wider spheres of activity within society and the work force. Such assertions were soon criticized, however, for overstating the amount of “real change” which actually occurred.² Despite the unprecedented opportunities which the war had afforded women, it was shown that traditional attitudes toward gender roles remained intact, undermining and impeding any real advancement for women as a result.³ The measure of “improved status” or “real change” being as subjective as it is, the seemingly unresolvable nature of the debate eventually led some historians to reevaluate their approach. Recognizing that women’s wartime advances were elicited by “abnormal” emergency conditions, the war years were now portrayed as acting as a “clarifying moment”, revealing systems of gender in flux and consequently highlighting their workings. Through discourse analysis of state policy and propaganda, historians like Joan Scott and Denise Riley began to question exactly how gender was deconstructed and reconstructed during the course of

² William Henry Chafe was one of the earliest proponents of the “catalyst of change” or “traditionalist” view. The American Woman: Her Changing Social Economic and Political Roles, 1920-1970 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 253-254; also see Chester Gregory, Women in Defence Work during World War II: An Analysis of the Labor Problem and Women’s Rights (New York: Exposition Press, 1974); Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and their Segregated Work (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1978), 18-21.

³ Ruth Roach Pierson, “They’re Still Women After All”: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1986), 215-222; Karen Anderson, Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 61.

the war and how wartime discourses actually worked to limit gender disruption. By focusing on the connection between gender and politics, they argued that the emphasis shifts away from what impact the war had on women towards what impact women's experiences had on the politics of war.⁴ An understanding of women's wartime experience consequently assumes relevance in our understanding of the general history of the period.

Though the historical literature surrounding women's wartime roles has expanded greatly since the 1970's, the unique role which servicewives assumed in the conflict has largely escaped academic attention. Few studies have attempted to measure servicewives' contributions to the war effort, nor have they questioned how servicewives' experiences affected contemporary notions of gender as a result.⁵ The oversight is largely unexplainable, servicewives having tested a variety of established norms during the war. In Newfoundland, the enlistment of married men for wartime service inevitably altered

⁴ Joan Scott, "Rewriting History", 30, in Higonnet, Jenson, Michel and Weitz (eds.), Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Denise Riley, "Some Peculiarities of Social Policy concerning Women in Wartime and Postwar Britain", 261, in Higonnet, Jenson, Michel and Weitz (eds.), Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

⁵ Exceptions include Sarah Fishman, "Waiting for the Captive Sons of France: Prisoner of War Wives, 1940-1945", 182-193, in Higonnet, Jenson, Michel and Weitz (eds.), Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Sonya Michel, "American Women and the Discourse of the Democratic Family in World War II" 154-167, in Higonnet, Jenson, Michel and Weitz (eds.), Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Katherine Anne Ling, "Servicewives in Wartime Halifax, 1939-1945" (Master's thesis, Dalhousie University, 1994).

the patriarchal structure of many service families. Servicewives were suddenly single mothers and heads of households, roles for which women had been conditioned to believe they were ill-suited.⁶ But now the State assured servicewives that they were indeed “up to the task” and that by quietly conquering these new challenges they would be doing their part to aid the war effort. Private struggles to balance household accounts and raise children alone were likened to their husbands’ sacrifice in the military. In fact, the general mobilization of the home front touched almost every aspect of servicewives’ lives during the war, from the encouraging letters they were expected to write their husbands every week to their accumulation of war savings certificates. They became some of the most ardent “home front soldiers”, tirelessly supporting a war effort to which they held such an intimate connection.⁷

The nature of servicewives’ wartime role similarly challenged the State’s entrenched assumptions of gender. Traditionally in Newfoundland, government authorities avoided direct involvement in women’s welfare, assuming that husbands, fathers or other male relatives were ultimately responsible for such. Through the enlistment of their husbands for wartime service, however, the State necessarily assumed

⁶ The traditionally restricted nature of women’s roles in Newfoundland society has been described in a number of studies such as Cecilia Benoit’s, “Urbanizing Women Military Fashion: The Case of Stephenville Women”, 116-119, in McGrath, Neis and Porter (eds.), Their Lives and Times, Women in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Collage (St. John’s: Killick Press, 1995).

⁷ Quotation marks are used throughout the text to identify and emphasize words and phrases which were taken directly from the primary and secondary sources.

a degree of responsibility for servicewives' dependency.⁸ Establishing the extent of this responsibility and the nature of its obligation to these women would prove a source of irritation to the Newfoundland Government throughout the war years. Did these women warrant a comfortable measure of social support or a minimal level of government relief? The question was inescapably entangled in the State's own estimation of the value of women's roles within the home and society at large. What did servicewives contribute to the war effort? Were they even contributing to the war effort? State policies only gradually evolved as government and military authorities came to recognize the extent to which familial ties influenced the morale and subsequent effectiveness of the fighting forces. Of course, heightened concern for service families' welfare was generally accompanied by more invasive controls over their personal lives. A servicewife "deserved" financial and social support only so long as she complied with societal expectations of the "dutiful wife". Constructions of masculinity within the forces were also largely centered around this idealized image of "the girl he left behind".

Consciously or not, servicewives confronted traditional gender assumptions on a variety of levels during the war. They tested the established limits of

⁸ The dependent and subordinate role which Newfoundland wives assumed upon marriage has been discussed in numerous studies including Linda Cullum and Maeve Baird, "A Woman's Lot: Women and the Law in Newfoundland from Early Settlement to the Twentieth Century", 120-129, in Linda Kealey (ed.), Pursuing Equality: Historical Perspectives on Women in Newfoundland and Labrador (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1993); Cecilia Benoit, "Mothering in a Newfoundland Community: 1900-1940", 183, in Arnup, Levesque and Pierson (eds.), Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19th and 20th Centuries (New York: Routledge, 1990); Benoit, "Urbanizing Women Military Fashion", 118.

women's appropriate roles in the home. They expanded society's understanding of women's capabilities and strengths. Government and military officials were forced to come to terms with the extent of their responsibility to this group of women who were neither part of the military establishment nor completely civilian in character as well. And authorities held up their image as a symbol representing everything for which the country was fighting and yet backed away from any direct involvement in the financial and domestic problems which husbands' military enlistment ultimately created. Overall, the exigencies of the war effort and the intensity of servicewives' condition culminated in an experience which both illuminated and challenged the boundaries of women's traditional domestic roles. Labour in the home which had gone largely unrecognized suddenly assumed public relevance in the war effort's success. And domestic contributions which had previously defied valuation suddenly demanded financial remuneration. Identifying and assessing the influence that this extraordinary experience exerted on established gender systems in Newfoundland can broaden our understanding of the construction of gender generally during this period.

For nearly twenty-five years, women's experiences during the Second World War received limited, if any, historical attention.⁹ Their wartime appearance in

⁹ This historiographical discussion examines the development of the relevant literature in Canada and the United States. Although the British literature certainly relates to the Canadian and American experience, its focus has always been distinct due

military uniforms occasioned periodic mention in military histories but, by and large, women's contributions to the war remained overshadowed by the perceived supremacy of the male experience on the front lines of Europe and Asia.¹⁰

By the 1970's, however, emerging feminist historians had begun to fill this apparent void in the wartime literature. Initially these efforts were confined to sheer recovery, piecing together some understanding of women's experiences within the military and war defence industries.¹¹ But gradually the extraordinary contributions and activities of women on the home front began to stand out as forming a pivotal point in women's struggle for equality. An American, William Henry Chafe, was one of the first historians to present the war years as a turning point in women's history. Published in 1972, Chafe's book, The American Woman, laboured to explain the astounding advancements that women had made in society and the work place during the 1960's. He

to the extent of the mobilization in Britain and the country's relative proximity to the fighting. Newfoundland servicewives were married to men serving in British forces but their experiences and challenges to gender systems related far more readily to those of Canadian and American women than to those of the women in Britain. References to British sources do appear throughout the thesis, most particularly in the introductory sections of each of the later chapters.

¹⁰ W.A.B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhouse, Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977); Col. C.P. Stacey, Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1955).

¹¹ G.W.L. Nicholson, Canada's Nursing Sisters (Toronto: S. Stevens Publishing, 1975); Kathleen Robson Roe, War Letters from the C.W.A.C. (Toronto: Kakabeka Publishing Company Limited, 1975); Jean Bruce, Back the Attack: Canadian Women during the Second World War - At Home and Abroad (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1985).

described the war as an unconscious catalyst of change, pushing women of all ages and classes into paid employment, breaking down walls of discrimination and extending the boundaries of women's traditional roles.¹² "The war made possible what no amount of feminist agitation could achieve", Chafe argued, "it propelled women into a new and wider sphere of activity".¹³

Chafe's analysis perhaps best exemplifies the "traditionalist view" of women's wartime experience.¹⁴ Women had entered the paid work force in enormous numbers to help relieve the labour crisis created by the Second World War. They had succeeded at a variety of challenging jobs and then had retired to their traditional roles in the post-war home, having already broken down social barriers which would enable many to reenter the work force at a later date. Chester Gregory, another American historian of this period, laid out almost the same scenario of events in his 1974 book, Women in Defense Work during World War II, and Pat and Hugh Armstrong, writing in Canada in the 1970's, similarly pointed to the war years as the take-off point for women's increasing representation in the Canadian labour force.¹⁵

¹² Chafe, The American Woman, 253-254.

¹³ Chafe, The American Woman, 195.

¹⁴ Susan Carruthers defined the "traditionalist view" in her article, "Manning the Factories: Propaganda and Policy on the Employment of Women, 1939-1947", History, 75 (June 1990), 233.

¹⁵ Gregory, Women in Defense Work during World War II; Armstrong and Armstrong, The Double Ghetto, 18-21. As Armstrongs' book did not examine women's wartime experiences in detail, it cannot be described as reflecting traditionalist views. It

This optimistic view of women's wartime experience was quickly criticized as exaggerating the amount of real change which the war had elicited. Historians argued that the immutable power of ideology actually stemmed the war's lasting transformative effects, preventing any real change in women's social status as a result. Ruth Roach Pierson's work on Canadian women and the Second World War constitutes some of the most well-researched and debated arguments against Chafe's hypothesis. Essentially a collection of various articles that she had published in the 1970's, her 1986 book, "They're Still Women After All", focused on the reasons why women had made so few advancements in society and the work place during the unprecedented conditions of the Second World War. Concentrating the weight of her study on women's experiences in the military, Pierson pointed to the double standards which female recruits encountered with regard to job training, assignments, pay, and especially sexual conduct, as clear indications of persisting pre-war attitudes. She laid partial blame for the lack of progress on the shoulders of the women themselves for their failure to push for improved status at a time that seemed ripe for fundamental change. By forfeiting the improved position that they had achieved in the wartime labour force for the comfort and security of traditionally female roles after the war, Pierson argued that "more than a decade of feminism was once again sacrificed to femininity".¹⁶

does reflect a degree of optimism, however, surrounding the role that the war played in women's increasing representation in the post-war labour market.

¹⁶ Pierson, "They're Still Women After All", 215-222.

Pierson's work overtly challenged the traditionalist view which had depicted the war as being a positive influence on women's struggle for equality. Although tending to over represent the experiences of servicewomen as being typical for all Canadian women, her work highlighted some of the most common threads running through the "counter-traditionalist" side of the historical debate. Women were recruited in massive numbers to relieve the labour crisis created by the war's insatiable appetite for servicemen. They were invited into spheres of employment previously considered to be part of the male domain. But as these accomplishments were not initiated by a shift in social attitudes nor as a result of a self-conscious feminist campaign, there was little chance for their survival once the immediate crisis had passed. For counter-traditionalist historians, the Second World War did not provide the impetus for change that William Henry Chafe's thesis had depicted. The outdated hypothesis was attacked on many fronts.

Chafe's vision of women's wartime experience had been simplified by his failure to address the differences that class necessarily inflicted on women's lives. In "Rosie the Riveter: Myths and Realities", Paddy Quick refuted the popular perception that patriotic motivations were responsible for women's infusion into the wartime work force. Patriotism and perhaps a yen for adventure did factor into the decisions of middle-class women to enter war jobs, but the actual number of these women was comparably small, the majority preferring the relative freedom of voluntary work. On the other hand, working-class women were drawn to war-related jobs by the promise of higher wages

which afforded welcomed relief from the economic hardships of the Depression years. Patriotism figured little in their motivations for entering such employment, although government propaganda promoted the perception so as to emphasize the temporary nature of these wartime positions.¹⁷

Marc Miller's case study of the women working in Lowell, Massachusetts during the war similarly emphasized the role which class played in the determination of women's wartime experiences. Thirty-eight percent of Lowell's female population was actually employed before the war even began, women having supplied the labour needs of the area's textile industry since the 1820's. It was therefore only natural, Miller maintained, that these women would seek out higher-paying war industry jobs once they became available. They were hardly working for "pin money" as the propaganda suggested, but rather to support their families who depended upon the wages they earned through paid labour outside the home. With the completion of hostilities and disbanding of war industries, these women were ultimately forced to relinquish their higher-paying positions but few turned to domestic roles in suburban homes. The majority inevitably resumed their old jobs in textile factories. According to Miller, these women were at the mercy of the economic conditions of the day and could ill afford to fight for higher-paying, self-fulfilling jobs.¹⁸

¹⁷ Paddy Quick, "Rosie the Riveter: Myths and Realities", Radical America, 9 (July-August 1975), 122-124.

¹⁸ Marc Miller, "Working Women and World War II", The New England Quarterly, 53, 1 (March 1980), 58-60.

The pervasiveness of women's advancement into the wartime labour force was perhaps best demonstrated by the influx of married women into wartime jobs. Chafe described this development in the United States as "the most significant change wrought by the war" and a clear indication of the war's ability to dissolve traditional stereotypes.¹⁹ Other American historians, such as Eleanor Straub, have subsequently attached far less significance to this development as it was elicited by the extraordinary circumstances of war and not a widespread evolution in social attitudes. Married women were invited into the wartime work force only after the reserve of single female labourers had been completely exhausted, Straub explained. The move was considered to be a last resort and a temporary wartime necessity.²⁰ The rise in reported levels of juvenile delinquency during the war years was positive proof for American society of the dire consequences which invariably arose when married women were removed from their "natural" roles within the home.²¹

Ruth Roach Pierson's brief examination of the day care dilemma in wartime Canada similarly emphasized the imperviousness of traditional attitudes toward married women's appropriate roles. While forming the appearance of a positive step in

¹⁹ Chafe, The American Woman, 144.

²⁰ Eleanor F. Straub, "Women in the Civilian Labor Force", 219, in Mabel E. Deutrich and Virginia C. Purdy (eds.), Clio Was a Woman: Studies in the History of American Women (Washington: Howard University Press, 1980).

²¹ Alan Clive, State of War: Michigan in World War II (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1979), 205-209.

the government's perception of its responsibility to working women, Pierson maintained that the Dominion-Provincial Wartime Day Nurseries Agreement was far from revolutionary in its outlook. The severe labour demands of the war had finally compelled the government to scrape the bottom of its pool of reserve labour and recruit married women with children for wartime jobs. But as the government believed that only "war service" justified women leaving their young children to work outside the home, incentives such as the day care program were implemented solely for the use of women employed in the labour-starved war industries of Quebec and Ontario. The program's popularity eventually led to a slightly more flexible definition of "war service", but it retained its character as an emergency wartime measure. Despite appeals from provincial welfare agencies, the federal program was dissolved soon after the war was over.²²

The stereotypes which impeded sexual equality within the work place were similarly unaffected by women's increased presence in the wartime labour force. In an article entitled "The Job He Left Behind", Karen Beck Skold examined the

²² Evidently, the program was not dissolved in response to declining demand. Married women's participation in the work force had remained static from 1931 to 1941, representing just ten percent of the Canadian female labour force in both censuses. By 1951, however, the percentage of married women in the labour force had risen to thirty percent, representing a significant shift in employment patterns. The total participation rate of women in the Canadian labour force rose from 17% to 22% in the same period. Table 25, The Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, Volume 7 (Ottawa: King's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1936); Table 5, The Eighth Census of Canada, 1941, Volume 7 (Ottawa: King's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1946); Table 2 and 11, The Ninth Census of Canada, 1951, Volume 4 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1953); Pierson, "They're Still Women After All", 48-61; for a discussion of the day care dilemma in the United States see Howard Dratch's "The Politics of Child Care in the 1940's", Science and Society, 38, 2 (Summer 1974), 167-204.

occupational segregation which persisted in American shipyards throughout the Second World War. Women's entrance into this traditionally male sphere appeared to challenge the boundaries of conventional gender roles. Yet women were largely restricted to unskilled "helper" jobs and remained excluded from the "expert" jobs which would have afforded them the skills necessary to compete in the post-war shipbuilding industry. Thus, their positions were easily usurped by male workers with pre-war skills at the end of the war.²³ A similar study by Ruth Milkman attributed women's initial complacency towards their segregated positions in the American automobile industry to the improved status and remuneration which these "men's jobs" afforded. "The new women workers, most of whom had no factory or union experience, scarcely had time to get their bearings, much less develop the political resources they needed to participate effectively in struggles over job classification", Milkman explained.²⁴ The chance to work in a unionized industry constituted a huge economic advancement for most women and understandably overshadowed the mundane and second-class nature of most of their jobs.²⁵

²³ Karen Beck Skold, "The Job He Left Behind: American Women in the Shipyards during World War II", 55-75, in Carol Berkin and Clara Lovett (eds.), Women, War, and Revolution (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers Inc., 1980).

²⁴ Ruth Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work': The Sexual Division of Labor in the Auto Industry during World War II", Feminist Studies, 8, 2 (Summer 1982), 357.

²⁵ Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work'", 357; also see Ruth Milkman, Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 160.

If wartime industries maintained discriminatory attitudes toward women, then women of color were doubly disadvantaged, claimed Karen Tucker Anderson in "Last Hired, First Fired", as these women remained segregated by both their gender and race in the American labour market. While Chafe had compared the wartime experience of African-American women to a "second emancipation" in American society, Anderson discovered far more continuity than change in their position among wartime labourers.²⁶ Higher wages temporarily improved the economic conditions of these women, but their relative status among female workers remained unaltered, confining them to the lowest rungs of the labour force ladder.²⁷ Dionne Brand's more recent examination of the oral accounts of African-Canadian women echoed Anderson's conclusions. The war similarly offered these women entrance into industrial jobs, but only into the most dangerous and poorly paid positions. At the end of the war these women had to struggle to stay out of the domestic jobs to which Canadian society expected they should return.²⁸

The popular perception that women voluntarily vacated their higher paying industrial jobs at the end of the war has also been the focus for recurrent attacks. Historians have found strong evidence that the majority of women did not want to

²⁶ Chafe, The American Woman, 142-143.

²⁷ Karen Tucker Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II", The Journal of American History, 69, 1 (June 1982), 97.

²⁸ Dionne Brand, "We Weren't Allowed to Go into the Factory until Hitler Started the War: The 1920's to the 1940's", 188-190, in Peggy Bristow (ed.), We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

sacrifice the improved positions that they had attained in the wartime labour force. Their opposition was superseded, however, by managerial and societal pressures which claimed that it was women's "duty" to release their positions to returning veterans.²⁹ In Feminism in the Labor Movement, Nancy Gabin examined the post-war experiences of women engaged in the American automobile industry. As these women saw the futility of protesting what they perceived to be an inevitable chain of events, attempts at collective organization were nullified by their lack of cohesive support. The labour unions, which should have provided the leading spirit for these protests, similarly made little effort to defend the rights of their new sister members.³⁰

Despite the forced evacuation of women from the post-war labour force, Chafe had contended that women's steady advancement into paid employment since that time was directly attributable to the monumental changes which had occurred in society as a result of the war.³¹ On the other side of the debate, historians like Mary Schweitzer have countered that this advancement was actually reflective of expansions in traditionally female sectors of the American economy rather than feminist changes

²⁹ Miller, "Working Women and World War II", 58-61; Gregory, Women in Defense Work, 193-194.

³⁰ Nancy F. Gabin, Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 133-140.

³¹ Chafe, The American Woman, 193-195.

wrought by the wartime experience.³² The findings of Canadian sociologist, Patricia Connelly, paralleled such conclusions, arguing that technological advances in household production made commodities which had been considered luxuries in the pre-war era, post-war necessities. If a husband's salary could not meet these expenses then the growing number of female positions in expanding manufacturing, clerical and service industries provided women with an opportunity to maintain their family's relative standard of living.³³

In the short-term, however, women did leave the labour force in enormous numbers following the close of the war. Managers' discriminatory hiring practices provide only half an explanation, however. Historians have argued that the other half of the answer lies in the ambiguities and contradictions which were so much a part of women's wartime experience.³⁴ In Wartime Women, Karen Anderson examined the war's impact on three major centers of defence production in the United States - Baltimore, Seattle and Detroit. She discovered that the women working in defence industries in these cities were constantly exposed to confusing messages from plant

³² Mary Schweitzer, "World War II and Female Labor Force Participation Rates", The Journal of Economic History, 40, 1 (March 1980), 90.

³³ Patricia Connelly, "Female Labour Force Participation: Choice or Necessity?", Atlantis, 3, 2 (Spring 1978), 48-50; Patricia Connelly and Martha MacDonald, "Women's Work: Domestic and Wage Labour in a Nova Scotia Community", Studies in Political Economy, 10 (Winter 1983), 45-49.

³⁴ Maria Diedrich and Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, Women and War: The Changing Status of American Women from the 1930's to the 1950's (New York: Berg Publishers, 1990), 6-7.

managers and government authorities. To protect women's "femininity" during their temporary stint in the wartime employment pool, defence industries not only educated women in the construction of bombs and guns, but also offered courses in makeup application, proper dress and personality development. When training women workers, instructors routinely compared spot welding to sewing and the stamping and piling of parts in the heat treat department to cutting cookies.³⁵ "Rather than providing clear-cut alternatives to previous sex role definitions, the war years generated contradictory tendencies, confusion, insecurity and anxiety", Anderson concluded.³⁶ As the advancements which women made in the wartime labour force were not accompanied by ideological change, it is not surprising, claimed Anderson, that they would cling to the safety of traditionally female roles once the unprecedented conditions of war had passed.³⁷

Women's actions and attitudes in the post-war era have also been attributed to the constant barrage of contradictory messages which flooded the mainstream media during the war. In Canada, Yvonne Mathews-Klein studied the National Film Board's depictions of women in the 1940's and '50's and Susan Bland pursued a quantitative examination of advertising images in *Maclean's Magazine* for the same period. Both authors concluded that traditional attitudes remained intact despite the

³⁵ Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 61.

³⁶ Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 111.

³⁷ Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 173.

media's presentation of stronger and more independent images of wartime women. These empowered portrayals sought to encourage women's acceptance of non-traditional roles in the war effort. In no way was women's entrance into these domains intended to be permanent and, thus, even the most progressive images contained traditionally female undertones. Women might have been pictured making bombs while wearing overalls and turbans but the message stressed that it was doubly important for them to keep their hair shiny, their lipstick fresh and their naturally feminine attitudes in place.³⁸

The role that the American media assumed in the dissemination of gender expectations during the war has similarly been the focus for a variety of historical examinations. Leila Rupp compared the propaganda machines of the United States and Germany in Mobilizing Women for War, while Maureen Honey examined the themes in American fiction of that era in Creating Rosie the Riveter. Both authors stressed the media's direct involvement in the propagandist efforts of the American government throughout the wartime period. Women's help and support were essential to the war effort's success but their continued labour force involvement was expected to hinder post-war readjustment. Thus, women's "duty" to help and the intrinsic importance of their roles in the home were always highlighted and their war work presented as a "double burden". This approach masked the real benefits which women received from their

³⁸ Yvonne Mathews-Klein, "How They Saw Us: Images of Women in National Film Board Films of the 1940's and 1950's", Atlantis, 4, 2 (Spring 1979), 32-33; Susan Bland, "Henrietta the Homemaker and Rosie the Riveter: Images of Women in Advertising in Maclean's Magazine, 1939-50", Atlantis, 8, 2 (Spring 1983), 81-84.

lucrative new jobs and stressed the temporary nature of their sojourn outside the home.³⁹

Many women accepted the domestic ideal espoused by wartime propaganda and eagerly looked forward to the day when they could trade in their overalls and spot welders for aprons and electric irons. They were publicly praised for their untiring contributions to the war effort and assured that the victory was equally theirs. Yet women would soon realize that this acclamation was little more than lip service as they were effectively "frozen out" of all post-war reconstructive planning.⁴⁰ Gail Cuthbert Brandt described the failures of the committee organized to study the post-war problems of Canadian women in a 1982 article, "Pigeon-Holed and Forgotten". The sub-committee, composed of ten prominent Canadian women, produced a number of ambitious and forward-thinking proposals which would have advanced women's position within the home and labour force. Their suggestions fell on deaf ears, however, as neither the Canadian Government, nor the public at large, shared a similar interest in the improvement of women's post-war condition.⁴¹

In the same vein, many women's organizations had looked forward to

³⁹ Leila Rupp, Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 180-181; Maureen Honey, Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender and Propaganda during World War II (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 120-126.

⁴⁰ Clive, State of War, 185; Pierson, "They're Still Women After All", 61.

⁴¹ Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "Pigeon-Holed and Forgotten: The Work of the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women, 1943", Social History, 15, 29 (May 1982), 258-259.

gaining some measure of equality from the wartime experience. As Susan Hartmann explained in a 1979 article, these organizations were predominantly white and middle-class in outlook but represented feminist thoughts and ideals which many historians have claimed were absent in American society during the war years. Their efforts to improve the "conditions of womanhood" included the institution of child care and equal pay legislation. Yet their own inability to transcend class and ethnic lines, coupled with the government's apathetic interest in their goals, severely limited the effectiveness of these groups during a period which could have fostered the growth of a valiant social movement.⁴²

As Hartmann indicated, historians have often bemoaned the absence of a self-conscious feminist movement which could have directed women in a united struggle for equality during the war years. Certainly the conditions were favorable at this time, as the war placed women's labour in great demand. But ultimately, women failed to exploit the crisis as an opportunity to improve their position in the labour force and society at large. Traditional attitudes remained unchanged and herein lies the proof for many historians of the war's ultimate failure to improve women's condition in society.

Eventually, this flat condemnation of the war years as a static period in women's history became itself the focus for attack. By shifting emphasis from

⁴² Susan M. Hartmann, "Women's Organizations during World War II: The Interaction of Class, Race, and Feminism", 321-322, in Mary Kelley (ed.), Woman's Being, Woman's Place: Female Identity and Vocation in American History (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1979).

government policies and media depictions to the attitudes and motivations which propelled women's activities in the 1940's, historians attempted to graft a new perspective onto the established understanding of the topic. The sources for these studies were necessarily more difficult to harness and evaluate than those upon which historians had traditionally relied. Yet many described such study as the only approach capable of providing an accurate measure of the war's ultimate influence on women's lives.

In The Home Front and Beyond, Susan Hartmann was one of the first historians to present a more balanced interpretation of the war years based on the conflict's long-term impact on women's condition in the United States. She agreed that women had largely failed to capitalize on the opportunities which the war had provided to challenge the sex role structure. Yet Hartman pointed to post-war developments, such as society's increasing acceptance of employed married women, the growth of suburbs which removed many women from isolated rural existences, and the new technology which aided women in their household tasks, as advances which grew directly from the wartime experience. Government and social attitudes were not transformed by the war, but more importantly for Hartmann, the experience had spawned "seeds of change" which affected women's perceptions of their rights and roles in society. According to Hartmann, these altered expectations would ultimately contribute to the emerging feminist consciousness of the next generation of women.⁴³

⁴³ Susan Hartmann, The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940's (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1982), 210-216.

Another study which argued for a more balanced interpretation of the historical evidence regarding women's wartime experience was Diane Forestell's article, "The Necessity of Sacrifice for the Nation at War". Reexamining the same public opinion surveys which Ruth Roach Pierson had utilized in her work, Forestell concluded that Pierson had tended to overemphasize the Canadian public's opposition to the presence of women in the military and in non-traditional industries. While a degree of opposition certainly existed toward the idea of women assuming non-traditional roles in the war effort, Forestell's analysis demonstrated widespread public recognition of the need for women's labour on the home front and support for the government's initiatives to recruit women to relieve the manpower shortage. The reinterpretation presented a fresh perspective on the wartime atmosphere in which Canadian women lived and worked.⁴⁴

D'Ann Campbell also promised to provide a reinterpretation of American women's roles in the Second World War based on her attempts to measure women's own attitudes toward the conflict and their place in it. In her 1987 book, Women at War with America, Campbell utilized public opinion polls, consumer magazines and case files of social workers and sociologists. She argued that while women remained segregated within the military, labour unions and the work force, they also attained some advances which would not be snatched back at the end of the war. Nurses gaining control of their

⁴⁴ Diane G. Forestell, "The Necessity of Sacrifice for the Nation at War: Women's Labour Force Participation, 1939-1946", Social History, 22, 44 (November 1989), 347.

profession, women's discovery of non-material satisfactions in the labour force and the increasing desire of women to combine a career and marriage after the war all constituted real advances for women in American society. Campbell further concluded that the war had broadened women's expectations for their post-war lives and that they were not forced to return to domesticity after the war but rather chose this role based on their belief that it would provide the most personal fulfillment and satisfaction. "They were not, in fact, returning to the world of their foremothers," Campbell maintained, "but - consciously or not - reinterpreting it as a legacy for their daughters and grand-daughters".⁴⁵

Sherna Berger Gluck, another American, similarly insisted that wartime women should not be viewed as defenseless victims but rather as willing participants and instigators in their own experience. Historians must look beyond the analysis of government policy and labour force data, Gluck argued, and focus on women's self-perceptions and daily realities. Only then will historians gain an understanding of the long-term impact of the war years and where the experience fits into women's struggle for equality. Gluck held up life histories as a source from which future women's historians might draw some important new insights. Her 1987 book, Rosie the Riveter Revisited, described the life histories of ten women who had worked in the American aircraft industry during the Second World War. Her collection of interviews described

⁴⁵ D'Ann Campbell, Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 225-238.

some women as having gained greater power in their homes during the war, some as accumulating more confidence in the work place, and many believing that their experiences had presented stronger female role models for their daughters to emulate.⁴⁶

Historians such as Hartmann, Campbell and Gluck added another dimension to the historical debate surrounding women's experiences in the Second World War. Attempting to balance the largely negative conclusions of the counter-traditionalist historians, their approach was constructed around the belief that "real change" evades detection without conscious consideration of the attitudes and perceptions of wartime women themselves. While certainly fleshing out the boundaries of the debate, the perspective did little to settle the question of the war's relative influence on women's status in society.

In response to this apparent stalemate, feminist historians began to approach the subject with a new motivation. Assuming a more poststructuralist perspective, these historians questioned whether it is even possible to measure "improved status" or "real change". Of far more consequence, they argued, is an understanding of how the war experience challenged and highlighted the inner workings of established gender systems.⁴⁷ By stepping back and placing women's experiences within the context

⁴⁶ Sherna Berger Gluck, Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War and Social Change (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 263-270.

⁴⁷ According to the editors of Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars, *systems of gender* "construct and differentiate male and female activities and identities in accord with but not actually determined by biological sex. A gender system consists not merely of a set of social roles but also of a discourse that gives meaning to

of the gender systems at work within the military, labour force, home and society at large, efforts were made to explore the topic within a new framework.⁴⁸ Despite the unprecedented evolution in women's wartime roles, how did popular discourses reflect a desire to preserve established gender systems? How did women's wartime activities actually challenge the boundaries of these gender systems? In this perspective, systems of gender are in a constant state of flux, evolving and contorting in response to changing economic, political and social conditions.

Exemplifying such discourse analysis, an article by Melissa Dabakis examined one particular media image as an embodiment of a wartime discourse on working women. She described Norman Rockwell's popular wartime icon, "Rosie the Riveter", as giving "visual form to the contradictions embedded in wartime ideology".⁴⁹ On first glimpse, this image appears to imply a new code of femininity, "Rosie's"

different roles within a binary structure. Moreover, although the fundamental distinction between masculine and feminine appears to be universal, the gender system takes a different form in each culture. Finally, gender systems are not fixed, but respond and contribute to social change, discursively assimilating new social phenomena and reconstituting the fundamental distinction between the genders", Higonnet, Jenson, Michel and Weitz (eds.), Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 3-4.

⁴⁸ Feminist historians interested in the gender systems at work during the Second World War include Margaret Higonnet and Patrice Higonnet, "The Double Helix", in Higonnet, Jenson, Michel and Weitz (eds.), Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Joan Scott, "Rewriting History".

⁴⁹ Melissa Dabakis, "Gendered Labor: Norman Rockwell's Rosie the Riveter and the Discourses of Wartime Womanhood", 186, in Barbara Melosh (ed.), Gender and American History Since 1890 (New York: Routledge, 1993).

obvious muscular strength and competence as a worker conveying tacit acceptance of women's abilities and increasing presence in the wartime labour force. Upon closer examination, however, subtle character traits of femininity and maternity are revealed which reminded women of the domestic roles to which they should eventually return. Though hardly eradicating traditional gender assumptions, the representation did test the bounds of conventional femininity, thereby epitomizing contemporary renegotiations of gender on the home front.⁵⁰

Discourse analysis also promises to provide an expanded vision of women's wartime experience. The limitations of traditional documented sources have generally restricted historical examination to women's experiences in the wartime work force and in voluntary organizations. Women whose experiences fell outside these public arenas have remained virtually invisible within the historical literature. But by focusing on wartime discourses in state policy and mainstream media, historians like Sonya Michel have begun to explain how their excessive feminization of women as both workers and mothers during the war reflected increasing concern over the stability of gender systems. Such tensions reflected the state's conflicting desires to both overemphasize women's natural role as mother and, at the same time, desexualize women so that they would be prepared to accept the nontraditional roles required of them in the

⁵⁰ Dabakis, "Gendered Labor", 196-201.

wartime work force and in the home.⁵¹ Such inherent tensions form the basis for most discourse analysis, illustrating the implications of wartime disruption on established gender norms.

Despite the diversity and breadth of the historiography, the complex roles which servicewives assumed in the Second World War remain largely unexamined, necessitating examination from both a descriptive and more theoretical perspective. Who were these women and how did their experiences affect contemporary notions of gender? As in most areas of women's history, unearthing answers to these questions presents a complicated challenge. Housewives generally represent a highly elusive segment of the population for the historian to reach, disappearing as they do within the enclave of the family and household. Moreover, servicewives were virtually indistinguishable within the female population during the war, readily blending into the faceless mass of other young wives and homemakers. While it is relatively easy to ascertain some understanding of the public discourses which attempted to manipulate servicewives' behavior through propaganda and state policy, it is much more difficult to pin down exactly who these women were. How can we find out where and how these women lived during the war years, how many children they had, and whether they worked for wages

⁵¹ Michel, "American Women and the Discourse of the Democratic Family", 160-163.

outside the home? How can we measure the influence of their experiences on established gender norms?

The availability of a unique combination of archival sources made Newfoundland an ideal location to base a query of this kind. Most particularly, the accessibility of recently discovered military service records presented an incredible opportunity to reconstruct an impression of servicewives' wartime experience.⁵² These confidential files documented the most intimate domestic problems of Newfoundland servicemen during the war, including official investigations into their wives' living conditions, financial concerns and even fidelity during their absences overseas. As the problems at issue were obviously of a most sensitive nature, and because many of those concerned are still very much alive and visible within the community, names and other identifying information were carefully omitted from the text. Similarly opportune, the availability of the 1945 manuscript census for Newfoundland afforded a rare glimpse into the living and working conditions of servicewives in this province at the onset of post-war reconversion. By retrieving their names and addresses from servicemen's declarations of their next-of-kin, it was possible to cross-reference this list against the census to determine servicewives' ages, the ages of their children, some idea of their living conditions, and their declared occupations. The resource is unique, representing

⁵² 185 boxes of service records were recently discovered by the staff of the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador.

one which is not yet available to historians in other Canadian provinces.⁵³ Blended with more traditional archival references, local newspaper and magazine sources, as well as oral interviews with the participants themselves, the amalgamation presented an opportunity to compile a multi-faceted examination of servicewives' wartime condition, highlighting the inherent tensions which this experience placed on established gender systems in Newfoundland.

In order to set parameters for a study which could easily take on a somewhat international perspective, examination was limited to Newfoundland women who were married to Newfoundland men serving in British forces during the war. Although Newfoundland women married Canadian, American, British and Newfoundland servicemen almost indiscriminately during this period and thousands of Newfoundlanders served in the Canadian and American forces during the war, research constraints rendered such an inclusive study virtually impossible. By far, the majority of Newfoundlanders enlisted in the Royal Artillery Regiments, Navy and Air Force, along with the Newfoundland Militia, Newfoundland Forestry Unit and Merchant Marine. These British services were the only ones in which the Newfoundland Government was directly involved in recruiting and over which it exerted a measure of control. Consequently, the military service records of the Department of Defence were largely

⁵³ In Canada, manuscript censuses are normally not released to the public until at least ninety-one years have passed. As Newfoundland was not yet a province of Canada in 1945, its manuscript census for that year is not subject to the same privacy restrictions as are those of other provinces.

limited to men serving in these British forces. Moreover, the Newfoundland Government clearly delineated the extent of its responsibility to the wives of Newfoundlanders serving in British forces. The Newfoundland wives of British and Canadian servicemen remained ineligible for inclusion in the Government's schemes for supplementary grants and medical services throughout the war.⁵⁴ Thus, the boundaries for this study revealed themselves in a natural and logical manner, presenting a functional framework around which various assumptions could be studied and developed.

The individual chapters are organized thematically, beginning with an examination of the Newfoundland Government's policies toward servicewives in Chapter Two. The Department of Public Health and Welfare and the Department of Defence assumed the lion's share of control over servicewives' living conditions and welfare-related problems during the war, the records of which have been carefully preserved by the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador. Examination of this extensive collection of documents afforded a general understanding of the problems which servicewives posed for the Government during the war years, as well as the official response to these perplexing issues. The evolution of these policies in some cases reflected shifting governmental attitudes, while in others capitulation to mounting public pressure. In either case, the reactions are significant as they reveal the State's evolving estimation of servicewives' role in the war effort, as well as gender roles generally in

⁵⁴ "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Commissioner for Finance", 6 May 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 43, File 15, PANL; "Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Justice", 16 April 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 43, File 15, PANL.

Newfoundland.

The popular discourses which attempted to construct a wartime role for servicewives through newspapers and magazines are examined in Chapter Three. Analysis of the media's construction of gendered images has been the focus for an increasing number of historical studies in the past decade, the war years warranting particular interest for the contradictions which were so often embedded in wartime ideology. While some historians have organized quantitative studies of the imagery presented in one particular magazine, the majority have based their examinations on samplings of wartime imagery, dissecting a variety of images and messages for their gender content. This study of Newfoundland servicewives utilized the latter approach, drawing upon an examination of five local newspapers and one magazine for the period between May 1939 to December 1945. Given the specificity of the images under study, a quantitative examination of one particular source seemed unjustifiably time-consuming. As well, the image of the servicewife had no source for comparison in the pre-war years, making a more extended period of examination rather inconsequential. Thus, a general examination of the images and messages related to servicewives in local newspapers and magazines was used to assess public attitudes and expectations during the war. Examination was also made of the language used by local voluntary organizations in their efforts to raise funds to help needy servicewives. Much of the responsibility for the general welfare of servicemen's dependents was meted out to voluntary organizations such as the Newfoundland Patriotic Association. These organizations were constantly

appealing to the Newfoundland public through radio and print for financial contributions to help those who had been “left behind”. Examination of the language used in these appeals goes further than simply recounting the various contributions of voluntary organizations. It provides some sense of the underlying ideology which directed these voluntary activities.

Having established the tenor of the public and popular discourses, the study then turns to a comparison of servicewives’ “lived experiences” against their prescribed public roles in Chapter Four.⁵⁵ Tapping into women’s private lives during the wartime period is a difficult exercise, to say the least. The term “private” obviously implies a sense of seclusion and secrecy, compelling women’s historians to look outside traditional research sources for documentation of their experience. Fortunately for this study, the wartime experiences of Newfoundland servicewives were publicly documented in a number of ways. The manuscript census for 1945 was used to develop some conclusions about the general characteristics of servicewives, such as their ages and living conditions. One hundred and twenty-one wives were ultimately located within the census, representing women from all over Newfoundland - outports, towns and city. Of course, due to the imprecise procedures for listing addresses in most communities, the

⁵⁵ The term “lived experience” has been used by numerous historians such as Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson in Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 11; Penny Summerfield, Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 9.

majority of the wives located were living in St. John's at the time. The military service records of the Department of Defence also provided invaluable insight into servicewives' living and working conditions as they contain innumerable correspondence from these women to government officials. With their husbands absent from the home, it was left up to servicewives themselves to appeal directly to the Government when faced with the problems associated with insufficient military allowances, deserting husbands, and general loneliness and depression. As the Government had assumed a degree of responsibility for servicewives' welfare during the period of their husbands' military service, these women were more inclined to appeal to the Government for assistance during the war than they would have been either before or afterwards. Their plaintive letters described the atmosphere in which they lived and worked, as well as the challenges with which they were forced to cope as a result. Finally, some oral interviews were conducted to verify assumptions and help enliven various details. Ten women were interviewed for this study, representing wives of men serving in the Royal Artillery Regiments and Royal Navy, as well as the Newfoundland Militia, Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit and Merchant Marine. Historians such as Ruth Roach Pierson caution against the inherent complications and bias of oral interviewing, arguing that the way people describe their past experiences are inevitably shaped by present day discourses and ideology. Yet recognizing the fact that there is no such thing as "pure" oral testimony does not diminish its value as a research tool, especially in a study of this kind. Women's personal recollections and insights can fill in many of the "gaps" which

so often plague historians' reconstructions of women's past. They also lend a sense of immediacy to events which can easily become mired in subjective reasoning and interpretation. As Pierson herself has maintained, the historian must simply contextualize women's narratives, thoughtfully situating their memories in time and place.⁵⁶

As in Chapter Four, the confidentiality of the military service records afforded a privileged glimpse into the marital problems of separated servicemen and their wives during the war. Chapter Five focuses on the Government's assumption of its new role as middle man in these marital disputes, as well as the policies and regulations which attempted to control servicewives' sexuality for the sake of the war effort. As servicewives' fidelity became polluted with the characteristics of national obligation, their activities and behavior were increasingly monitored and subjugated to disciplinary measures. Insight is gained into the constrained position that wives occupied within the marital contract in Newfoundland, as well as into the Government's efforts to both maintain and protect wives' dependent status in such. The extraordinary conditions of war strained the very sinew of the institution of marriage in Newfoundland society, and the Government's response to such pressure revealed much about its perception of the role of women and marriage in Newfoundland.

Chapter Six provides a sense of closure to the narrative, comparing the

⁵⁶ Ruth Roach Pierson, "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History", 91-92, in Offen, Pierson and Rendall (eds.), Writing Women's History: International Perspectives (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

wartime promises made to servicewives against the post-war realities. Once again, letters from the military service records were used to establish attitudes and expectations, but now they are routinely signed by husbands instead of wives. With the general demobilization of the services in 1945, husbands were discharged and returned to their "old lives" in Newfoundland. The frustrations they expressed toward the lack of employment opportunities, housing, and veterans' benefits were undoubtedly echoed by their wives, and yet we hear only husbands' voices through these letters. With servicemen's resumption of their "rightful" place at the head of households, wives ceased writing directly to government officials with their complaints and requests. Yet appraisal can still be made of the actual rewards which servicewives received for their wartime sacrifice. The entire war effort had been built around assurances that the country was fighting to protect ideals which would receive greater promotion in the post-war order. All citizens, and especially servicemen and their families, could look forward to a more secure and comfortable post-war existence based upon the technological and administrative advances made during the war. Predictably, reality could never compare to the idealized visions constructed during the wartime crisis and many servicewives and their husbands would become ultimately disillusioned with the government and society for which they had sacrificed so much to protect.

By carefully piecing together various components of servicewives' wartime experience, both public and private, this study seeks to evaluate the influence that this experience placed on established gender systems in Newfoundland. Of course,

no study can definitively define servicewives' wartime experience as this group was inherently divided by class, regional and economic differences. Their husbands had been recruited for military service from all segments of Newfoundland society and so servicewives represented a similar cross-section of the population. Their backgrounds and living conditions were as varied as their sacrifices and struggles in the war effort. Class distinctions often eased the financial constraints of military allowances, for example, as officers' wives received significantly larger pay packets than those of other ranks. Locality also played a role in servicewives' experiences, urban residents usually having greater access to government departments and voluntary services. And some wives were simply better prepared to live independently during the period of wartime separation, their husbands having been absent from the home recurrently in the past while participating in the Labrador fishery, the lumber industry, or working in Canada and the United States.⁵⁷ But despite their many differences, servicewives also shared common experiences and concerns. Anxiety for their husbands' safety and their own futures, for instance, was a constant source of stress and frustration for most servicewives during the war. And though servicewives rarely identified themselves as a distinct group, government authorities were certainly forced to recognize the distinct influence they exerted on recruitment and morale within the military. The media similarly united

⁵⁷ Economic conditions often forced Newfoundland men to leave their local communities to "follow the work" available in the Labrador fishery, Newfoundland's lumber woods and in Canada and the United States. Benoit, "Urbanizing Women Military Fashion", 115.

servicewives in a common public image which both defined and exploited their role in the war. Determining how this experience affected the colony's war effort, as well as contemporary notions of gender, can therefore contribute much to our understanding of this exciting period in Newfoundland history.

Chapter 2

“Fixing Dependency”: The State’s Estimation of Servicewives’ Wartime Role

Everyone had a role to play in the Second World War. The principle was at the core of every belligerent nation’s war effort. It defined “total war”. In Newfoundland and throughout the Empire, citizens were expected to assume their appropriate roles in the defence of the motherland, turning in tandem toward the communal goal of victory. Behind the curtain, so to speak, it was governments’ responsibility to maintain the efficiency and integrity of the machine. Squeaky wheels jeopardized the entire effort and so government intervention into all aspects of life reached an all time high. To a greater or lesser degree, governments dictated where citizens could work, how much they would earn, and what they could buy. The overriding concern in all these directives was maximum contribution to the war effort.

Servicewives posed a rather perplexing problem for government officials. What were they contributing to the war effort? Were they even contributing to the war effort? Unlike the women who volunteered for military service or accepted jobs in defence industries, servicewives’ contributions were not easy to define. They could not be pigeonholed or plotted on graphs according to master plans. Consequently, their role in the war effort only gradually received public recognition. In Newfoundland, servicewives were initially viewed as little more than relief recipients. By removing their husbands from the home through military service, the Government had necessarily assumed a degree of responsibility for their welfare. Yet the actual extent of this

dependency was never clear. Did the Government owe servicewives a comfortable measure of support or were they simply bestowing state-sponsored charity to temporarily headless families? In the absence of discernible evidence to the contrary, it was assumed that servicewives were not contributing to the war effort and, therefore, beholden to the Government for their keep.

Only slowly did there emerge a reluctant acceptance on the part of the Government to the idea that these women did indeed assume an integral role inasmuch as their welfare and attitudes affected recruiting and morale among the men fighting overseas. To deny the value of this relationship was essentially to diminish women's roles in the home generally. The issue dips into a political debate which even today appears virtually unresolvable. What is the value of women's work in maintaining the home? An examination of the Government's response to this thorny question as it related to Newfoundland servicewives during the Second World War offers some insight into the gender systems which were in place at this time and how these systems were affected by the conditions of war. What was the Government's estimation of servicewives' role in the war effort? What did this estimation imply about its perception of women's roles generally in Newfoundland? Did this estimation change at all during the course of the war? The Government's attempts to establish a minimum level of responsibility for servicemen's dependents highlighted the deep-seated gender biases operating within Newfoundland society at this time, as well its own evolving role in issues of social reform. As always, crisis both illuminated and accelerated administrative change.

The Second World War marks an important juncture in the history of Newfoundland and its pervasive effects on the character and appearance of the island have not gone unrecognized. Indeed, the six war years have yielded a remarkably rich source of historical interpretation, describing almost every conceivable aspect of Newfoundland's wartime experience. The "friendly occupation" of Newfoundland by Canadian and American servicemen has received the greatest share of examination as the cultural and economic influences of this "invasion" are often linked to Newfoundland's shifting political orientation and subsequent union with Canada.¹ The valiant efforts of Newfoundland servicemen on the front lines have similarly received their share of historical mention, as have the tireless voluntary contributions of Newfoundland women on the home front.²

¹ Such studies include Peter Neary, Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949 (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988); Malcolm MacLeod, Peace of the Continent: The Impact of the Second World War Canadian and American Bases in Newfoundland (St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications Limited, 1986); Bernard Ransom, "Canada's Newfyjohn Tenancy: The Royal Canadian Navy in St. John's, 1941-1945", Acadiensis, 23, 2 (Spring 1994); 45-71; Robert Kavanagh, "The Canadian Army and the Defence of Newfoundland" (Master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1995).

² See G.W.L. Nicholson, More Fighting Newfoundlanders: A History of Newfoundland's Fighting Forces in the Second World War (Published by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1969); Wilfred Martin, Random Islanders on Guard (St. John's: Creative Publishers, 1994); Edward Chafe, Gunners of World War II: 166th Newfoundland Field Regiment Royal Artillery (St. John's: Creative Publishers, 1987); Margaret Dulcy, The Caribou Hut: The Story of a Newfoundland Hostel (Toronto,

Yet amidst the veritable sea of wartime literature, the unique position that servicewives assumed in the colony's war effort has escaped historical attention. Newfoundland is hardly alone in this oversight, little having been published in Canada, the United States or Britain regarding servicewives' intimate connection to the military establishment.³ Two notable exceptions are Myna Trustram's study of marriage in the Victorian army - Women of the Regiment - and Cynthia Enloe's more general examination of the impact of militarization on women's lives in Does Khaki Become You?. Though neither study focused specifically on the Second World War period, both carefully documented the military establishment's consistent desire to camouflage its dependency on servicewives. From the Victorian era to the present day, the instrumental role that servicewives have assumed in recruiting and morale among the forces has been obscured as they remain an "alien presence" within this "bastion of manliness". The problem is essentially one of control and the establishment's desire to minimize women's influence on military operations while at the same time protecting morale and steady re-enlistment among the men. Consequently, servicewives find themselves marginalised within the establishment, their concerns only being addressed when they serve explicit

1949).

³ Some popular histories have been published which compile servicewives' wartime recollections including Joyce Hibbert (ed.), The War Brides (Toronto: P.M.A. Books, 1978); Peggy O'Hara (ed.), From Romance to Reality (Cobalt: Highway Book Shop, 1983); Colin Townsend and Eileen Townsend, War Wives: A Second World War Anthology (London: Swinden Publications, 1989).

military objectives.⁴

In Sexism and the War System, Betty Reardon argued that a fear of feminine characteristics is actually essential to military socialization. Caring and concern, considered to be profoundly feminine traits, are perceived as a threat to the unquestioning acceptance of authority upon which the military depends. "Care and concern tend to be person- and relationship-oriented rather than structures- and rules-oriented", Reardon explained, "When the structures or rules are seen as harmful to persons, particularly related persons (friends, family, dependents), a feminine perspective would bend the rules or go around the structures".⁵ Such a perspective naturally threatens the integrity of an institution like the military which relies upon obedience and a blind adherence to rules and structures.⁶ Thus, female influences within the military establishment remain suspect and obscured.

Historically, governments have routinely interceded to monitor the hazardous effects of servicewives' conduct on military morale and efficiency. In "Waiting for the Captive Sons of France", Sarah Fishman described the Vichy government's paternalistic policies toward the wives of French prisoners of war as

⁴ Myna Trustram, Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 196-201; Cynthia Enloe, Does Khaki Become You?: The Militarization of Women's Lives (Boston: South end Press, 1983), 48-57.

⁵ Betty Reardon, Sexism and the War System (New York: Teachers College Press, 1985), 28-31.

⁶ Reardon, Sexism and the War System, 28-31.

primarily concerned with the preservation of absent husbands' "rightful" place in the home. To protect families against disintegration during the war, legislation was introduced which made divorce more difficult to obtain and forbidding it during the first three years of marriage. Laws were also enacted which punished adultery with the wife of a prisoner of war with jail terms and fines.⁷ Echoing such findings, Sonya Michel described the lack of male leadership in American service families' homes as being replaced with a new level of government intervention. State sponsored day care and after-school programs for working mothers were introduced, along with an Emergency Maternity and Infant Care program for the wives and children of lower-ranking servicemen. Such policies were not part of a set of permanent social entitlements, however, but rather a temporary reaction to wartime disruptions which threatened the stability of the traditional American family. The ideal of the conventional family, nurtured by a full-time, stay-at-home mother, was passionately guarded throughout the war as it came to symbolize all that American men were fighting for. The discourse reinforced traditional views of women's social role but also invested it with major political significance which both confined and manipulated servicewives' wartime identity.⁸

⁷ Fishman, "Waiting for the Captive Sons of France", 182-193.

⁸ Michel, "American Women and the Discourse of the Democratic Family", 154-167.

The Second World War brought great change to Newfoundland. Its strategic location in the world conflict made it a vital transcontinental link and a key pawn in the defence of North America. Thousands of Canadian and American troops were stationed throughout the island, transforming the colony's population and igniting a military construction boom which boosted levels of employment and prosperity.⁹ Voluntarily or not, Newfoundlanders were inundated by wartime activity and unavoidably caught up in the wartime fervor. Thousands of patriotic volunteers organized to provide accommodation and entertainment for visiting servicemen, as well as a variety of comforts and surgical supplies for the men serving overseas.¹⁰ And young Newfoundlanders - men and women - enlisted for military service, eager to make their contribution to the defence of the Empire.¹¹

The war effort put forth by Newfoundlanders was shaped by a number of factors, not the least of which was the fact that the government directing it was neither

⁹ The colony's overall population increased by eleven percent during the war and even more so in areas affected by large scale military construction. MacLeod, Peace of the Continent, 31; Canadian expenditures on military construction in Newfoundland totalled \$65 million by 1945 and American spending has been estimated as ranging as high as \$30 million. Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume 5 (St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications, 1994), 633.

¹⁰ Nicholson, More Fighting Newfoundlanders, 538-539.

¹¹ A total of 524 Newfoundland women served in the Canadian armed forces during the war. Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume 5, 629; Neary, Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 183-186.

popularly elected nor sanctioned by the people. The Depression of the 1930's had left Newfoundland virtually bankrupt and threatening to default on its debt to Britain. As a result, Newfoundlanders had been compelled to relinquish responsible government in favor of rule by a Governor and a Commission of six men appointed by the British Government. This non-elected body was given the task of governing Newfoundland while steering the island back onto the road of economic recovery. The Commissioners were not responsible to an electorate and received recurrent criticism for governing the colony in a rather despotic manner. Despite its advancing unpopularity among Newfoundlanders and a significantly improved wartime economy, the Commission of Government continued to rule the colony throughout the wartime period.¹²

With Britain's declaration of war in 1939, Newfoundland's dependent status determined her automatic participation in the conflict. Further sweeping powers were conferred onto the Commission of Government for the defence of the country, as well as the regulation of social and economic life as they affected the war effort. In consultation with the Dominions Office and the British War Ministry, the Commission came to rule the colony's population virtually by decree.¹³ Public expenditures were cut and taxation increased in order to reduce Newfoundland's demand on the British Treasury. Lease agreements were negotiated with Canada and the United States which

¹² Neary, Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 25-26; S.J.R. Noel, Politics in Newfoundland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 221-230.

¹³ Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume 5, 629; "Memorandum for Commission", 11 September 1940. GN 13/1. Box 14, File 25, PANL.

substantially contributed to Britain's war effort.¹⁴ And as the Government's revenues increased with wartime prosperity, surplus funds were transferred to London to be added to Britain's reserves or extended in the form of interest-free loans.¹⁵ The Newfoundland population had no voice in these decisions, their rights to consultation having been traded away with responsible government.

In the First World War, Newfoundland had raised its own overseas regiment, a decision which had cost the colony dearly in terms of both men and money. No longer in a financial position to afford such patriotic gestures, it was determined that Newfoundlanders should be recruited into British services during the Second World War and undergo their training in the United Kingdom.¹⁶ For sentimental reasons, as well as in an effort to keep Newfoundlanders together and serving under Newfoundland officers, recruits were often routed into two specific regiments of the Royal Artillery - the 166th (Newfoundland) Field Regiment and the 59th (Newfoundland) Heavy Regiment.¹⁷ Newfoundlanders also served in the Royal Navy and Air Force during the course of the

¹⁴ Neary, Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 178-182.

¹⁵ Approximately \$38 million had been transferred to the British Treasury by June 1942 and almost \$10,300,000 in interest-free loans by January 1944. Noel, Politics in Newfoundland, 243.

¹⁶ G.W.L. Nicholson, "Our Fighting Forces in World War II", 468, in The Book of Newfoundland, Volume 4 (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishing Ltd., 1967).

¹⁷ A total of 2,343 Newfoundlanders served in these artillery regiments during the war. Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume 5, 629; Nicholson, "Our Fighting Forces in World War II", 469.

war, as well as in the Merchant Marine. A large number of Newfoundlanders crossed the Atlantic to serve in the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit which was engaged in timber operations in Scotland. And men were recruited to serve in the Newfoundland Militia, a home defence force whose members were also considered to be on full-time active service.¹⁸

In regard to the recruitment of men for the British services, the directives handed down by the War Office were clear: "Married men will not be accepted because it is contrary to the principles of the Army Council to keep soldiers separated from their families for more than one year, subject to the exigencies of the Service. If married men were accepted, therefore, there would be a likelihood of appeals being made for special consideration later for their families".¹⁹ Sir Humphrey Walwyn, the Governor of Newfoundland, ventured to suggest that married men should be permitted to enlist in the first draft as "otherwise numbers of [our] best men may be limited by the early age at

¹⁸ A total of 3,419 Newfoundlanders served in the Royal Navy during the war and 713 enlisted in the Royal Air Force. Newfoundlanders serving in the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit totalled nearly 3,600 and estimates of the total number of Newfoundlanders serving in the Merchant Marine range between 5,000 to 10,000. A total of 1,668 Newfoundlanders enlisted in the Newfoundland Militia (or Newfoundland Regiment as it was renamed in March 1943), 787 of whom went on to join overseas units. Approximately 1,160 Newfoundland men also served in various forces of the Canadian military during the war. Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume 5, 629.

¹⁹ "Memorandum on Enlistment in Newfoundland", 1939, PRC #35, Box 26, File 9, PANL.

which fishermen marry”.²⁰ Yet the War Office remained unmoved. Ideally, the military services were to be made up of single, emotionally unattached, mobile young men; men who could devote their dedication and loyalty to one mistress - the Service. As Myna Trustram has described, wives and children were traditionally perceived as a liability within the British military establishment and more specifically “a millstone around the army’s neck, affecting mobility, discipline and efficiency”.²¹

Recruiting authorities could afford such selectivity at the outset of the war as there existed in Newfoundland a ready pool of unemployed from which single recruits could easily be drawn. The Great Depression had ravaged the island’s economy, driving up the relief roles and creating starvation conditions in many outport communities. At the Depression’s peak, nearly one third of Newfoundland’s total population and one-half of its work force was relying on some form of government relief. These relief allowances were notoriously low, averaging approximately six cents per person per day.²²

Commissioner for Justice, William R. Howley, observed in February 1935 that it was “barely enough to keep body and soul together, and is economically unsound inasmuch as

²⁰ “Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs”, 16 September 1939, PRC #35, Box 26, File 19, PANL.

²¹ Trustram, Women of the Regiment, 29.

²² Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume 1 and Volume 4, 612-613 and 375-377; Richard Straus, “The Americans Come to Newfoundland”, 555, in The Book of Newfoundland (St. John’s: Newfoundland Book Publishing Ltd., 1967); “To the Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare”, 5 November 1934, GN 13/2/A, Box 467, PANL.

it is perpetuating and encouraging an under-nourished population, who sooner or later will become a much heavier charge on the State".²³ Conceivably, many of the Newfoundlanders who flocked to recruiting centers in the fall of 1939 had more than patriotic motives in mind.²⁴

Married men, also desirous of earning a living wage after years of unemployment, offered their services to the military knowing full well that there were no provisions in place for family allowances. A captain from Bishop's Bay appealed to the Director of Recruiting on behalf of one eager recruit: "He is a married man but is not seeking any family allowance, but is desirous of serving his Country, as well as making an effort to independently support his family without having the stigma of the dole".²⁵ With the routine dismissal of such applications, married men simply learned to skirt the issue by declaring themselves single upon enlistment.²⁶ When an increasing number of servicewives began appealing to the Government for financial assistance, recruiting

²³ "Memorandum re Unemployed", 14 February 1935, GN 13/1/B, Box 166, File 70, PANL; Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume 4, 375-376.

²⁴ Many Newfoundlanders volunteered for military service as an alternative to public relief. See "Constabulary Report", 26 June 1942, PRC #35, Box 111, File 134, PANL; "W.M.V. to Commissioner for Justice", 23 July 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 166, File 69, PANL.

²⁵ "Captain John D. to Director of Recruiting, St. John's", 6 August 1940, PRC #35, Box 143, File 25, PANL.

²⁶ "...[S]ingle men will get the preference in all drafts for Over Seas", was the official pronouncement in recruiting directives at the beginning of the war. "Director of Recruiting to R.W.S.", 16 February 1940, PRC #35, Box 15, File 28, PANL.

officers could only respond that there had been “no report of this man’s marriage” or “stated he was single with no dependents”.²⁷

It proved equally problematic for authorities to prevent men from marrying once they had been accepted into military service. Authorities recognized that the majority of enlisted men were “arriving at an age when they might normally be thinking of getting married” and that even if a soldier married without the express permission of his commanding officer, his marriage was still considered to be legal and theoretically his wife could sue for maintenance through the civil courts.²⁸ Though disagreement persisted as to the extent of the Government’s liability to these men’s dependents, almost from the outset, issues regarding family allowances had to be addressed.

²⁷ Examples of such reports include: “Memorandum to Commissioner for Justice and Defence”, 3 October 1940 and 11 October 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 22, PANL; “Recruiting Officer to Director of Recruiting”, 22 March 1941, PRC #35, Box 96, File 29, PANL; “Chief Clerk to District Magistrate, Grand Falls”, 20 November 1944, PRC #35, Box 88, File 4, PANL; the Secretary for Public Health and Welfare explained to the Commissioner for Justice and Defence: “There have from time to time come to our attention cases of genuine need amongst dependents of members of the Forces and in respect of whom no arrangement was made at the time of enlistment. A considerable number of unreported cases of this kind must exist”, 7 July 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 50, File 19, PANL.

²⁸ “Memorandum to Commissioner for Justice”, 6 December 1939 and 16 January 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL; the Commissioner for Justice argued in the case of the Newfoundland Militia that although “it was not intended to enlist married men...we have not, however, been able to prohibit matrimony...I do not see how as the years go by we can keep young men from marriage and it is impossible on the rate of pay without allowances for them to live. In fact, they are now getting into debt and into distress”, 12 August 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL.

The allowances which the War Office eventually instituted for dependents were set purposefully low so as not to become an inducement for troops to marry. "Family allowance is not intended to cover the full cost of maintenance of a soldier's family", the War Office explained, "it is a supplement to the soldier's pay in aid of that maintenance".²⁹ The onus for dependents' welfare lay with the serviceman and, as his enlistment had been voluntary, it was "assumed that men would not join the forces if they had persons dependent upon them for whose maintenance provisions could not be made without special assistance from Service funds".³⁰ To ensure that genuine dependency had existed prior to enlistment, married men were required to defer qualifying allotments from their pay to families at home before allowances would be issued.³¹ A cap was also placed on wives' total allowable income which prohibited the issue of allowances to wives whose weekly household revenue exceeded an established limit.³² Unlike servicemen's military pay, family allowances were neither considered to have been

²⁹ "Allowances for Families and Dependents of Men Serving in H.M. Forces during the Present War", 1939, GN 1/3/A, Box 118, File 36, PANL.

³⁰ "Ibid."

³¹ "Qualifying allotment" refers to the deductions made from a serviceman's pay for the maintenance of his family at home. Servicemen were required to "allot" a minimum percentage of their pay to their dependents before family allowances would be issued. "Royal Artillery Family Allowances", GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL.

³² "Royal Navy Dependents Allowance", PRC #35, Box 26, File 18, PANL; "Royal Air Force Dependents Allowance", PRC #35, Box 7, File 3, PANL; "Increased Rates of Family and Dependents Allowance", 10 October 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 22, PANL.

earned nor warranted by any extra service on the part of married recruits. Wives and other dependents simply drove up the cost of a recruit's services to the military and recruiting instructions continued to indicate that all efforts should be made to "weed out" men with familial obligations.³³

Although Newfoundland was not responsible for financing its war expenditures, the Commission of Government was eager to manage all aspects of the island's war effort and readily accepted the Dominions Office's request to take charge of the investigation and distribution of dependents' allowances.³⁴ The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs suggested that local authorities could assess individual claims most easily and efficiently, thereby avoiding the delays which would ultimately result should all claims be filtered through the War Office in London:

It will be understood that the local authorities would act as the agents of the War Office in the matter but it is thought that there should be no difficulty in assessing awards, and it is desired to avoid the delay which would be incurred in referring proposed awards to the War Office for approval before making any payment. In

³³ "Proclamation", 6 February 1940, GN 1/3/A, Box 118, File 36, PANL; "Report on Visit to Newfoundland", 25 August 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL; "Commissioner for Finance to Commissioner for Justice", GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL.

³⁴ "Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Newfoundland Governor", 6 November 1939 and 9 February 1940, GN 1/3/A, Box 118, File 36, PANL; "Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", 19 February 1940, GN 1/3/A, Box 118, File 36, PANL; "Commissioner for Justice to Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare", 25 January 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 22, PANL; "Colonial Office to Captain S.", 22 January 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 42 (1), File 22, PANL; Susan McCorquodale, "Public Administration in Newfoundland during the Period of the Commission Government: A Question of Political Development" (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1973), 185.

any cases where doubt arises, reference could be made to this country by telegraph.³⁵

Despite such assurances that the War Office was “only a call away”, the official line of reasoning belied the fact that the British Government desired some distance from the welfare complications which would invariably arise during the course of the war.

According to Cynthia Enloe, this action was not out of line with the British Government’s traditional response toward the welfare of military families as they had always side-stepped responsibility by leaving such problems up to the local civilian authorities where military bases were located.³⁶

With the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, the Commission of Government had been largely unprepared to deal with the administrative demands involved in directing a national war effort. New responsibilities were divided among the various departments of government, the Department of Justice temporarily assuming responsibility for recruiting and defence matters generally in Newfoundland.³⁷ Though the investigation and distribution of dependents’ allowances seemed to fall within the purview of these responsibilities, the Commissioner for Justice, Edward Emerson, hesitated to affix this further duty to the department’s already oppressive workload.

³⁵ “Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland”, 16 October 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL.

³⁶ Enloe, Does Khaki Become You?, 59-60.

³⁷ A separate governmental department for defence was not established until June 1940. Edward Emerson assumed the position of Commissioner for both the departments of justice and defence. Neary, Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 127.

When broached on the subject in January 1940, the Commissioner explained that it would “of course be impossible for me to impose this burden upon the present small accounting staff of this Department...I have already added to their duties the payroll of the Militia, the accounting work in connection with the recruiting movement and the Recruiting Division and the accounts in connection with the Internment Camp so that they are already taxed to their limit”.³⁸ The Department of Public Health and Welfare, he countered, was the department which could most effectively handle this unenviable “burden”. As this department was already in charge of the War Pensions Division, it was deemed to have the “specialized knowledge necessary to give the proper attention to this kind of work”.³⁹ It was also believed that such payments should be processed through the department so as to “prevent complications in regard to grant[ing] of relief”.⁴⁰ The Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare, John C. Puddester, accepted the suggestion, explaining: “I quite agree with you that this is for several reasons the proper Department to handle these payments. For instance the information that it will give our

³⁸ “Commissioner for Justice to Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare”, 25 January 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 22, PANL.

³⁹ “Commissioner for Justice to Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare”, 25 January 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 22, PANL; “Governor of Newfoundland to High Commissioner for United Kingdom in Canada”, 23 September 1940, PRC #35, Box 26, File 11, PANL.

⁴⁰ “Telegram from Vice-Chairman to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs”, 7 July 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 22, PANL.

officials as regarding relief will be invaluable".⁴¹

This connection between dependents' allowance payments and relief was more than suggestive. Service families' allowances would be handled by the same governmental department which was responsible for administering public relief.⁴² Family allowance claims would be investigated by the same official bodies which investigated applications for relief, namely the local police constabularies and Newfoundland Ranger Force.⁴³ To a degree, applicants for both forms of assistance had to prove themselves morally deserving of such grants, meaning, in the case of married women, that they were conscientious housekeepers, faithful wives, and devoted mothers.⁴⁴ Finally, volunteer agencies were used in both instances to "take up the slack", so to speak, monitoring families' welfare, evaluating claims for increased assistance, and providing additional aid when required. The system naturally tended to link service families' allowances with the stigma of the dole.

⁴¹ "Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare to Commissioner for Justice", 27 January 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 22, PANL.

⁴² "Governor of Newfoundland to High Commissioner for United Kingdom in Canada", 23 September 1940, PRC #35, Box 26, File 11, PANL.

⁴³ "Newfoundland Constabulary Report", 16 May 1938, GN 13/1/B, Box 242, File 32, PANL; "Secretary for Justice to Secretary for Public Health and Welfare", 14 March 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 166, File 69, PANL;

⁴⁴ "Confidential Report of the Medical Officer for Public Health and Welfare", 30 October 1934, GN 13/2/A, Box 467, PANL; "Increased Rates of Family and Dependents' Allowance", 10 October 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 22, PANL; this idea will be examined in more detail in following chapters.

Newfoundland's Poor Law heritage and restricted system of government had left little room for the development of an efficient public welfare system. For the most part, responsibility for the welfare of the poor had been relegated to local charitable organizations, successive governments avoiding direct involvement in all but the most extreme cases of need.⁴⁵ Even amidst the massive economic upheaval of the Depression years, the perception persisted that able-bodied relief posed an imminent threat to traditional work ethics by eroding men's will to work. Relief allowances were purposely kept below the standard of living which work could provide so as to maintain a ready pool of applicants for even the lowest paying jobs in Newfoundland.⁴⁶ Relief recipients also continued to be divided into the "able-bodied" and those considered to be in need of permanent and, therefore, legitimate government support.⁴⁷

Women seemed to traverse a fine line in this categorical division, throwing a degree of ambiguity over the regulations. Traditionally in Newfoundland, wives became the dependents of their husbands upon marriage. This dependency was

⁴⁵ George Pope, "The Welfare Revolution in Newfoundland", 258, in The Book of Newfoundland (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishing Ltd., 1967).

⁴⁶ Neary, Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 54.

⁴⁷ In December 1934, the Secretary of the Service League questioned the Department of Public Health and Welfare regarding its reluctance to aid "able-bodied" Newfoundlanders: "The lists have now come in. Not a great deal is asked for: In a great many cases only a few garments and boots per family. But when I sent these forms to Dr. Mosdell he did not approve them because they are able-bodied...As you are aware, it was stated in our Notices that only the sick, aged, etc, would be assisted, but a very large number of the able-bodied have also applied", 29 December 1934, GN 13/2/A, Box 467, PANL.

both protected and enshrined within the law.⁴⁸ Husbands were obliged to support their wives just as wives were obliged to provide sexual and domestic services in return.⁴⁹ It has been argued that the instrumental roles which married women assumed in family-based fishing operations in Newfoundland tended to elevate their status within the home.⁵⁰ According to Marilyn Porter in particular, the unremitting poverty and toil of traditional outport life leveled ideological dominance within the family as wives' contributions in the home and fishery were recognized as vitally important to their families' survival. "Nobody had any 'real' power," Porter maintained, "being helpless in the hands of the merchants and the 'truck system'".⁵¹ But while a condition of mutual dependency certainly existed in these outport homes, Porter's descriptions of the mutual respect and spirit of cooperation which ultimately resulted appear overstated.⁵²

According to Cecilia Benoit, irrespective of their economic status, men did retain a

⁴⁸ Under English common law it was a husband's duty to support his wife and acts were recurrently enacted which protected women's rights to such support. Cullum and Baird, "A Woman's Lot", 145-148.

⁴⁹ Cullum and Baird, "A Woman's Lot", 125-140.

⁵⁰ See Marilyn Porter, "She Was Skipper of the Shore Crew: Notes on the History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Newfoundland", 41-45, in McGrath, Neis and Porter (eds.), Their Lives and Times, Women in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Collage (St. John's: Killick Press, 1995); Hilda Chaulk Murray, More Than Fifty Percent, Woman's Life in a Newfoundland Outport, 1900-1950 (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1979).

⁵¹ Marilyn Porter, "Women and Old Boats: The Sexual Division of Labour in a Newfoundland Outport", 101, in Gamarnikow, Morgan, Purvis and Taylorson (eds.), The Public and the Private (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1983).

⁵² Porter, "Women and Old Boats", 101.

measure of “real” power in Newfoundland society, namely their power over women.⁵³ Community elders, particularly priests and aging family patriarchs, sanctioned men’s dominance in the home, defining husbands’ rights to set down rules and demand to be served. Public institutions like the courts and mercantile establishments further justified this subordination as they tended to view wives as the “property” of their husbands.⁵⁴ Legally, wives’ contributions to family fishing enterprises were rarely considered sufficient to entitle them to a proportionate share in property ownership and merchants similarly refused to recognize wives as formal partners with their husbands in such enterprises.⁵⁵ Moreover, as the definition of women’s work in the home and the wider public world of wage labour became more rigid in the twentieth century, wives’ dependence on their husbands increased in Newfoundland.⁵⁶ Economic power remained in the hands of men, preserving wives’ dependency and impeding any reformulation of

⁵³ Benoit, “Mothering in a Newfoundland Community”, 183.

⁵⁴ Benoit, “Mothering in a Newfoundland Community”, 183.

⁵⁵ See Sean Cadigan, “Whipping Them into Shape: State Refinement of Patriarchy among Conception Bay Fishing Families, 1787-1825”, 52-53, in McGrath, Neis and Porter (eds.), *Their Lives and Times. Women in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Collage* (St. John’s: Killick Press, 1995); Cullum and Baird, “A Woman’s Lot”, 125; Trudi Johnson has recently presented a more nuanced interpretation of the matrimonial property system in Newfoundland. According to Johnson, Newfoundland residents often found ways to circumvent matrimonial property law to suit their own needs and those of succeeding generations, pointing to a real difference between what the law stated and what was actually practised. “Matrimonial Property Law in Newfoundland to the End of the Nineteenth Century” (Ph.D. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1998).

⁵⁶ Benoit, “Urbanizing Women Military Fashion”, 118.

the laws and social structures which defined their subordinate status.

Yet the patriarchal ideals which restricted women's roles in Newfoundland society also afforded them a modicum of protection when left without a male breadwinner to depend upon.⁵⁷ In cases in which women were deserted or widowed by the death of a husband, for instance, the State was aware of the need to provide some measure of public support.⁵⁸ Wives and children without means of support were lumped in with the "aged" and "distressed sick", thereby warranting permanent assistance.⁵⁹ But at the same time the allowances issued them were admittedly "not intended to be fully maintaining".⁶⁰ Public charity was not a right but a privilege, dependent upon the available resources and inclination of the supporting society. Although opportunities were severely limited, widows and abandoned wives were expected to scrounge some form of additional income with which to augment their meager relief payments. A 1945

⁵⁷ Of course, widows and deserted wives had to prove that they had absolutely no male relatives upon whom they could rely for support. A widow, for instance, could not qualify for public assistance if she had two sons over the age of sixteen. According to Cullum and Baird: "The patriarchal view of women being taken care of by men extended even to a widow and her sons...sons [who] may not have been in a financial position to support their aged mothers as well as their own families", "A Woman's Lot", 159.

⁵⁸ Cullum and Baird described "widowed" women as having been traditionally included in government listings of those classified as destitute and receiving public support. "A Woman's Lot", 155.

⁵⁹ "Suggestions Re-Organization of Distribution of Clothing by the Service League", GN 13/1/A, Box 467, PANL.

⁶⁰ Idea explained in a memorandum prepared by the Department of Public Health and Welfare, 18 February 1935, GN 13/1/B, Box 166, File 70, PANL.

Newfoundland Constabulary report records such women as working in grocery stores, bakeries, and beauty parlors, as well as taking in boarders and working as charwomen.⁶¹

This variance between the domestic ideal and economic reality similarly affected servicewives during the war. They were now in receipt of military allowances during the period of their husbands' wartime service but these allowances were "not intended to cover the full cost of maintenance".⁶² Though rarely overt, government correspondence occasionally implied that wives without children could and should supplement their admittedly inadequate allowances with paid work outside the home. In a dispatch from the Secretary for Defence to the Trade Commissioner in London, only a serious medical condition posed a plausible excuse for a servicewife not working and consequently appealing for an allowance increase: "This [allowance] is quite inadequate as she has to pay for board and lodging and clothe herself. She is unable to work to increase her income and in this respect she is acting on the advice of a medical doctor".⁶³ Such attitudes undoubtedly trickled down from senior officials in Britain where, unlike Newfoundland, expectations toward married women's work roles had expanded since the

⁶¹ "Newfoundland Constabulary Report", 13 December 1945, GN 13/2/A, Box 406, PANL.

⁶² "Allowances for Families and Dependents of Men Serving in H.M. Forces during the Present War", 1939, GN 1/3/A, Box 118, File 36, PANL.

⁶³ "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 5 January 1946, PRC #35, Box 19, File 6, PANL.

outbreak of the war.⁶⁴ In regard to widows' war pensions, for example, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs explained to the Governor of Newfoundland that "young widows whether of Officers or other ranks who are fit and who have no young children should be expected to earn their own living and that it is in their own interest that they should be encouraged to do so".⁶⁵

Such assertions amounted to little more than inflated double-talk in wartime Newfoundland, however, where the Government itself prohibited the entrance of married women into the ranks of its civil service.⁶⁶ This exclusion was a widely accepted tenet of the social order, apparently requiring neither explanation nor stipulation. In a published advertisement for a stenographer-typist "(female)", no provisions as to marital

⁶⁴ In 1943, 43 percent of all women in the paid work force in Britain were married, in comparison to 16 percent in 1931. In Newfoundland, only 6 percent of the total female labour force was married, according to The Eleventh Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1945 (Ottawa: Canadian Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1949), Table 44; Penny Summerfield, "The Girl that Makes the Thing that Drills the Hole that Holds the Spring...: Discourses of Women and Work in the Second World War", 40, in Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (eds.), Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996); also see Janann Sherman, "The Vice Admiral: Margaret Chase Smith and the Investigation of Congested Areas in Wartime", 127, in Kenneth Paul O'Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons (eds.), The Home Front War: World War II and American Society (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995).

⁶⁵ "Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland", 27 April 1945, GN 38, S6-2-1, File 7, PANL.

⁶⁶ Nancy Forestell discussed the limited employment opportunities available to married women in St. John's in the 1920's and '30's in "Times Were Hard: The Pattern of Women's Paid Labour in St. John's Between the Two World Wars", 86-89, in McGrath, Neis and Porter (eds.), Their Lives and Times, Women in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Collage (St. John's: Killick Press, 1995).

status were mentioned and yet only two of the fifty-six women who applied were married. The two were by far superior to the others in experience and qualifications but both were rejected solely upon the basis of their marital status. A notation next to the name of one of these applicants stated simply “married woman, seemed smart” while that next to the other acknowledged “quite good but as she is married we could not take her”.⁶⁷ The Civil Service Act similarly compelled female employees to retire immediately upon marriage.⁶⁸ Women might petition for the retention of their positions after marriage but inevitably found it impossible to surmount the Government’s self-constructed barricades.⁶⁹

In the face of such deep-rooted prejudice toward the presence of married women in the work force and the insufficient rates of military allowances, there were few alternatives available to Newfoundland servicewives but to move back in with parents or other family members. This shift in dependency was not only expected but sometimes encouraged by the Government. In the case of the Newfoundland Militia, the

⁶⁷ “List of applicants for stenographer-typist position in the Department of Defence”, 21 January 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 241 1/2, File 34, PANL.

⁶⁸ Section 19 of the Act explained that “an established woman Civil Servant shall be retired on marriage, unless the Commissioner on the recommendation of the head of the department in which she is employed approves her retention in the interest of the public service, and such retention shall be on a temporary basis”, Civil Service Act of 1947, Section 19 (2), GN 13/1/B, Box 132, File 109, PANL.

⁶⁹ Examples of such requests were found in GN 13/1/B, Box 132, File 109, PANL; GN 13/1/B, Box 148, File 158, PANL; GN 13/1/B, Box 147, File 77, PANL; GN 13/1/B, Box 136, File 55, PANL.

Commissioner for Finance remarked:

I sincerely hope that the allowances will not prove too strong an inducement towards matrimony. In considering the amount of allowances I think we should bear in mind that the militia men undertook family obligations without any promise of assistance and with their eyes open. No doubt hardship has arisen in some cases but I imagine that in many others the wife continues to live with her parents and may possibly follow remunerative employment.⁷⁰

At other times it was suggested that perhaps the Government should “force each married soldier to send his wife and family to live with parents” as an alternative to increasing service families’ allowances. It was admitted, however, that the suggestion was “drastic and perhaps not feasible”.⁷¹ Nevertheless, such reasoning revealed the Government’s reluctance to provide servicewives with the means to live independently during the period of their husbands’ military service.

In its veritable state of infancy, the Department of Public Health and Welfare was hardly in a position to add the further responsibility of dependents’ allowances to its already overloaded agenda. Having been established only eight years previously, the department was still struggling to regulate the distribution of relief payments to thousands of destitute families throughout the island.⁷² Now faced with the

⁷⁰ “Commissioner for Finance to Commissioner for Justice and Defence”, 5 September 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL.

⁷¹ “Major A.T. Howell to Secretary for Defence”, 29 April 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL.

⁷² In March 1940, magistrates were still complaining that “our greatest trouble in this section thus far is the dole”, “Secretary for Justice to Secretary for Public Health and Welfare”, 14 March 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 166, File 69, PANL.

daunting task of coordinating dependents' allowances, it scrambled to establish a system of distribution even as applications began flowing in.⁷³ Overworked and understaffed, the department was criticized for its constant confusion and the delays which ultimately resulted.⁷⁴ Newfoundland servicewives could expect to wait an average of three to four months between the time of application and receipt of their first allowance cheque and some applications sat in the department's files for years unattended.⁷⁵ The Combined Services Liaison Office in London pulled few punches in its appeal for the department to accelerate the process of allowance payments:

As you will notice this correspondence deals with dependant's allowance and covers thirteen separate cases which are still outstanding... We have already written to you and cabled on this subject of the delay by the Department of Public Health and Welfare in answering these very important enquiries from the Regimental Paymaster. I regard it as absolutely disgraceful that such matters are not attended to more promptly. These men are away from their own country and are not in a position to look after their families themselves. They naturally expect your Department, the Department of Public Health and Welfare and this Office, to see that their dependants are properly cared for. If the men themselves were ever to become aware of this lackadaisical treatment which their families are receiving I fear what their Re-action would be.⁷⁶

The other side of this administrative chaos tended to be the overpayment of some

⁷³ "Director of Recruiting to Commissioner for Justice", 8 February 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 22, PANL; "Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland", 17 August 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 22, PANL.

⁷⁴ "Ministry of Pensions, Ottawa, to Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare", 20 November 1946, GN 38, S6-2-1, File 7, PANL.

⁷⁵ "Compassionate Allowance Committee Report, 1941", MG 632, PANL.

⁷⁶ "Officer-in-Charge, Combined Services Liaison Office, to Secretary for Defence", 27 April 1945, PRC #35, Box 63, File 59, PANL.

families' allowances. These mistakes were blamed on the department's "lack of experience and knowledge" but it was ultimately servicewives who paid the greatest price as the department ruthlessly held back part and occasionally all of their monthly allowances until the overpayments were recovered.⁷⁷

Of course, some confusion and miscommunication were probably unavoidable given a job of this magnitude and the scattered nature of the Newfoundland population. Outside St. John's, most Newfoundlanders lived in small outpost communities spread out along the colony's coasts. Servicemen were enlisted from all these communities and it was suddenly the Department of Public Health and Welfare's responsibility to distribute allowance payments to their respective families.⁷⁸ One of the many glitches in distribution turned out to be the tendency for many families with the same surnames, and occasionally Christian names, to be living within the same community.⁷⁹ Exasperated, Mrs. Mary K. of St. Fintan's complained to the recruiting

⁷⁷ "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 20 July 1944, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Magistrate", 16 May 1942, PRC #35, Box 96, File 137, PANL; "Liaison Office Report", 28 September 1943, PRC #35, Box 41, File 22, PANL; "Report of the Regimental Paymaster, R.A. (Field Branch)", PRC #35, Box 37, File 56, PANL.

⁷⁸ "War Service Grants", PRC#35, Box 3, File 26, PANL.

⁷⁹ For example, the Secretary for Defence explained to the Accountant and Comptroller General of Inland Revenue in Cardiff that "we have in a good many cases several men with the same Christian and surnames from the same towns in Newfoundland", 21 May 1947, PRC #35, Box 102, File 59, PANL; See also "Secretary for Defence to Liaison Office", 11 April 1946, PRC #35, Box 88, File 97, PANL; "Director of Recruiting to Mrs. ___", 10 July 1941, PRC #35, Box 97, File 91, PANL.

officer in St. John's that she had been getting her allotment cheque every month in Charlot K.'s name: "...and I got to return them back every time. What is the good of sending me them cheques. I can't change them. I don't want no more them cheques...I have been to our Magistrate and gave him the cheque and told him the trouble and still it's no better. Would you please see what you can do for me".⁸⁰

When faced with non-payment of their military allowances, servicewives were unsure as to whom they should appeal for help. The system of distribution was vague at best. In outport communities, magistrates and local constabularies were usually used by the Department of Public Health and Welfare to verify dependency and investigate claims.⁸¹ Yet many wives, traditionally accustomed to appealing to the Church in matters of welfare, channeled their requests for information through rather confused clergymen.⁸² The Department of Public Health and Welfare blamed the Department of Defence for not properly informing recruits as to the procedures governing dependents' allowances:

It is suggested to the Department of Defence that men recruited for service with

⁸⁰ "Mrs. Mary K., St. Fintan's, to Recruiting Officer, St. John's", 26 December 1941, PRC #35, Box 104, File 26, PANL.

⁸¹ "Secretary for Defence to Mrs. __, Cox's Cove", 8 July 1942, PRC #35, Box 36, File 35, PANL; "Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare to Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 21 July 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 43, File 3, PANL.

⁸² "The Rectory, Channel, to Director of Recruiting, St. John's", 25 September 1941, PRC #35, Box 94, File 59, PANL; "The Rectory, Corner Brook, to Colonel Commanding the Newfoundland Regiment", 6 October 1943, PRC #35, Box 47, File 107, PANL.

the various overseas Forces are not sufficiently informed of the regulations governing entitlement to dependents' allowances...There have from time to time come to our attention cases of genuine need amongst dependents of members of the Forces and in respect of whom no arrangement was made at the time of enlistment. A considerable number of unreported cases of this kind must exist. It is rather a pity that such developments should occur at all. These would be obviated almost entirely if the men concerned were informed as to the method of protecting their dependents against want.⁸³

If servicemen were perplexed by allowance procedures and eligibility requirements, then their wives were literally mystified. "I had a letter from my husband...telling me that he had signed more paper concerning my allowance", a wife vaguely explained to the Secretary for Defence, "...I haven't heard anything about it since or neither have I received any money. What do you suppose I'm going to live on afterall".⁸⁴

Unaccustomed to the formality and stringency of allowance procedures, servicewives were left to negotiate an obstacle course of bureaucratic regulations and "red tape".

Complications immediately emerged from military regulations which required the presentation of marriage certificates and birth certificates for each dependent child before family allowances would be issued. Directives from the Department of Home Affairs warned that "it is essential that applicants produce their marriage certificate

⁸³ "Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 7 July 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 50, File 19, PANL; also see "Redress of Service Grievance", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 16 January 1943, 7.

⁸⁴ "Mrs. __, Corner Brook, to Secretary for Defence", 23 March 1942, PRC #35, Box 79, File 73, PANL; the prevalence of spelling and punctuation errors in servicewives' correspondence made their identification in the text confusing and problematic. Thus, the errors are presented as they appear in the documents, unaltered and unidentified.

and the birth certificates of their children... in no case should men be accepted or sent to St. John's without them".⁸⁵ As such slips of paper were easily misplaced, a barrage of requests for marriage and birth certificates descended upon the Department of Public Health and Welfare, which also counted among its many responsibilities the governing of the registrations of births, marriages and deaths.⁸⁶ The officer in charge of fielding these requests complained:

Since the outbreak of war the demand for birth certificates has increased enormously and the revenue in July last was the highest in any month since I have been attached to this branch. For the past three years we have been co-operating with the military authorities both here and in Canada in searching our records and supplying proofs of age and marriage for men in the services and for their dependents. Your two clerks have been and still are fully occupied with this type of work exclusively...The work of searching being continuous it has been found impossible to give any time to the compilation of vital statistics.⁸⁷

The search for such certificates was often frustrated by the laggardly manner with which many clergymen accepted their role as registering officers in Newfoundland. Parents,

⁸⁵ "Department of Home Affairs Memorandum", 21 October 1939, GN 13/1/B, Box 344, File 6, PANL; "Director of Recruiting to Mrs. __", 13 May 1941, PRC #35, Box 113, File 48, PANL; as well, "a certificate from a responsible authority that Wife and children are living" was also required before marriage allowances would be issued. "Assistant Director of Recruiting to Magistrate", 11 April 1940, GN 13/1, Box 344, File 6, PANL.

⁸⁶ Typical of such urgent requests for marriage and birth certificates was that of one servicewife from Bonavista Bay: "I am in need of my Marriage Certificate, and am wondering if you could get same and please send me. My husband is in the "Militia" and I can't get any money before I gets a copy of my marriage certificate. I had a one and I moved into a nother home and I mislaid it...trusting you will do all you can and as quick as posible", 19 March 1942, PRC #35, Box 15, PANL.

⁸⁷ "Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Comptroller and Auditor General", 19 October 1942, GN 38, S6-1-3, File 30, PANL.

too, were often lax in notifying the proper authorities regarding new births.⁸⁸ Even more frustrating was the job of acquiring dependents' allowances for the adopted children of servicemen. Until 1940 there was no adoption legislation in Newfoundland and yet military regulations demanded proof that a child had been statutorily adopted before allowances would be paid. Officials recognized that "considerable hardship" was being caused in such cases but the War Office could "make no exception to the normal rule".⁸⁹ Such "normal rules", rigid and inflexible as they were, did not take into consideration the rather primitive and informal bureaucracy which existed in Newfoundland at this time.

The restricted system of government and ever-fluctuating economy in Newfoundland necessitated a pared down approach to government services. Appeals for any expansion of these responsibilities were consequently viewed with some suspicion within the Commission. When the Boy Scouts' Association in St. John's requested a list of poor families of servicemen in an effort to supply them with toys for Christmas, the Government could only respond that "...we do not keep any record of the state of the families of men overseas...however, I feel if you were to ask Mrs. A.C. Holmes of the [Women's Patriotic Association], Caribou Hut she may be able to help you as many wives and mothers of boys in poor circumstances make appeals to her".⁹⁰ Clearly, the

⁸⁸ "Ibid."

⁸⁹ "Paymaster, RA Recruiting Party, to Minister of Justice", 23 July 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 12, PANL; Pope, "The Welfare Revolution in Newfoundland", 259.

⁹⁰ "Secretary for Defence to General Secretary, Boy Scouts' Association, St. John's", 26 November 1941, PRC #35, Box 36, File 35, PANL.

Commission was indicating that although it had accepted responsibility for the distribution of dependents' allowance payments, it had not assumed responsibility for the general welfare of servicemen's families. Throughout its term of administration, the Commission remained characteristically opposed to further financial commitment in schemes of social reform and routinely directed welfare-related problems to voluntary organizations. Indirectly, however, the Government was forced to maintain a hand in service families' general welfare through sporadic and highly secretive financial contributions to the voluntary organizations which attempted to meet these families' desperate requests for aid.

The organization most associated with service families' welfare during the wartime period was the Newfoundland Patriotic Association. Almost immediately upon the declaration of war in 1939, members of the Great War Veterans' Association and the Board of Trade had begun petitioning the Government to establish a committee which could act as a "connecting link" between the Commission of Government and Newfoundland people in the country's preparations for war. The Commissioners balked at the suggestion that they should be bound to consult such a committee before taking executive action in connection with Newfoundland's war effort and rumors began to circulate that the Commissioners were "killing the formation of this organization".⁹¹ Anxious to make a viable contribution to Britain's war effort and knowing that this was

⁹¹ "Commissioner for Justice to Governor of Newfoundland", 6 February 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 36, File 25, PANL.

impossible without the cooperation of the people, the Commissioners quickly regrouped and actively encouraged the formation of such a consulting committee through the reformation of the Newfoundland Patriotic Association. The understanding was made clear, however, that the constitutional position of the government prohibited prior consultation with the Association in decisions regarding the war effort. Informally, the Commissioners might consult any committee created by the Association but they were not "honour-bound" to do so.⁹²

The Newfoundland Patriotic Association which was reconstructed in 1940 was a pale reflection of the Patriotic Association which had been originally established during the First World War. In 1914, the N.P.A. had been organized in an effort to remove party politics from the war effort and had taken over the entire administration of the manpower going overseas, a mammoth endeavor which had been financed solely through Newfoundland funds.⁹³ In 1940, the economic and political situation had changed completely in Newfoundland and the Association was now relegated to "assist in aiding and caring for all residents of Newfoundland who enlist in the armed forces", as

⁹² "Memorandum Re Proposed Formation of Patriotic Association", 15 January 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 36, File 25, PANL; "Memorandum for Commission from Commissioner for Justice", 7 February 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 36, File 25, PANL; "Commissioner for Justice to Colonel Outerbridge", 6 February 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 36, File 25, PANL.

⁹³ "Patriotic Association Formed", 27 February 1940, GN 1/3/A, Box 118, File 36, PANL; Patricia Ruth O'Brien, "The Newfoundland Patriotic Association: The Administration of the War Effort, 1914-1918" (Master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1981).

well as “their wives, children and other dependents”.⁹⁴ Essentially, the N.P.A. attended to the social welfare problems of Newfoundland servicemen and their dependents, responsibilities with which the Commission did not want to become associated. Yet through the Compassionate Allowance Committee which was organized to administer a system of supplementary grants for servicemen's dependents, the Association did manage to maintain a relatively close relationship with the Department of Public Health and Welfare.⁹⁵ The Chairman of the N.P.A. Finance Committee assured the respective Commissioner that he would maintain:

...very close liaison with you and your department before we make any grants from the Patriotic Association. I think that you will agree that we should pool all the information possible and that the Finance Committee and the Compassionate Allowance Committee, which is a sub committee of the Finance Committee, should have very close liaison with you and your department.⁹⁶

Obviously jockeying for a position of influence within the Government, the N.P.A. did become a valuable tool for the Commission in relation to the often vexing problem of dependents' welfare. Embarrassing reports of destitute service families were regularly passed off to the Compassionate Allowance Committee, whose system of supplementary

⁹⁴ “Articles of Constitution and Bye-Laws of the Newfoundland Patriotic Association”, 18 April 1940, The Evening Telegram Ltd., MG 632, PANL.

⁹⁵ “N.P.A. Treasurer to Department of Public Health and Welfare”, 17 February 1944 and 30 August 1944, MG 632, Compassionate Allowance Committee Reports, 1944, PANL; “Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare to Secretary Pensions Committee, N.P.A.”, 26 March 1941, MG 632, Compassionate Allowance Committee Reports, 1941, PANL.

⁹⁶ “Chairman N.P.A. Finance Committee to Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare”, 11 January 1944, MG 632, Treasurers Report, 1944, PANL.

grants provided a cushion against the Government's rather erratic administration of family allowances.⁹⁷

The system of supplementary grants organized by the Compassionate Allowance Committee soon became the Association's largest expenditure and the work with which it was most closely associated. The distribution of compassionate grants grew steadily throughout the war period from \$1,129 in 1941 to over \$37,000 annually by the war's end.⁹⁸ Funding for this work was raised entirely through voluntary contributions and the public support that the Association elicited was truly astounding. Under the dynamic leadership of F.M. O'Leary, a veteran of the First World War and Finance Committee Chairman, nearly \$300,000 was raised through a variety of public appeals during the war.⁹⁹ The success of these fund-raising programs relied heavily on publicity in newspapers and through the daily fifteen-minute radio program, "The

⁹⁷ "Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare to Secretary Pensions Committee, N.P.A.", 26 March 1941, MG 632, PANL; "Lady Walwyn to President", 5 April 1943, MG 635, Box 6, File 8, PANL; "Report of the Compassionate Allowance Committee", 18 January 1945, MG 632, PANL; "Chief Clerk to C.J. Ellis, Secretary N.P.A.", 13 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 95, File 46, PANL.

⁹⁸ In 1941, the N.P.A. Finance Committee noted that "up to the present time the Compassionate Allowance Committee is the largest spending committee. This, of course, is only to be expected and this will probably continue until that time when those serving in the Navy, Army, Air Force and Mercantile Marine return to civil life", 30 September 1941, MG 632, PANL; "Compassionate Allowances to February 1946", MG 632, PANL.

⁹⁹ Nicholson, *More Fighting Newfoundlanders*, 542; "Yearly Contributions to the Newfoundland Patriotic Association", February 1940 to February 1946", MG 632, PANL.

Barrelman”, sponsored by the firm of F.M.O’Leary Ltd. The original Barrelman, Joseph R. Smallwood, and later his replacement, Michael F. Harrington, effectively presented the pathetic straits of servicemen’s dependents so as to enlist public sympathy. The cost, however, was probably alienation of many needy servicewives whose pride prevented them from appealing for such public charity.¹⁰⁰

While the N.P.A. focused its efforts on raising funds for the financial relief of servicemen’s dependents, the Women’s Patriotic Association took a more “hands-on” approach to service families’ welfare. Unwilling or unable to contribute to the war effort through the N.P.A., a group of prominent women in St. John’s had originally established the W.P.A. in 1914 to coordinate and direct women’s voluntary activities in the First World War.¹⁰¹ The Association had been reorganized with the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 and although primarily concerned with the welfare of servicemen stationed in Newfoundland, the Association also created a Visiting Committee which monitored the general welfare of servicewives and other dependents through a program of routine visits and unofficial counseling.¹⁰² Of the various committees which made up the Women’s Patriotic Association, the Visiting Committee was most plagued by a lack of voluntary

¹⁰⁰ G.W.L. Nicholson, More Fighting Newfoundlanders, 542; “Thank You for Your Offering”, MG 632, PANL.

¹⁰¹ Gale Denise Warren, “The Patriotic Association of the Women of Newfoundland, 1914-1918”, The Newfoundland Quarterly, 92, 1 (Summer 1998), 23-32.

¹⁰² Barbara Doran, “Women’s War Efforts - First and Second World Wars in the Patriotic Association of Newfoundland” (Unpublished paper, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1982).

support. Listening patiently to the domestic problems of lonely servicewives apparently could not compete with the more glorified work available in servicemen's canteens and hostels. Despite repeated attempts to impress upon women the importance of visiting servicemen's dependents, the committee was never able to generate sufficient voluntary support so as to become truly effective.¹⁰³ In 1943, the annual report of the committee addressed this growing indifference:

As Convener of the Visiting Committee I want to say that I know that this has taken second place with many of the visitors, a few faithful ones continue to visit, but so many have taken on new war work which they consider more important, but I would like to assure these people that they are wrong. The ladies who promised at the beginning of the war to do this work should realize that their efforts were not in vain, but greatly appreciated...These are not very pleasant visits to make, but when people are in trouble I think they appreciate others feeling for them.¹⁰⁴

Certainly, Frances B. Holmes, Convener of the Visiting Committee, did recognize the importance of keeping servicewives comfortable and happy while their husbands defended the Empire overseas. Through the Visitors' Room at the Caribou Hut hostel, she acted as a trouble-shooter to whom military officials and servicemen could direct their concerns regarding dependents' welfare-related problems in Newfoundland.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ "Second, Fourth and Fifth Annual Reports of the Women's Patriotic Association", MG 635, Box 2, PANL; "Report of Convener of Visiting", 1941, MG 635, Box 4, PANL; "Minutes of the Executive Committee, Women's Patriotic Association", 20 September 1941 and 3 September 1942, MG 635, Box 4, PANL.

¹⁰⁴ "Fourth Annual Report of the Women's Patriotic Association", 1943, MG 635, Box 2, PANL.

¹⁰⁵ "Fourth and Fifth Annual Reports of the Women's Patriotic Association", MG 635, Box 2, PANL.

She distributed clothing and shoes to needy service families, helped many wives locate housing in crowded wartime St. John's, and generally attempted to relieve dependents' hardships whenever they were brought to her attention.¹⁰⁶ But this system of aid was haphazard and usually overlapped with the relief work of other patriotic associations. In 1941, for example, the Visiting Committee received a government grant to help obtain coal for needy service families but these efforts coincided with similar services offered by the Newfoundland Patriotic Association and the Kinsmen's Club.¹⁰⁷ As there were no clear boundaries between the responsibilities and services of the various patriotic organizations, numerous incidents occurred in which a wife received aid from two organizations for the same problem or, conversely, in which she received nothing while her request was directed and redirected through the machinery of various patriotic organizations.¹⁰⁸

The Commissioners were not about to step in to systemize procedures, however, as any connection on their part might be perceived as setting a precedent for

¹⁰⁶ "Minutes of the Executive Committee, Women's Patriotic Association", 16 March 1940, MG 635, Box 6, PANL; "Secretary's Report, Women's Patriotic Association", 2 July 1940, MG 635, Box 6, PANL; "Sixth Annual Report of the Women's Patriotic Association", MG 635, Box 2, PANL.

¹⁰⁷ "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Hon. Secretary Women's Patriotic Association", 28 October 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 25, File 24, PANL; "Minutes of the Executive Committee, Women's Patriotic Association", 18 October 1941, MG 635, Box 6, PANL.

¹⁰⁸ "Women's Patriotic Association Letters, 1943", MG 635, Box 6, File 8, PANL; "Minutes of the Executive Committee of the W.P.A.", 18 October 1941, MG 635, Box 6, PANL.

further governmental obligation in issues of social reform.¹⁰⁹ When faced with the problem of an increasing number of recruits being sent overseas with inadequate outerwear, for example, the Government agreed to entrust a small fund for such expenditures to Mrs. Holmes of the W.P.A.. The Commissioners explained that Mrs. Holmes, “pledged to secrecy,...would undertake to produce the necessary vouchers for expenditure but the recruit would be unaware that the fund came from the Treasury and there would be no more extravagance than if she were doing as she has done in the past, appealing to friends for help in this direction”.¹¹⁰ Similar covert tactics were used to establish the W.P.A.’s fund to help needy servicewives procure coal during the winter months. In October 1941, the Commissioner for Justice and Defence addressed the “pressing needs” of servicemen’s wives and families in an appeal to the Commissioner for Finance:

You will, I feel sure appreciate that it is impossible, especially in the winter time, for these women to exist in anything but the direst poverty upon the meager allowances which they receive. They are paid in depreciated sterling and are living in a very high tariff country, and it seems clear to me that we will have to

¹⁰⁹ In 1935, the Commission was very concerned that word would leak out that they were helping some relief recipients pay their rent. The Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare wrote to the Commissioner for Justice: “[Y]ou know how injudicious it would be to publish to the world that we are paying rent. Every landlord in the City would be throwing his tenants out, bag and baggage... We simply cannot let any person know we are doing even this much”, 18 February 1935, GN 13/1/B, Box 166, File 70, PANL.

¹¹⁰ “Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Commissioner for Finance”, 20 September 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 36, File 25, PANL.

do something to assist them.¹¹¹

Five hundred dollars was eventually placed in a fund for this purpose, to be disbursed at the discretion of Mrs. Holmes. She assured the Commissioners that the fuel grants would go only “to the right and most deserving families” and, more than true to her word, she was able to return over three hundred unexpended dollars from this fund back to the Commission at the end of the winter.¹¹² Strident investigative procedures were developed by both the W.P.A. and N.P.A. during the course of the war to check the authenticity of servicewives’ claims of destitution.¹¹³ As in the general distribution of charity to the poor, servicewives had to prove that they were not only in need, but “deserving” of assistance, implying faithful wives, devoted mothers, and conscientious housekeepers.¹¹⁴ A variety of social controls were entrenched in most volunteer agencies’ systems for assistance.

Despite the best efforts of the N.P.A. and W.P.A., the majority of

¹¹¹ “Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Commissioner for Finance”, 22 October 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 25, File 24, PANL.

¹¹² “Commissioner for Finance to Commissioner for Justice and Defence”, 27 October 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 25, File 24, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Secretary for Finance”, 12 October 1942, PRC#35, Box 3, File 25, PANL; “Frances Holmes, W.P.A., to Commissioner for Justice and Defence”, 10 October 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 34, File 55, PANL.

¹¹³ “Secretary of the Compassionate Allowance Committee, N.P.A., to Chairman of the Finance Committee”, 28 May 1942, MG 632, PANL.

¹¹⁴ The Commission of Government attempted always to secure stricter supervision over those in receipt of government relief. Neary, Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 54.

servicewives were unaware or unwilling to appeal for such aid and continued to live on the brink of economic collapse, many in destitute conditions. The British rates of pay were far lower than those paid in the Canadian and Australian services and set without consideration for the high cost of living that existed in Newfoundland at the time. In 1940, for example, a Newfoundland gunner received approximately fifty cents a day in contrast to a Canadian private's pay of \$1.35 and an Australian private's pay of \$1.92.¹¹⁵ At the same time, the cost of living in Newfoundland was estimated as rising two-thirds between 1939 and 1946, a figure which was described as actually underestimating the "true increases in prices".¹¹⁶ One Newfoundland seaman complained that the cost of the rent of one furnished room occupied by his wife was \$20 per month, "whilst coal is \$24 per ton, and food is also much dearer than in the United Kingdom".¹¹⁷ Such necessities had to be purchased from a monthly allowance which ranged from approximately \$22 for a Newfoundland wife without children, up to \$40 for a mother of four. The comparable

¹¹⁵ "Comparative Rates of Pay and Allowances in Various Dominion Forces", 1940, GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL.

¹¹⁶ The Governor of Newfoundland reported in July 1946 that "the official Cost of Living Index at present shows an increase compared with 1939 of 63%, though, as your Lordship is aware, the view has been expressed in the recent Report on the Financial and Economic Position of Newfoundland that this understates the true increase in prices", "Governor of Newfoundland to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", 29 July 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 119, File 3, PANL; also see Jane Lewis and Mark Shrimpton, "Policymaking in Newfoundland during the 1940's: The Case of the St. John's Housing Corporation", *The Canadian Historical Review*, 65, 2 (1984), 235.

¹¹⁷ "Commanding Officer of H.M.S. Ferret to Commodore Commanding Londonderry Escort Force", 26 February 1943, PRC #35, Box 105, File 22, PANL.

Canadian allowance rates averaged out to be a little over \$50 a month for a wife only, to \$95 for a wife and four children.¹¹⁸ A disgruntled Newfoundland officer complained:

After considering the whole affair and of course realizing that there was a war going on and we all had to do our share I carried on and tried to do my duty as best I could in spite of the fact that the difference in my pay with the Canadian's and the Newfoundlanders was a loss of one dollar a day, together with a loss of the same amount in my wife's Allowance, in other words, in order to fight in the War it was costing me and my family a loss of two dollars per day...¹¹⁹

Resentment grew in regard to the growing gap between the rates paid to servicemen of the various Dominions and their perceived value among the Empire's forces.¹²⁰

Newfoundland servicemen were described as feeling "a sense of being badly used in contrast to their fellows in other services, and at home, in civil life".¹²¹ The economic position of their families appeared to lag ever further behind those of other service families and especially the civilian population.

Since 1940, the Great War Veteran's Association had been lobbying for increases in pay for the men serving overseas and their dependents to bring them to the standard of other Dominion forces. The Commission of Government consistently

¹¹⁸ "Rates of Family Allowances Plus Compulsory Allotment Applicable to Gunners Only with Effect from 4-11-1940", GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 22, PANL.

¹¹⁹ "Serviceman to Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom", 21 March 1946, PRC#35, Box 16, File 94, PANL.

¹²⁰ "Trinity Branch of the Great War Veterans' Association to Secretary G.W.V.A.", 16 March 1940, GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL; "Leave Pay for Newfoundland Sailors, Soldiers and Air Crew", GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL.

¹²¹ "Memorandum of Meeting Held to Discuss Newfoundland Ratings", 11 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 4, File 24, PANL.

countered, however, that Newfoundlanders were not in a comparable political position:

There is one vital difference in our position as compared with the position of the other Dominions. These larger countries are carrying their own financial war burden in its entirety and the burden of all their civil services. They are today in the same position in which Newfoundland was during 1914-18. That we are not now in that position may be considered unfortunate, but it must be realized as the most important factor governing questions of finance.¹²²

An increase or supplement to Newfoundlanders' rates of pay would necessarily have to come from either the British Government or increased taxation within Newfoundland.

The Commissioners argued that they could hardly ask the British taxpayers to "pay over twice as much to the boys of Newfoundland as is being paid to their own sons who will be training in England and fighting side by side with them".¹²³ Conversely, the Commissioners argued that Newfoundland's small and poor population was already carrying as much taxation as it could reasonably bear and, if this was not the case, then surely it was the colony's first duty to reduce the demand upon the British taxpayer in regard to Newfoundland's grant-in-aid.¹²⁴ It was a difficult argument to attack, especially by a people so perceivably beholden to another.

But as economic conditions continued to improve in Newfoundland, the

¹²² "Leave Pay for Newfoundland Sailors, Soldiers and Air Crew", GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL.

¹²³ "Ibid."

¹²⁴ "Ibid."; the term "grants-in-aid" referred to the sums paid over to Newfoundland by Britain to help finance the administration of government, social services and reconstruction programs. Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World*, 30-31.

disadvantaged position of service families became harder to ignore. By 1942, the island was experiencing a period of unprecedented prosperity due to the local military construction boom. As foreign dollars poured into the region, elevating Newfoundlanders' incomes and the cost of living, servicewives found it increasingly difficult to survive on their meager military allowances which were usually paid in depreciated British sterling.¹²⁵ The commanding officer of the Newfoundland Militia described the financial predicament of numerous service families:

May I draw your attention to the deplorable conditions in which some of the wives and children of our married men are living. Our Medical Officer has made some investigation into this and finds that where a soldier is maintaining a domicile his pay and allowances are far from being sufficient to maintain his family and can furnish them with only practically bare necessities. As you know, the prices of accommodation, food and other supplies in St. John's have risen very fast and high, and I frankly cannot see how a soldier can maintain his family here, unless they live with parents.¹²⁶

In the spring of 1942, the Great War Veterans' Association once again initiated a movement for an increase in servicemen's rates of pay and allowances.¹²⁷ In this instance, however, besides publishing its views in the press, the Association also

¹²⁵ "Brief submitted by Committee to Discuss Whole Question of Pensions, Separation Allowances and Kindred Matters", GN 38, S6-2-1, File 1B, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 10 January 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL.

¹²⁶ "Commanding Officer Newfoundland Militia to Secretary for Defence", 29 April 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL.

¹²⁷ "Memorandum for Commission", 15 April 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 58, File 57, PANL.

enlisted the support of local businesses and labour unions from across the country.¹²⁸

Along with representatives from associations like the Bay of Islands Businessmen's Association, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and the Newfoundland Labourers' Union, the general manager of Bowater's Pulp and Paper Mills petitioned the Government to increase servicemen's rates of pay by instituting a special tax on all persons in the country based on their earnings: "There is no doubt, as far as the people in Corner Brook are concerned they want to do something for the men who volunteered, and it does seem to me that a small tax, based on earnings, is the easiest way to settle this somewhat controversial question".¹²⁹ The request seemed reasonable as it simply sought to disseminate the economic prosperity which the majority of Newfoundlanders were now enjoying. Under the pseudonym "Fair Play", a letter to the editor of The Daily News similarly asserted:

There is one urgent matter that evidently escaped the attention of the government and that is an increase for our boys fighting for us 'on the other side of the water'. With our overflowing revenue it is indeed regrettable that the overdue recognition of their services has been let pass and that their pay has not been increased at least six pence per day. Six pence per day will mean quite a lot in a year, possibly \$200,000, but when you consider that this amount is often collected in a day at the Customs House, there does not appear to be any justifiable reason for further delay in the bettering of the condition of our young men 'at the front'.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ "Memorandum for Commission", 15 April 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 58, File 57, PANL.

¹²⁹ "Bowater's Newfoundland Pulp and Paper Mills Limited to the Secretary to the Commission of Government", 2 April 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 58, File 57, PANL.

¹³⁰ "Letter to the Editor", The Daily News, 6 January 1942, 4.

The Commission was concerned with the increasing publicity surrounding the condition of Newfoundland service families but did not feel a pay increase justified at this time as the presence of “grumblers” was always to be expected.¹³¹ “It is natural that the people of Newfoundland, who are passing through a period of unusual prosperity, should be anxious to secure generous treatment for their sons overseas”, the Commissioner for Justice and Defence explained, “but I am afraid that the true circumstances are not yet fully understood”.¹³² The “true circumstances” to which Mr. Emerson referred was the fact that Newfoundland’s economic future remained uncertain. Although the island was currently experiencing an unprecedented level of revenue, there was no guarantee that this trend would continue after the war. In fact, the Commissioners were quite sure that it would not.¹³³ As the Government’s overriding directive had always been *long-term economic recovery and stability for Newfoundland*, it remained committed to a policy of increased taxation and nominal spending so as to accumulate the surpluses it predicted Newfoundland would need for reconstruction in the post-war

¹³¹ “Memorandum for Commission”, 15 April 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 58, File 57, PANL.

¹³² “Minutes of the Department of Public Health and Welfare”, GN 38, S6-1-4, File 2, PANL.

¹³³ The Commissioner for Justice and Defence wrote in 1942: “...[I]t is an error to assume that the present unprecedented revenue is bound to continue. It may possibly do so but there is reason to believe that at a fairly early date the extraordinarily high earning power of our people created by military construction projects will begin to decline and will ultimately fall to a comparatively low figure”, 24 April 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 58, File 57, PANL.

period.¹³⁴ Despite growing agitation, the Commissioners assured the War Office that they would stand firm in their resistance to service pay increases until “the time arrives for recruiting to begin again”.¹³⁵

By June 1942, the British Government was pressing the Commission to launch another mass recruitment drive and the public’s demands for an increase in the rates of servicemen’s pay and family allowances finally had to be met head on.¹³⁶ The “steady shrinkage in strength” of the 59th (Newfoundland) Heavy Regiment had become an increasing concern for the Dominions Office. They reported that no new recruits had arrived from Newfoundland since November 1941 and warned that the “Newfoundland character of the Regiment” was now in serious jeopardy.¹³⁷ The Commissioners explained that until the agitation for service pay increases subsided and the amount of

¹³⁴ Harry Cuff, “Political Developments in Newfoundland”, 70-71.

¹³⁵ “Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs”, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL.

¹³⁶ “Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs”, 19 June 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL; of course, the financial condition of service families had always been a significant concern to recruiting authorities. A telegram from the Governor to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in March 1941 warned: “Matter urgent. Rendell reports bad effect on recruiting in addition to families demanding dole which is very undesirable”, GN 13/1/B, Box 26, File 20, PANL ; also in that year, the Director of Recruiting complained: “I am sure that you will realize my anxiety so that recruiting, which is already sufficiently difficult, should not be made more so by the fact that wives who would naturally be dissatisfied were not being paid family allowance”, 18 January 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 26, File 20, PANL.

¹³⁷ “Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland”, 2 June 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL.

work at the Canadian and American bases diminished, intensive recruiting drives would meet with little success.¹³⁸ But the Dominions Office was determined to prevent further “dilution” of the 59th and offered to send the Commanding Officer of the Regiment, Colonel J.W. Nelson, to Newfoundland to “get in personal touch with relatives of members of the Regiments” in an attempt to quell public agitation and create a more favorable atmosphere for recruiting.¹³⁹ The Commissioners countered that such a visit at this time would serve only to stimulate agitation:

*We feel that it is most important that before Nelson starts for Newfoundland we should explain more fully that the recruiting problem is now at a delicate stage. The agitation to which we referred in our telegram No. 202 for increased pay and for pensions and post war benefits equal to those of the Canadians is very strong at the present time and those behind it would know how to turn Nelson’s visit to their advantage by intruding this subject of pay, pensions, etc., on every possible occasion...It is for this reason that we think it would be much better for Nelson to postpone his visit.*¹⁴⁰

Despite the Commission’s concerns, the pseudo public relations mission continued according to plan in August 1942. Nelson’s interviews with the families of over four hundred men were reported to have been highly effective in “dispelling most, if

¹³⁸ “Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs”, 5 June 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL.

¹³⁹ “Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland”, 11 June 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL.

¹⁴⁰ “Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs”, 19 June 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL.

not all, of the ill-founded statements as to pay, allowance and conditions of our forces".¹⁴¹ He maintained that of all the relatives he had met, only four had approached him with complaints - that is complaints other than those related to allowance increases.¹⁴² While avoiding comment on the actual number of dependents who had broached him with financial concerns, Nelson did concede that the rates for dependents' allowances were insufficient to meet the high cost of living in Newfoundland. He strongly recommended the institution of some form of supplementary grant for families of this region.¹⁴³

In September 1942, the War Office announced an increase in the rates of dependents' allowances for all British troops but the paltry sum would do little to relieve the particular economic hardships of Newfoundland service families. Anxious to stem the rising tide of public resentment in regard to service pay increases, the Commission reported back to the Dominions Office that in their opinion "the British increases to

¹⁴¹ "Report on Visit to Newfoundland", 25 August 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL.

¹⁴² "Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL.

¹⁴³ In August 1942, Colonel Nelson reported that "the cost of living in St. John's is very very high and I really cannot understand how some families manage to exist", "Memorandum for Commission", 27 August 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL; "Report on Visit to Newfoundland", 25 August 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL; "Telegram from Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", 31 August 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL; "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Commissioner for Finance", 6 May 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 43, File 15, PANL.

wives and children were if anything on the small side".¹⁴⁴ The Commissioners consequently requested approval to announce their own additional grant of 30 cents per diem for wives and 10 cents per diem for children of Newfoundland servicemen.¹⁴⁵ The Government was eligible to redeem this expense through the War Service Grants Department of the War Office but, in the interests of the "communal war effort", offered to absorb the expense themselves through the treasury surpluses they had heretofore accumulated of over \$11,000,000. "[The grant] will be earmarked out of surplus", the Governor explained, "...Commission is fully convinced that nothing less than concessions stated will satisfy growing public demand".¹⁴⁶

Aside from recruiting concerns, the Commission's decision to supplement dependents' allowances had also emerged from growing recognition of the influence that service families' financial problems exerted on military morale and efficiency. It had become increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that domestic worries distracted and impeded the effectiveness of soldiers, sailors and airmen fighting overseas. The

¹⁴⁴ "Telegram to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL.

¹⁴⁵ "Telegram to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL; "Pay and Allowance Increase Announced", 15 September 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL; "Memorandum for Commission", 21 September 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL.

¹⁴⁶ "Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", 3 July 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL; the \$11,000,000 figure was quoted by the Commissioner for Finance at a meeting of the General Committee on Demobilization, 18 December 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 10, PANL; "Memorandum for Commission", 27 August 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 52, File 11, PANL.

Commissioner for Justice and Defence noted in 1941 that servicemen “are worried with debt and their efficiency cannot be kept up whilst they are in this condition”.¹⁴⁷ In 1942, the Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland warned the Dominions Office that “our men in the Regiments feel very discontented...more particularly, as they are continually receiving letters from their wives and dependents in Newfoundland asking for additional help in view of hardships and the increased cost of living”.¹⁴⁸ And Colonel Nelson similarly described a Newfoundland soldier as “handicapped by having domestic worries... he will never make a soldier until he gets his home worries settled”.¹⁴⁹ Families were instructed to avoid needlessly worrying servicemen about domestic problems as such concerns were “disturbing factors” to their service overseas and consequently “detrimental to the War Effort”.¹⁵⁰ Such connections between service families’ welfare and soldiers’ morale denoted an evolving recognition and tacit appreciation for servicewives’ integral influence at the front.

The office which gradually assumed the role of middle-man between the servicemen overseas and the Newfoundland Government in issues of dependents’ welfare

¹⁴⁷ “Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Commissioner for Finance”, 6 October 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL.

¹⁴⁸ “Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland to Eric Machtig, Dominions Office”, 17 August 1942, PRC #35, Box 3, File 26, PANL.

¹⁴⁹ “Commanding Officer 59th (Newfoundland) Heavy Regiment to Colonel Rendell, Recruiting Office”, 15 December 1942, PRC #35, Box 4, File 16, PANL.

¹⁵⁰ “Commanding Officer H.M.C.S. “Avalon” to Secretary for Defence”, 5 February 1943, PRC#35, Box 98, File 54, PANL.

was the Combined Services Liaison Office for Newfoundland Forces, attached to the Trade Commissioner's Office in London. Besides the enormous job of routing all mail to Newfoundland personnel serving overseas, the office maintained contact with the three Service Ministries and respective unit welfare officers so as to field servicemen's requests for information regarding their families' welfare at home. These responsibilities were meted out to the Officer-in-Charge under the vague job description: "generally takes care of all matters in which he can assist the case of any Newfoundlander".¹⁵¹ Captain Lewis Brooks, a local man who had formerly worked as Secretary of the Newfoundland Fisheries Board, assumed the position of Officer-in-Charge of the Liaison Staff in 1941, a position which he personally considered "a sacred trust".¹⁵² Unfortunately, when the office was established in late 1940, it was difficult to imagine the scope of the responsibilities with which it would eventually be entrusted. While the sorting and routing of mail continued to be one of the most important branches of its responsibilities, the office had to contend with an increasing number of urgent and often rather delicate welfare-related requests. Understaffed and overworked, the office staff admitted that they could follow up on only a small fraction of these problems.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 30 June 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 32, File 100, PANL.

¹⁵² "Ibid."

¹⁵³ "Liaison Office to Dominions Office", 30 June 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 32, File 100, PANL; "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 2 September 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 32, File 100, PANL.

Gradually authorities realized that there existed a pronounced lack of central control in regard to Newfoundland servicemen's welfare-related concerns, reportedly resulting in general confusion and "a tendency to by-pass the proper procedures".¹⁵⁴ The Commission admitted being unsure as to whom they should address such correspondence - the Trade Commissioner's Office or the Liaison Office in London.¹⁵⁵ They also complained that there existed no clear line of communication with which to track the movements of Newfoundland personnel serving overseas.¹⁵⁶ Servicemen were similarly confused as to what official channels were open to them and to whom they should direct their welfare-related concerns.¹⁵⁷ In view of these problems, the 1st (Newfoundland) R.A. Holding Battery was formed in 1944. Among its many functions, the battery was expected to "maintain liaison with the Dominion of Newfoundland Trade Commissioner on domestic problems peculiar to Newfoundland

¹⁵⁴ "Howell Report", 5 January 1944, GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL; "Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland to Commissioner for Justice and Defence", GN 13/1/B, Box 32, File 100, PANL.

¹⁵⁵ "Memorandum for Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 18 June 1941, GN 13/1, Box 252, File 1, PANL; "Memorandum for Commission", 5 January 1944, GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL.

¹⁵⁶ "Secretary for Defence to Mr. Michael J. Gillis", 26 January 1944, PRC #35, Box 105, File 120, PANL.

¹⁵⁷ "Redress of Service Grievance", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 16 January 1943, 7.

personnel, such as discharges, compassionate cases etc.”¹⁵⁸ Authorities anticipated that these responsibilities would form a large part of the work of this division. It was also suggested that as far as possible, the battery should be officered and manned by Newfoundland personnel who would presumably possess greater sympathy and understanding for the particular domestic problems of Newfoundland servicemen.¹⁵⁹

This reorganization mirrored a similar trend which had begun in the Canadian military in 1943. In that year the “Personal Relations Branch” of the Special Services Corps had been established to coordinate all enquiries and investigations of Canadian servicemen’s family problems in an effort to eliminate the duplication, delays and resulting anxieties which were so much a part of the former system. The new division was expected to accelerate the whole process surrounding servicemen’s domestic enquiries and thus “improve the general level of morale, efficiency, and dependability among the Canadian Forces”.¹⁶⁰ The division’s establishment marked a new level of state intervention into issues affecting dependents’ welfare. As was the case in Newfoundland, Canadian authorities were gradually forced to accept responsibility for the general well-being of servicemen’s families, despite the precedent this was inevitably setting for the rest of society. The development foreshadowed the federal government’s increasing

¹⁵⁸ “Confidential - 1st (Newfoundland) R.A. Holding Battery”, 17 June 1944, GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL.

¹⁵⁹ “Howell Report”, 5 January 1944, GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL.

¹⁶⁰ Ling, “Servicewives in Wartime Halifax”, 53-55.

involvement in socialized programs, such as employment insurance and mothers' allowances.

An important part of this debate over the State's responsibility for service families' welfare, was the question of liability for their medical expenses. Service pay, barely able to meet the costs of necessities in wartime Newfoundland, rarely allowed a servicewife to save for sudden medical expenses. Assistance for such an unexpected "calamity" was provided under the Army Council's Allowance Regulations but these stipulated that servicewives and children were to be referred to "military hospitals".¹⁶¹ As there were no British military hospitals in Newfoundland at this time, such cases were vaguely addressed within paragraph 74 of the regulations referring to "persons entitled to treatment in a military hospital being for special reasons treated at public cost in a civil hospital".¹⁶² But who would ultimately absorb the expense for the treatment of wives in civilian hospitals? Confusion persisted as to the War Office's actual liability, but in the interim the Commission agreed to "provide hospital and other treatment as required in order to avoid developments that may be unpleasant to all concerned if such cases are not

¹⁶¹ A.T. Howell, the Commanding Officer of the Newfoundland Militia, explained in a letter to the Secretary for Defence: "...[I]t is a calamity for a man of this unit to be faced with medical and hospital expenses for medical attention for his dependents", 10 March 1942, PRC #35, Box 5, File 11, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Secretary for Public Health and Welfare", 21 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 5, File 11, PANL; "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare", 13 March 1942, PRC #35, Box 5, File 11, PANL; "Major A. T. Howell to Secretary for Defence", 10 March 1942, PRC #35, Box 5, File 11, PANL.

¹⁶² "Secretary for Defence to Secretary for Public Health and Welfare", 21 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 110, File 117, PANL.

treated promptly and satisfactorily".¹⁶³ The issue at stake was essentially whether service families' medical expenses were a civilian or military charge. Proximity to the problem ultimately forced the Commission to accept responsibility so as to avoid "unpleasant" complications.

As it had established in its distribution of service families' allowances, the Commission approached its responsibility for their medical expenses in essentially the same manner as it did for relief recipients. Wives and children of service personnel were to make "prior application" to the Department of Public Health and Welfare for any potential medical treatment. The department would then send a district nurse to the families' home to assess the case and determine if the patient truly required hospital services. If this proved to be so, the department would then refer the patient to the government-run General Hospital in St. John's which would ensure "a very large saving of money in comparison with what would have to be paid were the patient admitted and treated under auspices other than those of this Department itself".¹⁶⁴ The Secretary for

¹⁶³ "Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Defence", 13 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 5, File 11, PANL; among numerous requests for clearer instructions, the Secretary for Defence asked the Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland to "refer this matter to the proper Department of the War Office and ask for instructions as to whether this and similar cases can be dealt with under Allowance Regulations, Paras. 73 and 74 - the charges to be recovered from the War Office. If such cases should be handled at public expense (British funds) should it be under the auspices of the Department of Public Health and Welfare? A brief reply by cable would be appreciated when you have received a ruling", 10 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 5, File 11, PANL.

¹⁶⁴ "Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Defence" 19 May 1942, PRC #35, Box 11, File 47, PANL.

Public Health and Welfare further explained:

Where this Department has to take responsibility for the payment of bills on such accounts it requires that arrangements for medical services or for hospital treatment should be made by or through its own officials...if your own officer makes the hospital arrangements, some patients will insist upon admission to outside hospitals over which we have no control and where we have to pay at rates much higher than those involved in connection with treatment in the wards of our own hospital.¹⁶⁵

In “confinement” (or maternity) cases, for which the General Hospital in St. John’s could not provide treatment, patients were referred to the Grace Hospital which had for years been in receipt of a government grant to cover the cost of treatment of “indigent confinement cases”. The institution agreed to extend “this special treatment” to the wives of Newfoundland servicemen without charge provided that such admissions were certified by the Department of Public Health and Welfare.¹⁶⁶

To avoid any misconceptions as to servicewives’ “rights” to subsidized medical treatment, these “free professional services” were initially provided solely to the families of non-commissioned officers and men. The better paid dependents of commissioned personnel were specifically excluded from this arrangement.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ “Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Defence”, 19 May 1942, PRC #35, Box 11, File 47, PANL.

¹⁶⁶ “Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to the Secretary for Defence”, PRC #35, Box 11, File 47, PANL; “Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Officer Commanding Newfoundland Regiment”, 27 August 1945, PRC #35, Box 11, File 47, PANL.

¹⁶⁷ “Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare”, 29 January 1943, PRC #35, Box 11, File 47, PANL.

Eventually the privilege was extended to the families of all officers as it was presumed that the additional costs would not be great, it being “very likely that some officers would prefer not to take advantage of any such arrangement if it did exist”.¹⁶⁸ Public ward accommodation in the General Hospital reportedly did “not seem quite right” for the wives and children of officers’ and efforts were made to acquire “some extra consideration” and “slightly better accommodation” in these cases.¹⁶⁹

The Government also refused to accept responsibility for any medical expenses not specifically related to hospital treatment. Medical services rendered in the home were expressly ineligible for assistance, aside from some exceptional cases.¹⁷⁰ Midwifery, a practice still very much in use in Newfoundland at this time, was explicitly excluded from the Government’s subsidized arrangement. The Secretary for Public Health and Welfare, Lewis Crummey, explained that in connection to service families, “this Department is unable to assume liability for midwives charges...the Department

¹⁶⁸ “Secretary for Defence to Commissioner for Justice and Defence”, 11 April 1944, PRC #35, Box 11, File 47, PANL.

¹⁶⁹ “Officer Commanding Newfoundland Regiment to Secretary for Defence”, 12 May 1944, PRC #35, Box 11, File 47, PANL; the issue of class distinctions among servicewives will be discussed in later chapters. In this chapter the distinction receives attention simply to verify the Government’s assumption that it should only assume responsibility for the medical expenses of “needy” servicewives.

¹⁷⁰ “Secretary for Defence to Secretary for Public Health and Welfare”, 7 July 1943 and 5 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 5, File 11, PANL; “Major A.T. Howell to Secretary for Defence”, 18 May 1942, PRC #35, Box 5, File 15, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Secretary for Public Health and Welfare”, 5 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 5, File 11, PANL.

undertakes to pay only for purely medical services".¹⁷¹ If a servicewife wanted or needed to have her confinement expenses paid for by the Government, she had no choice but to convince the district nurse who investigated her case of the necessity of a hospital delivery.¹⁷² The attitude bespoke of an advancing trend in government policies which had come to the fore in 1936 with "An Act to Govern the Practice of Midwifery in Newfoundland". The Act regulated and restricted the work which could be performed by midwives and defined emergencies in which midwives were bound to call a registered medical practitioner.¹⁷³ Midwives who were unable or unwilling to secure government certification now faced the threat of fines and imprisonment. Control of the childbirth process was gradually being wrested from the hands of midwives, compelling more and more Newfoundland women to seek out the services of "medical professionals" who would deliver their babies in hospital environments.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ "Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Major M.S.", 19 January 1945, PRC #35, Box 11, File 47, PANL.

¹⁷² "Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Services Medical Board", 29 January 1943, PRC #35, Box 5, File 11, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to W.P.A. Secretary, Bay Roberts", 26 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 79, File 95, PANL.

¹⁷³ "An Act to Govern the Practice of Midwifery", GN 13/1, Box 211, PANL.

¹⁷⁴ In "The Role of the Newfoundland Midwife in Traditional Health Care, 1900-1970", Janet McNaughton described the demise of midwifery as a gradual and unfrontational evolution during which Newfoundland midwives cooperated with medical practitioners. (Ph.D. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1989), 319-325.

Everyone had a role to play in the Second World War. Servicewives, however, occupied a role to which the State attached little significance - the maintenance of servicemen's homes and families. Historically, women's domestic work had remained undervalued and dismissed as unimportant. It was considered unskilled and mundane and ultimately suited to women's inherent capabilities and temperament. But at the same time, the State remained inextricably dependent upon this unpaid domestic work for the maintenance of its labour force, and potential labour force in the case of children. Still, the State rarely acknowledged this dependency.

The case of servicewives in the Second World War posed one instance in which the State was forced to recognize its dependence on wives' roles in the home. Husbands were recruited for wartime service in the military and thereby removed from the domestic environment. Wives were offered an allowance by the Government for their maintenance during the period of husbands' military service but this was not to be construed as "paying women" for their work and roles in the home. Newfoundland's Commission of Government initially viewed these allowances as little more than relief payments and servicewives as virtual "wards of the State". Like widows and abandoned wives receiving the dole, servicewives had to be looked after until their husbands were returned to their "rightful place" at the head of households. It was a messy and burdensome chore for the Government but one which was perceived as an incumbent condition of war.

The degrading facade constructed around dependents' allowances was predictable given the State's firmly entrenched attitudes toward socialized programs. Government support for any segment of society appeared to threaten traditional work ethics and demeaning systems of relief ensured a ready pool of reserve labour for even the lowest paying jobs in Newfoundland. As servicewives' allowances were viewed as little more than public relief payments, the system of distribution was organized to ensure that only the truly "needy" applied. A cap was placed on servicewives' total allowable income. Allowance distribution and investigations were managed by the same official bodies which monitored public relief. And the provision of medical services was rendered in the same manner as indigent cases, the wives of higher paid officers remaining ineligible for such assistance throughout much of the war. In recruiting husbands for military service, the Government had assumed a degree of responsibility for their dependents' welfare but this support was never to be construed as an inalienable "right".

Neither did the Government's assumption of dependency imply any intention to help servicewives live independently during the period of their husbands' wartime service. The allowances issued them were not intended to be "fully maintaining" and proved to be woefully inadequate amidst Newfoundland's steadily rising cost of living. In theory, servicewives could always obtain paid work outside the home to augment their meager military allowances. But the opportunities for such work were severely limited, the Government itself prohibiting the employment of married women in

its civil service. As an alternative, wives were encouraged to move back in with, and thereby to shift the burden of their dependency onto, their parents or other family members. The presence of servicewives living independently during the war would have undoubtedly threatened the patriarchal ideals upon which Newfoundland society was based. Historical evidence has suggested that women in fishing communities of outport Newfoundland tended to share a greater partnership with husbands than did their urban contemporaries. Still, very few of these women would ever have contemplated living independently and, in all likelihood, such attempts would never have proved feasible. Women's dependence upon men remained an unassailable tenet of Newfoundland society and the Government was not about to help servicewives challenge this traditional gender norm.

What the Government did not immediately recognize, however, was just how dependent its war effort would become on the welfare and attitudes of servicewives. The existence of servicewives and families living in destitute conditions while their husbands fought for the Dominion overseas did not play well to a public which was already suspicious of the Government's priorities in the war effort. Their demands for service pay and allowance increases repeatedly fell on deaf ears, reinforcing their awareness and criticism of the despotic system under which they lived. Focused on its accumulation of surpluses for post-war reconstruction, the Commissioners refused to address the question of allowance increases until mounting recruiting pressures finally compelled them to do so. By this time, the morale of the men fighting at the front had

also become a concern as it was realized that all the training, discipline and physical conditioning in the world was inconsequential when a serviceman was distracted by his family's domestic problems at home. Gradually, the governments in both Newfoundland and Britain came to realize the extent to which the war effort relied on the women who were "keeping the home fires burning" and the implementation of allowance increases, cost of living supplements and a more effective system for dealing with their welfare-related problems were eventually instituted. Such actions indicated a degree of recognition and tacit appreciation for servicewives' role in the war effort. It had been assumed that servicewives were dependent upon the State but now there was some acknowledgment of the interdependency which actually existed.

These concessions foreshadowed an advancing trend in government policies toward ever-increasing acceptance of socialized programs. Governments had tended to distance themselves from responsibility for citizens' general welfare and in Newfoundland, with its primitive bureaucracy and scattered population, this was even more the case. The desperate economic conditions of the 1930's had forced the Commission to assume a degree of responsibility for citizens' welfare to ensure, if nothing else, that they did not starve to death. But for the most part, the Commission avoided entanglement in welfare-related problems, fearing that any such connection would set precedents for greater and inevitably more expensive government involvement. Increasingly, however, the public in Britain, Canada and even Newfoundland would demand that their governments provide some form of social safety net which would

ensure a minimum standard of living for all citizens. In Canada and, with Confederation, in Newfoundland, this safety net would eventually include employment insurance, mothers' allowances, and subsidized medical care. The Commission's gradual assumption of responsibility for servicewives' welfare during the Second World War quietly heralded this advancing trend.

Certainly, the period of the Second World War represented an extraordinary experience. The Commission of Government had never been set up to deal with the incredible pressures and demands involved in managing a local war effort. Painfully short-staffed and pressed for time, government departments literally had to make up the rules as they went along, British officials showing little interest in the day to day administration of such. But the frenzied atmosphere can also be seen as pushing to the fore attitudes and perceptions which had previously flowed inconspicuously beneath the surface. The Government's estimation of the value of women's roles in the home was generally revealed through its perception of servicewives' role in the war effort. According to such, wives were not so much contributors as dependents within the social order. Like children, they relied upon male breadwinners, or in the absence of such, State support. The infrastructure of Newfoundland society was built around this patriarchal ideal, compelling the Government to protect husbands' "rightful" roles during the period of their wartime service. In so promising, the Commission was torn between the conflicting desires to both confine wives' labours to the home and yet avoid providing them with viable means to do so. This strange dichotomy persisted until public agitation

eventually forced the Government to reluctantly grant some concessions. By this time, the general public and Newfoundland servicemen themselves had come to recognize the extent of servicewives' connection to the war effort. The Government's admission of such now offered some validation for wives' roles in the home but at the same time tended to strengthen the chains which bound them there. No attempt was ever made to determine how servicewives might have helped themselves, namely through part-time jobs, domestic services and day care facilities. Wives' roles in the home were substantiated through allowance increases and similar concessions but their dependency was confirmed.

Chapter Three

“Designating Duty”: Designing a Public Image for Newfoundland Servicewives

The Second World War unfurled on newspaper pages and cinema screens as well as on the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific. A total war effort required the cooperation and participation of all segments of society and the media were used to enlist this mass support. Patriotism, self-sacrifice and duty were the primary messages of the day, widely disseminated through a variety of subtle and not-so-subtle means. The war never fell off the front pages of newspapers and rarely escaped mention in editorials and advice columns. Newsreels at local theaters compared the atrocities of the other side to the valiant efforts of their own fighting men, and advertisers capitalized on the current preoccupation in their campaigns for everything from shoe polish to cereal. The world was at war and there was no way to avoid hearing about it.

The wave of wartime imagery emerged slowly in Newfoundland. But by 1942, with the entrance of the Americans into the war, the island was effectively flooded by wartime messages and expectations.¹ Stalwart soldiers gazed accusingly out of the pages of local newspapers as “Rosie the Riveter” look-a-likes touted the merits of Coca-

¹ War images were not prevalent in Newfoundland until 1942, reflecting the Americans’ entry into the war in December 1941 and the American origin of many of the advertisements in local papers. Also in 1942, the allied war effort gained momentum, creating greater interest in women’s contributions on the home front. Susan Bland discovered a similar absence of war images until late 1941 in her quantitative examination of the advertising images presented in *Maclean’s Magazine* during the wartime period. “Henrietta the Homemaker and Rosie the Riveter”, 81.

Cola and Maxwell House for keeping them at their wartime best. Everyone from Winston Churchill to your Great Aunt Mary seemed to be working to defeat Hitler and a quiet weekend in the country was suddenly tantamount to treason. If you were not working, you better be on your way to work somewhere because this war was not going to be won by thinking about it. In fact, thinking really only served to slow things down. Better to just realize what your role was and then buckle down and do it.

The question of servicewives' appropriate role in the war was clear. Their job was to wait. It was an easy role in theory but fraught with hidden meanings and expectations. Advertisers tended to veer away from this potentially hazardous image, as it seemed to elicit only feelings of guilt or condemnation. The image of the housewife, on the other hand, was a much safer product to exploit. Smiling, young wives hanging clothes on the line summoned fuzzy thoughts of home and mother. This was the image for which Newfoundland men were fighting, an image which they had been conditioned to want to protect. Suddenly it appeared that the only way to be a man was to protect women. Recruiting advertisements exploited this sense of obligation, blatantly usurping slackers' masculinity and denying them any right to call themselves men. The gulf between the genders deepened as men and women were increasingly separated by physical and psychological barriers. Men were at the "front"; women were on the "home front". Men were destroying humanity; women were maintaining the home and family. Amidst these fervid messages, servicewives had to balance public expectations with the daily reality of their lives. Advice literature clearly indicated what was expected and the

penalty for failure.

This chapter examines the image of servicewives presented in local newspapers through advice literature, advertisements and patriotic appeals, as well as volunteer agencies' public requests for aid.² There are, of course, inherent complications in relying on this source to gauge a public definition of servicewives' wartime role, not the least of which is the fact that most Newfoundland newspapers were incorporating a sizable percentage of foreign content into their publications at this time.³ Many of the

² Radio and cinema also helped mould servicewives' public image during the Second World War. In Newfoundland, however, these sources are extremely difficult to study and, in the case of movies, not so locally relevant. Newspaper sources, on the other hand, are readily available and relatively easy to examine. The newspapers examined for this chapter included: The Daily News, The Evening Telegram, The Grand Falls Advertiser, The Bay Roberts Guardian, The Western Star and The Newfoundland Quarterly (more of a magazine format). The papers were not studied in a quantitative manner but rather for representational samplings of wartime imagery which could be dissected for their gender content. All the war years received examination, although 1943 and 1944 tended to offer the most bountiful crop of war-related images. Besides advice literature, advertisements and patriotic appeals, the language of the Newfoundland Patriotic Association's public requests for aid were also examined in an effort to understand the image of servicewives utilized in these appeals, as well as the underlying ideology which directed the Association's efforts.

³ Another complication involves gauging Newfoundlanders' access to these media messages. Did the residents of outport Newfoundland, in particular, have access to these newspapers? According to Jeff Webb's study of the "Barrelman" radio program, some Newfoundland communities had only one radio, owned by the merchant and accessible only to men. "Constructing Community and Consumers: Joseph R. Smallwood's Barrelman Radio Program", Journal of the Canadian Historical Association, 8 (1997), 172. Yet it is fair to assume that most Newfoundland women, and particularly servicewives who had such a stake in the progress of the war, would have had some access to these informational sources. Moreover, the discourses presented in the wartime media disseminated public expectations in both a direct and indirect manner. An advice columnist's description of servicewives' wartime role, for example, was directed as much to society generally as it was to servicewives specifically.

popular advice columns, cartoon strips and advertising campaigns of the era were actually imported from Canada and the United States. Nonetheless, the combination of these more generic messages with local representations formed a discourse which both informed and reflected society's expectations toward Newfoundland servicewives as women, wives, mothers and workers. The evolution of this discourse reveals as much about public expectations towards women generally in Newfoundland as it does about servicewives' perceived "duty" on the home front.

Historical fascination with the construction of gendered images during the Second World War has spawned a vast array of studies and publications. Yet few, if any, have focused specifically on the creation of servicewives' wartime role. As advertisers and propagandists tended to stir servicewives into the broader mash of housewives during the war, historians have generally lumped the two together in much the same way. One of the most prolific writers on wartime representational forms, however, has recognized servicewives as "the spiritual center of the mobilization campaign" in America during the Second World War. In "Remembering Rosie: Advertising Images of Women in World War II", Maureen Honey argued that the protection of headless, vulnerable families became soldiers' primary duty and motivation on the front lines as they fought to keep the enemy at bay. This image of masculine strength preserving feminine purity countered the similarly widespread image of "Rosie" and her riveting gun. The message was

obvious. Women could prove themselves in the industrial sphere as much as they liked but ultimately their well-being depended upon a “stronger male savior”.⁴

The nostalgic vision of a home and family untouched by war was a similarly cherished ideal in Britain during the war. Both Margaret Allen and Susan Carruthers have described the Ministry of Information’s “woman power” campaign as never completely abandoning the perception that married women’s place was in the home. Instead, the domestic ideal was used to structure the development of all labour policies related to women, determining the order in which women were brought into the work force and where they were placed. Married women in charge of households, and especially those caring for young children, were the last to be recruited, and then for only part-time work. Despite the extreme exigencies of the nation’s war effort, the domestic ideal was ferociously protected as a symbol of the values which the nation was fighting to preserve.⁵

In Canada, the domestic ideal was also jealously guarded during the war and housewives depicted as virtual “home front heroines”. In a quantitative examination of advertising images in Maclean’s Magazine, Susan Bland discovered that ads directed

⁴ Maureen Honey, “Remembering Rosie: Advertising Images of Women in World War II”, 96, Kenneth Paul O’Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons (eds.), The Home-Front War: World War II and American Society (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995).

⁵ Margaret Allen, “The Domestic Ideal and the Mobilization of Womanpower in World War II”, Women’s Studies, 6, 4 (1983), 410-411; Susan Carruthers, “Manning the Factories: Propaganda and Policy on the Employment of Women, 1939-1947”, History, 75 (June 1990), 234-240.

to housewives comprised the majority of advertisements between 1939 and 1950, constituting at least 39% of all ads directed to women in any given year. Housework gained new esteem in these campaigns as everyday tasks were now imbued with patriotic duty. Housewives were portrayed as having less time because of their wartime activities, thereby highlighting the necessity of products which would eliminate drudgery and save time. These themes had been mainstays in advertising before 1939 but were now garnished with heightened importance because of the wartime crisis.⁶ The idea that traditional attitudes remained embedded in even the most revolutionary wartime images has been generally conceded as fact in most historical studies.⁷

Print journalism in Newfoundland always seemed to mirror the times. In the late nineteenth century, for example, there were no fewer than ten newspapers being published daily and weekly in St. John's and a variety of smaller papers doing the same in outport communities across the island. The papers were outspoken and flagrantly partisan, reflecting a society deeply divided by class, religious and ethnic associations.⁸

⁶ Bland, "Henrietta the Homemaker and Rosie the Riveter", 67-84.

⁷ Judith McArthur referred to this widely-held hypothesis in "From Rosie the Riveter to the Feminine Mystique: An Historical Survey of American Women and World War II", *Bulletin of Bibliography*, 44, 1 (March 1987), 10-18.

⁸ *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, Volume 3 (St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications, 1994), 125.

By the Second World War, however, the political temperament had changed completely in Newfoundland and the local newspapers adjusted their style of reporting accordingly. The two major papers out of St. John's, The Daily News and The Evening Telegram, adopted a rather neutral attitude toward the Commission of Government, voicing little criticism as to the governing of the country. The editors filled their pages instead with syndicated news columns and reprinted stories from the foreign press. To match the increasingly bustling and cosmopolitan appearance of wartime St. John's, both papers also modernized their appearance and layouts, introducing expanded sports sections, American comic strips and women's pages.⁹ Some of the smaller papers published outside St. John's, and further removed from the Commission's seat of power, tended to voice more criticism of the Government's policies and attitudes. The Grand Falls Advertiser and The Bay Roberts Guardian, for example, opposed the Commission of Government throughout the war period, often complaining about the "secretive" and "closed-door" administration which left the public in "almost complete ignorance" of the methods and activities of the Government.¹⁰

Every editor in Newfoundland, irrespective of his political opinions or associations, was compelled to temporarily subvert the proverbial "freedom of the press" in order to aid the communal war effort. The dissemination of propaganda was an

⁹ Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume 3, 131-134.

¹⁰ "Editorial Comment - Public Relations Official", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 5 February 1944, 2; Historical Directory of Newfoundland and Labrador Newspapers, Located in the Center for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

indispensable wartime weapon and as United Kingdom editors, they were obliged to publicize information in a manner deemed appropriate by the Ministry of Information in Britain.¹¹ These directives predominantly targeted editors' handling of news stories regarding their own and the enemies' war efforts at the front.¹² But as historians have well-documented, the British war ministries established an incredibly close liaison with newspaper and magazine editors throughout the United Kingdom during the war, compelling them to relay propaganda in a variety of forms. Newfoundland editors would hardly have been immune to this official pressure and the images and messages disseminated through their wartime publications were undoubtedly influenced by propagandist policies and expectations.¹³

One issue upon which all Newfoundland editors seemed to agree was the question of servicewives' appropriate role in the war. Although rarely represented in

¹¹ The manner in which local editors were expected to approach war-related news stories was explained in a "Confidential Circular to Governor of Newfoundland from Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", 13 May 1942, GN 13/2/A, Box 390, File 37, PANL.

¹² Newfoundland newspapers were subject to strict censorship procedures during the war. Defence regulations clearly stated that "such censors shall also have the power to control press matters or any other matter intended for publication within such limits as the Governor in Commission may from time to time prescribe and to control all matters to be broadcast or otherwise to be communicated to or disseminated among the public", "The Act for the Defence of Newfoundland", 2 September 1939, GN 13/1/B, Box 214, File 22, PANL.

¹³ Janice Winship, "Women's Magazines: Times of War and Management of the Self in Woman's Own", 127, in Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (eds.), Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996).

wartime advertising campaigns, the colony's servicewives received recurrent attention in local editorials and syndicated advice columns. The underlying message in these columns was clear - servicewives' job was to wait. As husbands dutifully marched off to fight for the defence of the Empire, wives dutifully waited in the kitchen, "keeping the home fires burning" and praying for a safe return. The apparent simplicity of the definition actually concealed a tightly layered core. The image of the "good servicewife" was built upon inherent expectations to which all wives were subject but servicewives even more so because of their intimate connection to the war effort and their husbands' supreme sacrifice for the Dominion.

First and foremost, it was a servicewife's duty to protect her husband's rightful place in the home by maintaining a sense of his presence even while he fought on the front lines thousands of miles away. Wives were encouraged to display pictures of their husbands in prominent places throughout the home.¹⁴ Mothers were also advised to help their children write regularly to their fathers overseas, sending samples of their crudest scribbles even "if you have to guide his hand on the letter to Daddy".¹⁵ Servicemen were to be constantly reassured that they had been neither forgotten nor rendered dispensable within the home. "Write often, but write now" was the oft used motto in editorials of the period, reminding women of the urgency of their obligation.¹⁶

¹⁴ "Mind Your Manners", The Daily News, 12 May 1943, 8.

¹⁵ "Letters to Dad in Service", The Daily News, 24 April 1945, 6.

¹⁶ "Write Often, Write Now", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 23 October 1943, 2.

Servicemen overseas were described as feeling “cut-off” from the real world and anxiously awaiting the arrival of mail from home. In “Colonel Howell’s Message of 1943”, the commanding officer of the Newfoundland Regiment listed three general requests which he had received from the men serving overseas: “Send more mail...send parcels regularly...[and] send a regular supply of cigarettes”.¹⁷ Mail and parcels were “vitaly important” to servicemen’s morale and it was wives’ duty, more than any other, to ensure that their husbands’ received a constant stream of encouraging letters and thoughtful packages from home.¹⁸ “Pack a Box of Vita-Vim Multiple Capsules in your Parcels”, one advertisement advised, picturing a pretty, young wife wrapping a box while a man in uniform smiles on approvingly from a bubble overhead.¹⁹ Wives’ devotion and commitment on the home front assumed new public relevance in the maintenance of servicemen’s morale and efficiency on the front lines.

Although encouraged to keep their husbands apprised of everyday activities in the home, servicewives were expressly advised never to “complain” or “grumble” in their letters to husbands overseas. “Unnecessary details about financial troubles should not be heaped upon the serviceman”, one advice columnist warned, “Don’t tell him how much you have to do without. He can’t supply you with red or blue

¹⁷ “Colonel Howell’s Message”, The Grand Falls Advertiser, 1 January 1943, 2.

¹⁸ “Report of Officer-in-Charge”, 9 November 1943, PRC #35, Box 85, File 162, PANL.

¹⁹ The Bay Roberts Guardian, 15 July 1944, 4.

ration stamps or gas for your automobile...Don't complain. After all, he can't do anything about matters and you'll only make him miserable".²⁰ Although their lives now seemed to revolve around wartime restrictions and the increasing cost of living, Newfoundland servicewives were cautioned against sharing these concerns for fear of upsetting their husbands' efficiency overseas: "Above all else, don't ever write of personal illness or troubles. A good many cases of desertion and most cases of extreme home-sickness can be traced to letters from home, laden with tears about some unfortunate circumstance".²¹ Wives were told that the "primary object" of their letters was to make their serviceman "happy and glad to have heard from you" and were to be filled with cheerful, newsy stories about the family gathering at Grandma's or the amusing incident that happened on the way to the farm. "So learn to fight your personal battles alone," the columnists advised, "If you ever feel the soldier is the person you want to tell your troubles to, sit down, write the letter, pour out your heart, and relieve your emotions. But never never send that letter. Post it in the flames of a roaring bonfire where it can do no harm".²²

Servicewives' letters to their husbands overseas also posed a potential threat through the valuable information they could provide should they fall into enemy hands. The idea of spies and espionage was widely accepted in Newfoundland at this

²⁰ "Topics to Write to Service Men", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 17 July 1943, 4.

²¹ "Letters for Servicemen", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 7 August 1943, 5.

²² "Ibid."

time. "Invisible Agent" and "Unseen Enemy" were playing at the Capital in 1942 as wild rumors of Nazi air raids and U-boat attacks circulated throughout St. John's.²³ Wives possessing any military information whatsoever were warned to "think twice before you talk and then keep your mouth closed" and instructions were issued to all Newfoundland servicemen and their wives, exhorting them to comply with censorship regulations.²⁴ Besides prohibiting the description of troop movements and defence measures, the regulations also outlawed "ambiguous phrases", "exaggerated statements", and "detailed accounts of the weather".²⁵ The restrictions naturally inhibited the formation of any type of relaxed or unaffected correspondence between separated husbands and wives. Frustration with the censor's arbitrary black pen was humorously reflected in a poem entitled "You Can't Print That" by Norman R. Jaffrey:

On the shores of Name Deleted,
In the land of Never Mind,
There's a temple maiden seated,
And she thinks of me, I find;
I receive each month a letter
With the censor markings plain,

²³ "Playing at the Capital", The Daily News, 7 December 1942, 6, and 29 May 1943, 6; "Wild Rumors Circulating", The Daily News, 14 April 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 364, File 19, PANL; "Agent #24 to Chief of Police, St. John's", 30 June 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 364, File 21, PANL.

²⁴ "Think Twice", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 23 October 1943, 2; "Capt. J.M.R. to Security Division, Newfoundland Constabulary", 24 August 1943, GN 13/2/A, Box 457, PANL.

²⁵ "Some Salient Points About Censorship", August 1940, GN 13/2/A, Box 390, File 36, PANL; "Canadian Gets Suspended Sentence", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 6 February 1943, 8.

And she asks if I forget her
In this sad and plaintive strain:

'Come you back, my lover fair,
Come you back to You Know Where,
Where the teakwood temple shimmers,
But the bells are off the air,
Come you back; we'll be together
In this (word omitted) weather,
As the dawn comes up like thunder
Out of Whatzis over there.'²⁶

Perhaps most grievous of a servicewife's incumbent duties was her obligation to remain "faithful" during the period of her husband's absence overseas. This implicit expectation was rarely addressed in advice columns but in August 1942 the War Office in London did issue a public appeal to the wives and sweethearts of servicemen to "be careful of behavior while their men are away".²⁷ More telling, the appeal also directed mothers and mothers-in-law to "keep their mouths shut about what's going on at home" while their sons served overseas. "We aren't going to get our men to fight with 100 per cent of their heart if they feel their wives are unfaithful to them," the announcement continued. Mothers' tendency to write their sons "about the good times their wives are having" served only to worry absent husbands and was listed as one of the chief causes of illness in the army.²⁸ Yet many mothers found it impossible to sit idly by

²⁶ Excerpt from poem by Norman R. Jaffrey. A type-written copy of this poem apparently circulated through the Departments of Justice and Defence during the war as found in PRC #35, Box 64, File 1, PANL.

²⁷ "Wives Sweethearts Must Use Caution", The Western Star, 14 August 1942, 4.

²⁸ "Ibid."

in the face of what they perceived as a definite shirking of responsibility. An outraged mother of a Newfoundland soldier informed the Department of Public Health and Welfare that since her son had left Newfoundland "...his wife has acted pretty bad. She has gone to St. John's lately to bring forth another child which is her second since he left".²⁹ An official investigation failed to reveal any concrete evidence of misconduct nor any adequate reason why the wife's allowances should be canceled.³⁰ Yet this type of "watch-dogging" and "rumor-mongering" undoubtedly hounded most servicewives living in close-knit Newfoundland during the war. Servicewives were easy prey and their actions and attitudes highly suspect. In a letter intercepted by the Newfoundland Censor in 1943, a concerned citizen gossiped to a Torontonion cousin that a neighbor and her Airman husband "...are not getting on very good he knew all about her going out with [J.H.]. She got a cheque for \$52.00 and before the week was gone she had it all spent...she spent it on [J.H.] buying gas for her car. Her mother told me this so I guess its true".³¹ Increasingly, servicewives' fidelity seemed to be taking on the characteristics of a national obligation.

A waiting servicewife was expected to represent the image of the devoted,

²⁹ "Mrs. ___ to Department of Public Health and Welfare", 17 February 1944, PRC #35, Box 115, File 100, PANL.

³⁰ "Chaplain to Station Adjutant", 14 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 115, File 100, PANL.

³¹ "Intercepted Letter", 4 June 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 254, File 18, PANL; "Report of Newfoundland Constabulary", 12 June 1943, PRC #35, Box 64, File 5, PANL.

pinning heroine portrayed in patriotic war movies. She was the “girl to spur them on” in “Aerial Gunner” and the “girl in the heart of every man behind a gun” in “To the Shores of Tripoli”.³² She was a complicated blend of the girl-next-door, glamorous pin-up, and adoring mother figure. As Robert Westbrook has observed in an examination of the construction of women as “objects of obligation”, this image not only incited men to fight but also addressed itself to women, suggesting that if men were obliged to fight for their pin-up girls, women were obliged to fashion themselves into pin-up girls worth fighting for. Betty Grable, for instance, was presented to the public as not only a glamorous image of beauty but also a model of female virtue on the home front. She was a model girlfriend, wife and mother and her popularity only increased after she married in 1943 and had a child a year later. Grable’s more “common” physical attributes and tastes were preferred over those of her more exotic and better-endowed Hollywood contemporaries as she seemed to represent home and family and moral ideals worth defending.³³ Men’s obligation to protect such female virtue and vulnerability was implicitly conveyed in movies such as “Hitler’s Madman”, playing at the Capital in September 1943. The advertisement pictured a glimpse of a frightened, young woman in a torn nightdress set behind the image of two powerful, leather-clad legs of a Nazi invader. The jagged

³² Excerpts from movie advertisements in The Evening Telegram, 19 November 1943, 5; The Daily News, 5 February 1943, 6.

³³ Robert Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl That Married Harry James: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II”, American Quarterly, 42, 4 (December 1990), 596-606.

lettering of the caption beneath threatened: "Women First - for our brave Nazi soldiers".³⁴

The highly gendered ideal to which servicewives were expected to aspire during the war was balanced with an increasingly polarized image of "real men" in Newfoundland society. Recruiting propaganda, in particular, played up the idea that it was "a **man's duty** and privilege to fight to protect his home and dear ones".³⁵ Young men were needed to "do a **man's job** to join our glorious fighting men, who are holding the name 'Newfoundland' so high. How ashamed and low you will feel when these **real men** return after the war".³⁶ "Don't Delay! Enlist Now! Take a **man's part** in the knockout of Hitler."³⁷ The discourse left little room for interpretation. "Real men" were serving overseas in uniform, all others were medically unfit or slackers. The distribution of official badges to the medically rejected in 1940 purposefully placed many others in an exposed and vulnerable position.³⁸ But even those men sporting the badges often suffered

³⁴ "Hitler's Madman", The Evening Telegram, 7 September 1943, 5; the advertisement in The Daily News described "Hitler's Madman" as "a stark, stirring story of the lustful conquerors...The Nazi Creed - The firing squad for men...a living death for every woman!", 9 September 1943, 6.

³⁵ "This War Is Not Over Yet", The Evening Telegram, 3 February 1944, 7 (highlighting mine).

³⁶ "Colonel Howell's Message", PRC #35, Box 42, File 35, PANL (highlighting mine).

³⁷ "Gunners Needed", The Newfoundland Quarterly, 43, 2 (September 1943), 40 (highlighting mine).

³⁸ "Recruiting Office, St. John's, to Magistrate's Office, Grand Bank", 29 November 1940. GN 13/1. Box 344, File 6. PANL.

under the narrowing definition of masculinity as any man on the home front naturally risked comparison to the “real men” fighting on the front lines. Cartoons of the period seem to best illustrate this reevaluation of power on the home front as women appeared to appropriate the position of these “lesser men”. One cartoon in The Daily News pictured a middle-aged man contemplating a sign advertising: “Men wanted to work in this war plant. Your Country Needs You!”. The man ultimately decides that the work would be too hard and dirty for him but much to his chagrin is met by his wife at home who excitedly declares that she has just gotten a job at the war plant that day.³⁹ In the same vein, another cartoon poked fun at the readjustment of power in the work place as a middle-aged woman proudly informs her co-worker husband that she has been made assistant superintendent of drill presses in her department. Her shocked husband meekly offers his congratulations while two of his buddies smugly warn that the man’s family will “start rubbin’ it in...she’s only been here four months an’ is promoted - he’s been runnin’ the same machine for 20 years!”.⁴⁰ The home front was increasingly pictured as women’s domain as “real men” were siphoned off to serve on the front lines of the war.

As women were portrayed assuming greater positions of power in society, the work that housewives, and servicewives, performed in the home received greater recognition. The Veterans’ Magazine announced in December 1943 that housekeeping in Newfoundland had “become a wartime job”, calling for “a spirit of cooperation among

³⁹ “The Gremlins”, The Daily News, 22 January 1943, 6.

⁴⁰ “Out our Way”, The Daily News, 5 June 1945, 9.

housewives, the government and the shops".⁴¹ Also in 1943, a Purity Factories advertisement pictured a statuesque young woman carrying a pail under one arm and a load of vegetables under the other: "Salute to Women! Women nursing, Women growing Food for Freedom - We salute these women and are proud to have lightened their labours with good fresh biscuits and cookies".⁴² Indeed, women's work in the home was now depicted as vital to the war effort. Puro Household Disinfectant declared that "On the home front germs are the enemy" while an Aunt Jemima's advertisement pictured a husband in uniform saluting his wife in gratitude as she places a steaming stack of pancakes before him.⁴³ In the new wartime atmosphere, coping with rationing restrictions had become "a patriotic duty" and recycling and "making do" an enviable skill.⁴⁴ In the previous Depression years, Newfoundland housewives had "made do" with much less and been forced to conserve much more, but now they received praise and accolades for their "savvy wartime skills". Moreover, the Commission of Government now publicly

⁴¹ The Veterans' Magazine: Official Organization of the Great War Veterans' Association, 14, 2 (December 1943), 75.

⁴² The Daily News, 13 September 1943, 10 (see illustration on following page).

⁴³ The Grand Falls Advertiser, 24 April 1943, 7; The Evening Telegram, 1 September 1943, 3 (see illustration on following page).

⁴⁴ An editorial in The Grand Falls Advertiser described rationing as "a patriotic duty on the part of each and every one of us, a duty which the people of Newfoundland will gladly fulfill as a wartime emergency and necessity", 3 July 1943, 2; The Evening Telegram declared: "Eat it up; wear it out; make it do; do without - We are not sure who said it first but it is being quoted everywhere these days. Its a challenge to every Newfoundlander...to everyone who believes in the cause for which we fight", 3 February 1944, 10.

pleaded for housewives' assistance in the monitoring of the country's system of prices and supply: "Your whole-hearted help is needed in this price control plan. If every woman does her part, it cannot fail. Its success will be a big step on the road to victory. Its failure would be a serious blow to our war effort. You can tip the balance towards success".⁴⁵ Housewifery had donned the cloak of a vital new public role.

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK :

A great catastrophe is sometimes a good thing for it awakens men to faults and necessities.



SALUTE TO WOMEN !

Women nursing,
Women growing Food
for Freedom—

We Salute these Women and
are proud to have lightened
the labors with Good Fresh
Biscuits and Cookies—

Cream Crackers

Dad's Cookies

Grandmas' Currant Cookies

PURITY AERATED WATERS

Are made from the finest quality fruit juices and essences,
American cane sugar and pure filtered water. Bottled by
experts into sterilized bottles.

THE PURITY FACTORIES, Ltd.

Newfoundland's Foremost Manufacturers of Biscuits, Candies,
and Pure Food Products

ON THE HOME FRONT GERMS ARE THE ENEMY



"I first sprinkle my floors and stairs
and rugs with water containing a few
tablespoonsful of PURO. That allays
the dust -- and kills the germs."

PURO is the finest household disinfectant.
Use it a few spoonfuls to the pail of wiping,
sprinkling and scrubbing water. Use it in sinks
and outhouses. Keep your house hospital clean
and germ free with PURO.

In enlisting their support for wartime rationing and restrictions,

Newfoundland housewives were repeatedly reminded that their sacrifices in this regard

⁴⁵ "Important Government Announcement", The Evening Telegram, 31
December 1941, 11.

were mild compared to the conditions endured by women in the war-torn countries of Europe. "Poor Newfoundland!", an editorial in The Western Star sarcastically chided:

We have been feeling sorry for ourselves lately because of the high cost of living and because it is difficult to buy some of the things we took so much for granted before. No bananas. No batteries. No bicycles. What a distressing thing war is...We shake our heads when we pay a few cents more for this or that article of food, we grumble because there is a shortage of fruit, but in Poland there is practically NO food at all. In Greece the price of bread has risen from twenty-five drachmas to five thousand...THESE PEOPLE OF THESE COUNTRIES ARE STARVING, but these things happen in far away Poland or Greece - not in Newfoundland.⁴⁶

Another article entitled "Facing the Food Future" quipped:

When menu making stares you in the face do you feel put upon, fret about rationing and shortages, rack your brain for substitutes for supper? Well stop your beefing and count your blessings. Why there is scarcely a country in the world where housewives have such an easy time of menu making still. In England where the best table of Europe is now set, women would consider your supply abundant, your choice bountiful beyond belief.⁴⁷

A regular feature in The Newfoundland Quarterly called "Mr. Iliff's Diary" also regularly informed Newfoundland readers of the incredible wartime shortages and sacrifices with which the British public was forced to cope as a result of the war.⁴⁸ Newfoundland housewives were not merely asked to comply with wartime rationing, recycling and salvage efforts, they were conscripted into service through the propagation of a sense of societal guilt and shame.

⁴⁶ "Poor Newfoundland", The Western Star, 26 June 1942, 2.

⁴⁷ "Facing the Food Future", The Evening Telegram, 5 January 1944, 6.

⁴⁸ "Mr. Iliff's Diary", The Newfoundland Quarterly, 43, 1 (June 1943), 29-31.

Newfoundland housewives were now portrayed as fighting on the front lines of a home front war and were encouraged to systematize and organize their duties as if working in a war plant.⁴⁹ “There’s no time for puttering these days. Everything must be systematic or you aren’t doing your part”, an advice columnist warned, “For a job well done, careful planning is necessary. This certainly applies to housework. Make out a schedule to fit your particular household and follow it”.⁵⁰ Advertisers also played up this image of the housewife as war worker. “Lookie! My hands do war work on the family clothes line!”, one spokeswoman explained.⁵¹ Another declared: “The Little General keeps my hands working overtime” and pictured a young mother pointing to her infant son in a carriage.⁵² In keeping with their new position in the home front war, women’s fashions also took on a decidedly military-inspired appearance. An advertisement featuring military-style hats observed “It’s forward march and at ease in both military and millinery basic orders this spring” while another for the Parker and Monroe shoe store pictured a pretty young woman saluting while wearing a civilian variation of a military

⁴⁹ In a public address, the Governor of Newfoundland insisted: “There is a front at home - indeed a front right here in Newfoundland - just as there is one in Europe”, GN 13/1/B, Box 42(1), File 9, PANL.

⁵⁰ “Schedule for Housekeeping”, The Grand Falls Advertiser, 30 October 1943, 9.

⁵¹ The Evening Telegram, 25 September 1943, 9.

⁵² The Evening Telegram, 11 September 1943, 2.

uniform.⁵³ “Slacks” also received expanded promotion in local advertisements which generally emphasized their practicality for women working around the home.

Advertisements for clothiers like Ayre and Sons Limited frequently presented attractive images of women wearing slacks while working in the garden or doing other household chores.⁵⁴

Among the wartime duties now delegated to Newfoundland housewives, one of the most essential became saving money. Women were repeatedly assured that they could “win the war by saving” and as the primary managers of household income, it was their responsibility to budget so as to be able to purchase as many war savings certificates as possible.⁵⁵ As part of one wartime savings campaign, a solemn looking woman in a frilly apron was pictured holding up her right hand in a pledge to “do my

⁵³ The Evening Telegram, 10 February 1944, 8; The Daily News, 5 July 1941, 7; and 9 June 1945, 7.

⁵⁴ The Daily News, 19 June 1945, 4; 22 May 1943, 4; and 28 May 1943, 9; The Evening Telegram, 15 May 1943, 8; in “Fashioning the Feminine: Dress, Appearance and Femininity in Wartime Britain”, Pat Kirkham argued that these changing styles in fashion did not necessarily indicate a “masculinization” trend but rather continuing “feminization”, the incorporation of “chic” masculine elements into stylish women’s clothes having been an influence since the 1930’s. Found in Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (eds.), Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 170-171. One cannot deny, however, that the new styles were practical and streamlined in appearance, reflecting a society preoccupied with military and work-related images.

⁵⁵ “Win The War By Saving”, The Grand Falls Advertiser, 6 February 1943, 1; “Stick to Your War Savings”, The Grand Falls Advertiser, 20 February 1943, 2; “Win The War By Saving”, The Grand Falls Advertiser, 13 March 1943, 1.

utmost this month to support the Wings for Victory Campaign".⁵⁶ A similar advertisement in *The Newfoundland Quarterly* showed a young mother with her infant son and daughter at her side looking out over the Newfoundland landscape and praying: "God grant that nothing may happen to this Newfoundland of ours. Grant that we may have the strength to keep her! Make us willing and glad to make what sacrifices we must, that all that Newfoundland means to us, shall not perish from the earth!"⁵⁷



⁵⁶ "Our Community Pledge", *The Western Star*, 16 October 1943, 7; the "Wings for Victory Campaign" was one of several wartime campaigns which promoted the sale of war savings certificates.

⁵⁷ "Oh Newfoundland, My Newfoundland", *The Newfoundland Quarterly*, 42, 1 (June 1942), 41.

Besides these rather somber images, war savings certificates could also take on the guise of veritable ammunition with which Newfoundland housewives could help defeat Hitler. One advertisement exclaimed: "Bombers and more bombers are needed to avenge the sinking of the Caribou...Remember the Caribou...Buy War Savings Certificates Regularly!".⁵⁸ Another demanded: "Total war calls for total effort...not only by our fighting forces but by civilians as well...every man, woman and child can fight back...buy war savings certificates to the utmost of your ability".⁵⁹ Local advertisers reinforced this growing sense of duty, assuring housewives that they would aid them in their national obligation to conserve: "It's Your Duty to Save! We can help you with these good values at the Royal Stores".⁶⁰ Housewives' patriotism was increasingly measured in sacrifice and their accumulation of war savings certificates.

The task of raising children, which had always been considered an inherent skill, was similarly added to housewives' arsenal of wartime duties. "Safeguard the War Generation", a Heinz Strained Foods advertisement advised, "Mothers always have the responsibility of rearing healthy, vigorous citizens of the future".⁶¹ Certainly, in

⁵⁸ "Bombers and More Bombers", The Daily News, 6 November 1942, 8; the "Caribou" ferry steamer was torpedoed and sunk during a regular sailing between Port aux Basques, Newfoundland and North Sydney, Nova Scotia in October 1942. Neary, Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 163.

⁵⁹ "Nothing Matters But Victory", The Newfoundland Quarterly, 42, 3 (December 1942), 3.

⁶⁰ The Daily News, 14 February 1942, 5.

⁶¹ The Daily News, 7 June 1945, 10.

wartime the rearing of healthy, vigorous children seemed even more imperative as this generation came to represent the country's future - a future which Newfoundlanders were laying down their lives to protect. It was mothers' responsibility more than any other to ensure the health and vitality of these leaders of the future. The language in advertisements reinforced this heightened sense of protection. "FOR DEFENCE", Doyle's Pure Newfoundland Cod Liver Oil declared, "give your children the best defence against the roots of weakness and disease".⁶² "Guard Against Prickly Heat!", the Colgate Talcum Powder Company warned.⁶³ And a Quaker Puffed Wheat advertisement pictured a young boy wearing an oversized army uniform and boots with the caption: "They're big for him but he'll fill them someday! Right now what he eats is important!".⁶⁴ Not only were Newfoundland mothers protecting an idealized symbol of the country's future but they were also raising what could potentially be the next generation of fighting men. With the public's increasing consciousness of the war effort's dependence on the comparative strength and vitality of its troops, mothers' efforts in the home were now placed on a more competitive track. "Bet I'm Setting a Wartime Record for Growing", a determined looking tot attributed to Quaker Whole Grain Oats as another ad instructed: "He wants to be a flier someday...Give Him Proper Food Right Now!".⁶⁵

⁶² The Daily News, 5 May 1943, 9.

⁶³ The Daily News, 6 May 1943, 12.

⁶⁴ The Daily News, 29 September 1943, 7.

⁶⁵ The Grand Falls Advertiser, 5 February 1944, 8; and 1 May 1943, 7.

Besides being an efficient homemaker and thrifty money manager, the ideal wartime housewife was also expected to assume an expanded role in the community through tireless voluntary contributions to the war. Like women's previously underrated work in the home, their unpaid work in the community was now glorified and touted as fundamental to the war effort's success. Local editorials routinely commented on the "essential" and "sincerely appreciated" work of women on the voluntary front. "There can certainly be no doubt of the sincerity and fullness of the war effort of the ladies in this area", The Grand Falls Advertiser expounded:

Many of these on the Ladies' Auxiliary of the [Great War Veterans' Association] are also members of the [Women's Patriotic Association], Red Cross and other such aids to our war effort. In addition the ladies are always charged with the running of a home and the proper raising of their children. All such activities leave little time for many other things which they would normally like to do. We can therefore take off our hats to their enthusiasm and efficiency and we trust that they will see fit to continue the good work.⁶⁶

Similarly, the work of the Women's Patriotic Association was described as "nothing short of extraordinary...No more worthy work has been undertaken in the war effort on the home front...The ladies deserve the highest praise and admiration of the whole District".⁶⁷ The Great War Veterans' Association enthusiastically agreed: "When the entire history of Newfoundland's war effort is written, the activities of the Women's Patriotic Association will provide one of its most important chapters, a tribute to the patriotic women of

⁶⁶ "G.W.V.A. Ladies' Auxiliary", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 18 March 1944, 2.

⁶⁷ "Seeing Is Believing", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 13 November 1943, 2.

Britain's oldest colony".⁶⁸ Such public recognition validated women's previously under-appreciated work in the community and encouraged many to step up their efforts on that front. But even these lofty accolades were quickly deflated when made the object of pointed sarcasm. Questioning volunteers' actual contribution to the war effort, a cartoon in The Evening Telegram portrayed a slightly overweight, matronly looking lady addressing an amused sailor surrounded by a bevy of young women: "Young man, we're trying to keep you boys happy. Would you care to come to our club's luncheon today?"⁶⁹ Another cartoon poked fun at three middle-aged women's dedication to a first aid lesson on one unsuspecting husband: "Wait a minute girls - this is a good chance to go through my husband's pockets".⁷⁰ That which was practically lionized on page two could be easily mocked as superfluous and amusing on page seven.

Images of housewives wielding brooms like guns and saluting one another were similarly countered with advertising messages which reminded women that they were still the fairer sex, and as such the maintenance and cultivation of beauty continued to be important. Like the advertisements which assured female war workers that the suppleness of their skin and the freshness of their breath were doubly important when working on the line, Newfoundland housewives were warned that they should not let their

⁶⁸ The Veterans' Magazine: Official Organization of the Great War Veterans' Association, 15, 1 (May 1946), 19.

⁶⁹ "This and That", The Evening Telegram, 25 November 1943, 13.

⁷⁰ "This and That", The Evening Telegram, 19 May 1943, 7.

extra busy schedules get in the way of their personal beauty regimes.⁷¹ In an ad entitled “A Woman’s Part”, the Cutex Liquid Polish Company warned: “In these busy days, a woman’s place is here - there - everywhere. But regardless, her hands must be beautiful”.⁷² “Colgate Smile Wins for Wife!”, another advertisement declared, “In keeping marriage romantic, Bad Breath is a serious fault. Don’t risk it! Play it safe! Use Colgate Dental Cream”.⁷³ And housewives were similarly assured that “Victory Gardens also produce Fine Figures”.⁷⁴ Efficiency in household tasks had assumed a vital role in the war effort but was never to be attained at the cost of personal beauty and attractiveness to the opposite sex.

While traditional attitudes remained embedded in wartime imagery, new conceptions of women’s appropriate roles inside and outside the home were also disseminated on a scale heretofore unseen in Newfoundland society. Stories of individual women’s heroic feats behind the lines in Europe regularly appeared in women’s pages, as did pictures of competent young women serving in the military and in war plants, usually

⁷¹ “Jane Pilcher: A Queen of Production and Beauty”, The Daily News, 13 May 1943, 8; “Military Wedding for Another Ponds Girl”, The Grand Falls Advertiser, 6 March 1943, 4; “Safeguards her Lovely Complexion”, The Daily News, 26 November 1942, 9; “First Woman Ferry Pilot Still Feminine”, The Daily News, 15 July 1941, 7; “I’m the Mechanic with the Soft White Hands”, The Evening Telegram, 4 September 1943, 14.

⁷² The Daily News, 7 September 1943, 6.

⁷³ The Daily News, 22 May 1943, 10.

⁷⁴ The Daily News, 29 May 1943, 8.

demonstrating their aptitude at tasks previously considered to be part of the “male domain”.⁷⁵ The militarization of housework and portrayal of married women as doing “double duty” in the home and the work force, similarly presented an empowered image of women which naturally led to discussion of women’s post-war future.⁷⁶ Although primarily Canadian in origin, stories often appeared regarding the success of day nurseries for working mothers in Ontario and the necessity of implementing similar aides such as laundry and grocery shopping services.⁷⁷ There was some mention of the elevation of household work to the status of a vocation and pointed criticism toward a British announcer’s declaration that housewives were incapable of taking part in public life.⁷⁸ For a short space of time, women were depicted as more than the subservient helpmates and glorified trophies that had appeared before the war.⁷⁹ Though far from

⁷⁵ “Held in France for Three Years”, The Evening Telegram, 13 December 1943, 8; “World Champion”, The Daily News, 5 July 1941, 8; “Women Doctors Go To War”, The Grand Falls Advertiser, 18 September 1943, 6; “Women at Work”, The Western Star, 4 September 1942, 4; “British Women Workers Seen as Vanguards of Industry”, 28 February 1942, 9; The Evening Telegram, 25 September 1943, 12; The Daily News, 26 May 1943, 9.

⁷⁶ “A Working Woman’s Week”, The Daily News, 27 May 1943, 8.

⁷⁷ “Day Nurseries Prove Boon to Working Women”, The Evening Telegram, 10 February 1944, 8; “Through Female Eyes”, The Evening Telegram, 28 January 1944, 8.

⁷⁸ “Post-war Employment for Canadian Women”, The Evening Telegram, 9 February 1944, 1; “Would Bar Mothers from Public Life”, The Evening Telegram, 5 November 1943, 8.

⁷⁹ A cursory study was made of the images presented in the immediate pre-war years (1938 and 1939) for all the newspapers examined. Advertising images tended to present women as either mothers or beautiful beaus. The examination revealed no images

reality, women were portrayed as taking charge and fighting Hitler through traditional as well as non-traditional roles. In an advertisement for a film entitled "City Without Men", playing at the Palace in September 1943, women were described as "fighting for their men, and their right to love them!"⁸⁰ Certainly no anthem for liberation, it formed a striking commentary nonetheless.

The designation of wartime duties was not reserved solely for servicewives, enlisted men and homemakers. Duty and obligation were recurrent themes running through most advertising, cartoons and advice literature of the day. "Its your duty whether 8 or 80 to join the army of good health!", the Eno Digestive Company warned in 1941.⁸¹ The themes permeated almost every aspect of the media, conditioning society to support, sacrifice and conserve for the sake of the war effort. "Nothing Matters But Victory!", was the catch phrase of the era, projecting a society unified around one central goal.⁸² Everyone was expected to assume a role and sacrifice for the sake of the war effort. While it was young men's duty to enlist for overseas service, it was society's duty, as a whole, to support these men's efforts from the home front. "We are counting on you to back us up!", three servicemen demanded in a war savings advertisement in

of women portrayed as working outside the household.

⁸⁰ "Playing at the Palace", *The Western Star*, 4 September 1943, 14.

⁸¹ "Enlist with Eno", *The Evening Telegram*, 4 November 1941, 8.

⁸² "Nothing Matters But Victory", *The Newfoundland Quarterly*, 42, 3 (December 1942), 3.

1943.⁸³ A similar ad questioned: "What will the answer be when the returning soldier, sailor or airman asks...What did you do to help me? Will I be proud to say that I did my share...my level best...to help him on to glorious victory? Or will I be embarrassed because of my neglect of him who risked life itself? Heaven forbid!!".⁸⁴ Society owed servicemen a debt for their sacrifice in the war - a supreme sacrifice which could never be equaled on the civilian front. "What can we who stay at home know of the SACRIFICES of those who FIGHT?...We can't realize THEIR SACRIFICES. They fight that we may live...to make the WORLD FREE."⁸⁵ As ever, obligation was inextricably bound to the concept of atonement.

Of the numerous patriotic organizations appealing to Newfoundlanders' sense of patriotism and communal guilt during the war, the Newfoundland Patriotic Association was undoubtedly the most effective in harnessing the power of the media to generate widespread public support. In promoting the cause of financially distressed service families, the Association's organizers immediately recognized the exploitability of servicewives' public persona. Here was an image which could readily tap into the temperament of the time. The idea of local wives and children struggling with financial crises while their husbands and fathers fought for the Dominion overseas provided a

⁸³ "We Are Counting On You", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 30 January 1943, 8.

⁸⁴ "What Will the Answer Be", The Daily News, 8 September 1943, 9.

⁸⁵ "And We Talk of Sacrifices", War Savings Certificate advertisement, The Newfoundland Quarterly, 43, 1 (June 1943), 2.

powerful symbol which was not easily dismissed. Newfoundlanders were repeatedly called upon, through both radio and press appeals, to “do their part” for the families of the men to whom they owed such a debt. “Satisfied to let others carry the load?”, one appeal accused.⁸⁶ “Are Newfoundlanders doing their part in helping the cause of the boys who have gone overseas?”, another questioned.⁸⁷ Shrewdly, the Association couched its fund-raising requests in terms of percentages of income. Who could refuse to share one percent of their weekly pay with the families of the men who were making such a supreme sacrifice? Non-wage-earning fishermen were also encompassed in the scheme, requested to donate a comparative percentage of their catch in lieu of cash.⁸⁸ The returns from these campaigns were truly astounding and continued to grow with the Association’s utilization of the media’s might. Even as late as 1944, it was reported that more concerted publicity efforts had “produced a considerable boost in the value of subscriptions”, from below \$4,000 per month to the end of August to a maximum of over \$10,000 per month by December.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ “Satisfied to Let Others Carry the Load?”, The Daily News, 18 September 1943, 1.

⁸⁷ “Report of the Finance Committee of N.P.A.”, 17 October 1941, MG 632, PANL.

⁸⁸ “Fish Fund Appeal Ended For This Year”, The Bay Roberts Guardian, 13 February 1943, 4; “Circular sent out by the Sub-Committee of the Finance Committee of the N.P.A.”, MG 632, PANL.

⁸⁹ “W.B. Temple, N.P.A., to Finance Committee, N.P.A.”, 31 January 1944, MG 632, PANL.

Of course, the image that the Patriotic Association exploited was hardly one with which the majority of servicewives would care to be associated. "Pathetic" examples of the "class of appeal" made to the Compassionate Allowance Committee were regularly presented in public appeals for subscriptions.⁹⁰ "A woman with four children, her husband in the Royal Artillery, unable to meet rent and threatened with eviction"; "A widow with rent in arrears owing to maternity expenses. Eviction order actually served"; another young family about to be evicted from their home, "...bailiffs actually in the house, immediate action necessary".⁹¹ These and numerous other cases were presented as "characteristic appeals" made to the Compassionate Allowance Committee. "Can't you see the tragic appeal in these cases made directly to your patriotism?", the organizers implored.⁹² The Association further expounded that only the most "deserving" and "honourable" families were appealing for such aid. Situations were routinely described which assured patrons of "...not only the honourable way in which recipients accept any help given but also the indomitable spirit of our men in the services. Aren't these men worthy of our backing?".⁹³ How would Newfoundlanders ever face servicemen after the war "...if we at home have not done our duty by helping needy

⁹⁰ "Some Work of the Compassionate Allowance Committee", MG 632, PANL; "Draft", 2 June 1941, MG 632, PANL.

⁹¹ "Some Work of the Compassionate Allowance Committee", MG 632, PANL; "Compassionate Allowance Committee Report", 1940, MG 632, PANL.

⁹² "Some Work of the Compassionate Allowance Committee", MG 632, PANL.

⁹³ "Ibid."

dependents while they are away?”⁹⁴ In this discourse servicewives and families assumed the role of defenceless victims, subjected to a fate controlled by circumstance. Their husbands were the primary players, performing a role for which society owed them a debt of gratitude and modicum of protection for their loved ones. As secondary players, servicewives found themselves relegated to the wings, their “tragic” image merely used to compound society’s perception of its debt to servicemen.

The media was constantly manipulating images and messages throughout the war so as to enlist and direct public support in the war effort. But even as the media spearheaded this home front attack, it could occasionally find itself exposed to confrontational fire. The local clergy, in particular, had always been critical of the growing influence of movies, radio and print journalism in the lives of Newfoundlanders and now, with their heightened propagandist messages, the media’s power seemed truly threatening. “In all too many homes the radio is usurping the place of God and the parents,” Reverend J.J. Murray declared in his regular column for The Newfoundland Quarterly:

There is very little supervision of programs and children are allowed to listen to anything they please even to those that are only for mature audiences. Mistaking make-believe for reality, their youthful minds are confused, and the consequent bewilderment warps their judgment. The same applies to the movies when no prudent judgment is exercised about their selection. The handsome hero who lives the life of ‘Reilly’, constantly appearing on the screen before children,

⁹⁴ “Draft”, 2 June 1941, MG 632, PANL.

doesn't foster in them noble ambitions to be worthy citizens.⁹⁵

More disturbing to Reverend Murray than children's belief in the "make-believe" world of the media was the growing glorification of women's beauty and sexuality in print and films. He described such glorification as "the clamorous cries of sensual and greedy men who catalogue the physical beauty and attractions of women for material gain in advertisements and pictures".⁹⁶ "God never meant these things to be commercialized, to be bartered away to the highest bidder", Murray continued, "He has given to each one that attraction that is hers to use only in the way that is ordered by the Divine Plan for her vocation in this world".⁹⁷ To Reverend Murray, the media were cheapening women's natural vocation (motherhood) with "a sinful glorification" of her "instinct and longing" for that role (sexuality). Given an opportunity to respond, the media would have undoubtedly agreed with the allegations as a basic pillar of the industry had always been the indisputable fact that "sex sells".⁹⁸ Even amidst the seemingly topsy-turvy atmosphere of the Second World War, the media never set aside its portrayal of women as sexual objects. Images of pretty, young women were used to sell everything from

⁹⁵ "The Home and the Child", The Newfoundland Quarterly, 45, 4 (March 1946), 15.

⁹⁶ "The Church and Women", The Newfoundland Quarterly, 44, 1 (June 1944), 32.

⁹⁷ "Ibid."

⁹⁸ Tina Pieraccini and Robert Schell, "You're Not Getting Older - You're Getting Better", 123, in C.M. Lont (ed.), Women and Media: Content/Careers/Criticism (Boston: Wadsworth, 1995).

deodorant to insurance. They called men to arms and reminded them of their duties on the home front. They assured society that “women were still women” even when wearing overalls and military uniforms and they presented working models for other women to emulate. Reverend Murray might condemn this exploitation of women’s image as “sinful glorification”, but he would be hard pressed to suggest an alternative which could have ever mobilized the home front on such a magnitude.

Newfoundland society buzzed with wartime patter, jargon and phraseology during the Second World War. Radio programs, cinema screens and newspaper pages spun a web of patriotic propaganda intent on capturing the imagination and support of a society at war. The images and messages used to construct this web were presented as paradigms for Newfoundlanders to emulate, the media both educating and disseminating public expectations for gender appropriate roles. Young men were expected to enlist for overseas service in the military, just as their wives were expected to wait patiently at home, “keeping the home fires burning”. A “good servicewife” protected her husband’s rightful place in the home during the period of his absence overseas; she encouraged and cheered him in a constant stream of supportive letters and packages; and she maintained a brave front even in the face of trying and often overwhelming circumstances. She was unerringly devoted and faithful, representing both a symbol of female strength in the face of adversity and female frailty intrinsically

dependent upon male protection. As housewife, she was similarly represented in the guise of brave home front soldier, battling Hitler with ration books and war savings certificates while all the while protecting her “natural charms” and attractiveness to the opposite sex. The image was constructed to meet specific wartime exigencies. It was a cardboard cutout, bereft of life and reality.

This two-dimensional image was riddled with conflicting inconsistencies. The “good servicewife”, for example, was expected to maintain a sense of her absent husband’s presence in the home and family but was also expected to sever all natural and intimate communication with him. As previously described, information regarding financial concerns, worries about children and even personal illness were never to be shared with husbands fighting overseas for fear of upsetting their morale and efficiency. Censorship regulations compounded this sense of isolation and separation as couples’ letters were routinely examined and relieved of any information which could be construed as useful to the enemy. Innocent comments about the weather, humorous exaggerations and even ambiguous “inside” jokes were considered “highly suspect” and a threat to the nation’s war effort. The cheerful, bubbly persona which servicewives were expected to present in their letters could never foster a sense of real marital intimacy. Furthermore, servicewives were advised to learn to solve their problems on their own, assuming responsibility for many of the roles traditionally delegated to husbands. But how could servicewives protect husbands’ rightful place in the home when they were obliged to appropriate it out of necessity, having little choice but to depend upon their own

resources for survival during the war?

Public expectations of servicewives' fidelity during the period of their husbands' absences overseas were similarly nullified by the equally imperative plea for public discretion in regard to real or rumored incidents of wives' misconduct. Apparently more menacing to the war effort than the actual act of adultery, was the idea that such information could tunnel its way through to servicemen fighting on the front lines and thus seriously undermine morale. While authorities found it difficult to compel fidelity among the wives of its servicemen, they could propagate an image of wives' unerring faithfulness which would suit their purposes almost the same. Cracks in this mirror image only appeared when "concerned" citizens assumed it was their responsibility to inform servicemen of their wives' indiscretions. Publicized appeals in this connection clearly indicated that such "well-meaning" counsel was more detrimental to the war effort than the actual indiscretion itself. But if it was wives' wartime duty to remain faithful, then why was it not civilians' duty to report incidents of infidelity? While some citizens struggled with this apparent hypocrisy, for the majority of "home front soldiers", anxious to protect their troops' morale and efficiency overseas, this inconsistency made perfect sense.

As Newfoundland men enlisted to fight for the defence of a transparent ideal of womanhood, they also enlisted to protect a definition of masculinity which would have little basis in post-war reality. "Real men" fought to defend women. This became one of the major tenets upon which all recruiting efforts in Newfoundland were based.

The narrowing definition of “real manhood”, however, forced society to adjust the scale of masculinity, the pinnacle now represented by the stalwart serviceman, immersed in the predominantly male atmosphere of the front. With the completion of hostilities and the inevitable disbandment of service fraternities, this definition of masculinity would retain little validity. While “real womanhood” could still be attained with a powder puff, lipstick and two hours at the hairdressers, the gauge of “real manhood” would require serious revision. As in the Depression era when the definition of “male” as “breadwinner” temporarily lost its footing in Newfoundland society, the wartime definition of “man” as “uniformed protector of woman” would similarly be set adrift on a shifting gender scape after the war.

Newfoundland society also reverberated with the rumblings of shifting gender fronts as women were mobilized to fight the “home front war”. Housewifery, traditionally the most female of the “female” vocations, was effectively militarized for the war effort and women glorified as feisty “home front soldiers”. But the militarization of housewives also inferred a degree of “masculinization”, the military traditionally representing an exclusive domain of men. Thus, images of housewives wielding brooms like guns and saluting one another promoted a masculinized image of the most sacred of gender spheres - “women’s sphere” or the home. The congruent expectation that Newfoundland housewives also maintain their beauty and attractiveness while attending to their wartime roles rubbed roughly against the militarized image of women as home front soldiers. The two images could never meld into one, existing instead in uneasy

tension until the end of the war when the militarized image could be easily expended.

Newfoundland society's perception of its duty to protect servicemen's families from privation during the war similarly drew upon a female ideal at variance with the empowered image of women as home front soldiers. To raise funds to help needy service families, the Newfoundland Patriotic Association exploited an image of servicewives as defenceless victims of wartime exigencies. As a measure of society's debt to their servicemen husbands, Newfoundlanders owed headless service families a degree of protection and financial support. A degree of dignity was apparently not included in the exchange as the language of the appeals bespoke a patronizing and disparaging attitude toward these "pathetic" women. Of course, as Newfoundland society was conditioned to believe that only truly destitute cases warranted public assistance, the tragic tone of the Association's appeals is not entirely unexpected. It is still interesting to reflect, however, upon an atmosphere in which so many conflicting images of women managed to exist so peacefully alongside one another. While historians have documented the traditional themes which remained embedded in even the most revolutionary wartime images, one cannot deny the fact that they were empowered images nonetheless.⁹⁹

Representations of housewives as home front soldiers, actively backing up men in the war effort, presented an image of women as strong and capable partners in the war effort. The

⁹⁹ Historians generally agree that the majority of images presented in the wartime media were based on traditional attitudes and that self-sacrifice, not self-actualization, were their primary messages. Even apparently empowered images, such as that of "Rosie the Riveter", have been dissected to reveal their very traditional parts. See Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 71-72; Dabakis, "Gendered Labor", 201.

images rarely denoted a sense of equality with men but their potency stood in stark contrast to the victimized portrayals of women presented in the Patriotic Association's appeals and recruiting propaganda. That the two polarized images could exist so peacefully together reflected the state of national emergency but also society's confidence that the interloper could be easily extinguished once the immediate crisis had passed.

The most interesting comparison of wartime representational forms would actually be a juxtaposition of these media images with the real attitudes and living conditions of the women they meant to represent. The images studied here were obviously packaged to sell a product, namely the war and the war effort. Women were compelled to buy into the war, enlisting their services for the defence of the Dominion no matter what their skills or status in society. The images portrayed did not represent reality but they did promote ideals to which every woman, as wife, mother and worker, would have had to make comparisons at one time or another. Was this public pressure internalized by servicewives or did it simply exist in an intransigent form outside their reality? Could servicewives associate any sense of their wartime experience with these fictionalized, propagandist images or were they merely construed as objects of interest and occasional jest? Staring into the eyes of these two-dimensional glamour girls and home front dynamos, one wonders how thin these paper images actually were.

Chapter Four

“In Which We Serve”: Uncovering Servicewives’ Lived Experience

“In Which We Serve” was one of the most highly anticipated and widely acclaimed films of the war years. Written, directed by and starring Noel Coward, this patriotic block-buster was described as telling the tale “of a ship, the men who so gallantly serve in her, and of the women who love her, fear her, and pray with all their hearts for her safe keeping”.¹ In many ways the standard “blow-em-up” cinematic fare, it also attempted to interweave into its plot some of the human drama of the British home front. As the three main characters cling to a rubber dingy after their ship is lost in battle, each harkens back to memories of his loved ones at home in England and of their unerring devotion and fortitude in the face of wartime adversity. Images of wives’ courageous struggles on the home front are entwined into the general story of valor and honour on the front lines, implying a subtle sense of interdependence in the war effort. Advertising for the film championed its broad appeal, proclaiming: “The Greatest Picture of the Year is A GREAT WOMAN’S PICTURE!”.²

While fleshing out some of the stereotypic perceptions of the watery-eyed figure waving from the pier, the poignant portrayal never actually surmounted the cliches and characterizations which so plagued the “waiting wife” role. Who were these women?

¹ Advertisement for “In Which We Serve”, *The Daily News*, 11 May 1943, 6.

² “Famous Picture to Be Shown Here”, *The Grand Falls Advertiser*, 29 May 1943, 1.

What were they doing during the war? How were their lives affected by the fantastic events of war? Did their experiences differ? Was any one of them prepared for the bewildering challenges and expectations which met them upon their husbands' decision to enlist? We can assume that some wives met the challenges head-on and emerged stronger for the battle. Others undoubtedly stumbled under the pressure and fell beneath its weight. One thing is sure: unlike their celluloid alter-egos, real servicewives were never guaranteed a happy ending and rarely had the chance to reshoot a scene.

In attempting to examine the condition of Newfoundland servicewives during the Second World War, the availability of the 1945 manuscript census afforded a unique opportunity to track the living and working conditions of these rather inconspicuous women.³ Blending into the general population as they did, servicewives were rarely identified as a distinct group, denoting in itself the ambiguous line they straddled between civilian and military roles during the war. Similarly opportune was the accessibility of the military service records of the Department of Defence. This veritable "Pandora's box" (or boxes to be exact) contained the personnel records of

³ The manuscript census was used to develop some conclusions about the general characteristics of Newfoundland servicewives. The census often did not stipulate exactly which women were married to servicemen but a master list of approximately 400 servicewives' names and addresses was compiled through enlistment records and several amalgamated listings of servicewives discovered in the service records of the Department of Defence. By cross-referencing these names against the 1945 census according to community, or in the major centers by street, 121 servicewives were eventually located. The greater portion of these wives were located in St. John's simply because the city's wider use of street names and numbers permitted more definite identification. Outport residents were usually listed under the community name only.

Newfoundland's "Fighting Forces", serving both at home and abroad during the war. Only recently discovered after years in storage, these highly confidential files contain government and military correspondence related to servicemen's wives, as well as wives' personal letters to government officials. Whether stolid intergovernmental memos or passionate hand-written notes from wives, the correspondence gives voice to events which occurred over a half century ago. Finally, oral interviews were used to verify some assumptions and help enliven various details.⁴ Although interviewing procedures are inherently cluttered with personal biases and interpretations, these women's memories of their wartime experiences offered a unique first-hand perspective which could not be overlooked in a study of this kind. Through the integration of these various sources, an effort was made to reconstruct servicewives' experiences on the Newfoundland home front and offer some insight into how they reacted to the wartime role in which they served.

Historical examination of servicewives' experiences during the Second

⁴ Twenty women were interviewed for this research but only ten proved to be a perfect match with the study's criteria. The ten were married either before or during the course of the war, their husbands were members of the British armed forces, Newfoundland Militia, Newfoundland Forestry Unit or Merchant Marine, and they lived in Newfoundland for the entirety of the war. Many of the interviews were conducted orally but when distance or inconvenience proved a factor, written questionnaires were also used. To protect subjects' anonymity, names and other identifying information have not been presented in the text.

World War has been largely limited to popular histories, such as Dianne Taylor's There's No Wife Like It, Ben Wicks' Promise You'll Take Care of My Daughter and Barbara Ladouceur and Phyllis Spence's Blackouts to Bright Lights.⁵ Drawing primarily on oral interviews and personal reminiscences, these collections offer a wonderful sense of intimacy but few generalized conclusions or observations. The historical value of these works is immeasurable, however, as a necessary stepping stone from which more analytical examinations can be launched.

D'Ann Campbell attempted to infuse more immediacy into her examination of servicewives' wartime experiences in Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era. Utilizing a sociological study of Ohio servicewives conducted during the Second World War, Campbell evaluated the war's influence on servicewives' attitudes and behavior. She described this group of women as being lonely, unhappy and financially strapped throughout the war, yet discovering a maturity and independence because of their experiences which contributed to more egalitarian marriages afterward.⁶ These conclusions fit snugly into the larger theme of Campbell's book, namely that the war broadened women's expectations for their post-war lives,

⁵ Dianne Taylor, There's No Wife Like It (Victoria: Braemar Books Limited, 1985); Ben Wicks, Promise You'll Take Care of My Daughter (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Limited, 1992); and Barbara Ladouceur and Phyllis Spence (eds.), Blackouts to Bright Lights: Canadian War Bride Stories (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 1995).

⁶ Campbell, Women at War with America, 210-212.

reinventing domesticity and femininity to reflect women's greater sense of self.⁷ Her conclusions point to the war as a definite advancement for women in American society, not on a public level, but rather in women's private estimations of their own value and capabilities.

Writing in the 1980's, Campbell and her contemporaries focused on "improved status" and "real change" for women as a result of the war experience. More recently, however, historians have approached the topic from another vantage, arguing that women's wartime experiences need to be examined against the broader framework of the gender systems at work within the military, labour force, home and society at large. How did women's wartime activities challenge the boundaries of established gender systems? How did gender systems evolve in response to the changing economic, political and social conditions of war?⁸ The previous chapters of this study examined the political and popular discourses which attempted to manipulate and preserve established gender systems in Newfoundland. Now servicewives' "lived experiences" are measured against these discourses in an effort to determine their influence and ultimate applicability during the war.

⁷ Campbell, *Women at War with America*, 225-238.

⁸ Feminist historians interested in the gender systems at work during the Second World War include Dabakis, "Gendered Labor", 182-204; Higonnet and Higonnet, "The Double Helix", 31-47; Joan Scott, "Rewriting History", 21-30.

The 1945 census was the eleventh national census of Newfoundland and arguably one of its most important. Designed and prepared in July 1945 and conducted in the early fall of that year, the census documented the living and working conditions of a country on the cusp of political, economic and social transition. With the winding down of hostilities and massive demobilization imminent, Newfoundlanders now turned their attention to their rather dubious economic future and stunted political condition. The island was no longer the desperately bankrupt entity which had been forced to sacrifice responsible government in 1934. Its strategic location in the war had proved a veritable boon for the country's coffers, extensive military construction contributing to treasury surpluses heretofore unseen or even imaginable in the colony's history. Now in a position to throw off the political shackles which had become increasingly difficult to bear, Newfoundlanders could choose the course that their political future would take. Thus, the 1945 census represented more than the usual enumeration and analysis of the population. It was a cataloguing of the country's assets and liabilities which would help determine the position and status it would assume in forthcoming constitutional negotiations. Lewis Crummey, the Secretary for Public Health and Welfare, described the significance of the national census at this juncture: "It will be agreed that at this particular time the Census assumes a degree of importance hitherto unknown, representing as it does a complete stock-taking of the composition and condition of the

people of this country as viewed from the widest possible angle”.⁹

As an historical source for this study over fifty years later, the census is particularly significant as it documented the living and working conditions of Newfoundland servicewives at the very point of demobilization. With the war over but most of their husbands awaiting official discharge from the military, these women were still living a largely transient existence, just now being afforded the luxury of planning a post-war future and establishing permanent homes of their own. The census recorded who these women were, in what condition they had been living, and what they were doing in regard to work during the war years. Had the census been taken even four months later, it would have invariably revealed altered living and working conditions as couples established and reestablished homes within the community. What the census affords then is a “snapshot” in time, from which we can make assumptions of servicewives’ wartime experiences in Newfoundland and determine how they coped with their lot in the wartime drama.

A representational sampling of one-hundred and twenty-one wives was compiled through the 1945 census, representing women from all over Newfoundland - outports, towns and city. According to this sampling, those wives left to “carry on” at home were primarily what we would expect in regard to age, nationality, and education.¹⁰

⁹ “Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to All Secretaries”, 6 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 143, File 17, PANL.

¹⁰ A “racial origin” category was also included in the census but the answers appeared very subjective, dependent upon the respondent’s or the census taker’s

They were relatively young women, their average age being 27.7 years in 1945, placing most in their early to mid twenties during the course of the war.¹¹ Nearly all listed their nationality as “Newfoundlander”, only one Canadian, one American, one English and one Scottish woman declaring otherwise.¹² They were also relatively well educated, sixty percent declaring that they had attended seven or more years of schooling and only thirteen out of 121 unable to declare that they could read and write.¹³ Like most Newfoundland women of their generation, they had probably attended school intermittently until their middle teens, their education being recurrently interrupted by

particular interpretation. No viable assumptions could be measured through examination.

¹¹ Of the 121 women located in the 1945 census, all but two recorded their age. Only one woman was listed as being over 40 years of age in 1945, and five as being under twenty years (one 18 year old and four at 19 years).

¹² According to the general figures presented in the 1945 census, most women in Newfoundland, in fact 98%, declared that they had been born in the colony. The Eleventh Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, Table 35; evidently the Scottish woman was a war bride, declaring that she had lived in Whitbourne in 1935 while her husband hailed from Spaniard’s Bay, Newfoundland; the English woman was the wife of an officer in the Newfoundland Regiment. She and her three children had followed her husband to Newfoundland at the beginning of the war and were still residing here in 1945. Reference to such was found in “Secretary for Justice to Secretary for Finance”, 5 October 1939, PRC #35, Box 73, File 21, PANL; the Canadian and American were both born outside Newfoundland but declared that had moved to Newfoundland before 1935.

¹³ The percentage of women in the sampling who declared that they could read and write (108 out of 121 or 89%) matched exactly with the census figures for all Newfoundland women over the age of ten (89%). In the category regarding years of schooling, the census sampling again showed a close correlation with the national average, 74% of the sampling declaring that they had completed five or more years of schooling as compared to 69% of all Newfoundland women over the age of ten who had declared the same. The Eleventh Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, Tables 24 and 40.

demands for their labour in the home.¹⁴ Stints in the paid labour force may have followed but would have abruptly ended when they married in their late teens or early twenties.¹⁵ This was the pattern of life for most women in Newfoundland society in the early twentieth century. The role of wife, mother and homemaker was the vocation to which the majority of women aspired. The pattern defined their expectations and life course. The inevitability of this path was hardly to be railed against as there were few conceivable alternatives with which it could be compared.¹⁶ “Spinsterhood” was a term

¹⁴ Linda Cullum and Maeve Baird described the traditional pattern of life for Newfoundland women in “A Woman’s Lot”. According to such, the importance of education was not always recognized in Newfoundland, particularly for female children whose labour was often required at home, helping their mothers with “women’s work”, 79-80; In relation to Stephenville women, Cecilia Benoit explained that “[c]hildhood freedom frequently ended as early as age eight or nine. Young girls, like their male siblings, might leave school after the second or third grade. Prior to World War II, few finished high school”, “Mothering in a Newfoundland Community”, 180.

¹⁵ In her examination of the pattern of women’s employment in St. John’s between the two World Wars, Nancy Forestell noted: “Full-time, paid employment outside the home was just a temporary interlude for most between leaving school and getting married. It was part of one stage in their life cycles... Women seldom considered that they would ever have to return to wage labour after marriage, for they expected that their husbands would assume the role of breadwinner and earn a ‘family wage’ while they took on the role of homemaker”, “Times Were Hard”, 76; the assumption that most of the women of the census sampling married in their late teens or early twenties is evidenced by the average age of the sampling being 27.7 years in 1945 and the predominantly young ages of their children.

¹⁶ According to Cullum and Baird, “[i]n the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most women in Newfoundland married... married life was simply an extension of life in her father’s house. The training of childhood prepared her for the duties and responsibilities of a home and family of her own. Marriage age varied from community to community between 1900 and 1949, but usually young women married by their late teens”, “A Woman’s Lot”, 129.

filled with pity and disdain, representing a fate to be avoided at all costs.¹⁷

The women of the census sampling apparently complied with societal standards, marrying in their late teens or early twenties and many beginning to have children right away.¹⁸ Judging by the declared ages of these children, 43 percent of the sampling had children either before or very early in the war, conceivably before their husbands' enlistment or transfer overseas.¹⁹ Almost a quarter of the women were raising more than one child at this time but only three women were raising relatively large families of more than three children.²⁰ By 1945, however, 71 percent of the women described themselves as mothers, 39 percent of the entire sampling having a child at

¹⁷ In "Mothering in a Newfoundland Community", Cecilia Benoit recognized that "marriage was the highest goal for woman, other than entering the convent" but further explained that the financial resources required to send a daughter to a convent eliminated this goal as an option for most women, 177. Benoit also described those women who did not marry as usually burdened with the label "old maid" and remaining "a servant and perpetual minor in her parents' house, despite her age, life experience and productive labour. Even married women tended to view her as somehow 'abnormal' since she did not mother children", 180.

¹⁸ "Once married a woman would be expected to begin a family", Cullum and Baird explained. "Motherhood was considered to be a woman's major role in life", "A Woman's Lot", 129.

¹⁹ 52 of the 121 women traced in the 1945 census declared that they had children four years of age or older (43%).

²⁰ 29 of the 121 women traced declared that they had more than one child four years of age or older (24%); only three women of the entire sampling declared that they had more than three children four years of age or older.

home one year of age or younger.²¹ The pronounced “baby boom” in 1945 was predictable as couples either started families or resumed having children after the incumbent delay caused by years of separation and the uncertainty of war. The apparent “gap” in the ages of many siblings represented the period of husbands’ absences overseas. Of the 47 women who declared that they had a child one year of age or younger in 1945, 30 percent of these women described the next oldest sibling as being four years of age or older.²² For 36 percent of this group of new mothers, the baby was their first child.²³ Thus, we can assume that the war interrupted many servicewives’ natural childbirth cycle and delayed its initiation in other cases. It is also apparent that a sizable number of servicewives were raising children alone during the course of the war, assuming the role of single mothers for the period of their husbands’ military service.

The census sampling also suggests that relatively few servicewives were living in homes they owned during the war. Only 17 percent of the entire sampling

²¹ 86 of the 121 women traced declared they had one or more children in 1945 (71%); 47 of the 121 declared that they had a child one year of age or younger (39%). Although one year of age would imply that the child was born well before the end of the war, the determination of a child’s age under one year was very approximate. Many census takers did not bother to list a child’s age in months (especially over six months) but rather rounded it off to one year.

²² 14 of the 47 women who declared that they had a child one year of age or younger in 1945, described the next oldest sibling as being four years of age or older (30%).

²³ For 17 of the 47 women who declared that they had a child one year or younger, this was their first born (36%).

declared that they owned the homes in which they were residing in 1945.²⁴ These women tended to be a little older than the average age of the sampling, averaging approximately 30 years of age as opposed to 27. A large majority of these women in “owned” homes were also raising children at the time (86%), almost half having large families of three or more children (48%).²⁵ Seventy-one percent of these homes were described as “singles”, as opposed to “semi-detached” or “row” houses, the average value per home being \$2,552.²⁶ These families undoubtedly bought or built these homes before the war, the financial constraints of military allowances making such a purchase virtually impossible during the course of the war. The fact that these women appear slightly older than the average age of the sampling and more inclined to have had children, and even large families at this time, further supports the assumption that they had established these homes well before their husbands’ military enlistment.

While home ownership suggests a comparable advantage in the living conditions of these women, the majority of these houses would hardly have been fit with the amenities which connote luxury. Many homes outside St. John’s, and even within St. John’s, lacked indoor plumbing or central heating, necessitating the hauling of much

²⁴ 21 of the 121 women traced declared that they were living in homes they owned (17%).

²⁵ 18 of the 21 women living in owned homes declared that they had children (86%), 10 of whom had three or more children (48%).

²⁶ 15 of the 21 women described themselves as living in “single” homes (71%); 3 in “semi-detached”; 2 in “row” houses; and 1 in a “flat”.

water and chopping of wood.²⁷ Numerous wives complained to government officials, not about their insufficient military allowances, but their inability to manage many of the heavier chores around the home which their husbands' had traditionally performed.²⁸

After writing three times to the chief officer of the Newfoundland Militia and receiving no reply, one servicewife wrote directly to the Governor for help:

I have two small children, one of them three years old and one six months and I need my husband home to get wood for me and which I have none for the winter, which will soon be here, and living in an outport it means a good lot of work for a man, and then how can I do it, a woman...Also I have a small house which is not finished, the water comes in everywhere and the snow will come in this winter and if you could see it you would say it is not warm enough for a dog to live in alone human beings, because it needs to be finished.²⁹

Another wife complained to the Department of Defence:

My baby has not turned two years and I have to do all the outside work. Such as carrying water and the well is over a hundred yards from the house and I'm not strong enough to do a man's work. We have a lot of land and its all going to ruin... We got a calf this summer that means the grass has to be cut. I'm not

²⁷ The number of consumers of electrical power in Newfoundland nearly doubled between 1949 and 1959 and then doubled again between 1959 and 1969, denoting customers' limited access to electrical power during the war years. See Historical Statistics of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume 1 (St. John's: Creative Printers and Publishers Limited, 1970), Table S-6.

²⁸ "Magistrate to Secretary for Defence", 16 September 1944, PRC #35, Box 80, File 86, PANL; "Mrs. ___ to Department of Public Health and Welfare", 4 August 1942, PRC #35, Box 16, File 39, PANL; "Mrs. ___ to Director of Recruiting", 25 November 1941, PRC #35, Box 26, File 25, PANL.

²⁹ "Mrs. ___, Bonavista Bay, to His Excellency, The Governor", 14 November 1942, PRC #35, Box 143, File 3, PANL.

*feeling so well and so much worry is getting me down.*³⁰

Struggling to keep its own head above the waves of administrative crises, the Commission of Government could afford little sympathy for the domestic predicaments of such women. In dismissing servicewives' claims that they were ill-suited to perform "men's work" around the home, however, the Government, in effect, translated an expectation that servicewives were capable of assuming these traditionally "male" tasks. Magistrates routinely dismissed wives' complaints that they were incapable of managing their homes alone, one observing in May 1943:

Mrs. ___ could not suggest any really sound reason as to why she desired the return of her husband, apart from the fact that his services were necessary to keep the property in decent repair, that she had no one to bring water from the well during the winter months, and that she missed her husband in providing kindling for the home.³¹

Occasionally, wives were curtly advised that they could always "hire a man" to do these essential household chores.³² But in wartime Newfoundland, this was much easier said than done. Wives often responded in disbelief to such counsel, questioning how they could ever obtain these services on their meager military allowances and in an environment in which almost every available man was either in the military or employed

³⁰ "Mrs. ___, Bonavista, to Department of Defence", 17 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 93, File 91, PANL.

³¹ "Stipendiary Magistrate to Secretary for Defence", 11 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 47, File 43, PANL.

³² "Secretary for Defence to Commanding Officer, H.M.C.S. "Avalon", 28 June 1944, PRC #35, Box 92, File 74, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to District Magistrate", 26 September 1942, PRC #35, Box 16, File 15, PANL.

on military construction projects.³³ Ultimately, most servicewives had to manage alone, taking over responsibility for these heavier chores or successfully negotiating alternative arrangements.

Certainly, some servicewives were better prepared to manage these responsibilities than were others, having already become accustomed to running their households in the absence of male support prior to the war. As Cecilia Benoit described in her examination of Stephenville women, economic factors often forced the men of that community to recurrently leave their homes to find work in the nearby lumber camps of Corner Brook. After the fall harvest, many men would leave the community and not return before Christmas, after which they would be gone again until it was time for spring planting to begin. As Benoit explained: "The women watched their male kin come and go with the seasons, never quite sure where they were, always fearful that they would return without enough money to settle accounts with the merchant".³⁴ With their husbands absent from the home for months at a time, these women were necessarily forced to assume the "hard work" involved in running their households and family farms, in combination with the other activities of their sex. They planted seeds, doctored animals and gathered firewood in an effort to keep their families and farms operating

³³ "I can't afford to pay anyone on what I get. I just get enough to live", wrote Mrs. ___ of Codroy to the local magistrate, 29 August 1942, PRC #35, Box 16, File 15, PANL; "Mrs. ___, Point aux Gaul, to Secretary for Defence", 5 July 1944, PRC #35, Box 109, File 32, PANL.

³⁴ Benoit, "Mothering in a Newfoundland Community", 175.

smoothly until the men returned.³⁵ But unlike these situations in which wives were left to manage their homes alone for months at a time, husbands' military service now forced wives to cope independently for years on end, with little relief in sight. Husbands no longer had the opportunity to replenish the families' reserves of firewood or to make periodic repairs to the home. Moreover, servicewives were obliged to manage their households on static military incomes which did not reflect the rising cost of living which existed in Newfoundland at the time. Husbands' absences from the home now "cost" their families money, especially in a community like Stephenville which became a site of significant military construction during the war.

More common than home ownership among servicewives, according to the census sampling, was the renting of apartments or row houses. Approximately one third of the wives traced through the census described themselves as living in rented accommodations, the majority renting "row" houses (39%) or "apartments and flats"(30%).³⁶ The average rent paid for these units was approximately \$18 per month.³⁷ To put this in perspective, the average gunner's wife received only about \$50 per month

³⁵ "Ibid.", 181.

³⁶ 37 of the 121 women traced declared that they were living in rented homes (31%). Of the 33 who actually described the type of home they were renting, thirteen described it as a "row" house (39%), ten as a "flat or apartment"(30%), five as a "semi-detached"(15%), and five as a "single"(15%).

³⁷ Somewhat surprisingly, \$18 turned out to be the average monthly rent paid for all tenant occupied dwellings in Newfoundland according to the 1945 census. The Eleventh Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, Table 64.

and, because of the sharply rising cost of living in Newfoundland, the price of food and coal had become extraordinarily expensive. The price of flour, for example, had risen from \$2.50 to \$3.50 per sack in 1940 alone and the price of coal finally capped at \$24 per ton.³⁸ One wife from Bell Island described her growing frustration with the situation: “The allowance that I receive from my husband who is serving in the Artillery is not enough for substances of life. Compared with the present price of food, \$50.94 is not a living only an existence. My children and myself are both naked, cold and hungry. I can’t get coal enough to keep us warm”.³⁹ Also frustrating for servicewives, was the continually escalating cost of rent, especially in areas of concentrated military construction, such as St. John’s. Workers from all over Newfoundland were leaving their regular jobs in the fishery and similar industries and migrating to areas offering higher paying military construction jobs. This abnormal influx of workers strangled local housing conditions, creating fervent competition, inevitable price hikes, and the “general practice” of periodically evicting tenants so as to obtain higher rentals.⁴⁰ Existing on

³⁸ “Constabulary Report”, 18 September 1941, GN 13/1, Box 393, File 9, PANL; “Coal Regulations”, GN 13/1/B, Box 11, File 37, PANL.

³⁹ “Mrs. __, Wabana Mines, to Colonel Rendell”, 4 April 1942, PRC #35, Box 41, File 59, PANL.

⁴⁰ According to the 1945 census, 36% of the households in the city of St. John’s were described as “crowded households”, 46% of those in Bell Island, 54% in Buchans and 57% in Windsor. The census defined a “crowded household” as one with less than one room per person. The Eleventh Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, Table 71; “Department of Defence to Magistrate”, 20 November 1941, GN 13/1, Box 344, File 6, PANL; “Memorandum by the Deputy Food Controller”, GN 13/1/B, Box 109, File 52, PANL; also see Lewis and Shrimpton, “Policymaking in Newfoundland during the

static military allowances, servicewives could hardly hope to compete in this aggressive atmosphere. The presence of children only intensified their disadvantage as landlords were usually reluctant to accept tenants with children. One wife recounted the difficulties she had encountered in her efforts to obtain and retain rental accommodations for herself and her three children:

I've had too much trouble trying to get some place to live with three children. It isn't easy to rent rooms with three children...I'm going to tell you how I've had to bum around since he's been over there. After I had to get out of the house in Corner Brook I lived with his Aunt for three months then I came out here with my mother for the winter. Then the next spring I rented some rooms with my Sister who was then living in a rented house belonging to a family who was then living in Buchans. We were only there three months when we got our Notice to get out the people wanted to move out and there was no other place we could rent. We stayed there and had to be put out on the road and so my mother had to take me in again and they don't want me around with three children.⁴¹

The Commission eventually introduced an act restricting unfair rent increases throughout Newfoundland but the very nature of the island's chaotic housing situation at this time tended to impede the effectiveness of such administrative controls.⁴² In many of the major military centers, any home owner with an extra room could readily locate tenants who would pay top dollar for the luxury of a roof and even half a bed. The rental accommodations of the women traced through the census sampling varied greatly

1940's", 235.

⁴¹ "Mrs. ___ to Sir", 8 May 1944, PRC #35, Box 115, File 102, PANL.

⁴² "An Act Relating to Restriction Upon the Increase of Rent and Recovery of Possession of Premises in Certain Cases", 29 November 1942, GN 13/1, Box 1, File 45, PANL.

both in cost and the number of rooms they could rent. In St. John's, for example, some servicewives rented two-room flats for as little as \$5 a month while others paid \$25 to \$40 for two to five-room row houses. The wife of an officer in the Newfoundland Regiment lived in an eight-room row house costing \$60 per month, but her husband and two fellow soldiers (conceivably military servants) were also in residence. Most service families who rented, even those with up to four children, appeared to make do in two or three rooms, although the condition and location of these units is impossible to gauge through the census. A Newfoundland Constabulary report in 1941 referred to the condition of one service family's rented home as "indescribable":

On entering the house I went over a stairs and I noticed a back room immediately on the landing of the stairs that the window was gone completely. Mrs. ___ informed me that this has rotted away and fallen out. She occupies two rooms on the second floor; one for a kitchen and the other for a bedroom. All the family sleeps in two beds in this room...The top flat of this house is unoccupied; this being due to the roof being in such a leaky condition. Mrs. ___ informed me that she could not live there, and in fact, now when it rains, the water comes down through the two rooms which she is occupying...Mrs. ___ receives \$50.00 per month as an allotment, and she informs me that this can scarcely feed her and the children due to the high prices of food. Already she has contracted a bill of \$40.00 at the Grocery Store where she is dealing, and is trying to pay for it from one month to another.⁴³

The severe housing shortage created cut-throat competition for even the most dilapidated of slum housing in areas of military construction.

The steadily rising cost of living and competitive housing market left most servicewives with few alternatives but to move back in with their parents or other family

⁴³ "Constabulary Report", 24 November 1941, PRC #35, Box 111, File 182, PANL.

members. The situation appears to have been the most common living arrangement for local servicewives, representing over half of the women identified through the census sampling (51%).⁴⁴ Initially, this statistical result was attributed to the assumption that these women would have been the most easily traced through the census source, undoubtedly moving far less frequently than servicewives living in rented accommodations during the war. But the service records of the Department of Defence further supported the idea that this was indeed the most prevalent living situation among servicewives. Government officials often referred to servicewives' decision to move back in with parents or other family members as "normal procedure".⁴⁵ Most of these wives in the census sampling were listed as living with their own parents or relatives on their side of the family (66% of the census sampling), as opposed to their husbands' parents or other in-laws (34%).⁴⁶ Of course, traditionally in Newfoundland, women tended to remain in their parents' homes until marriage. The arrangement afforded a measure of supervision and protection for young women but also allowed wage-earning

⁴⁴ 62 of the 121 women traced declared that they were living with their own parents, their husband's parents or other family members such as brothers or uncles (51%). This can be verified by their response to the census question, "relationship to head of household". If wives were living in their own homes or rental accommodations, they responded "wife". If living with family, they responded "daughter", "daughter-in-law", etc.

⁴⁵ "Stipendiary Magistrate to Secretary for Defence", 1 June 1943, PRC #35, Box 114, File 45, PANL.

⁴⁶ Of the 62 women living with family during the war, 41 resided with members of their own family (66%), while 21 lived with members of their husband's family (34%).

daughters to contribute to the household economy.⁴⁷ Although married, servicewives again appeared to warrant a measure of parental protection and supervision during the period of their husbands' absences overseas. Moreover, the military allowances which they received each month may have represented a vital, or at least welcomed, contribution to their parents' household income. In such situations, military allowances may have afforded a degree of financial security and comfort for servicewives and their families, particularly in comparison to those wives attempting to live independently during the war.⁴⁸

Despite its many advantages, moving back in with parents or other family members could also create overcrowded and stressful living conditions. The number of rooms occupied per family member in these dwellings is difficult to estimate, but the census sampling suggests many congested accommodations, shared by numerous generations of family. One servicewife, for example, was described as sharing a seven-room semi-detached home with eleven other extended family members. Another instance

⁴⁷ "Most parents did not like daughters to live someplace else, where they would be away from their supervision and protection...[they] were reluctant to allow their daughters to move beyond the bounds of their guardianship", Nancy Forestell explained in regard to St. John's women in "Times Were Hard", 82; in relation to Stephenville women, Cecilia Benoit described the Catholic hierarchy as strongly believing "that a woman should be 'protected' by a man - either by a father, a husband, a male relative, or at least by the local priest", "Mothering in a Newfoundland Community", 177.

⁴⁸ Traditionally in Newfoundland, especially in smaller communities, husbands also brought their wives to live in their parents' homes immediately after marriage until the means were available to build their own homes nearby. Porter, "Women and Old Boats", 98.

listed a servicewife and ten family members renting a five-room row house in East End St. John's. The Department of Defence records similarly cite many incidents in which servicewives were forced to leave their parents' homes because of overcrowded conditions.⁴⁹ A Newfoundland Constabulary report described the living situation of one airman's wife staying with her family on Bell Island:

[The servicewife] informed me that she has two children...with whom she is at present living in the home of her mother...She has no bed of her own in this home and is using a bed belonging to a member of the family...There are eight members of the family which, together with [the servicewife] and her two children, makes a total of eleven persons. The house has three bedrooms only, one of which is occupied by three sons all of whom are sleeping in one bed. Another son is sleeping on a couch in the front room downstairs in order that his sister [the servicewife] may have a bedroom for herself and her two children. [The mother] also informed me that she is about to be married but before doing so it is necessary for [the servicewife] to find another home for herself and her two children.⁵⁰

Living with family undoubtedly offered some sense of support and security for wives awaiting their husband's return from overseas. But the crowded living conditions, lack of privacy and inevitable intrusion into their personal affairs, created a longing among many servicewives for a permanent home of their own. These wives complained to the Government that they were forced to move from place to place, continually beholden to various relatives for their keep. One wife demanded: "I haven't

⁴⁹ "Commanding Officer H.M.C.S. "Avalon" to Secretary for Defence", 31 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 82, File 72, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to H.A. Outerbridge", 17 May 1944, PRC #35, Box 92, File 96, PANL; "Mrs. __, Bell Island, to Commanding Officer", 20 January 1943, PRC #35, Box 95, File 90, PANL.

⁵⁰ "Constabulary Report", 8 October 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 22, PANL.

any home of my own and it's impossible to get one with the allotment I am getting and I can't work as I have a child to look after. I have to depend on someone else for a place to live in and I don't think I should have to depend on someone else, with a husband of my own".⁵¹ A similar request was addressed to the Commissioner for Justice and Defence:

I have no home only going from place to place. I spend so much time at my own home and so much at my husband's home at Hickman's Hr as I do not get enough money to supply the necessary things of life. As I have to buy everything from fire wood up. And I have a child two years old. So you can see that forty-one dollars is not much to clothe, feed and buy everything else according too for two persons .⁵²

Another wife's anxiety over not having a "real home" was heightened by her recently discovered pregnancy. She wrote: "I have no home of my own and neither my step-father, nor my father-in-law can help me in any way and since we were married after my husband went overseas I find it impossible to make a home fit to live in, and my living on my naval allowance, especially in my present condition".⁵³ Such requests drew upon analogous phraseology, such as "no permanent home", "no home of my own", or simply "no home". These women were not describing houses or larger apartments but "homes" where they could settle down and begin raising their families like "normal" wives.

The written requests which servicewives directed to government officials

⁵¹ "Mrs. __, St. John's, to Department of Public Health and Welfare", 19 January 1945, PRC #35, Box 88, File 62, PANL.

⁵² "Mrs. __, Southport, to Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 13 December 1943, PRC #35, Box 105, File 80, PANL.

⁵³ "Mrs. __, Bell Island, to Secretary for Defence", 4 June 1943, PRC #35, Box 95, File 90, PANL.

were usually clear and to the point. They desired either an increase in their family allowance which would enable them to set up a home of their own, or they wanted their husbands discharged from the military, whence they could secure local employment, a familial home and adequate support. "If it's impossible for me, not to get any more money, I can't see why he can't get released from the navy, so he could get some other job", one servicewife argued.⁵⁴ "Please do not think I want to be a slacker from the war effort", another explained, "as it would be the last thing I would do to try and get my husband out of the army if he wasn't urgently needed at home".⁵⁵ A sense of bitterness permeated other requests: "Am I supposed to starve and my two children, while my husband is fighting? If you don't intend to pay me get my husband back and put a single man in his place. I fail to see why they took him in the first place with so many single men who's place is over there".⁵⁶ Another wife stated simply: "I have two children one three years and the other two years in February. And I have firing to by , rent to pay and other things to by and I cannot live on what I am getting so I want my husband home. And home he must come. I demand my husband from the Navy".⁵⁷ Servicewives were

⁵⁴ "Mrs. __, St. John's, to Department of Public Health and Welfare", 19 January 1942, PRC #35, Box 88, File 62, PANL.

⁵⁵ "Mrs. __, Point Aux Gaul, to Secretary for Defence", 4 December 1943, PRC #35, Box 109, File 32, PANL.

⁵⁶ "Mrs. __, Bell Island, to Sir", 18 April 1941, PRC #35, Box 115, File 25, PANL.

⁵⁷ "Mrs. __ to Director of Recruiting", 25 November 1941, PRC #35, Box 79, File 68, PANL.

told that their sacrifices and suffering were part of their contribution to the war effort, but even the most ardent patriots would have had their breaking points.

The Government's response to servicewives' requests for their husbands' discharge or temporary compassionate leave was always guarded. Upon investigation of such cases it was usually determined that there would be "very little that the rating [sailor] would be able to do to help his family by obtaining his discharge".⁵⁸ A district magistrate confided in one instance:

There is no doubt about the anxiety of the wife to get her husband home; that is quite understandable in the case of a married man who has been away from his family for three and a half years. The main point is whether he could be of any better economic advantage to them at home. Personally I believe their condition would be much worse off if he were to be returned...insofar as the fishery end of it goes the soldier would be better off soldiering than trying at this difficult time to restore his fishing property to normal.⁵⁹

Often authorities failed to consider, or refused to consider, the extent to which economic conditions had changed since the husband had enlisted for military service. True, there had been few employment opportunities in 1939, but now wives witnessed the tremendous evolution in the demand for labour and rates of wages in Newfoundland and felt distinctly left out.⁶⁰ Correspondence from the Secretary for Defence to the Trade

⁵⁸ The term "rating" referred to a naval enlisted man; "Newfoundland Ranger Force Report", 10 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 47, File 117, PANL.

⁵⁹ "District Magistrate to Secretary for Defence", 30 May 1944, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

⁶⁰ The district magistrate for Grand Bank explained to the Secretary for Defence: "Fishery activities in this community and district are such in season, as are also opportunities of berths on coasting vessels, that no man who is physically fit would have

Commissioner in London addressed this disparity:

There is no doubt that the condition of this family under present conditions is better than it would be if he were at home and still receiving Government relief...As it is Mrs. ___ is receiving \$50.00 a month and the Gunner is of course fed and clothed at Government expense so that his living expenses do not reduce the \$50.00 a month for the family. On the other hand it is quite possible that the Gunner would be able to obtain employment on one of the construction projects and earn considerably more than \$50.00 a month.⁶¹

A constabulary investigation similarly concluded:

At the time [the serviceman] joined the Artillery he was on relief and the prime reason for joining was to support his wife and family. He now sends the amount of \$39.80 per month to them but this is not sufficient under present living conditions according to his wife. In my opinion what I know of the case should this man be returned and take advantage of the present employment boom he would be in a position to better look after his family and improve their standard of living in the community.⁶²

Husbands had signed a contract which placed their families in an increasingly disadvantaged economic position. Wives now attempted to correct the situation.

To be sure, the Government was skeptical of the increasing number of applications for discharge that they were receiving. "I am very much alarmed at the increase in the number of applications for discharge from the services on compassionate grounds", the Secretary for Defence reported in April 1942, "At times I suspect that

to remain idle under existing conditions", 29 January 1944, PRC #35, Box 81, File 50, PANL; "Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Defence", 12 September 1942, PRC #35, Box 143, File 3, PANL.

⁶¹ "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 18 December 1941, PRC #35, Box 111, File 182, PANL.

⁶² "Constabulary Report", 26 June 1942, PRC #35, Box 111, File 134, PANL.

some of these applications originate in the man or his family's desire, to have him back in Newfoundland now that conditions have improved so much and remunerative employment is so easy to obtain. As a consequence some of these applications may not be truly genuine".⁶³ By June 1943, the Secretary for Defence was cautioning the Trade Commissioner that the granting of such discharge requests would certainly become:

...the thin edge of a wedge and would be forerunner of scores of applications, and it would be very difficult to handle the situation. Already we have had a number of visits and applications from wives for the repatriation of their husbands but it has been felt that especially in view of the increased allowances for wives and children that there has been no real justification and no action has been taken to secure discharge.⁶⁴

Investigating magistrates held similarly suspicious views of wives' discharge requests. One observed in late 1943: "It seems clear that the persistent requests which have come from this section regarding the release of men from the services emanate from the fact that one or two service men from the section had secured their release, and others at home who have relatives on service believe it is simply to ask and receive repatriation and/or discharge".⁶⁵ These "patriotic slackers" were disdainfully compared to other service families "whose circumstances are as deserving as the case at issue and yet these people are proud enough to bear with distress in the 'cause' of which they are a voluntary part,

⁶³ "Secretary for Defence to Officer Commanding Newfoundland Militia", 1 April 1942, PRC #35, Box 42, File 50, PANL.

⁶⁴ "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 12 June 1943, PRC #35, Box 16, File 15, PANL.

⁶⁵ "District Magistrate to Secretary for Defence", 30 December 1943, PRC #35, Box 109, File 18, PANL.

rather than seek the easy way out of patriotic responsibility".⁶⁶

But "patriotic responsibility" held little meaning to a wife struggling to feed and house her family in wartime Newfoundland. Lacking any type of "means test" with which to gauge service families' degree of qualifying "destitution", local authorities brought their own prejudices to investigations, subjectively determining who "deserved" extra consideration.⁶⁷ One constable sympathetically described the condition of a particularly destitute servicewife in St. John's:

I feel quite sure that it is impossible for this family to live at that house during the coming winter. I would also like to remark that the woman herself is of a good type. I noticed that the floor of the kitchen, although bare, was clean, and the children were clean also except for the shabby appearance of their clothing. You will appreciate the difficulty this woman has with the care of six small children.⁶⁸

Other constables dismissed similar claims as being "without foundation in fact".⁶⁹ One

⁶⁶ "District Magistrate to Secretary for Defence", 29 January 1944, PRC #35, Box 81, File 50, PANL.

⁶⁷ "Unless the whole position of men serving could be examined on the grounds of a 'means test' and impartiality successfully guarded against, my personal reaction is that more harm than good will follow the discharging of men who are physically fit", wrote one district magistrate to the Secretary for Defence, 29 January 1944, PRC #35, Box 81, File 50, PANL; any serviceman seeking compassionate discharge had to prove that "he has remunerative work assured, another condition being that his dependants are in destitute circumstances. King's Regulations are firm on these points", the Director of Recruiting explained in April 1941, PRC #35, Box 16, File 32, PANL; "A condition of hardship in the family" did not necessarily denote a "condition of destitution", according to the Secretary for Defence, 28 July 1944, PRC #35, Box 87, File 125, PANL.

⁶⁸ "Constabulary Report", 24 November 1941, PRC #35, Box 111, File 182, PANL.

⁶⁹ "Constabulary Report", 23 January 1945, PRC #35, Box 105, File 141, PANL.

wife admitted to an investigating officer that “she made one mistake” (adultery) but that her husband’s parents and family had forgiven her and that “they were friendly with her now”.⁷⁰ Further investigation, undoubtedly with her in-laws, concluded that her sworn statements were nothing but “a string of lies”. Contrary to her story, she had not been fired from her job but gave it up because she did not like the early hours and hard work; her brother, recently released from prison, was living with her; and her husband’s family would have nothing to do with her, her father-in-law actually forbidding other members of the family “to be seen with the Gunner’s wife”.⁷¹ Not surprisingly, her application for discharge was not approved, nor was her allowance increased. In fact, neither of the servicewives’ applications for discharge received favorable consideration, entangled instead in months of bureaucratic “red tape”. The secretary ultimately responsible for such investigations, admitted himself that the application process was “a long drawn out affair” for which “very often there are not sufficient grounds to warrant my recommending that discharge be carried out”.⁷²

In fact, few successful discharges or compassionate leaves were granted for Newfoundland personnel, although the machinery for such remained in place to

⁷⁰ “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 1 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

⁷¹ “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 5 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

⁷² “Secretary for Defence to Clergyman”, 7 December 1944, PRC #35, Box 103, File 30, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Magistrate”, 6 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 85, File 14, PANL.

siphon off servicewives' complaints and project the image that something was being done.⁷³ Some wives were not easily put off, however, and confidently pursued their claims to higher authorities. The officers charged with investigating such claims for the Newfoundland Militia described themselves as "definitely hindered in our efforts by appeals and demands from especially the womenfolk of boys who have volunteered for [the Royal Artillery]. In this particular case, a demand was made on me by Mrs. ___ which I could not accept, and on receipt of which I decided to put our usual machinery in motion. I was threatened with the weapon of appeal to higher authority".⁷⁴ Other wives negotiated with whatever means they had at their disposal. "I am riting to you to see if you can get places in the orphanage for my 2 children", a servicewife explained, adding:

They got no parents adopted them when they were babies and now I am sick and I had a operation in May and I can't work or look after them. My husband is in the army since 1940. I want to put them in the orphanage until the war is over. So will you please oblige me. If I could get my husband home I would not give them

⁷³ The Liaison Office explained to the Secretary for Defence in 1943: "Of course, the policy to date has been that we have not, for one moment, considered any possibilities of granting compassionate leave to members of either of the two artillery regiments", 27 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 6, File 29, PANL; in another letter to the Secretary for Defence, the Liaison Officer surmised: "The Admiralty as you know, is very much against granting any discharges on compassionate grounds, and in fact I cannot call to mind any of our ratings who have obtained a discharge on these grounds", 24 June 1942, PRC #35, Box 85, File 73, PANL; the Commanding Officer of the Newfoundland Militia wrote the Secretary for Defence: "We have many applications for discharge on compassionate grounds, but so far have refused them all for security reasons", 1 May 1942, PRC #35, Box 42, File 51, PANL.

⁷⁴ "Newfoundland Militia to Secretary for Defence", 21 January 1943, PRC #35, Box 42, File 50, PANL.

up.⁷⁵

Others apparently utilized the arguments and phraseology popularized by the Newfoundland Patriotic Association's fund raising appeals: "If my husband knew the condition I am in I am sure he would be terrified seeing he is sacrificing his life for so low a price of money and his wife cannot get that...This is my fifth letter I have written concerning this affair. If I soon don't get money will have to appeal to the public for help".⁷⁶ These women were hardly accepting their hardships as valiant victims but stridently pursuing their claims as agents of their own experience.

Of course, not all servicewives had to bargain from the cheap seats. Officers' wives enjoyed many advantages over their non-commissioned brethren. The structure and discipline of the military depended upon the maintenance of an established "pecking order" and the extraordinary conditions of the Second World War hardly upset this well-rooted tradition. Officers' wives naturally expected to receive higher rates of pay in Newfoundland during the war. In 1941, for example, the wife of an officer in the Royal Artillery with no children could expect to receive approximately \$30 a month family allowance plus her husband's qualifying allotment compared to a gunner's wife's

⁷⁵ "Mrs. __, Codroy, to Secretary for Defence", 12 August 1942, PRC #35, Box 16, File 15, PANL.

⁷⁶ "Mrs. __, Clarke's Beach, to Secretary for Defence", 18 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 81, File 76, PANL.

allowance of \$24 plus qualifying allotment.⁷⁷ Officers' wives also routinely enjoyed special consideration in their quests to secure suitable housing in wartime Newfoundland. In some cases this might entail the Government stepping in to procure rental accommodations within the civilian community for officers' wives, while in others it could include the Government's provision of furniture, utensils and other household necessities.⁷⁸ Evidence also exists which suggests that officers occasionally enjoyed "unofficial" privileges in regard to temporary compassionate leave. The Liaison Officer for Newfoundland reported in 1943 that he had made "unofficial arrangements" to secure a Newfoundland officer some free time at home:

When Flight Lieut. ___ returned from Germany I did everything possible to get him sent home for some leave but, although I tried it was absolutely impossible to do anything for him officially. However as I considered his record deserving of every possible assistance I did finally succeed in making unofficial arrangements for him. This was done through the kindness of Air-Commodore ___ who has always taken a great interest in [the officer] and who was, at one time, in charge of Field Command. Air-Commodore ___ wangled it so that [the officer] could get

⁷⁷ In the case of a Regiment Sergeant Major serving in the Royal Artillery in 1941, for example, the minimum qualifying allotment was estimated to be approximately \$22 a month as opposed to a gunner's minimum allotment of \$16. "Royal Artillery Family Allowances", GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 15 September 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL; in the case of the Newfoundland Militia, officers were also permitted to "live out" of barracks, enabling them to claim an additional subsistence allowance of approximately \$2.20 per day. "Commissioner for Finance to Commissioner for Justice", 15 March 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 93, File 9, PANL; "Newfoundland Militia Pay and Allowances", GN 13/1/B, Box 193, File 39, PANL.

⁷⁸ "Secretary for Justice to Secretary for Finance", 5 October 1939, PRC #35, Box 73, File 21, PANL.

home and back again on a bomber.⁷⁹

Officially, authorities might inform servicewives that it was “impossible to secure approval” for any type of compassionate leave for members of the different forces.⁸⁰ But behind the scenes, members of the upper echelons of the services obviously enjoyed a measure of unofficial “wangling” and privilege reserved solely for their class.

A servicewife’s condition was not only affected by her husband’s rank and status within the military, but also by his behavior in such. If an enlisted man decided to go AWOL (absent without leave), for example, his wife’s allowance was immediately suspended without notice until the serviceman was apprehended.⁸¹ Often a wife did not even know why her allowance had been stopped and to whom she could appeal for help in the interim. “I have always received my allowance up to within the last 4 months

⁷⁹ “Liaison Officer to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 20 August 1943, PRC #35, Box 113, File 58, PANL.

⁸⁰ The Secretary for Defence wrote in 1944: “I quote only two cases, but in fact there have been a large number of applications forwarded for leave for members of the different forces and it has been impossible to secure approval”, 14 August 1944, PRC #35, Box 16, File 86, PANL.

⁸¹ Numerous examples of this action were located in the service records of the Department of Defence, including: “Liaison Office Report”, 15 October 1942, PRC #35, Box 81, File 38, PANL; “Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare to Commissioner for Justice and Defence”, 21 July 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 43, File 3, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Rurality”, PRC #35, Box 22, File 11, PANL; wives allowances were also routinely, though incorrectly, suspended when husbands were serving terms in detention. “Regimental Paymaster to Board of Pensions”, 7 May 1941, PRC #35, Box 14, File 25, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Rurality”, 2 June 1942, PRC #35, Box 48, File 1, PANL; “Officer-in-Charge to Secretary for Defence”, 13 June 1945, PRC #35, Box 87, File 80, PANL.

when it was suddenly cut off and without warning”, a distraught servicewife complained:

My allowance was 18 shillings per week. What is the reason that this allowance was terminated. As his legal wife I am entitled to the above amount as long as my husband remains in his majesty’s service. If there is anyone else trying to take this allowance away from me I want to know this at once otherwise I will take further steps to ascertain the truth.⁸²

For many servicewives, living hand to mouth during the war, missing even one allowance cheque could easily force them into destitution. A constable described such a case in June 1942:

She also informed me that she has not received any money since April and at the present time there is no food in the house and has no chance to get any. She wrote the Department of Public Health and Welfare in respect to not getting any money and they informed her that her husband was absent without leave and that she would not receive money. However, if this woman does not get money within the next few days she will have to apply for relief.⁸³

Official response to such complaints was usually brusque and unsympathetic. “I am afraid Mrs. ___ will receive no allowance until her husband reports back to his ship”, the Secretary for Defence routinely explained.⁸⁴ Their husbands had deserted their posts but it was servicewives who ultimately paid the price. Further compounding wives’ sense of helplessness in cases of this kind was the general reluctance among officials to inform wives’ of their husbands’ “unpatriotic behavior”. The Liaison Office in London

⁸² “Mrs. ___, Corner Brook, to Secretary for Defence”, 22 January 1942, PRC #35, Box 79, File 73, PANL.

⁸³ “Constabulary Report”, 6 June 1942, PRC #35, Box 82, File 94, PANL.

⁸⁴ “Secretary for Defence to H.M.C.S. “Stadacona”, 9 September 1946, PRC #35, Box 84, File 98, PANL.

complained to the Secretary for Defence: "We are rather hesitant in replying to her enquiry as [the serviceman] is a deserter. Perhaps you could arrange for the matter to be explained to Mrs. ___".⁸⁵ In this atmosphere of whispers and secrecy, it is hardly surprising that even incidents in which men were falsely reported as AWOL could go unchecked for months at a time.⁸⁶

In many instances a husband's desertion was directly attributable to his family's living conditions at home. The problem became most prominent among Naval ratings on leave in Newfoundland, gradually escalating in frequency until 1943 when efforts were made to regain some measure of control over this "very difficult and urgent problem".⁸⁷ Unlike men serving in the Royal Artillery and Air Force, Naval ratings were occasionally issued leave during which they could visit their families in Newfoundland. What they discovered upon their arrival, however, forced many ratings to reevaluate their priorities and loyalties in the war effort. One rating described his predicament:

I was married shortly before going over seas about three years ago. Sorry to say I havent got a home, my wife depending on someone else all the time and having

⁸⁵ "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 17 October 1944, PRC #35, Box 103, File 20, PANL; other examples include: "Liaison Office to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 10 December 1941, PRC #35, Box 95, File 14, PANL; "Stipendiary Magistrate to Secretary Compassionate Allowance Committee", 26 June 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 43, File 3, PANL.

⁸⁶ Examples include: "Secretary for Defence to Reverend", 15 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 84, File 115, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 11 May 1944, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

⁸⁷ "Memoranda of Meeting Held to Discuss Newfoundland Ratings", 11 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 4, File 24, PANL.

the privilege of coming home for a while this summer I found that her monthly pay for herself and one child is only forty one dollars which is not half enough to live on the way things are now. I have served around England. Also North and West Africa but the way things are going at home it dosent give one any farther interest...So if there is any thing you can do surposing its a discharge or otherwise a few months off to work and try and get a home and make my family comfortable. Please reply as soon as possible.⁸⁸

With the routine dismissal of such applications for compassionate leave, many ratings decided to take matters into their own hands. The committee set up to study the growing problem of desertion among Newfoundland ratings reported in May 1943:

In the main, ratings who had been in desertion were all ones with families or other dependents. They returned from active service and found that the cost of living had materially increased since they had left their homes and the very inadequate pay and allowances which they received were insufficient to look after the people they had left there. This was very significant and definitely pointed to the existence of a problem which was almost wholly a social one and which should be of great concern primarily to the Newfoundland Government.⁸⁹

The emphasis on the "social" origins of the problem reflected Naval authorities' conviction that it was not a "disciplinary" problem, meaning their problem. Rather it was the rating's preoccupation with the problems of his family's welfare and finances in Newfoundland which ultimately overrode "any considerations of discipline".⁹⁰ In a relatively short space of time, these ratings could find remunerative employment which would enable them to earn a reasonable sum of money before they were apprehended or

⁸⁸ "Leading Seaman ___ to Secretary for Defence", 28 November 1943, PRC #35, Box 105, File 80, PANL.

⁸⁹ "Memoranda of Meeting Held to Discuss Newfoundland Ratings", 11 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 4, File 24, PANL.

⁹⁰ "Ibid."

surrendered. They quite willingly accepted the risk of punishment in order to attain their financial objective, suggesting wherein their real priorities lay.⁹¹

Most servicemen did not have the opportunity to witness first-hand the arduous living conditions of their wives at home, but their morale was no less dependent upon their awareness of such. The mail was truly the only line of communication between separated husbands and wives, and as previously intimated, it was certainly not ideal. Servicemen were constantly on the move and directing their mail in an accurate and timely fashion often proved problematic. Incidents were reported in which servicemen did not receive mail for months at a time, only to receive thirty letters all at once.⁹² Generally, however, the dispatch of mail to the men overseas was recognized as “vitally important” to their morale and a premium was placed on the organization and distribution of such.⁹³ More often, authorities blamed the non-receipt of mail on wives’

⁹¹ “Naval Officer in Charge to Commissioner for Justice and Defence”, 20 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 4, File 24, PANL.

⁹² “Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence”, 13 April 1944, PRC #35, Box 15, File 46, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Bishop”, 26 April 1940, PRC#35, Box 89, File 37, PANL.

⁹³ “Liaison Office Report”, 9 November 1943, PRC #35, Box 18, File 107, PANL; the Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland wrote the Commissioner for Justice and Defence in 1943: “I feel very sympathetic with our men when they do not get parcels or letters sent them from home. The receipt of parcels and letters is so very helpful to our men’s morale”, GN 13/1/B, Box 11, File 46, PANL; the Liaison Office similarly described servicemen as becoming “naturally worried” and “upset” when they failed to receive regular mail from their wives. “Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence”, 24 October 1941, PRC #35, Box 83, File 77, PANL; 14 September 1943, PRC #35, Box 90, File 68, PANL; 14 December 1944, PRC #35, Box 113, File 79, PANL.

apparent laxness in this, one of their paramount patriotic duties.⁹⁴ "I feel sure that you must have written him and possibly your letters have been lost, or not properly directed", the Secretary for Defence patronizingly accused one wife.⁹⁵ "I may say Sir," another wife responded, "that I write every week also have sent parcels every month to the address as quoted in the paper".⁹⁶ Other wives faced interrogation by local constables as to why they were failing to fulfill their national obligation. Wives usually responded that they did indeed write regularly and that it was their husbands who failed to keep up their end of the correspondence. "I wish to inform you that I have written 12 letters to my husband since Aug., the last one was dated Jan. 4, 1945", one wife carefully stated, "Also I have sent 3 lots of cigarettes and a X-mas box. But it is nearly 3 months since I have received a letter from my husband. The last one was dated Oct. 31, 1944".⁹⁷ In these situations, the Government dutifully arranged for military authorities to interview husbands and make them promise to write more regularly in the future, as otherwise "it

⁹⁴ "Officer-in-Charge to Secretary for Defence", 1 May 1942, PRC#35, Box 119, File 7, PANL.

⁹⁵ "Secretary for Defence to Mrs. __, Reef's Harbour", 15 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 79, File 26, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 6 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 112, File 37, PANL.

⁹⁶ "Mrs. __, St. John's, to Secretary for Defence", 19 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 109, File 48, PANL.

⁹⁷ "Mrs. __ to Sir", 19 January 1945, PRC #35, Box 105, File 98, PANL; "Constabulary Report", PRC #35, Box 27, File 86, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Mr. V.B., Bell Island", 10 August 1944, PRC #35, Box 81, File 69, PANL.

would mean ceaseless enquiries from the family as to his welfare".⁹⁸ Wives' concerns over non-receipt of mail were apparently more an irritant to the Government than a national concern.

Of course, the regular receipt of mail did not necessarily ensure healthy morale among the men fighting at the front. Wives were encouraged to write "cheerful, newsy letters" to their husbands overseas but their concerns and apprehensions could not always remain hidden between the lines. Some were more obvious than others, as was the case in a letter from a distressed servicewife from Port Aux Gaul:

My dear Husband, Just a note as I haven't time to write much this mail. No doubt you have rec. the message saying father was very low. Yes, dear, he was taken last Tuesday with stroke in throat and have not taken a drink or anything to eat since. We stay up every night. I don't think he will pull through this time. Hester and Jane come in and does bit of work for me. There is no girl to get. I am so worried about the children as they have to beat about. Cannot keep about home. Its too much noise. All I hope is they don't get sick. I have wished some this past week you were here to help me out. Everyone tells me I will be done of it myself by the time this is over...I do hope you can get home. Don't worry dear, we will mänge by the help of God.⁹⁹

Another wife complained:

Dear Mark, I must try and write you a few words. First I must say I received a air letter from you last Friday and was glad to hear from you, but I was Disipointed cause you was not coming home, till you the truth I just about lost my mind I couldnt control my mind at all, for to see the cold wether coming and me sick

⁹⁸ "Officer-in-Charge to Secretary for Defence", 10 December 1943, PRC #35, Box 84, File 130, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Liaison Office", 15 December 1942, PRC #35, Box 109, File 68, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 18 February 1943, PRC #35, Box 84, File 96, PANL.

⁹⁹ "Mrs. __, Point Aux Gaul, to My dear Husband", 10 September 1943, PRC #35, Box 109, File 32, PANL.

and not able to look out to the children, and the children sick, its heart breaking and what can I do Mark in getting wood and sawing it, to keep the House warm this winter and no cold to buy and no one to cut wood. Can I go in the woods sick and criples as I am.¹⁰⁰

Still, other men received letters from home which told only part of the story. One serviceman requested an investigation into his wife's living conditions, the results of which were so deplorable that the Liaison Officer found it necessary to shield him from the full facts of the situation:

I have written to the Adjutant of the 59th - I did not forward a copy of the report as the living conditions of the family are so deplorable that I think that the fewer people who know the story the better, it certainly does little credit to our country to allow such conditions to exist. I myself would not have believed it possible were it not for the police report...When I wrote the adjutant I merely gave him bits of the report, because I do not see that it will do [the serviceman] any good to know the full facts.¹⁰¹

While some wives maintained a brave front in their correspondence overseas, others were blamed for needlessly "upsetting" servicemen through their "plaintive letters demanding that they come home".¹⁰² "[Your husband] has become a trained signaller and is of value to the Army and his training is likely to prove valuable to him when the war is over," the Secretary for Defence condescendingly explained, "It would be a pity for him to be

¹⁰⁰ "Copy of Letter Intercepted by Newfoundland Censor - Mrs. ___ to Gunner, 59th Nfld. Heavy Regt.", 1 October 1942, PRC #35, Box 16, File 39, PANL.

¹⁰¹ "Liaison Office Report", 12 January 1942, PRC #35, Box 111, File 182, PANL.

¹⁰² "Report of the Officer Commanding Newfoundland Regiment", GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL.

discharged if his family can be suitably looked after".¹⁰³ Servicewives were reminded of their patriotic responsibility in the war effort and the fact that "patriotic effort and sacrifice go hand in hand".¹⁰⁴

As opposed to servicewives' personal correspondence to their husbands overseas, the Government's attitude toward keeping wives officially informed of husbands' status and physical condition was "no news is good news". Wives who complained that they had not heard from their husbands for the better part of a year were politely informed that "no news is good news".¹⁰⁵ Others who believed that their husbands' ships had been sunk in battle were similarly advised that "no news is good news".¹⁰⁶ Even when wives received official information through telegrams, it often appeared that the military terminology was purposefully intended to confuse and annoy. "Seriously wounded", for example, meant something completely different than "dangerously wounded" (although even the Secretary for Defence seemed unsure as to

¹⁰³ "Secretary for Defence to Mrs. __, Corner Brook", 26 September 1942, PRC 335, Box 16, File 15, PANL.

¹⁰⁴ "Department of Justice Circular", 4 October 1940, GN 13/2/A, Box 455, PANL.

¹⁰⁵ "Director of Recruiting to Mrs. __, Bonavista Bay", 6 June 1941, PRC #35, Box 90, File 38, PANL.

¹⁰⁶ "Secretary for Defence to Secretary W.P.A.", 27 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 101, File 15, PANL; "Mrs. __, Pouch Cove, to Secretary for Defence", 18 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 112, File 92, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Mrs. __, St. John's", 9 June 1943, PRC #35, Box 111, File 94, PANL.

which should cause more worry).¹⁰⁷ “Missing in action” was not the same thing as “missing and presumed dead”.¹⁰⁸ Even “killed in action” did not necessarily dash all hope for a happy reunion as men occasionally returned from the dead as a result of clerical errors and miscommunication.¹⁰⁹ This rather glib explanation aside, it is impossible to understand the terror which would have gripped any servicewife upon the appearance of a telegram messenger making his way down her street. The only sight more feared would be that of a grave looking clergyman knocking at her door, as this was the standard procedure through which the Director of Recruiting notified relatives of fatalities.¹¹⁰ Servicewives’ “waiting” role often meant waiting for the arrival of bad news.

¹⁰⁷ In correspondence the Secretary for Defence attempted to describe the progression of official injury categories: “If he is removed from the ‘dangerous’ list to the ‘serious’ list and if he is removed from the ‘serious’ list to the ‘minor ailment’ category the information is always conveyed by cable”. But in another cable written just eight months later, the Secretary explained that: “‘Serious’ cases are more serious than ‘Dangerous’ cases”, throwing his original estimation completely out of whack. “Secretary to The Parsonage, Salmon Cove”, 12 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 105, File 29, PANL; “Secretary to Relieving Officer, Elliston”, 20 December 1943, PRC #35, Box 22, File 73, PANL.

¹⁰⁸ “Secretary for Defence to Mrs. ___, St. John’s”, PRC #35, Box 36, File 10, PANL.

¹⁰⁹ “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 14 July 1943, PRC #35, Box 96, File 33, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Confederation Life Association”, 5 September 1942, PRC #35, Box 36, File 36, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 31 October 1942, PRC #35, Box 115, File 77, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 2 October 1943, PRC #35, Box 114, File 31, PANL.

¹¹⁰ “Social Service Committee to Commissioner for Justice and Defence”, 9 January 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 50, File 15, PANL.

But what did servicewives do while they were waiting? The 1945 census offers little insight into this question. Many were obviously living under trying circumstances, struggling to make ends meet on meager military allowances in an atmosphere of steadily rising prices. But how did they manage these new wartime pressures, especially in the face of rationing and other growing governmental controls within the home? Actually, for the majority of the women interviewed for this study, rationing seemed to have had little impact on their lives, or at least on their memories of the period. They remembered that rationing was in place and some shared humorous anecdotes as to how they had skirted the system, but few described it as a much of a sacrifice. The reason for this relative indifference appears to be two-fold. In the first place, most Newfoundland women were simply accustomed to living with tight consumer budgets and limited access to goods. Secondly, the Commission of Government introduced rationing relatively late in the war (really not until mid 1943) and even then not with a great deal of determination. "It must be borne in mind," the Governor explained to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in late 1942, "that rationing is difficult in Newfoundland where of a total of thirteen hundred and odd towns and villages over one thousand of them are populated by less than one hundred people and may be considered remote areas. Canada herself has recognized that her remote areas should not be rationed by coupons".¹¹¹ The Commissioner for Public Utilities and Supply further

¹¹¹ "Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", 6 January 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 104A, File 30, PANL.

supported this contention: "The Secretary of State, in the telegram referred to, suggests importing on Government account if cooperation from trade is lacking. We have not got warehousing facilities and, if we had, we have not got experienced staff - apart altogether from the administrative difficulties to which the Secretary of State refers".¹¹²

Instead of rationing, the Government introduced a rather far-reaching system of price controls. Prices had risen significantly in Newfoundland since the outbreak of war, pushing the cost of living upward at a rapid pace. Assuming a base figure of 100 in October 1938, the Government estimated that the cost of living index had advanced to 104.4 one year later, and to 150.2 by the end of 1942.¹¹³ The rise was predominantly attributed to the higher cost of food, Grand Falls, for example, reporting that prices had advanced at least forty percent between 1940 and 1941. Flour had risen from \$2.50 to \$3.45 per sack, tea from 85 cents to \$1.10 per pound, and evaporated milk from 11 cents to 18 cents per tin. The price of coal was also described as rising 55 percent during the course of the year.¹¹⁴ In response, the Government attempted to check this trend through the introduction of price ceilings on a multitude of necessities such as flour, bacon, ham, butter, cheese, eggs, sugar, tea, cocoa, gasoline and even tires and

¹¹² "Commissioner for Public Utilities and Supply to Commission of Government", GN 13/1/B, Box 104A, File 30, PANL.

¹¹³ "Memorandum by the Deputy Food Controller", GN 13/1/B, Box 109, File 52, PANL.

¹¹⁴ "Newfoundland Constabulary Report", 18 September 1941, GN 13/1, Box 393, File 9, PANL; "Cost of Living Index Advanced", The Daily News, 28 February 1942, 3.

children's shoes. But in the "absence of inspectors and acute public interest", the price controls were virtually "unenforceable".¹¹⁵ By 1943, the Government estimated that about sixty percent of all food had been brought under some form of price control but the Commission was still criticized for not doing more.¹¹⁶ The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs complained that the Newfoundland Government did not appear to be taking "any important steps" to deal with the growing inflation and the inevitable period of readjustment which would occur when military construction in the country began to wane.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Newfoundlanders had grown increasingly impatient with the situation, The Grand Falls Advertiser describing the Commission as "content to sit idly by while the cost of living mounts and the value of the dollar decreases".¹¹⁸ Dutifully, the Commission expanded its system of price controls once again and introduced a limited coupon rationing program centered on tea, coffee, sugar, evaporated milk, and molasses. The program was essentially a token offer, however, and although coupons were issued, enforcement relied heavily on retail and consumer cooperation. Not surprisingly, the Government could report in 1944 of "only the slightest black market in

¹¹⁵ "Memorandum by the Deputy Food Controller", GN 13/1/B, Box 109, File 52, PANL.

¹¹⁶ "Ibid."

¹¹⁷ "Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland", 6 January 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 109, File 52, PANL.

¹¹⁸ "Everything Possible", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 8 May 1943, 2.

Newfoundland".¹¹⁹

Unlike rationing, the Commission promptly introduced blackout legislation in late 1941, explaining "...so far as this subject we have acted entirely on our own initiative. At no time did the Dominion Office or the War Cabinet ask us to black out or even suggest it".¹²⁰ By this point in the war, the battle of the Atlantic was reaching its peak and there was an ever present assumption that St. John's might be attacked from the sea or the air.¹²¹ Thus, in late 1941 and early 1942 the northern part of the Avalon Peninsula was blacked out on a similar basis to that in force in Great Britain at the time.¹²² Many of the women interviewed for this study readily recollected the blackout experience. "Of course, you know we had blackouts", one wife explained, "...yes, every night at a certain time we'd have to pull across the blackout curtains or shutters, whatever you had. Everything on the street would be pitch dark - even the car lights just showed

¹¹⁹ "Memorandum on Rationing in Newfoundland", GN 13/1/B, Box 11, File 38, PANL; Harry Cuff, "Political Development in Newfoundland during World War II", Extracted from Winning Entries in the Newfoundland Government Sponsored Competition for the Encouragement of Arts and Letters, etc. (1964), 73.

¹²⁰ "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Governor of Newfoundland", 6 August 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 198, File 64, PANL.

¹²¹ "U-Boat Attacks Newfoundland Port", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 26 February 1944, 1.

¹²² In April 1942, several short-wave German radio broadcasts alerted local listeners: "Newfoundland need not worry about its poor little blackout because we will come by day and take it during the week end, arriving on Friday and finishing on Sunday", "Constabulary Report", 7 April 1942 and 9 April 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 364, File 20, PANL; "Constabulary Report", 7 April 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 241, File 1, PANL.

tiny slits".¹²³ Another wife remembered: "At ten o'clock everything had to be blacked out. You had to get off the streets, if you didn't you'd feel a grab on your shoulder and you were told to get in. Yes, they scared me plenty".¹²⁴ Many of the women interviewed also projected a real sense of proximity to the action of the war, and especially the danger of attack and espionage. "Yes, we knew a war was on alright", a wife from Bell Island explained, "...I remember my brother saying he saw a sub - it was like a big sausage, he said, with a stack stuck up from the middle...My father and mother were fishing one day and a periscope followed them all the way into the shore".¹²⁵ Another wife recollected: "My father was working at the YMCA around the time of the [Knights of Columbus] fire. He was an electrician, setting up the stage at the Y and suddenly they saw a man's leg come through the ceiling. They ran up to investigate and found rolls and rolls of toilet paper stuffed into the seams. The toilet paper had been soaked with gasoline...We wondered why it was never in the papers - they couldn't let that stuff out I guess".¹²⁶

Aside from the rumors of spies and lurking submarines, some of the servicewives interviewed also related a sense of concern for their own personal safety during the war, especially on the streets of wartime St. John's. "There were lots of

¹²³ Excerpt from interview conducted with Mrs. M.F., 16 November 1998.

¹²⁴ Excerpt from interview conducted with Mrs. G.B., 10 November 1998.

¹²⁵ Excerpt from interview conducted with Mrs. J.M., 9 November 1998.

¹²⁶ Excerpt from interview conducted with Mrs. G.B., 10 November 1998.

soldiers and sailors around”, one wife stated, “you had to be careful”.¹²⁷ “No, you’d get in trouble if you went to certain tough areas”, another remembered, “...girls in those areas got picked up - everybody knew what they were there for. The men went there to pick up a woman to sleep with. A woman had to let herself down - you looked after yourself”.¹²⁸

Rumors ran rampant in St. John’s of unruly, drunken servicemen attacking innocent victims, both male and female. An editorial in The Daily News expressed growing frustration with the changing atmosphere of the city:

Not a day passes without its record of some citizen having been the victim of an unprovoked assault by servicemen...No one expects conditions in this town to be the same as they were in peace-time. But they do not have to be as bad as they are and it is up to the authorities, both civilian and service, to do something about the present situation...if people are to be subjected to constant molestation on the streets, there is going to be a reaction that will not be pleasant and a demand for regulations that will put many parts of the town out-of-bounds for servicemen.¹²⁹

The trains appeared to be an even greater concern for women, as it was reported that female passengers were often subjected to the undesired attention and advances of traveling packs of servicemen. A drunken Canadian officer had to be hauled out of the berth of a frightened fifteen-year-old girl by one conductor who later reported:

¹²⁷ Excerpt from interview conducted with Mrs. E.L., 4 November 1998.

¹²⁸ Excerpt from interview conducted with Mrs. M.W., 27 October 1998.

¹²⁹ “This Must Be Stopped”, The Daily News, 29 September 1942, 4; it should be noted that many incidents are also cited in the Department of Defence records which indicate that servicemen were not always the instigators of such altercations, but could also be the innocent victims of attacks by drunken locals. “Memorandum in reply to Memo. From Headquarters Canadian Troops Newfoundland”, 13 November 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 32, File 119, PANL; “Constabulary Report”, 25 August 1944, GN 13/2/A, Box 416, PANL; “Constabulary Report”, 13 July 1944, GN 13/2/A, Box 396, PANL.

I have had on several occasions to speak to Canadian Officers on this same matter, it is getting too prevalent and should be stopped or else it will not be safe for a female passenger to travel on the train. There is now considerable talk among first class passengers about the immorality that is happening on some of the trains. If allowed to continue the good reputation of the trains will be ruined in the eyes of the traveling public.¹³⁰

Incidents of such sexual attacks are difficult to locate in the Department of Defence records, although some do exist. In July 1942, for example, the Secretary for Public Health and Welfare reported to the Commissioner:

While at Placentia a few days ago I gathered some impressions regarding conditions under which local women are employed at the American Base at Argentia that caused me considerable concern. I understand that one of these girls has already lodged a complaint alleging rape on the part of an American, and that it has been found extremely difficult to secure the evidence necessary for the prosecution of the alleged offender. It is generally understood that girls employed as stated feel that they are entirely unprotected and that they are so afraid of perils of various kinds that they, for the most part, do not move from their quarters after nightfall.¹³¹

Although the unfortunate woman referred to in the Secretary's report was

¹³⁰ "Conductor to Supt. Eastern Division, Newfoundland Railway", 31 August 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 130, File 131, PANL; a Constabulary report also cited: "Clergymen, businessmen and general public have complained to me of the conduct of troops on the trains and say that it is almost impossible for women to travel without being molested by these men", 22 May 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 176, File 23, PANL.

¹³¹ "Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare", 7 July 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 240, File 8, PANL; it should be noted that the Constabulary reports tended to dismiss these claims as exaggerated. "Constabulary Report", 21 July 1942 and 25 September 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 240, File 8, PANL; other reports of drunken servicemen "accosting females" turn up in the local papers such as that in *The Evening Telegram*, 19 November 1943, 3; *The Grand Falls Advertiser*, 18 September 1943, 1; *The Grand Falls Advertiser* also reported: "Now it is not safe for a woman to go on the street after dark and Grand Falls is losing the good reputation which it has always enjoyed", GN 13/1/B, Box 32, File 119, PANL.

single, a number of servicewives were also employed at the various bases during the course of the war. Yet the census sampling offers little, if any, indication of such employment. Of the 112 women traced through the census who responded to the occupation category, 99 of them (88%) described themselves as housewives.¹³² Only eight out of the 112 cited themselves as having a job outside the home, such as saleslady, clerk, checker, laundress, office worker or stenographer. One woman worked in a mattress factory and another described herself as a live-in maid. While the job categories listed certainly offered no surprises, the fact that so few women listed them was rather unexpected. Many servicewives were living with parents or other family members who could have conceivably provided a measure of reliable child care. They were dependent upon notoriously inadequate military allowances in an atmosphere of steadily rising prices. And there were obviously plenty of employment opportunities for women in Newfoundland at this time, either in the expanding civil service or in the laundrettes and messes of the numerous Canadian and American bases. Why then did servicewives not grab this opportunity to earn a little extra money with which to improve their comparably disadvantaged economic position?

One explanation might be that the census source itself is simply not a reliable indicator of these women's employment. Domestic responsibilities usually made wives reluctant to seek full-time wage labour outside the home, but they might have

¹³² Actually, 96 of 112 women who responded to the occupation category of the census listed themselves as "housewives". One described herself as a "house assistant" and two as a "serviceman's wife".

accepted temporary part-time work as the need and opportunity arose.¹³³ Would they have declared these various short-term stints to the census taker? Probably not.¹³⁴

Married women were not a widely accepted component of the Newfoundland labour force at this time, representing just six percent of all wage earning women in 1945.¹³⁵

Perhaps a legacy of harder times in which working women were perceived as taking jobs away from men, the attitude persisted that married women belonged in the home.¹³⁶ The women interviewed for this study reinforced this view, one wife explaining:

But you know I had to leave work when I got married, there was no choice, you had to go. No one ever said you had to go, it was just taken for granted. When you got married you had to leave to make room for someone else. That's the way it was, you just did it...Before [my husband] left he made my father promise him that he wouldn't let me go back to work. I probably would have disobeyed my husband but I never would've disobeyed my father.¹³⁷

¹³³ In "Times Were Hard", Nancy Forestell explained: "Because most married women experienced such heavy domestic responsibilities, they were reluctant to seek full-time wage labour outside the home even when there was a strong economic impetus for them to do so", 86.

¹³⁴ According to Forestell, the Newfoundland censuses generally appear to present significant undercounting in relation to married women's wage earning activities, particularly those who were shopkeepers, laundresses and charwomen. "Times Were Hard", 92.

¹³⁵ Only 6% of the total female labour force in Newfoundland was married, according to the 1945 census. A little over 5% were widowed and nearly 89% single. Nearly all married women worked in traditionally "female" occupations, such as dressmakers, sales clerks, charwomen, janitors, stenographers, teachers and nurses. The Eleventh Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, Table 44.

¹³⁶ Forestell referred to the "social taboo" of married women working outside the home in "Times Were Hard", 86.

¹³⁷ Excerpt from interview conducted with Mrs. M.F., 16 November 1998.

The explanation placed blame on both Newfoundland society at large and husbands' influence closer to home. It was assumed that married women did not have to work because they had husbands to support them. If they did work outside the home, they were either unfairly taking a job away from someone more deserving or they actually needed the job, implying that the male breadwinner of the home could not adequately support his family. It was a classic "catch-22" which left married women in a confused and defenceless position.

Hardly covert, discrimination toward married women in the labour force operated openly as an accepted tenet of the social order. In the civil service, for example, the expectation of female employees' automatic retirement upon marriage was not only spoken, but legislated.¹³⁸ Authorities recognized this regulation as discriminatory but ultimately necessary.¹³⁹ "One reason for the rule is, of course," the Secretary for Justice explained in 1940, "that it is expected that when a woman marries her support falls upon

¹³⁸ "Civil Service Act, 1947, Section 19 (1)", GN 13/1/B, Box 132, File 109, PANL; several examples of shorthand-typists listed as "Mrs." instead of "Miss" exist in the files, although none of these specify whether the women were widows or not. "Civil Service Questionnaire", GN 13/1/B, Box 119, File 37, PANL.

¹³⁹ In 1949, the Attorney General of Newfoundland was asked specifically whether any discrimination existed against the employment of women in the civil service. Unapologetically, his response cited the Civil Service Act of 1947 which required female civil servants to retire upon marriage. He further explained, however, that "she may be re-employed if she becomes a widow". "Mrs. ___ to the Attorney General", 8 June 1949, GN 13/1/B, Box 122, File 80, PANL; "Legal Assistant to Mrs. ___", 14 November 1949, GN 13/1/B, Box 122, File 80, PANL.

the husband and the job should be filled by some other person requiring a salary".¹⁴⁰

Examples exist in the Department of Defence records of women who wanted to retain their civil service jobs after marriage, but were effectively forced to give them up.¹⁴¹ One district magistrate appealed to the Secretary for Justice on behalf of his stenographer in 1940:

Miss __ has performed very faithful services during the past four years, and now is planning to be married. Unfortunately the man of her choice is earning only comparatively small salary, and she realizes that the cost of setting up a home will be considerable. For this reason she is hoping that you may see fit to retain her services. She is most efficient at her work here in the office, and I should like very much to recommend it.¹⁴²

Official response to such requests was invariably the same: "...[R]etain Miss __ after her marriage until her successor is appointed. Her retention will not be necessary for a period longer than a few weeks, certainly no longer than one month after her marriage".¹⁴³ At a

¹⁴⁰ "Secretary for Justice to District Magistrate", 31 August 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 132, File 109, PANL.

¹⁴¹ "District Magistrate to Administrative Officer, Department of Justice", 7 December 1945, GN 13/1/B, Box 136, File 55, PANL; "Miss __ to District Inspector, Newfoundland Constabulary", 25 November 1947, GN 13/1/B, Box 143, File 23, PANL; "Miss __ to Superintendent Fire Department", 6 July 1949, GN 13/1/B, Box 148, File 158, PANL.

¹⁴² "District Magistrate, Grand Falls, to Secretary for Justice", 20 November 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 132, File 109, PANL.

¹⁴³ "Legal Assistant to Secretary for Finance", 25 July 1949, GN 13/1/B, Box 148, File 158, PANL; five other cases of women requesting permission to remain in their civil service jobs after marriage were discovered for the time period under examination. All were refused. In an exceptional case permission was extended for six months additional service. "Secretary for Justice to Miss __", GN 13/1/B, Box 132, File 109, PANL.

time when government departments were continually complaining of their inability to locate and retain qualified staff, female employees were still expendable simply upon the basis of their marital status.¹⁴⁴

Although barred from many types of employment, some servicewives did manage to locate paid jobs outside the home. Aside from the jobs listed in the census sampling, examples were also found in the Department of Defence records of servicewives who left Newfoundland to work in the woollen mills, rubber plants and defence industries of Ontario, leaving their children in their parents' care for the interim.¹⁴⁵ The Commission eventually sealed this loophole, banning the recruitment of married women and widows with children for Canadian industries.¹⁴⁶ Other servicewives were described as having secured employment on the Canadian and American bases in Newfoundland, either as laundresses or waitresses.¹⁴⁷ In both instances, it is interesting

¹⁴⁴ "Newfoundland Constabulary to Secretary for Justice", 28 August 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 147, File 76, PANL; "Secretary for Justice to Secretary for Finance", 19 February 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 136, File 55, PANL.

¹⁴⁵ "Chief Clerk to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 9 February 1945, PRC #35, Box 112, File 9, PANL; "Magistrate to Secretary for Defence", 20 September 1945, PRC #35, Box 114, File 45, PANL; "Mrs. ___ to Secretary for Defence", 28 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 84, File 60, PANL; "Chief of Police to Secretary for Defence", 14 July 1942, PRC #35, Box 108, File 63, PANL; "Constabulary Report", 6 April 1941, GN 13/2/A, Box 402, PANL.

¹⁴⁶ Peter Neary, "Canada and the Newfoundland Labor Market, 1939-49", *The Canadian Historical Review*, 62, 4 (December 1981), 491.

¹⁴⁷ "Liaison Officer to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 5 January 1943, PRC #35, Box 104, File 81, PANL; "Report of the Newfoundland Ranger Force", 31 May 1945, PRC 35, Box 82, File 3, PANL; "Department of Defence to Colonel Rendell",

to note that servicewives looked to non-Newfoundland employers, who were perhaps perceived as more immune to the island's social controls. Most often, however, servicewives were described as "taking in" work to help augment their insufficient military incomes. Some wives took in household washing for families in the neighborhood, some took in sewing, and some took in boarders.¹⁴⁸ Obviously, if they could not go out to work, enterprising servicewives could always take work in.¹⁴⁹ One of the servicewives interviewed for this study explained: "Yes, I was a full-time housewife and mother and did some sewing part-time as time allowed".¹⁵⁰ "Full-time housewife and mother" seemed to hold a different connotation to these women than it does for more recent generations. Housework was a full-time job and in a day and age when washing

18 October 1944, PRC #35, Box 83, File 77, PANL; "Department of Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Defence", 7 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 18, File 139, PANL; "Welfare Officer to Assistant Director", 25 August 1944, PRC #35, Box 87, File 67, PANL.

¹⁴⁸ "Secretary for Defence to Commanding Officer H.M.C.S. "Avalon", 24 November 1943, PRC #35, Box 93, File 86, PANL; "T.C. to Secretary for Defence", PRC 35, Box 16, File 16, PANL; "Magistrate to Secretary for Defence", 24 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 29 January 1944, PRC #35, Box 115, File 20, PANL; some references were also found of servicewives working as domestic servants: "Magistrate to Secretary for Defence", 30 August 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL; "Constabulary Report", 23 January 1943, PRC #35, Box 15, File 81, PANL; "Constabulary Report", 31 March 1945, GN 13/2/A, Box 402, PANL.

¹⁴⁹ Nancy Forestell also discovered that married women, especially working-class married women, were often willing to take in boarders, laundry or sewing to augment their household incomes. "Times Were Hard", 88.

¹⁵⁰ Excerpt from questionnaire completed by Mrs. M.T., 9 November 1998.

machines, vacuum cleaners and ready-made meals were still a luxury rather than a necessity, these women would have had little time or energy to engage in paid labour outside the home. Hence, the standard response given when asked whether they had worked outside the home during the war was most commonly a simple "No, I was married".

Despite their demanding schedules within the home, some servicewives did manage to devote time to voluntary activities during the war. "I was a volunteer at the Y. Hostel", one servicewife explained, "...we served the armed forces at dinner every weekend from 4 pm to 8 pm...[Why?] Because it was our duty to our Brothers and Sisters to at least [give] them a hot and delicious dinner".¹⁵¹ Under the management of several officers' wives, a group of Naval wives volunteered to organize a library for the distribution of papers and magazines to the men of the Naval ships visiting St. John's.¹⁵² Through the Women's Patriotic Association, some servicewives also visited other wives and mothers of the servicemen overseas, to chat and discuss their mutual problems and concerns. Weekly meetings in the Club Rooms of the Caribou Hut hostel were organized for this purpose, allowing groups of servicewives sharing similar problems and responsibilities to help one another.¹⁵³ The Association's annual report for 1940

¹⁵¹ Excerpt from questionnaire completed by Mrs. J.Y., 19 October 1998.

¹⁵² "Secretary for Defence to Major R.H.T.", 23 February 1942, PRC #35, Box 6, File 13, PANL.

¹⁵³ "Minutes of the Executive Committee of the W.P.A.", 18 April 1945, MG 635, Box 1, PANL; "Report of the Patriotic Association of the Women of

explained: "In several cases some young wives have met each other and in discussing their finances found it would be easier to share one house to halve expenses; this has been done in several cases. Not only do many of these wives miss their husbands in the home for the help they brought in, but with young children to care for, many find it very difficult even to collect fire wood".¹⁵⁴ This type of cooperation would have undoubtedly eased many of the material and psychological hardships of servicewives' wartime experience. Unfortunately, it appears that the bulk of these women had neither access nor inclination to seek out services of this kind.

The stress of trying to make ends meet, raising children alone and waiting for the ominous knock at the door, eventually became more than some servicewives could bear. As the war dragged on, some wives were reportedly suffering from nervous breakdowns and a few were confined to mental hospitals.¹⁵⁵ One wife was described as "a nervous wreck...calling and crying for her husband all the time".¹⁵⁶ Others developed

Newfoundland", 1942-43, CNS.

¹⁵⁴ "W.P.A. Annual Report 1940", MG 635, Box 2, PANL.

¹⁵⁵ "District Magistrate, Grand Falls, to Secretary for Defence", 28 June 1945, PRC#35, Box 114, File 77, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Commanding Officer, H.M.C.S. "Avalon", 8 September 1944, PRC #35, Box 84, File 52, PANL; "F/O R.A.F. to Secretary for Defence", 22 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

¹⁵⁶ "T.C. to Secretary for Defence", 15 July 1944, PRC #35, Box 87, File 49, PANL.

ulcers or similar ailments as a result of their incessant worry and fatigue.¹⁵⁷ “My wife for the past few years has been suffering from duodenal ulcers and a heart murmur and has been advised that her trouble is greatly due to my being away for all those years Overseas”, one serviceman explained.¹⁵⁸ Even more common, however, were general descriptions of servicewives as “overworked”, “ill with loneliness” or “showing the effects of trying to raise a family alone”.¹⁵⁹ One wife complained to the Secretary for Defence: “My husband went overseas three months after we were married...I feel sure that he has done his part while I have suffered severely for it at home...I feel sure that there are others who can take his place who are carefree and have nothing to hinder them”.¹⁶⁰ Another wife abjectly explained: “Our home and surroundings are entirely going to ruin...It’s not because I want to be a slacker in my war effort. I would gladly do

¹⁵⁷ The Secretary for Defence described one servicewife’s health as suffering “as a result of the heavy burden which she carries”, 28 April 1945, PRC #35, Box 47, File 117, PANL; “Newfoundland Ranger Report”, 13 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 82, File 98, PANL; “T.C. to Secretary for Defence”, 13 June 1945, PRC #35, Box 92, File 77, PANL; “A.J.W., M.D., to Secretary for Defence”, 20 March 1944, PRC #35, Box 79, File-126, PANL.

¹⁵⁸ “Serviceman to Secretary for Defence”, 14 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

¹⁵⁹ “Mrs. ___ to Recruiting Office, St. John’s”, 31 August 1942, PRC #35, Box 79, File 23, PANL; “W.T., Wabana, to Secretary for Defence”, 16 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 81, File 68, PANL; “T.C. to Secretary for Defence”, PRC #35, Box 16, File 16, PANL.

¹⁶⁰ “Mrs. ___, Hickman’s Harbor, to Secretary for Defence”, 23 November 1943, PRC #35, Box 105, File 80, PANL.

all possible but what does it benefit to have what we had home gone to ruin".¹⁶¹ In comparison, however, such complaints and descriptions certainly appear to have been more the exception than the norm. For every servicewife that showed signs of "cracking" under the pressure, many more "soldiered on", absorbing the stress and waiting for the long promised relief which would come at the end of the war.

 Servicewives certainly inhabited a "waiting" role during the war. They "waited" to have children. They "waited" to establish permanent homes of their own. They "waited" for the dreaded knock at the door or cryptic telegram message. While their husbands' role seemed to be one of action and movement, theirs seemed to be one of patience and immobility. Their husbands' enlistment had effectively placed their lives on hold, emphasizing how dependent they were on traditional gender structures. Consciously or not, servicewives realized that their expectations and goals were intrinsically dependent upon men as husbands, fathers and breadwinners. With the removal of their husbands through military service, wives' "natural" life course was placed in limbo, neither moving forward nor regressing to any degree. This condition was, by far, the object of most servicewives' complaints to the Government during the war. They resented being unable to establish their own homes as wives and mothers, as

¹⁶¹ "Mrs. ___ to Secretary for Defence", 5 July 1944, PRC #35, Box 109, File 32, PANL.

this was the vocation to which they had dedicated their lives upon marriage.

Newfoundland society offered no wider scope for a married woman other than that of wife, mother and homemaker. With no homes, husbands, and in some cases children, the war had effectively robbed Newfoundland servicewives of their standing and status in society. These roles were primary to their sense of self-identity and worth.

The role thrust upon servicewives instead was now one of self-sacrifice and fortitude. The popular image of the housewife as brave home front soldier, fighting Hitler with ration books and war savings certificates, held little meaning to financially strapped, homeless servicewives. Yet the essence of such messages still managed to penetrate these women's psyches, the wording of their letters often referring to personal "duty", "sacrifice" and not being a "slacker". Perhaps through a recognition of their own "supreme sacrifice" for the war effort, they spoke of "patriotic responsibility" with a sense of reverence and awe. To do otherwise, would have been to diminish and even tarnish the contribution that their husbands were making on the front lines. In the absence of adequate financial remuneration for military service, patriotic rewards seemed to be all that servicewives had to hold on to. Without such, their husbands' contributions and their own domestic sacrifices would hold little meaning. The Government propagated this sense of wartime patriotism for the benefit of the war effort, but servicewives internalized it out of a sense of necessity and survival.

Servicewives' connection to the military was inescapable and yet barely recognizable within the establishment itself. They were immersed in a class system based

upon their husbands' rank and status within the military. Their welfare and security were entangled in the same bureaucratic "red tape" which now controlled their husbands' lives. And their well-being at home was inextricably bound to servicemen's morale overseas, both materially and psychologically. Servicewives were advised to "soldier on" for their husbands' sake, struggling to make ends meet yet keeping up a cheerful persona in their weekly letters overseas. When this fallacy broke down, husbands' morale suffered and defection and discipline became a problem. Unlike single men, the priorities and loyalties of married men were definitely split and no amount of conditioning or discipline could break these familial bonds. In some cases, the military actually utilized marital ties as a disciplinary tool in itself, ruthlessly cutting servicewives' allowances, and essentially their lifelines, when husbands were reported as deserting or serving terms in detention. Just as wartime propaganda manipulated these bonds to induce men to fight, military authorities were not above plucking familial strings when it proved to be to their advantage.

As opposed to their husbands' military service, servicewives' living and working conditions were neither uniform nor standardized. Their personal living situations varied greatly during the course of the war, some struggling to maintain their own homes and others dependent upon the hospitality of family members. Some servicewives eked out a lonely existence with no one to turn to for help or support. Others longed for a modicum of personal space, surrounded by family in cramped and overcrowded accommodations. For some wives, military allowances represented an

improvement in their economic condition compared to that endured during the Depression years. For others, especially those attempting to live independently, military allowances proved woefully inadequate in the face of Newfoundland's rapidly rising cost of living. Very few wives appeared to work outside the home during the war, but their working conditions within such varied greatly according to their particular living situation. Those residing in their own homes, especially in outport communities, were forced to appropriate many heavy "male" chores, such as chopping wood and hauling water. Combined with their regular "female" duties around the home, some wives complained that they did not know how they could manage their new responsibilities. Other wives, living with their parents or other family members, complained that they had no opportunity to manage their own homes or to raise their children as they would like. But even these complaints themselves divided the group, the vocal minority often being viewed with patriotic contempt by government and military officials. "Good servicewives" were expected to silently endure adversity with resignation and resilience. Unlike their husbands who melted into a faceless, uniformed mass, servicewives were never classed as a distinct group, either by themselves or others. They shared overwhelming anxieties and challenges, yet there is little evidence of any concerted effort to unite for mutual support and understanding. Theirs was largely a solitary struggle on a strange and lonely battlefield.

Yet despite the overwhelming expectations of silence and servitude, some servicewives did complain in an overt and unapologetic manner. Unable to go on as they

were any longer, they appealed to government officials for increased support or the return of their husbands. They recognized that their wartime role was one of sacrifice, but questioned the extent of this obligation. How much was enough? As Newfoundland experienced an unprecedented economic boom, servicewives and their children felt distinctly left out. Their husbands earned inadequate military wages, set with almost no consideration for the high cost of living which existed in Newfoundland at the time. And servicewives themselves were virtually forbidden to engage in the paid labour force, societal and employment restrictions confining their labour to the home. Single women had become an accepted component of the Newfoundland work force, but discriminatory barriers continued to obstruct married women's participation. Their "job" remained in the home, both defining and legitimizing their dependence on husbands. Consequently, with the transference of this dependency onto the Government during the war, servicewives asserted their "right" to receive adequate support much as they would in legal proceedings against deserting husbands. Some appeals drew upon a sense of victimization, addressing paternalistic assumptions of female dependency. Many other letters emphasized how unfair the situation had become and how deserved they were of increased support. To these wives, assistance was neither a privilege nor a gift but warranted based upon the roles they performed in the home, as well as their sacrifice for the war effort. Unfortunately, these women wrote as single voices, unaware or uninterested in the fact that theirs was a shared experience among many. Isolated within the home, their plaintive demands were easily muffled and ignored. Yet the intrinsic

validity of their claims and their own perception of such implied an innate appreciation for the value of their wartime role. Consciously or not, servicewives agreed to support the war effort only to the extent that the State supported them, thereby inciting a subtle renegotiation of power between the public and private spheres.

Chapter Five

“Till Death Do You Part”: Legislating Morality for Separated Husbands and Wives

To me marriage is a civil contract of special importance in that the interests of unborn generations are involved. It is therefore proper that the State should be concerned with regard to both the making and the breaking of the contract.¹

The opinion was expressed by Thomas Lodge, the Commissioner for Public Utilities, in a memorandum to the Commission in August 1936. In response to an application for the introduction of divorce legislation, Lodge emphasized the increasingly civil nature of the marital “contract” in contemporary society. Though the Church may endorse the union, Lodge maintained, the State actually presided over the transaction, determining the terms of entry and withdrawal. The contract thereby formed a triangular union whose points were fixed, yet rarely congruent. Wives tended to assume the weakest point of the alliance, negotiating from a position of dependence and servitude. The State, on the other hand, formed the apex of the union, its preeminent position based on popular perception of the legitimate family as the basic unit of the social structure. Thus, the State assumed a rather paternalistic persona in the exchange, its mandate being the protection of homes and families and the sanctity of the marital contract. Any loosening of the bonds of this covenant was consequently perceived as threatening the health and vitality of the nation as a whole.

¹ “Memorandum for Commission of Government from the Commissioner for Public Utilities”, 24 August 1936, GN 13/1/B, Box 373, File 10, PANL.

Traditionally in Newfoundland, the State's intrusion into marital contracts was virtually nonexistent. The island's primitive bureaucracy and invasive denominational controls ensured that marriage remained a largely binding and inescapable transaction. No system for legal separation existed, nor did any laws for divorce. There was essentially only one sanctioned avenue out of a marital contract and that entailed some digging and a pine box. With the commencement of the Second World War, however, the playing field changed remarkably, especially for separated servicemen and their wives. Husbands were fighting on the front lines thousands of miles away, while their wives waited on the home front, unsure whether they would ever see their spouses again. Distance, loneliness and a growing awareness of the ephemerality of life naturally strained marital ties. Whether in the interest of the war effort, their perceived debt to servicemen, or their aversion to social dependency, the Commission of Government was forced to assume the role of referee in an increasing number of marital disputes. Reaction to this onslaught on the "sacred institution" reflected public and private perceptions of the changing role of marriage in Newfoundland society, as well the designation of power among its primary players.

Initially, the concepts of fidelity and divorce were to be included in the previous chapter which broadly chronicled servicewives wartime experience. Upon examination of the service records of the Department of Defence, however, it became apparent that the topics deserved appreciably more attention and space. The files offered innumerable references to "confidential investigations" and "rumored suspicions".

Moreover, incidents of marital misconduct, abandonment, divorce and bigamy were described in relatively elaborate detail. The correspondence revealed the diffident and often conflicting positions of the Commission of Government and military authorities in dealing with these encroaching problems. Were marital indiscretions to be “excused” under the extraordinary conditions? Were servicemen “obliged” to maintain their wives no matter what the circumstance? Should some couples be “freed” from their marital obligations considering the unprecedented situation? The position which the Government assumed in these altercations was one of both intermediary and concerned participant. For the sake of the war effort, it was forced to intrude into intimate domestic issues to which it had previously appeared indifferent. For the sake of government policy and finance, it interceded to protect the bonds of marital contracts, as well as wives’ “rights” to financial support. The Government’s response to its new interfering role speaks volumes regarding its perception of the role of women and marriage in Newfoundland society.

Although the topics of wartime morality and sexuality have received significant academic attention, the role that servicewives and their absent husbands played in the debate has been the focus for limited historical study.² Carol Smart

² See for example Pierson, “They’re Still Women After All”; Susan R. Grayzel, Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

recognized this apparent oversight in her examination of marriage and divorce in wartime Britain. Admitting that her conclusions were largely speculative given the topic's lack of scholarly study, she described the often "hasty" wartime marriages between "virtual strangers" as being far removed from the idealized version of matrimony which still permeated most public policy discussions in the 1940's. While authorities generally tended to ignore the practical and personal difficulties of married life, in the case of servicemen whose wives had become illegitimately pregnant during the war, they were prepared to sidestep their usual "official" position. Rather than distancing themselves from the problem, authorities intervened on behalf of these men, facilitating legal separations and divorces as a means to safeguard morale. But for the most part, Smart explained, official policy seemed intent on ignoring the immense disruptions to married life caused by the war. To deflect growing public pressure for divorce reform, the British Government eventually announced a Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce in 1951. Yet few changes to the law were ever recommended, public policy remaining focused on "punishing" people for divorcing, rather than helping them make the transition to another marriage or back to single life again.³

In a broad compilation of American women's Second World War "experience", Doris Weatherford also devoted attention to the subject of fidelity among

³ Carol Smart, "Good Wives and Moral Lives: Marriage and Divorce, 1937-1951", 91-105, in Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (eds.), Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and the British Cinema in the Second World War (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996).

separated servicemen and their wives. According to Weatherford, American society's "moral double standard" dictated that while a serviceman's infidelity was understandable given the strict regimentation and psychological stress of Army life, a wife's faithfulness was imbued with patriotic importance. The dream of returning to the domestic hearth and devoted wives assumed a significant role in the maintenance of morale during the war years. Thus, a serviceman depended upon society to ensure his wife's fidelity during the period of wartime separation. Wives were forced to become totally circumspect in their behavior and activities, as gossip and suspicion were easily aroused. By and large, wives were expected to exhibit their devotion to husbands by giving up all social activity and cloistering themselves in the home during a time in their lives which should have represented their most active years.⁴

Servicewives also merited passing attention in Gillian Swanson's examination of the changing sexual landscape of wartime Britain. In "So Much Money and So Little to Spend It On: Morale, Consumption and Sexuality", Swanson argued that during the Second World War sexual behavior and the management of private life became matters of national relevance. To safeguard the morale of servicemen overseas, as well as civilians on the home front, the Government was forced to address women's sexuality as part of the war effort. The conditions of war, and specifically the separation of many husbands and wives due to military service, were perceived as perverting

⁴ Doris Weatherford, American Women and World War II (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 1990), 254-257.

women's natural desires and giving rise to "unsatisfactory conditions in social morality" which included increasing incidents of divorce and separation, sexual relations outside marriage, illegitimacy, and venereal disease. In the interests of the war effort and general social morality, women were advised how they should deal with the strains caused by war, such as husbands' altered behavior while on leave and even their own sexual temptations. According to Swanson, the exigencies of war allowed sexuality to become a central aspect of national definition, the sexual becoming "an integral part of social management in ways that had only been hinted at prior to wartime".⁵

In appearance and mood, Newfoundland society was dramatically altered by its wartime experience. Thousands of young servicemen invaded the island, bringing with them new ideas and customs. Massive military construction projects injected capital and resources into the depleted economy, buoying the personal incomes of many Newfoundlanders. The rate of unemployment plummeted, wages increased, and a general feeling of optimism and hope replaced the demoralization of the Depression years. Throughout all, a sense of urgent energy permeated the atmosphere, acclimatizing the island to its new strategic significance on the world stage. For a time, the actual

⁵ Gillian Swanson, "So Much Money and So Little to Spend It On: Morale, Consumption and Sexuality", 70-86, in Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (eds.), Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996).

fighting of the war appeared to inch closer and closer to Newfoundland's shores, culminating in the sinking of the "Caribou" ferry in 1942. For many men and women, this was a time to "live for the moment", irrespective of moral inhibitions and social constraints.

Amidst this aura of raw mortality and vitality, social conventions and mores often yielded to individual enthusiasms and passions. Men and women no longer had the opportunity to get to know one another over a matter of months. For a society on the move, especially the younger segment, true love had to be squeezed into three days leave or before the completion of the current military construction project. In reality, true love was often impeded by such rigid time constraints, but one could always hope for the next best thing. The occurrence of illegitimate births increased in staggering degrees in areas of military construction, as did the reported and unreported cases of venereal disease.⁶ Public brothels were apparently nonexistent in Newfoundland but prostitution and small-scale "houses of ill-repute" did flourish around centers of military

⁶ The occurrences of illegitimate births in Stephenville, the site of an American air force base, jumped from just over 27% at the end of the Depression to a high of 53% during the war. Benoit, "Urbanizing Women Military Fashion", 120; MacLeod, *Peace of the Continent*, 39; "Prostitution and Venereal Diseases", *The Daily News*, 16 May 1940, 2; "Too Much Hush", *The Grand Falls Advertiser*, 15 January 1944, 2; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 11 April 1944, PRC #35, Box 98, File 18, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Magistrate", 28 June 1944, PRC #35, Box 81, File 65, PANL; "Magistrate to Director of Recruiting", 15 July 1941, PRC #35, Box 94, File 50, PANL; "Rurality to Secretary for Defence", 28 July 1944, PRC #35, Box 6, File 34. PANL.

construction.⁷ “Disorderly girls” were routinely reported to have been smuggled onto naval ships docked in St. John’s and even the girls working on the Canadian and American bases faced repeated slander as to their “real motivations” for taking such jobs.⁸ With the general loosening of morals came heightened suspicion of female behavior and conduct.

Married women were not above such social suspicions, especially those whose husbands were absent fighting overseas. On the surface, these women appeared to enjoy a new measure of freedom and lack of responsibility with which married women were rarely associated in Newfoundland. Without husbands to keep them in check, who would prevent servicewives from sliding off the path of the “straight and narrow”? Rumors abounded as to the real and supposed indiscretions of these women. Idle gossip over the back fence was one thing, but some of these rumors managed to cross the Atlantic to husbands serving at the front. Men were reportedly receiving all sorts of disturbing stories from friends and family concerning their wives’ behavior in

⁷ An American report on the state of Newfoundland’s wartime health services discovered no organized commercial prostitution in St. John’s but a considerable number of young girls and women who solicited on the streets. David Facey-Crowther, “Newfiejohn: Garrison Town”, Paper presented for Newfoundland Museum Lecture Series (June 1995); “Registry of Aliens to Sergeant M.P.M.”, 8 July 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 251, File 1, PANL; “Constabulary Report”, 4 June 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 176, File 23, PANL; “Constabulary Report”, 4 February 1952, GN 13/1/B, Box 366, File 26.

⁸ “Registry of Aliens to Chief of Police”, 10 February 1941, GN 13/2/A, Box 417; “Constabulary Report”, 25 September 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 240, File 8, PANL.

Newfoundland.⁹ “The above named [men] have all been informed that their wives are behaving in a disgraceful manner with Canadian and American troops”, the Combined Services Liaison Officer reported in 1942, “...the men are so upset that I urge you most strongly to obtain the information requested at as early a date as possible”.¹⁰ Other men were informed that their wives were working in houses of ill-repute, living with other men, or, of course, pregnant with illegitimate babies.¹¹ The Liaison Office repeatedly questioned how and why these often baseless rumors continued to make their way to the front. Their effects on morale were obvious as men helplessly worried and fumed over suspicions which they could neither personally confirm nor deny. “Something must be done without delay to rectify this terrible position”, the Secretary for Defence demanded in one such case, “[the serviceman] is almost frantic with worry and somewhat naturally it is affecting his work”.¹²

Hardly surprisingly, the root of many of these rumors extended directly to

⁹ “Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland”, 29 July 1942, PRC #35, Box 16, File 79, PANL.

¹⁰ “Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence”, 5 August 1942, PRC #35, Box 15, File 48, PANL.

¹¹ “Company Chaplain to Station Adjutant”, 14 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 115, File 100, PANL; “Rurality to Secretary for Defence”, 29 November 1943, PRC #35, Box 15, File 9, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Magistrate”, 13 November 1943, PRC #35, Box 83, File 77, PANL; “Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland”, 29 July 1942, PRC #35, Box 112, File 19, PANL.

¹² “Secretary for Defence to Magistrate”, 14 July 1942, PRC #35, Box 16, File 179, PANL.

the doors of servicemen's own families, and more specifically, their mothers. It is interesting to note how many times servicemen and military officials cite mothers as the primary informants of wives' immoral behavior. "A very pitiful case," the Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland observed in 1942, "[the soldier] has heard from his Mother that his wife is running around with other men and neglecting his children. The mother claims that the wife is spending her allowances and the children are ill-fed and improperly clothed".¹³ Other mothers hesitated to write directly to their sons overseas but relayed their suspicions instead to Government officials. Often they approached the office of the Secretary for Defence, but they also regularly broached the Department of Public Health and Welfare and Mrs. Holmes of the Women's Patriotic Association.¹⁴ "Yesterday, a Mrs. __, mother of [a soldier] came to tell me that [his] wife has now produced twins for an American soldier," Mrs. Holmes explained to the Secretary for Defence, "...she cannot write and tell her son about this latest news of his wife. She is very distressed about it and knows he will be. She wanted me to write him, but I thought it would be kinder to ask you to tell him. We have so much of this trouble going on with

¹³ "Secretary for Defence to Magistrate", 14 July 1942, PRC #35, Box 16, File 179, PANL.

¹⁴ "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 25 August 1943, PRC #35, Box 41, File 45, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 30 June 1943, PRC #35, Box 110, File 102, PANL; "Mrs. __, Trinity Bay, to Department of Public Health and Welfare", 17 February 1944, PRC #35, Box 115, File 100, PANL.

the wives of the men, and it is difficult to know what to do".¹⁵

Actually, it was difficult to know what to do. The Liaison Office urged Mrs. Holmes and other interceding officials to avoid directing such matters to husbands overseas or to their commanding officers until guilt had definitely been established. "...[W]ould it be possible for you tactfully to approach Mrs. Holmes and suggest that she refers such matters to us, through you or direct to us, whichever you prefer, but definitely not to Commanding Officers", the Liaison Officer discreetly advised.¹⁶ But even when guilt had been established, these reports often failed to make their way to the front for fear of needlessly upsetting servicemen's morale.¹⁷ Suspicious husbands were similarly advised to assume that "all was well" until the rumors had been officially investigated and verified. But this was easier said than done. Some husbands requested leave to return to Newfoundland to "find out how matters really stand".¹⁸ Barring this, they demanded the immediate cessation of their allotments and family allowances to their now "undeserving" wives. "She went into town spending my money and going out with other

¹⁵ "Frances B. Holmes to Secretary for Defence", 23 February 1944, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL.

¹⁶ "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 14 March 1944, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL.

¹⁷ "In addition to her statement I have also two Police reports. These are forwarded for your information but I think no useful purpose would be served in informing Gunner ___ concerning them", the Secretary for Defence explained to the Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland, 1 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 96, File 133, PANL.

¹⁸ "Chaplain to Station Adjutant", 14 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 115, File 100, PANL.

men and also said she was not married any longer to me and I never intend to have any connections with her any more so I would like for this thing to stop if it can be stopped”, fumed one gunner who had recently received insinuating reports from home.¹⁹ The Liaison Office attempted to reason with these anxious husbands, reminding them that rumors were certainly not “concrete” evidence of misconduct: “We forwarded the minister’s report to [the serviceman] and told him that in our opinion he had been hasty and there did not seem to be any foundation in the exaggerated stories of his wife’s behavior and we suggested to him that he should recontinue the allowances”.²⁰ But ruffled feathers were not easily smoothed. Feeling trapped over a half a world away, many “jilted” husbands flexed their breadwinner muscles and pressed for the cessation of allowances solely on the basis of whispered reports and aspersions.²¹

Men could not be left to stew until the completion of hostilities. And wives could not be cut off from all financial support simply because of rumor and innuendo. Military regulations clearly stated that “the issue of allowance is liable to

¹⁹ “Regimental Paymaster to Secretary for Defence”, 30 November 1942, PRC #35, Box 15, File 81, PANL.

²⁰ “Liaison Office Report”, 14 January 1944, PRC #35, Box 15, File 46, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 16 May 1944, PRC #35, Box 96, File 82, PANL; “[The serviceman] must be given the opportunity of reconsidering his decision, before withdrawing allowances”, the Liaison Office repeatedly advised. “Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence”, 30 August 1944, PRC #35, Box 41, File 35, PANL.

²¹ “Chaplain to Station Adjutant”, 14 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 115, File 100, PANL; “Constabulary Report”, 22 January 1943, PRC #35, Box 15, File 81, PANL.

discontinuance in the event of serious misconduct on the part of the dependent”; serious misconduct being the military translation for infidelity.²² But who should verify these reports of “misconduct”? What even constituted “serious misconduct”? While no official system for verification was ever sanctioned, an impromptu method of investigation was gradually instituted as conditions necessitated. Concerned servicemen usually approached their commanding officers or similar military officials who, in turn, channeled their requests for an investigation through the Liaison Office in London to the Commission of Government in Newfoundland. In the interests of the war effort, the Newfoundland Government declared itself “anxious to help out with information in cases of this kind” and promptly delegated the responsibility to the Secretary for Defence.²³ In response, the Secretary approached the district magistrates for information, stressing the confidential nature of these insinuating investigations. “I should like to emphasize that in this particular case I would not want a policeman or anyone else to visit the home for the purpose of securing information,” the Secretary routinely explained to magistrates, “but would like to have something in the nature of a confidential report”.²⁴ Some magistrates naturally took exception to the rather dubious duty of informing on wives’ behavior. The magistrate for Bell Island irately responded to one such request:

²² “Special Army Order”, 30 November 1941, PRC #35, Box 3, File 26, PANL.

²³ “Secretary for Justice to Secretary for Defence”, 25 November 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 189, PANL.

²⁴ “Secretary for Defence to Magistrate, Carbonear”, 30 September 1943, PRC #35, Box 80, File 47, PANL.

Recently I have received several letters requesting me to investigate and report on the character, mode of living and circumstances of the wives of men serving in the armed forces. In one or two instances I did answer the communications but gave very little if any information on the subject in question because if the person concerned has no police or Court record I do not feel it my duty to comment on her character from what may be only rumor.²⁵

Furiously back-peddling, the Secretary explained that he never imagined that magistrates “would personally enquire into matters, but would get a police officer or returning officer to do so”.²⁶

Distasteful or not, the requests for information on wives’ conduct had to be investigated and it was largely left up to the Newfoundland Constabulary to perform the actual leg work in these cases. The Liaison Office described these as “very delicate cases”, for which investigation should “be kept very confidential”.²⁷ The Secretary for Defence agreed, warning police officials: “I need hardly suggest to you the necessity of very careful and diplomatic enquiries in such a case as there may be the possibility that the information is not correct and it would be very distressing to a wife to know that such

²⁵ “Magistrate to Secretary for Defence”, 18 November 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 189, PANL.

²⁶ “Secretary for Defence to Secretary for Justice”, 9 December 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 189, PANL. Notice from the dates of the correspondence that in September the Secretary specifically requested magistrates to personally investigate cases, but in December claimed that he never imaged that they would personally do so.

²⁷ “Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence”, 5 August 1942, PRC #35, Box 15, File 48. PANL.

enquiries were on foot”.²⁸ Evidently, the term “confidential” was open to interpretation, however, as the constables regularly relied on interviews with wives’ parents, friends and even with the wives themselves in gathering information for their reports. Some wives were forced to give written statements defending themselves and their behavior. “Mrs. ___ states that she is true to her husband and would like to have him home”, the Secretary for Defence explained, “She said that some person wrote to her husband and told him lies”.²⁹ Other wives were never given an opportunity for self-defence, but were condemned upon the basis of rumor and association. “I have been talking with her parents,” one constable reported of a supposedly adulterous wife, “and am informed that she will not take their advice and it is useless to try and do anything with her”.³⁰ Another constable similarly accused: “She has three small children, which are very poorly dressed, and in my opinion they are not properly cared for by their mother. This woman spends three parts of her time on the street and in other peoples houses, and keeps very late hours at night”.³¹ Such police reports were often the only proof required to condemn wives of infidelity and serious misconduct, thus providing “sufficient grounds to permit

²⁸ “Secretary for Defence to Chief of Police”, 1 December 1942, PRC #35, Box 12, File 30, PANL.

²⁹ “Secretary for Defence to Colonel Rendell”, 18 October 1944, PRC #35, Box 83, File 77, PANL; also see “Statement of Mrs. ___, Bell Island”, 25 April 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

³⁰ “Constabulary Report”, 12 June 1943, PRC #35, Box 64, File 5, PANL.

³¹ “Constabulary Report”, 15 December 1942, PRC #35, Box 16, File 179, PANL.

[husbands'] allotments and allowances to be canceled".³²

In other instances a wife's misconduct was more difficult to substantiate, especially in the absence of reliable witnesses or at least "chatty" gossips. The most incriminating and damning evidence, however, was always the existence of an illegitimate birth.³³ This was the badge of ultimate dishonor, a fact which could be neither concealed nor denied. Simple math provided the burden of proof in such cases, a child's age being subtracted from the number of months or years that a husband had been overseas.³⁴ A negative answer spelled disaster for a woman's reputation, compelling many servicewives to hide their illegitimate pregnancies and the resulting offspring by placing these children with their own mothers or grandmothers.³⁵ The police described

³² "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 12 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 15, File 81, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 31 August 1943, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL; "Special Army Order", 30 November 1941, PRC #35, Box 3, File 26, PANL.

³³ "Cases are occurring and with alarming frequency just recently of Newfoundlanders serving in this country whose wives in Newfoundland are cohabitating with other men in Newfoundland and in quite a few cases even giving birth to children", a memorandum for the Commissioner for Justice and Defence observed in November 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 32, File 100, PANL.

³⁴ Officials hesitated to use the distasteful term "illegitimate", discreetly citing instead the date of the birth and the number of years the husband had been overseas. "It has been reported that the wife of Gunner ___ has recently given birth to a child. Gunner ___ has been overseas since June 1940", the Secretary for Defence reported in September 1943, PRC #35, Box 15, File 18, PANL; "...[H]er husband went overseas in 1940 and is still overseas and that about a month ago she gave birth to a child", a magistrate similarly explained in April 1943, PRC #35, Box 41, File 89, PANL.

³⁵ In relation to Stephenville society, Cecilia Benoit described women who became pregnant before marriage as "marked for life", "Mothering in a Newfoundland

such actions as “obviously for concealment reasons” but correspondence from husbands indicate that even stronger pressures may have existed.³⁶ Some husbands were willing to forgive and forget their wives’ indiscretions only if “the child was out of the house when he returned”.³⁷ Placing such children with their own mothers or grandmothers permitted some sense of closeness and maternal responsibility. Other wives could hardly afford such a luxury. With their husbands resolutely opposed to supporting such children, and wives possessing few alternatives to provide financial support themselves, many were forced to lay claims for support against the putative fathers. Such legal action often entailed the transference of custody to the biological father who could choose to simply provide financial support for the child’s upbringing or adopt the child himself and arrange to have his own sister or mother appointed as guardian.³⁸ Of course, many other illegitimate children were abandoned in orphanages or similar facilities. Perhaps not so coincidental, the Waterford Hall Home for Infants was opened in St. John’s in 1943, principally dedicated to providing care for illegitimate children between the ages of three

Community”, 178.

³⁶ “War Pensions Officer to Secretary for Defence”, 7 August 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

³⁷ Numerous incidents of such ultimatums exist in the Department of Defence records, including: “Department of Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Defence”, 7 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 18, File 139, PANL; “District Magistrate to Secretary for Defence”, 18 June 1943, PRC #35, Box 109, File 44, PANL.

³⁸ “Department of Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Defence”, 7 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 18, File 139, PANL; “District Magistrate to Secretary for Defence”, 1 November 1943, PRC #35, Box 109, File 44, PANL.

months and two years.³⁹

The decision to give up an illegitimate child was hardly one of choice but rather an economic necessity for most servicewives. Husbands could apply for the cessation of family allowances simply upon the basis of wives' rumored indiscretions and an illegitimate birth indisputably indicated guilt. "Although there may be no police or court record", the Secretary for Defence routinely remarked in such cases, "the facts reflect the woman's conduct".⁴⁰ In such situations wives had little alternative but to write their husbands, apologizing for their mistake and begging for forgiveness. "Mrs. ___ appears to be extremely sorry for the incident", one child welfare officer reported, "and has expressed her willingness to resume domestic relations with her husband upon his return from overseas, if he is willing to do so. She has written and told him all about the child. She hopes he will not discontinue the allotment as this, she says, is her only visible means of support".⁴¹ A probation officer patronizingly described the remorse of another "guilty" servicewife:

Mrs. ___ appears to be very sorry for what has happened and informed me that her Mother is quite willing to take the responsibility for her illegitimate child. She has her other child with her, and does not want to give it up. I asked her if she would like her husband to forgive her, and she said she was afraid he would never

³⁹ Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume 1, 422.

⁴⁰ "Secretary for Defence to Secretary for Justice", 9 December 1943, PRC #35, Box 83, File 77, PANL; "District Magistrate to Secretary for Defence", 30 August 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

⁴¹ "Welfare Officer to Director of Child Welfare", 24 October 1944, PRC #35, Box 96, File 92, PANL.

do so, but I think she has learned her lesson.⁴²

Ultimately, it was left up to the husband to decide whether forgiveness was in order or not. "No doubt [the Liaison Office] will advise [the serviceman] of the circumstances", the Secretary for Defence speculated in 1942, "and Gunner __ will have to make his own decision concerning further payments of allotment to his unfaithful wife".⁴³ Unable to earn a living to support themselves and their children, servicewives had little alternative but to acquiesce to their husbands' demands and ultimatums.⁴⁴

Often a husband's pride proved an insurmountable barrier to reconciliation, compelling him to cease all family allowances and to extract an additional pound of flesh through the removal of his own children from his wife's care. The procedure was usually as simple as the transference of military allowances from the wife to another appointed guardian.⁴⁵ Not only could wives' allowances be canceled upon the

⁴² "Probation Officer to Secretary for Public Health and Welfare", 7 October 1942, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL.

⁴³ "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 2 September 1942, PRC #35, Box 108, File 63, PANL.

⁴⁴ "Division of Child Welfare to Secretary for Defence", 7 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 18, File 139, PANL; Nancy Forestell, for example, described how difficult it was for women to live independently in St. John's during the interwar period. "Times Were Hard", 84.

⁴⁵ The Liaison Office advised the Secretary for Defence in 1944: "As there are quite a few cases very similar to this one [illegitimate birth] I should be glad if you could treat the matter as urgent", 14 March 1944, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 27 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL; "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 12 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 108, File 9, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for

assumption of “serious misconduct”, but their children were also ineligible to receive any allowances while in their care. Military regulations clearly stated:

When the issue of a Special Dependants' Allowance is discontinued under para. 8 on account of the dependant's misconduct, no Special Dependants' Allowance will be issuable for any children living with the dependant concerned. If, however, such children are placed under the care of another person nominated as guardian by the soldier, any Special Dependants' Allowance issuable in respect of them may be paid to this guardian together with the appropriate qualifying allotment and any voluntary allotment that may be authorized by the soldier.⁴⁶

By 1943, authorities were well accustomed to such procedures, callously describing the implications and penalties for such crimes. “No doubt the usual steps will be taken for the cessation of marriage allowance to the wife and for the payment of guardian's allowance and child's allowance to the [soldier's] mother”, the Secretary for Defence surmised.⁴⁷ When lacking independent means to financially support their children, servicewives often released custodial rights with little resistance. “Mrs. ___ stated that if her husband wanted to have his children given over to the custody of [his mother], then she supposed she would have to let them go”, explained one welfare officer.⁴⁸ Other wives stood their ground more firmly, determined to fight to keep their children. One

Newfoundland”, 31 August 1943, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL.

⁴⁶ “Special Army Order”, 30 November 1941, PRC #35, Box 3, File 26, PANL.

⁴⁷ “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 25 August 1943, PRC #35, Box 41, File 45, PANL; see also “Memorandum for Commissioner for Justice and Defence”, 3 November 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 32, File 100, PANL.

⁴⁸ “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 31 August 1944, PRC #35, Box 111, File 144, PANL; “Welfare Officer to Assistant Director”, 24 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

wife's written statement for the Director of Child Welfare defiantly maintained:

...[I]t is the desire of my husband that the children be taken from my custody and placed in the care of his sister...It has been stated to me that my husband's reason for this action is that I am still co-habiting with the father of my illegitimate child. I deny this latter statement. I am not co-habiting with this or any other man. I have not been with this man for nearly two years. My children are being well looked after in all respects. I am not willing that my children by my husband should be taken from me and I see no reason why this should be asked for...I am prepared to have my illegitimate child adopted and at present I am discussing arrangements with that in view.⁴⁹

In such instances of resistance, clauses of the Public Health and Welfare Act of 1931 could be invoked which permitted the department to step in to remove children from a wife's care upon the presumption of neglect.⁵⁰ Establishing negligence in such cases was generally a straightforward matter, hinged on the husband's accusation of misconduct and authorities' automatic association between a wife's infidelity and the neglect of her children.⁵¹ A magistrate reported that a serviceman "...is quite correct when he fears that his children are being neglected and that his wife is not at all endeavoring to look after them in a proper manner. Her own statement testifies to her moral character since her

⁴⁹ "Statement Witnessed by the Assistant Director for Child Welfare", 23 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

⁵⁰ "Under the Public Health and Welfare Act that Department is empowered to take children from a mother in circumstances such as the one under review", explained the Secretary for Defence in regard to an adulterous wife. "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 27 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL.

⁵¹ "Chief Clerk to Secretary for Defence", 9 November 1944, PRC #35, Box 119, File 27, PANL; "Commanding Officer to Liaison Office", 31 July 1943, PRC #35, Box 110, File 102, PANL; "Statement Made by Gunner ___", 7 March 1944, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL.

husband went overseas”.⁵² Another wife’s supposed neglect was described in greater detail, although hardly more substantiated:

...[S]he states that she expects to give birth to a child [illegitimate] some time in June...Mrs. ___ is the mother of four legitimate children aged 13, 10, 7 and 5 years respectively all of which are home...Mrs. ___ is illiterate. She decidedly lacks parental control of her home and her character and conduct has, during the past two years in particular, been of a doubtful nature. Her chief associate in this town is a young unmarried mother who is likely to give birth to another child shortly.⁵³

Infidelity connoted a wife’s moral ruin and her ultimate “unsuitability” to raise children.

In cases in which the Department of Public Health and Welfare refused to remove a serviceman’s child from his wife’s care, the soldier usually had the option of appealing to the civil courts in Newfoundland for sole custodial rights.⁵⁴ Under the existing laws, husbands were in a much better legal position to remove children from wives’ care than for wives to fight to retain them, especially in cases of misconduct or assumed neglect.⁵⁵ According to the Secretary for Defence, if a husband could prove that

⁵² “District Magistrate to Secretary for Defence”, 16 December 1942, PRC #35, Box 16, File 179, PANL.

⁵³ “Stipendiary Magistrate to Secretary for Defence”, 17 February 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

⁵⁴ “Department of Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Defence”, 6 December 1944, PRC #35, Box 16, File 138, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 20 July 1944, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL.

⁵⁵ According to Cullum and Baird: “Under English common law, [Newfoundland] children were considered “infants” until they reached the age of twenty-one, and so lived under the sole legal guardianship of their father. A mother retained no rights to custody or to determine the religious education of her children”. Of course, the welfare of the child could be given consideration over the right of the father in some cases. “A Woman’s Lot”, 75.

his wife was "the guilty party - perhaps through immoral habits - the husband may take action in Court for the custody of the children and if he proves that the wife is not a proper person to have the custody of the children the Court may order that the father take charge of them but may not oblige the husband to provide any support for the wife".⁵⁶ Although a husband might be serving on the front lines thousands of miles from home, his children could be legally removed from his wife's care and placed with guardians whom he appointed. In many cases this was naturally his own mother or sister, but in other situations children were placed in orphanages, boarding schools and even with court appointed foster parents until the serviceman's return from overseas.⁵⁷ Many husbands applied for discharges or periods of compassionate leave during which they could return to Newfoundland to make adequate arrangements for the accommodation and care of their children.⁵⁸ Invariably, however, these requests were denied as government and military officials could foresee no advantage to a father's presence at such a time. One father, whose six children had been recently divided among multiple foster homes and

⁵⁶ "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 5 April 1944, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 27 May 1943, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL; Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume 1, 421.

⁵⁷ "Secretary for Defence to Secretary for Public Health and Welfare", 25 August 1944, PRC #35, Box 110, File 27, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 4 May 1944, PRC #35, Box 108, File 33, PANL.

⁵⁸ "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 27 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 114, File 45, PANL; "Regimental Headquarters, 166th Regt., to Liaison Office", 27 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 110, File 102, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 15 August 1944, PRC #35, Box 111, File 134, PANL.

orphanages, was refused discharge upon this basis:

In view of the ages of the children and the fact that suitable homes have been found for them, I do not see how Gunner __ discharge could help the situation. Obviously he could not stay at home and act as housekeeper and look after his family, and as the case appears to me I do not feel prepared to recommend his discharge.⁵⁹

Servicewives struggled against social stereotypes, but so did their husbands.

Stereotypes also tended to determine the choice of weapons used by the adversaries in marital disputes. Husbands generally relied on financial threats in such altercations, while wives seemed to favor short, stinging shots to the male ego. In either case, the participants utilized that which was closest at hand, drawing upon thousands of years experience in the art of gender warfare. Hearing that his wife in Newfoundland was “carrying on” with a Canadian soldier, a gunner in the 59th immediately informed her that he had been committed to ten years imprisonment, necessarily suspending all military allotments and allowances. Upon investigation, the soldier admitted sending the erroneous cable but excused his behavior as being meant “merely to frighten her”.⁶⁰ Conversely, when another gunner’s letters home slowed in frequency, his suspicious wife in Newfoundland responded by cabling him that she would soon be married. “Do not

⁵⁹ “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 18 March 1942, PRC #35, Box 15, File 48, PANL.

⁶⁰ “Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence”, 5 June 1942, PRC #35, Box 90, File 94, PANL.

bother about me”, she breezily advised, “I am going to be married shortly”.⁶¹ She later admitted to investigating officials that she had “no intention of marrying anyone” and that she did not mean what she had written in the letter.⁶² Distance and communication barriers forced couples to adapt their style of fighting, but the general principles of the game remained the same. The Government similarly accepted the inherent guidelines of the game, denoting genuine surprise when a wife, suspected of infidelity, refused to cower upon the insinuation that her military allowances would be suspended. “The suggestion that her allowances might be canceled if there was any evidence of misconduct on her part did not seem to worry her at all”, the Secretary for Defence awkwardly reported to the Regimental Paymaster in January 1943.⁶³ Childless and working as a live-in domestic servant, this particular wife was in a position to deflect the standard blows. But for the most part, servicewives caved in under such pressure, appropriately responding to the stratagem of the gender game.

The haphazard and weighted system for establishing custodial rights and resolving marital disputes in Newfoundland was intricately tied to the island’s complete

⁶¹ “Secretary for Defence to Secretary for Justice”, 23 October 1943, PRC #35, Box 18, File 86, PANL.

⁶² “Copy of Statement of Servicewife”, 6 November 1943, PRC #35, Box 18, File 86, PANL.

⁶³ “Secretary for Defence to Regimental Paymaster”, 23 January 1943, PRC #35, Box 15, File 81, PANL.

lack of divorce legislation.⁶⁴ While most Canadian provinces were in possession of their own divorce courts by the Second World War, Newfoundlanders still had no avenue out of marital contracts, save an archaic system for annulment in very rare situations.⁶⁵

Abuse, neglect, infidelity, desertion, imprisonment and even life-time commitment to mental institutions were considered inadequate reasons for dissolving marital bonds. The decision to marry might be a hasty and passionate one, but its permanency, according to the law, was carved in stone. Citizens occasionally petitioned the Government for the implementation of divorce laws, protesting the colony's inflexibility and backwardness in

⁶⁴ In 1857, the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act was passed in England, representing the first significant step in the reform of married women's status in society. The Act abolished the divorce jurisdiction of the church courts, created a new civil court for divorce and matrimonial causes, and guaranteed property rights for a married woman while she was living apart from her husband. Two additional matrimonial causes acts were passed in England in 1860 and 1878, but neither were considered by the Newfoundland legislature. Not until 1948 was matrimonial causes considered before the Newfoundland Supreme Court in the case of *Hounsell v. Hounsell*. *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, Volume 1, 627; personal communication from Trudi Johnson; see Trudi Johnson, "Matrimonial Property Law in Newfoundland to the End of the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1998).

⁶⁵ Some Newfoundlanders obtained foreign divorces in the United States and Mexico. But according to Linda Cullum and Maeve Baird, the expense involved in such proceedings made the actual number of these divorces "relatively few". Furthermore, these divorces were not always considered valid by the Newfoundland courts, especially if the applicants were living in Newfoundland at the time. Cullum and Baird, "A Woman's Lot", 151-152; "Correspondence of Assistant Deputy Attorney General", 31 October 1950, GN 13/2/A, Box 388, File 118, PANL; "Deputy Secretary for Justice to Newfoundland Government Information Bureau, New York", 12 October 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

this respect.⁶⁶ Authorities routinely quashed such petitions, however, citing denominational concerns and a lack of public desire for same.⁶⁷ For a population resolutely devoted to and controlled by Roman Catholic, Anglican, United and several smaller Christian denominations, divorce laws were as threatening as seven-day work weeks and a nondenominational school system. According to church leaders, marriage was a genuine order of creation, indissoluble, making man and wife “one flesh”.⁶⁸ “What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.”⁶⁹ Thus, the island possessed no divorce procedures, nor any system for legal separation. Husbands and wives could choose to live apart through mutual agreement, but legally the State did not protect the interests of either party nor did it permit remarriage until one or the other had died.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ “Memorandum for Commission”, 18 April 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 373, File 10, PANL; “Memorandum for Commission from Commissioner for Justice”, 2 October 1936, GN 13/1/B, Box 373, File 10, PANL; “G.A., Barrister, to Governor of Newfoundland”, 19 April 1936, GN 13/1/B, Box 373, File 10, PANL.

⁶⁷ “Minutes of Commission of Government”, 19 April 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 373, File 10, PANL.

⁶⁸ “Rev. Donald W. Kranz Speaks”, 6, in Our Divorce Laws: Adequate or Archaic?: The Opinions of Ten Leaders in Church and State in Newfoundland (Compilation of columns originally published in The Daily News, 1969).

⁶⁹ “Pastor G.E. Noble Speaks”, Our Divorce Laws, 9.

⁷⁰ “...[U]nder the laws of Newfoundland divorce is not possible for a man or woman who is normally domiciled in Newfoundland. Furthermore there is no law to provide legal separation of married people. The only course open to people who are not happy in their marriage relations is living apart by mutual consent and where infidelity is proved on the part of one or other of the married persons, the court may order that the man must pay a given sum for the support of his wife or alternatively has no obligation to support his wife”, the Secretary for Defence explained to the Trade Commissioner for

The churches' description of divorce as a "cancerous evil to any society" was not far removed from the view of some of the Commissioners themselves.⁷¹ In 1936, the Commissioner for Justice, William R. Howley, described himself as opposed to the introduction of any divorce law in Newfoundland "on the ground that it is the first step towards the loosening of the family ties which are so essential to the basis of society and the welfare of the state".⁷² There was evidently some dissension among the ranks, however, as the Commissioner for Public Utilities, Thomas Lodge, argued concurrently for the introduction of some form of divorce legislation:

...[F]or any Church to claim that it shall have the right to veto the possibility of divorce for persons outside its membership seems to me outrageous, and for the State to lay down that in no circumstances shall a married person acquire a right to remarry and bring up a family of legitimate children seems to me both immoral and tyrannical. Even if I were satisfied that a great majority of Newfoundlanders were opposed to divorce on principle I could not agree that their known opposition relieved the Commission of Government from all responsibility. In my opinion we should put the responsibility on to the Secretary of State and advise him that (subject always to the facts being proven to the satisfaction of competent authority) we should be allowed to accede to the Petition.⁷³

To Lodge, denominational interests had little influence in the divorce debate, as marriage

Newfoundland in November 1943, PRC #35, Box 6, File 17, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 5 April 1944, PRC #35, Box 111, File 71, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 23 September 1943, PRC #35, Box 114, File 18, PANL.

⁷¹ "Rev. Donald W. Kranz Speaks", *Our Divorce Laws*, 6.

⁷² "Memorandum for Commission from Commissioner for Justice", 2 October 1936, GN 13/1/B, Box 373, File 10, PANL.

⁷³ "Memorandum for Commission from Commissioner for Public Utilities", 24 August 1936, GN 13/1/B, Box 373, File 10, PANL.

represented a “civil contract” between two individuals and the State.⁷⁴ Of course, unlike Howley, a native Newfoundlander, Lodge was one of the United Kingdom “imports”, unaccustomed to the ecclesiastical might wielded in the tiny colony. Britain had revamped its divorce laws in 1925, reflecting the public’s changing view of marriage and divorce in modern society.⁷⁵ The Dominions Office itself could not understand Newfoundland’s lasting abhorrence to divorce, the Secretary explaining in 1939:

One cannot help feeling that it is somewhat anomalous that there should be no facilities for divorce in Newfoundland but, of course, we appreciate the difficulties and I see that in the enclosure to your confidential despatch...it is stated that the enactment of a divorce law ‘would undoubtedly meet with the utmost opposition’ in the Island.⁷⁶

If the principle of divorce was repugnant to more than two-thirds of Newfoundlanders, as William Howley maintained, it was hardly the Commission’s place to force such legislation upon the population.⁷⁷ Thus, the Commission continued to oppose all petitions for divorce throughout its administration.

⁷⁴ “Ibid.”

⁷⁵ The Supreme Court of Judicature (Consolidation) Act of 1925 drew together existing legislation and extended the grounds under which women in Britain could be granted maintenance when separated. Women could now be granted divorces upon the same grounds as husbands and wives were given the same rights as husbands to apply for guardianship of their legitimate children. In 1937, the grounds for divorce were further extended to include cruelty and wilful desertion. Smart, “Good Wives and Moral Lives”, 92-93.

⁷⁶ “Dominions Office to Commission”, 1 June 1939, GN 13/1/B, Box 373, File 10, PANL.

⁷⁷ “Memorandum for Commission from Commissioner for Justice”, 2 October 1936, GN 13/1/B, Box 373, File 10, PANL.

The nature of divorce petitions and the Government's interest in such underwent a rapid transformation, however, with the beginning of the Second World War. Suddenly the Commissioners were faced with petitions from servicemen who had hastily married while serving in the United Kingdom only to discover that their new British brides were prostitutes, criminals or already pregnant with other men's babies.⁷⁸ Should these "honourable young soldiers" be chained to these "illicit women" for the rest of their lives? Other servicemen complained to the Commission of Government that their wives in Newfoundland had been unfaithful, neglecting their children and producing illegitimate babies.⁷⁹ Some of these men had met and fallen in love with British girls while serving overseas. Why should they have to return to their "immoral" wives in Newfoundland, abandoning "true love" in the United Kingdom? These men pleaded with the Commission to grant them their freedom and permit them an opportunity to get on with their lives. "Life for me at present is very empty," mourned one serviceman, married to an adulterous wife in Newfoundland, "I have no heart to continue fighting for

⁷⁸ The Liaison Office informed the Secretary for Defence in 1943: "There have been a large number of marriages by Newfoundlanders which have ended most disastrously...As an example of the unfortunate marriages which have been made I quote the following cases...", 18 October 1943, PRC #35, Box 94, File 89, PANL; "Liaison Office to Legal Aid Department", 19 January 1945, PRC #35, Box 92, File 101, PANL; "Deputy Medical Superintendent to Liaison Office", 17 November 1944, PRC #35, Box 92, File 101, PANL.

⁷⁹ "Liaison Office to Department of Defence", 5 August 1942, PRC #35, Box 15, File 48, PANL; "Curtis and Dawe Barristers at Law to Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 11 January 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL; "Memorandum for Commission from Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 1 April 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

freedom which I can no longer have".⁸⁰ Another Newfoundlander in a similar predicament implored:

I am sure that the Newfoundland Government could now make it possible for its citizens to be able to obtain a divorce. I know that there are other chaps over here who are in the same difficulty. If the government does not help us out now in our time of need how can she expect us to fight for her as true citizens should. We would not even be interested enough in her to come home...As you can see life will hold nothing for us Newfoundlanders, in this difficulty, if we are not allowed, by our own government, to have our freedom.⁸¹

The word "freedom" was beginning to take on many connotations in the wartime atmosphere.

The military was particularly sympathetic with the servicemen's plight, determining that many of their troubles had arisen as a direct result of having volunteered for overseas service.⁸² Each of the services possessed Legal Aid Sections through which servicemen could obtain free council as to their legal position and the possibility for

⁸⁰ "Gunner __ to the Department of Defence", 26 March 1944, PRC #35, Box 16, File 138, PANL.

⁸¹ "Gunner __ to the Government of Newfoundland", 27 December 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

⁸² The Liaison Office appealed to the Secretary for Defence on behalf of one soldier: "In view of the fact that the trouble which has arisen is a direct result of his having volunteered for overseas service and, in all probability would not have occurred had [the serviceman] stayed at home and not been separated from his wife, we feel that perhaps such an Organization as the N.P.A. might be willing to help out. As far as we are aware, [the serviceman] is not in a financial position to engage a lawyer but is still desirous of having a legal separation from his wife arranged", 29 June 1943, PRC #35, Box 92, File 106, PANL.

divorce.⁸³ Similarly, the Liaison Office championed the servicemen's cause, continually badgering the Commission for the introduction of divorce legislation or some "emergency measure" through which servicemen could obtain divorce or annulment. The Officer-in-Charge wrote in March 1943:

You will remember that I have written to you on other occasions concerning the question of divorce or annulment of marriages in those cases of our men whose wives have misbehaved themselves in Newfoundland...In the majority of these cases the men who are married to the girls in Newfoundland and in this country are all quite young, in their early twenties, and as Whalen says, there is not much of a future for them if they cannot obtain either a divorce or annulment of marriages; all that they can look forward to is a legal separation which means that they cannot get married again and both they and their wives will probably spend the rest of their lives living in sin.⁸⁴

The Commission of Government doggedly refused the Liaison Office's requests, the Secretary for Defence tending to blame the problem on the military itself, and specifically commanding officers who granted soldiers permission to marry without first making adequate enquiry into the background and "suitability" of the brides:

It is more than likely that marriages take place without the soldier concerned making cool and level-headed enquiries into the antecedents of the girl. It would be hard to say how far the man's Commanding Officer is responsible for some unhappy marriages...It seems the only action that can be taken is to suggest to Commanding Officers whenever possible that fuller enquiries be made when permission to marry is applied for in the hope that when the men do marry the

⁸³ "Legal Aid Section to Commanding Officer, H.M.S. Tracker", 22 October 1943 and 17 January 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL;

⁸⁴ "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 16 March 1943 and 11 April 1944, PRC #35, Box 6, File 20, PANL; See also "Memorandum for Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 3 November 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 32, File 100, PANL.

results will be happy.⁸⁵

Moreover, the Commission bristled at the Liaison Office's "intrusion" into the issue of divorce at any level, considering the subject to be a completely civilian one, devoid of military implications. "It also surprises me a little," wrote the Secretary for Defence of one petitioning serviceman, "that he should have addressed such an inquiry to you instead of directly to this Department or, preferably, to the legal department of the Dominion Office. It is hardly a matter directly concerning defence or military officials".⁸⁶ The Liaison Office defensively responded:

We agree that this query is not quite a service query but as it deals with the problems of Servicemen who will be affected after they leave the services it is our job to try and straighten the matter out, and when I received this query I thought it only fit and proper to produce some answer...the Combined Services Liaison Staff, is a War Office establishment and therefore, holds an official position and I think in queries such as these, it is quite in order for us to handle them.⁸⁷

Certainly, the Commission was feeling pressure, not only from the Liaison Office in London, but further up from the Dominions Office itself, to introduce some form of divorce legislation in Newfoundland. By 1944, the problem of deserted war brides in the United Kingdom was reaching alarming proportions. The British Courts were not permitted to grant these women divorces, however, because upon marriage, they

⁸⁵ "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 22 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 6, File 20, PANL.

⁸⁶ "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Liaison Office", 23 August 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

⁸⁷ "Liaison Office to Commissioner for Justice", 8 October 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

had automatically assumed the domicile of their husbands. Thus, a war bride was at the mercy of the divorce legislation in effect in her husband's homeland. In the case of a war bride married to a Newfoundland serviceman, this meant never being able to legally remarry and possibly remaining a charge on the British Government indefinitely. There was some attempt to persuade the Commission to enact some type of "emergency legislation". The Dominions Office approached the Governor on this "sad business" in March 1944: "We should be much interested to learn whether many such cases are arising in the Island as a result of the war. If so it occurs to us that this may possibly have some influence in bringing about a modification of the attitude of the various denominations in Newfoundland towards divorce legislation".⁸⁸ The Commissioners balked once again, however, chanting the standard public resistance refrain. Ultimately, the British Government would institute its own emergency measure, known as the "Matrimonial Causes (War Marriages) Act" of 1944. The Act gave the United Kingdom Courts jurisdiction in divorce over marriages contracted by a man domiciled outside the United Kingdom prior to his marriage, and a woman domiciled in Britain immediately before the marriage.⁸⁹ While legally enforceable in Britain, the Act left it up to the Dominions themselves to legislate as they saw fit on the subject. But Newfoundland, no longer a

⁸⁸ "P.A. Clutterbuck, Dominions Office, to Governor of Newfoundland", 4 March 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

⁸⁹ "Matrimonial Causes (War Marriages) Bill", GN 13/1, Box 84, PANL; "Confidential Memorandum for Commission from Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 29 August 1944, GN 13/1, Box 84, PANL.

dominion, was expressly denied this privilege, implying that the Imperial legislation would automatically apply to the colony.⁹⁰ Unwilling to advocate such an unprecedented move, the Commissioners requested that Newfoundland be excluded from the Act's jurisdiction on the basis that it would be "impolitic" for the Government to take any active step towards "tinkering" with a divorce law.⁹¹ "In the view of the attitude of such a large section of the people to divorce the Commission feel that it would be unwise to have an Act passed by the Imperial Parliament which may disturb the existing situation," the Governor explained, "It is suggested therefore...that the reference to Newfoundland in section four be deleted".⁹² Once again, the Commission had decided to staunchly protect the status quo.

The stone wall which the Commission constructed was never meant to imply a lack of empathy with the predicament in which so many servicemen and their wives found themselves. The Commissioners expressed their "greatest sympathy" and "deeply regret[ted] the circumstances" of this "difficult problem".⁹³ In fact, the

⁹⁰ "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Liaison Office", 23 August 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

⁹¹ "Confidential Memorandum for Commission from Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 29 August 1944, GN 13/1, Box 84, PANL.

⁹² "Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", 5 September 1944, GN 13/1, Box 84, PANL.

⁹³ "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Gunner __", 21 January 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL; "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Messrs. Curtis and Dawe, Solicitors", 3 January 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL; "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Captain __", 23 August 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box

Commissioner for Justice and Defence admitted that he could “foresee the time approaching when some method of obtaining divorce may have to be provided, particularly in cases of infidelity”.⁹⁴ He further revealed that the Commission had given the matter “the most serious consideration for many years...the question constantly being raised in one quarter or another”.⁹⁵ Why then did the Commissioners continue to guard their entrenched position in the face of such a marked increase in demand? Their defence was straightforward though somewhat superficial. “It is not a matter merely of establishing a ‘Divorce Court’, but of altering the substantive law”, explained the Commissioner for Justice and Defence in 1945:

...The Royal Instructions to Newfoundland Governors have from the beginning, forbidden, and still do, the passing of any law for the divorce of married persons. These instructions must therefore first be revoked, and that can only be done if a very strong case for it is put, with a great number of people behind it. I feel sure that if a plebiscite were taken today on the question, the Churches would all oppose any change and probably a majority of the laity as well. The main reason for this feeling, and I think it is a sound one, is that to permit divorce in this country would cause more trouble and suffering than it would cure. It would encourage hasty and reckless marriages and merely to dissolve them would remove the harmful consequences. It is true that Newfoundland seems to be alone in this respect but it is also true that marital relations in this country are on the whole far better than in any country where both marriages and divorce are easy. I fear that there must be much stronger agitation for a change before the

105A, File 51, PANL.

⁹⁴ “Memorandum for Commission from Commissioner for Justice and Defence”, 1 April 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

⁹⁵ “Commissioner for Justice and Defence to C.H.B., Esq.”, 27 October 1945, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

Government can justifiably take any action.⁹⁶

The explanation raised a jumble of constitutional, cultural and denominational concerns, presenting a paradox in which the Commission waited for authorization from a public which was constitutionally ineligible to authorize.⁹⁷ The Commissioners had obviously decided to bide their time. But what did the bureaucratic double-talk conceal?

One notable voice absent from the divorce debate was that of wives, and specifically servicewives. As their husbands pleaded with the Government to grant them marital freedom and their legal and military advocates petitioned for divorce legislation, where were wives' appeals and ultimatums? Evidently, many husbands were guilty of "marital misconduct" during their absences overseas. It is similarly evident that many wives "got wind" of these indiscretions, either through other servicemen or through their husbands themselves.⁹⁸ Why, then, did not a loud, contemptuous cry emanate from servicewives? Where were their appeals for freedom and petitions for divorce? Why should they be imprisoned in loveless marriages for the rest of their lives any more than their husbands? It is true, that the odd application for divorce originated from wives,

⁹⁶ "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to C.H.B., Esq.", 27 October 1945, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

⁹⁷ "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Private Secretary, Government House", 29 March 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

⁹⁸ "Statement of Mrs. ___, Trinity Bay", GN 13/2/A, Box 402, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 29 January 1944, PRC #35, Box 115, File 20, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 18 October 1943, PRC #35, Box 101, File 17, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Liaison Office", 12 November 1946, PRC #35, Box 19, File 6, PANL.

usually in cases of desertion or certifiable insanity of husbands.⁹⁹ For the most part, however, wives rarely petitioned the Government for divorces, even in cases of extreme mental and physical cruelty.¹⁰⁰ “Freedom” from the marital contract simply did not hold the same implications for wives as it did for husbands. Wives could not “pick up” and move on with their lives with the same ease as could their husbands. There were children, homes and their own financial support to consider, all of which were irreconcilably tied to husbands. Unless an offer of remarriage was imminent, there was really very little, if any, incentive for a wife to demand her freedom. In fact, for most wives, “freedom” from the marital contract remained a material and psychological threat.

The Commission similarly viewed wives’ “freedom” as a threat to both the established social structure and the colony’s financial well-being. The marital contract established that a husband was “bound” to support his wife.¹⁰¹ Newfoundland society was ordered around this principle, wives depending upon their “right to maintenance” as

⁹⁹ “Mrs. ___ to Department of Justice”, 27 June 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL; “Director of Public Prosecutions to Mrs. __, Grand Falls”, 21 June 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL; “M.M. to Major R.H.T.”, 29 September 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

¹⁰⁰ “Domestic Tangle Aired in Court”, *The Grand Falls Advertiser*, 18 March 1944, 1; “Windsor Woman Charges Husband with Cruelty”, *The Grand Falls Advertiser*, 18 September 1943, 1; “G.A., Barrister, to Governor of Newfoundland”, 5 March 1936, GN 13/1/B, Box 373, File 10, PANL.

¹⁰¹ “Transcript of the Judgment of Hounsell vs. Hounsell: Preliminary Argument on Points of Law”, 23 October 1948, GN 13/1/B, Box 127, File 95, PANL.

much as the Government depended upon husbands' "obligation" to maintain.¹⁰² Widows and some abandoned wives were supported at Government expense, but all others were expected to receive maintenance from their husbands. During the war, however, some servicemen found it remarkably easy to evade their "legal and moral" obligations in Newfoundland. Living a relatively new life in a foreign country thousands of miles from home, many servicemen experienced an epiphany in which they suddenly realized that they could no longer return to their "old lives" in Newfoundland. One member of the Newfoundland Forestry Unit struggled to explain to his wife how he had changed and why he could not return to her after the war:

I know you love me and once I did love you but now my life is changed. I am changed all over. I am not the same [B.]. I hope you will understand me in every way and please forgive me. I know you will manage alright there's always a way out...When I think of home I don't feel the same and when I think of going home I feel worse. I know you don't know how I feel but there it is...[B.] when you read this I want you to think of me in a different way. Think how happy I am over here and how it'd be if I did go home. I know you will never forgive me any more.¹⁰³

Other men vaguely declared that they were "finished" with their families in Newfoundland and simply ceased all communication with them.¹⁰⁴ In most cases, the

¹⁰² Cullum and Baird, "A Woman's Lot", 145-147.

¹⁰³ "Serviceman's Letter", 11 September 1942, PRC #35, Box 88, File 49, PANL.

¹⁰⁴ The Liaison Office explained to the Secretary for Defence in one such case: "...[T]hough reminded of the responsibility towards his family, [the serviceman] was not impressed and once again emphasized the fact that he was 'finished with his family'", 17 April 1945, PRC #35, Box 22, File 75, PANL; also see "Secretary for Defence to Mrs. ___, Topsail", 14 May 1942, PRC #35, Box 112, File 91, PANL; "Constabulary Report", 28 January 1944, PRC #35, Box 128, File 6, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Liaison Office", 11 September 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 50, PANL.

severing of “old ties” necessitated the cancellation of allotments and allowances to wives at home. Wives quickly discovered that they held little recourse against such actions. Military orders existed which made men liable to contribute to the maintenance of their families (barring serious misconduct on the part of the dependent), but these orders were rarely enforced.¹⁰⁵ Commanding officers were asked to “reason” with such men and “remind” them of their responsibilities toward their families.¹⁰⁶ In most cases, however, the Liaison Office advised abandoned wives that the “only way” to obtain support was to take action through the civil courts in Newfoundland.¹⁰⁷

While the incumbent legal fees would have proved prohibitory to most servicewives, the Newfoundland Government often stepped in to help trace deserting husbands and “pressure them” to live up to their familial obligations.¹⁰⁸ “Mrs. ___ is supporting herself and her three children to the best of her ability by taking in boarders but that does not relieve [the serviceman] of his responsibilities”, the Secretary for

¹⁰⁵ “Director of Recruiting to Commissioner for Justice”, 22 May 1940, PRC #35, Box 63, File 52, PANL.

¹⁰⁶ “Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence”, 17 April 1945, PRC #35, Box 22, File 75, PANL.

¹⁰⁷ “Liaison Office Report”, 6 July 1944, PRC #35, Box 6, File 5, PANL.

¹⁰⁸ “Secretary for Defence to Liaison Office”, 12 November 1946, PRC #35, Box 19, File 6, PANL; “Grand Falls Home Front Association to Secretary for Defence”, 15 April 1947, PRC #35, Box 83, File 60, PANL.

Defence routinely explained to the Trade Commissioner in London.¹⁰⁹ “There does not seem to be any justifiable reason why [the serviceman] should not be compelled to provide for the subsistence of his wife,” the Secretary expounded in a similar case, “This Department is not prepared to approach Mrs. ___ with a suggestion that she should release him from his legal obligation”.¹¹⁰ Certainly, the Commission was not about to release men from their “legal obligations” to maintain their wives in Newfoundland, as the onus for such would consequently fall squarely on the shoulders of the Government itself. The response was not out of line with traditional attitudes in Newfoundland as successive governments had long avoided responsibility for the maintenance of wives and children left destitute by deserting husbands. Several acts had been passed since 1834 which afforded wives the right to sue husbands for support.¹¹¹ By the Second World War these concerns fell largely within the purview of the Public Health and Welfare Act of 1931 wherein a husband could be charged with desertion in the courts and ordered to provide

¹⁰⁹ “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 29 January 1944, PRC #35, Box 115, File 20, PANL.

¹¹⁰ “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 23 September 1943, PRC 35, Box 16, File 78, PANL.

¹¹¹ The 1834 Act to Afford Relief to Wives and Children, Deserted by their Husbands and Parents was modified in 1856 and again in 1865. According to Cullum and Baird, “[w]hile the effect of these maintenance laws was to provide deserted wives and children with some means of recourse against starvation, the intent of the law was to prevent these women from becoming a ‘charge’ on the Colony by forcing the government to provide for them. Instead, wives had to sue their husbands in an attempt to secure some form of maintenance from them”, “A Woman’s Lot”, 145-146.

support under the threat of a prison term if he failed to comply.¹¹²

Evading responsibility for the long-term dependency of these abandoned servicewives was not easily maneuvered, however, as the Newfoundland courts held no jurisdiction over servicemen temporarily residing in the United Kingdom. "If the British authorities maintain their present attitude of refusing to recognize affiliation orders made by Courts other than those in England, Scotland and Wales", the Secretary for Public Health and Welfare warned in 1941, "the unfavorable financial repercussions on this Department will be considerable".¹¹³ According to military law, servicemen were legally liable for the maintenance of their dependents, but court orders for such could not be issued against their pay. Similarly, a serviceman could not be compelled to appear in a court of law nor to be punished for the offence of deserting or neglecting to maintain his wife or family.¹¹⁴ As the Director of Recruiting explained:

A soldier of the regular forces shall be liable to contribute to the maintenance of his wife and of his children, and also to the maintenance of any bastard child of which he may be proved to be the father, to the same extent as if he were not a soldier; but execution in respect of any such liability or of any order or decree in respect of such maintenance shall not issue against his person, pay, arms, ammunition, equipments, instruments, regimental necessaries, or clothing; nor shall he be liable to be punished for the offence of deserting or neglecting to

¹¹² Cullum and Baird, "A Woman's Lot", 146.

¹¹³ "Affiliation orders" referred to the provisions of the Public Health and Welfare Act of 1931 which could legally compel employers to deduct appropriate sums from a worker's pay for the maintenance of his wife and family. "Secretary for Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Justice", 10 February 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 43, File 6, PANL.

¹¹⁴ "Director of Public Prosecutions to Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 1 September 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 43, File 6, PANL.

maintain his wife or family, or any member thereof, or of leaving her or them chargeable to any area or place.¹¹⁵

All court orders against servicemen had to be directed to the War Office, which would ultimately decide whether the man had left his dependents in destitute circumstances “without reasonable cause”, the “mere fact” that an order had been issued “not proving this to be so”.¹¹⁶ The ruling left the Newfoundland Government at the mercy of the British War Office, whose primary concern was naturally the morale and efficiency of the fighting forces. Deductions could be made against a serviceman’s pay for the maintenance of his wife and family, but at the “discretion” of the Army Council or similar military board.¹¹⁷

As a rule, the military tended to look after its own, siding with the serviceman, no matter what the circumstance. An example of this allegiance was the military’s substantial acceptance of bigamy during the war, especially among Newfoundland servicemen.¹¹⁸ Denied access to divorce legislation, a remarkable number

¹¹⁵ “Director of Recruiting to Commissioner for Justice”, 22 May 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 43, File 6, PANL.

¹¹⁶ “War Office to All Financial Advisers and Army Auditors at Home and Abroad”, 2 December 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 43, File 6, PANL; “War Office Memorandum”, 21 August 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 43, File 6, PANL.

¹¹⁷ “Director of Recruiting to Commissioner for Justice”, 22 May 1940, GN 13/1B, Box 43, File 6, PANL.

¹¹⁸ It should be noted that a case of a servicewife who contracted a bigamous marriage was also discovered in the Department of Defence files. Already married to a gunner serving overseas with the 59th Regiment, the woman married a U.S. sergeant from Fort Pepperell in 1942. She was ultimately convicted of bigamy and served a term in the

of Newfoundlanders serving in the United Kingdom chose to simply renege on their marital contracts in Newfoundland in favor of new ones with British brides. To some it was a last resort, but other servicemen simply failed to appreciate the legal and moral gravity of such a decision. “[The serviceman] acknowledged being fully aware of the fact that he was committing bigamy...[he] offers no excuse for his action and is apparently unable to realize the serious nature of his present position”, one commanding officer explained.¹¹⁹ Another member of the Newfoundland Forestry Unit was reported to have “expressed surprise” when accused of contracting a bigamous marriage, stating that “he had never heard of bigamy”.¹²⁰ But even for those men who grasped the concept, the risks rarely outweighed the alternative. One serviceman explained to his wife in Newfoundland: “I am going to be honest with you and ask you if you will give me a divorce so as I can marry this girl after all you wont want me any more now, and I have a nice Baby over here to look after now if you dont give me a divorce I will live with her as I have done before or I will marry her and do my four months in jail then I can have her

penitentiary of six months. See PRC #35, Box 12, File 30, PANL and PRC #35, Box 103, File 38, PANL; the problem was evidently more widespread than the Department of Defence files would indicate. The Registry of Aliens reported in June 1942 that a number of women were contracting bigamous marriages with foreign seamen: “[T]he matter of marriage with foreign seaman is treated as a joke, and that such marriages, in some cases, are for convenience only”, “Registry of Aliens to Chief of Police”, 25 June 1942, PRC #35, Box 128, File 6, PANL.

¹¹⁹ “Personal and Confidential Report of the Newfoundland Forestry Unit”, 23 October 1940, PRC #35, Box 85, File 104, PANL.

¹²⁰ Newfoundland News, 4 January 1943, 1.

always".¹²¹ The serviceman was suspiciously accurate in his estimate of the penalty for such a crime. Servicemen convicted of contracting bigamous marriages in the United Kingdom generally received sentences ranging from three days imprisonment to six months.¹²² To a lonely, lovesick serviceman, this would most certainly have appeared a small price to pay.

A perturbed Commission of Government demanded that these men "own up" to their familial obligations in Newfoundland, arguing that they could not simply walk away from their moral responsibilities and marital contracts, no matter what the situation.¹²³ For the most part, however, servicemen were rarely even brought up on charges for bigamy in United Kingdom courts, the inability to present the "legal wife" being the primary obstacle to prosecution.¹²⁴ The futility of the situation mocked the best

¹²¹ "Dear H. from Husband", 13 January 1943, PRC #35, Box 12, File 78, PANL.

¹²² "Magistrate to Secretary for Defence", 24 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL; "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 17 November 1944, PRC #35, Box 92, File 66, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 4 March 1943, PRC #35, Box 82, File 72, PANL.

¹²³ Of course, the Government's primary "anxiety" remained "that the Wife and family in this Country should not be neglected or have their allowances cut". "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland", 20 August 1942, PRC #35, Box 12, File 78, PANL.

¹²⁴ In 1942, a detective in the Greenock Police Department explained to the Secretary for Defence: "I may say that two cases of a similar nature involving Canadians were reported to the Procurator Fiscal, here, who was instructed by the Crown Agent to take no action in view of the fact that the legal wives were domiciled in Canada, and therefore further police action in this case would be futile", 30 October 1942, GN 13/2/A, Box 458, PANL; also see "Secretary for Defence to Reverend, Woody Point", 19 January 1942, PRC #35, Box 85, File 104, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner

efforts of the Secretary for Defence, who surmised in one such case:

The Chief Constable states that no action has been taken about the alleged bigamous marriage as at present there is no evidence forthcoming of the previous marriage in Newfoundland...I am able to state that no action is likely to be taken. We have had experience of similar cases of bigamous marriages and have gone exhaustively into the situation. It appears that the production of a marriage certificate in a United Kingdom court is not sufficient but that the original wife must be produced in person before court proceedings can be taken.¹²⁵

Furthermore, the Commission of Government was prohibited from prosecuting these servicemen themselves, as the offence was not one for which the Department of Justice could institute proceedings for the man's return to Newfoundland to appear in court.¹²⁶

Stymieing all these efforts was the attitude of commanding officers and the Liaison Office itself that these men should not only avoid prosecution but should be aided in their efforts to attain divorces from their legal wives in Newfoundland.¹²⁷ A commanding officer sympathetically presented one serviceman's case to the Liaison Office in London:

The obvious solution is a divorce. He and his wife are completely estranged; and on the other hand the bigamous 'wife' and he are genuinely attached; and he is deeply attached to the three years old son of that illicit union. Is there no way of severing the marriage bond in the Dominion? If ever there was a case of 'Holy

for Newfoundland", 6 November 1942, PRC #35, Box 41, File 17, PANL.

¹²⁵ "Secretary for Defence to Clergyman, New Harbour", 19 September 1942, PRC #35, Box 112, File 91, PANL.

¹²⁶ "Director of Public Prosecutions to Secretary for Defence", 19 January 1942, PRC #35, Box 85, File 104, PANL.

¹²⁷ The Liaison Officer advised the Secretary for Defence: "Lieut. [M] is rather anxious that [the serviceman] should not be involved in any legal proceedings in Newfoundland, and it would be appreciated if this could be borne in mind when the case is being examined", PRC #35, Box 99, File 31, PANL.

Deadlock' this is one. In addition he has some word from his people that the wife is away on her own somewhere, which may give rise to certain suspicions. Can you see any way out of the tangle?¹²⁸

The “suspicions” turned out to be completely fictitious, the serviceman’s wife having been “away on her own” in a sanatorium for over a year.¹²⁹ Though the Department of Defence continued to demand “justice” for the abandoned wives in Newfoundland, they were often left with little more in their arsenal than moral persuasion. “I am afraid there is absolutely nothing that can be done”, the Secretary for Defence explained, “...the matter therefore resolves itself to one of persuading any such men concerned to realise their moral and lawful obligations to their families”.¹³⁰ Of course, distance inevitably impeded the effectiveness of such moral weapons.

Rather astoundingly, servicewives were largely excluded from the

¹²⁸ “Lieutenant to Combined Services Liaison Office”, 13 June 1944, PRC #35, Box 12, File 7, PANL.

¹²⁹ “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 18 August 1944, PRC #35, Box 12, File 7, PANL; a number of other bigamous husbands provided “certain accusations” against their legal wives which were similarly proven to be without basis. “Chief of Police to Chief Constable, Greenock”, 21 September 1942, GN 13/2/A, Box 458, PANL.

¹³⁰ “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 6 November 1942, PRC #35, Box 41, File 17, PANL; “Department of Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Defence”, 7 April 1945, PRC #35, Box 26, File 21, PANL; some religious leaders abhorred the moral irresponsibility of certain servicemen. A clergyman from New Harbour expressed his outrage in a letter to the Secretary for Defence: “Her husband should no matter what the cause for their present estrangement be man enough to keep his marriage vows and not break them as he sees fit, bringing hardship upon the woman and child of his union, and add trouble to another whom he deceived”, 3 August 1944, PRC #35, Box 99, File 31, PANL.

Government's struggle to convict their bigamist husbands. "Waiting wives" were left to worry and speculate as to why their husbands were no longer writing home and why they no longer received their family allowance payments. One wife complained:

I have written to St. John's several times, but they don't seem to know where he is. I had a paper come to sign about two months ago and I haven't heard any talk of that since. I don't know what the matter is really...I haven't heard from him since he joined the Navy. I don't know where he is. I am worried to death. I would like to get my money. I can't live on Fresh Air. Someone got to help me. If no one else don't look out to me the Government will have to. I can't stand it much longer.¹³¹

Another servicewife wearily addressed yet another appeal for information to the Director of Recruiting in St. John's:

I am still very anxious to find his whereabouts it is causing me a great deal of worry to think that he cannot be located by any of the authorities. I am going to ask you once again to try some other possible means to find him for me. I think it a strange situation to know that he cannot be located through the office. I have been pleading to you the past year it seems to no avail. I once understood that our friends overseas could be located at any time by information from our recruiting offices but I believe it no longer because my case proves it to no use.¹³²

Still other wives emphasized their continued "rights" to support, based on their "appropriate" behavior during their husbands' absences overseas. One wife explained:

I am still writing about that husband of mine and I guess I will be writing until he is hunted up and brought back here to me...Anybody in Northern Arm and lots in Botwood knows that I have been straight ever since my husband went away. And I have stayed home and looked out to my children. And I think if he can be found

¹³¹ "Mrs. __, Woody Point, to Sir", PRC #35, Box 85, File 104, PANL.

¹³² "Mrs. __, St. John's, to Recruiting Office", 21 July 1942, PRC #35, Box 112, File 91, PANL.

I can make him support me as well as the children.¹³³

Authorities' efforts to protect wives against such "harmful" information belied the Government's short-term view of its responsibility toward these women.¹³⁴ The Secretary for Defence actually preferred to hide behind his department's reputation for inefficiency rather than perform the "unpleasant duty" of informing a wife of her husband's recently contracted bigamous marriage:

I have not written this information to Mrs. ___ as I am sure that it would not do her anything but harm mentally and physically to receive a letter with the information I now give you and I must leave it entirely to your discretion as to whether you advise her of the circumstances. It might be kinder not to make any reference to it and let her continue to blame this office and the Trade Commissioner's office for lack of efficiency.¹³⁵

One would suppose that eventually, and certainly with the completion of hostilities, a wife would notice that her husband did not appear to be coming home. But this fell under the category of "post-war concerns", which were of little interest to government and military authorities caught up in the immediate fervor of war.

Once the crisis had passed, however, the Commission of Government would be forced to address the problem of deserted servicewives head-on. The problem

¹³³ "Mrs. ___, Botwood, to Sir", 28 November 1945, PRC #35, Box 115, File 102, PANL.

¹³⁴ Military authorities also hesitated to inform Newfoundland servicewives of their husbands' bigamous marriages. "Officer-in-Charge to Liaison Office", 14 March 1941, PRC #35, Box 85, File 104, PANL.

¹³⁵ "Secretary for Defence to Clergyman, New Harbour", 19 September 1942, PRC #35, Box 112, File 91, PANL.

of deserted war brides, on the other hand, was one in which the Commission was determined to avoid entanglement. When British lawyers began submitting affiliation orders against Newfoundland servicemen who had abandoned their British brides after the war, the Commission politely responded that such orders were legally unenforceable in Newfoundland. "A Scottish court would be without jurisdiction to enforce any order it might make for support in this country", the Deputy Secretary for Justice explained in 1947, "and unless Mrs. ___ comes to Newfoundland she cannot apply for relief to a Newfoundland court".¹³⁶ Similarly, the Commission of Government quickly agreed to pay for the transportation of war brides back to the United Kingdom when their husbands deserted them in Newfoundland. The Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare defended the Government's position in February 1948:

In such cases, especially where there was a probability of the women becoming a charge on public funds, it was deemed advisable upon request and due investigation, to send them back to parents who were generally willing to accept the responsibility for the future support of the persons so returned.¹³⁷

Deserted wives, whether of British or Newfoundland origin, were obviously perceived as a drain on public funds and a liability to the State, contributing little and absorbing much. The inherent sanctity of the marital contract forbade the Commissioners from enacting

¹³⁶ "Deputy Secretary for Justice to Stirling, Eunson and Belford, Dunfermline", 29 April 1947, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL; "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 1 February 1945, PRC #35, Box 88, File 113, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to D.M., Esq., Edinburgh", 21 June 1946, PRC #35, Box 89, File 91, PANL.

¹³⁷ "Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare to Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 7 February 1948, GN 13/2/B, Box 192, PANL.

legislation which would grant these women legal separations or divorces, and yet they were only too willing to bundle these modern exiles back onto transatlantic ships bound for Britain. The blatant hypocrisy of the situation must have impressed even the most grizzled of front-line bureaucrats.

In the end, we are left with an image of the war as a disruptive force on traditional values and institutions in Newfoundland society. Perhaps the desolation was inevitable, the war only accelerating trends which had already burrowed into the core of established precepts and ideology. Predictably, the Church and the State rallied around the ailing structures, propping them up against repeated blows. Infidelity, divorce, bigamy, abandonment, custody disputes- these were all separate branches of the same diseased root. They fed upon the time-worn ideal of marriage as a genuine order of Creation, as impenetrable as it was inescapable. To allow these tenets to rot away meant compromising the internal structure upon which all Newfoundland society was based. Thus, the sanctity of the marital contract was zealously guarded, ensuring that as "one flesh", husband and wife were inseparable and mutually dependent upon one another for their health, happiness and material well-being.

Although there were no conditions for early withdrawal, there were penalties for failing to meet the contractual obligations of the marital agreement. For wives, this inherently meant faithfulness - infidelity connoting a woman's shallowness

and ultimate moral degeneracy. As a wife, she owed her husband her complete and unerring devotion. Should she falter, the terms of her dependency automatically fell into question. Her own maintenance, as well as her custodial rights to her children, were now at stake. In the case of servicewives during the Second World War, the Commission of Government felt no compunction against identifying and rooting out “misbehaving” wives. After all, their immoral behavior threatened the social foundation upon which Newfoundland society was based. Though “serious misconduct” was not always easily verified, women could find themselves labeled in the most uncompromising fashion. Their husbands might worry about the “mark” of V.D., but wives risked being tagged with a more vivid scarlet letter. An illegitimate pregnancy could immediately topple a woman’s reputation and position within the community. With husbands serving overseas for years at a time, a suspiciously timed pregnancy was not easily explained. Thus, a servicewife had little choice but to confess her crime and beg her husband’s forgiveness. In such situations, the husband held the superlative power to absolve sins. He could choose to pardon his wife’s indiscretion and maintain her dependency, given certain provisions, of course. Or, he could chose to strip her of everything she held dear - her children, her home, her financial security, her social standing. The Government did not step in to protect these “fallen” women, but held up their image as an example to others.

The Government did intercede on wives’ behalf when husbands failed to meet their contractual obligations. Husbands were “bound” to support their wives as long as wives lived up to their end of the bargain. If a wife remained faithful, conscientiously

preserving her husband's home, then there was no excuse, either legal or moral, for a husband to deny her financial support. The Church, the State and society itself worked in tandem to ensure that husbands lived up to their "inherent" familial obligations. During the war, however, the same legal and social pressures could not be brought to bear on deserting husbands. Newfoundlanders serving in the United Kingdom suddenly found themselves outside the coercive grasp of these social constraints. The sanctity of the marital contract appeared far less venerable in the fantastic, new environment in which these men now served. The Government dutifully attempted to track down these wayward husbands, hitting them with all the legal and moral persuasion at their disposal. In the end, however, the Commission realized that its authority did not extend beyond the shores of Newfoundland. It struggled to have its voice heard, but the legal assertions and moral dictums were barely audible above the roar of war. Husbands evaded their familial responsibilities, thereby thrusting the obligation onto the Government itself. The institution of marriage, but also wives' dependent role in such, was consequently challenged, jeopardizing the traditional structuring of Newfoundland society.

The war experience highlighted the intrinsic inequities and disparate biases of the marital contract in Newfoundland. Despite the State's repeated assurances that the contract "protected" wives' rights and security, their inferior status afforded a precarious footing at best. Whether the "guilty party" or "innocent victim" in marital disputes, servicewives always seemed to pay the price as far as their material and social well-being were concerned. Any indication of infidelity on their part unleashed a torrent

of governmental and social controls meant to punish, embarrass and repudiate. Their husbands' marital indiscretions, on the other hand, were largely accepted as an inescapable byproduct of the war effort. No real stigma was attached to male adultery, while wives ran the risk of losing everything if discovered and denied forgiveness by their husbands. Similarly, husbands could afford to play with the idea of divorce during the war, demanding their "freedom" or discontinuing familial support. Conversely, a spurned or misused wife could hardly have threatened her husband with divorce, as the chains which imprisoned her in the marriage also formed her lifeline. She was trapped by the marital contract which both dictated and ensured her dependency. Until Newfoundland wives attained some degree of economic emancipation, the concept of divorce would remain a material and psychological threat.

The State's protection of the contract against wartime disruption sought to preserve a social order in which women forever played the role of subservient helpmate and indentured minion. The Commission steadfastly refused to entertain any petitions for divorce, even in the most justifiable of circumstances. To waver in their stand, would mean the toppling of the entire patriarchal structure. For if women's traditional role in Newfoundland society was to be maintained, then their "rights" to dependency had to be preserved. Husbands could not simply choose to discard unwanted wives and children as they saw fit. In Commissioner Howley's own words, the introduction of divorce legislation "would cause more trouble and suffering than it would cure. It would encourage hasty and reckless marriages and merely to dissolve them would not remove

the harmful consequences".¹³⁸ Legislation might compel husbands to contribute to the maintenance of these marital castoffs, but to what degree, especially in a relatively poor colony such as Newfoundland? Resolutely, the Commission decided that it was to everyone's benefit - husband, wife and government - that the ineluctable character of the marital contract be maintained. Of course, the Commission was ultimately protecting an outmoded and ineffectual vision of the institution in society. Increasingly, Newfoundlanders would be far less inclined to sacrifice their personal happiness for the spectral concept of social order. By 1945, the introduction of divorce legislation was imminent, ushered in upon the crest of the unprecedented experiences of the Second World War.

¹³⁸ "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to C.H.B., Esq.", 27 October 1945, GN 13/1/B, Box 105A, File 51, PANL.

Chapter Six

“Just You Wait and See”: Wartime Promises and Post-War Realities

During any war, sentimental ballads and patriotic songs seem to capture the tenor and mood of the time. The Second World War was no exception and songs such as “The White Cliffs Of Dover” struck a collective note, even amongst those who had never seen or even heard of Dover. What the lyrics denoted was a strong sense of communal resolve to finish the job at hand, but also a determination that such conditions should never transpire again. The sentiment was hardly naive, this generation being well aware of the inherent fragility of peace treaties. No one expected that the devastation and horror of the war would scrape away all the evil and ugliness of the world. They did expect some measure of reward for their sacrifice and effort during the conflict, just as they expected to return to a “normalcy” afterwards which did not include soup lines and dole orders. Entire populations had banded together in a united war effort, surely they could devise some way to curb economic depressions, poverty and wide-scale unemployment. Amidst the distressing atmosphere of war lurked a boundless sense of optimism, more integral to the war effort than any number of bombers and tanks. The bluebirds, shepherds, and blooming valleys of the war songs represented more than idyllic peace. They spoke of the attributes of a post-war world, made sweeter for the knowledge of war.

While advertisers forecasted a “new” post-war world defined by labour-saving technology and affordable luxuries, governments were rather reticent in their

paradisiacal promises. Recollections of the overwhelming reconstructive problems following the First World War forewarned of the dangers of post-war transitions. Reconstructive planning was virtually underway with the opening shots of the war, the problem of demobilization and the blending of servicemen back into the civilian population assuming prominence in all discussions. After all, servicemen had not simply signed up for a temporary stint in the military. They had given up everything - their homes, their families, their careers - in the defence of their nation. Governments promised these men that they would be appropriately rewarded for their sacrifice and service after the war was won. Technical training, comfortable homes, and good jobs would all be waiting for them at home. How these promises would be delivered, however, was a matter for much private and public speculation.

The Commission of Government in Newfoundland was particularly hesitant in making any concrete promises to servicemen. In theory, they assured these men that they would be well cared for after the war and that their families would receive support in the event of their death or disability. But such assurances were vague at best. As the war gradually wound to a close, servicemen abroad and Newfoundlanders at home began to question exactly what the Commission had in mind. Given the enormous treasury surpluses which the Commission had accumulated and their repeated assurances that the surpluses were necessary for post-war reconstruction, Newfoundlanders anticipated a comprehensive, well-organized plan. What society envisioned and what the Commission was prepared to deliver, however, were bound to clash. Servicemen, but

also their wives at home, would be ultimately disappointed. Servicewives had waited patiently in Newfoundland while their husbands defended the Empire overseas. They had struggled to make ends meet on static military allowances while their neighbors enjoyed unprecedented wartime incomes. Many had lived like virtual vagabonds, intruding upon their families' hospitality or constantly moving from one cheap apartment to another. They were often lonely, scared, and unsure of what the future had in store. Yet they were sustained by the conviction that when their husbands returned to them, all would be well. Unfortunately, this rarely proved to be the case. The "tomorrow" which Newfoundland servicewives waited to see often offered little respite from, or reward for, their wartime sacrifices.

The expectations and implications of "post-war dreams" have been examined by numerous historians, especially in relation to women's post-war condition. In "Pigeon-Holed and Forgotten: The Work of the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women", Gail Cuthbert Brandt described Canadians' anxiety over the post-war transition as directly attributable to the suffering and despair which they had experienced during the 1930's. Familiar with the inflation, recession and popular unrest following the First World War, this generation demanded that the Liberal government of Mackenzie King institute a well-publicized and aggressive scheme for post-war rehabilitation and planning. Of the numerous subcommittees established under the

Committee on Reconstruction, one was given the daunting task of identifying the potential post-war problems of women. Left with only eight months to fulfill this broad mandate, the subcommittee managed to submit a series of ambitious proposals for the improvement of women's status in society. As Brandt explained, however, Canadians were neither interested in, nor supportive of, such fundamental social change. In the absence of any concerted surge of popular sentiment, the subcommittee's recommendations lay dormant among the myriad of reports of other subcommittees, similarly dismissed once the exigencies of the wartime crisis had passed.¹

Susan Hartmann examined post-war planning from another vantage, focusing instead on the advice literature directed toward the wives of returning American servicemen. In "Prescriptions for Penelope: Literature on Women's Obligations to Returning World War II Veterans", Hartmann discovered that although economic and employment concerns took center stage in post-war planning, the social aspects of demobilization also assumed a degree of prominence. Through various forms of media, including government pamphlets, newspapers and magazines, servicewives were awakened to the readjustment problems which their husbands might experience upon repatriation and the appropriate behavior and attitudes that they should exhibit in response. Self-abnegation and submissiveness were their primary obligations, a premium now being placed on women's "natural" pampering and selfless characteristics.

¹ Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "Pigeon-Holed and Forgotten: The Work of the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women, 1943", *Social History*, 15, 29 (May 1982), 239-259.

Wives were advised to adapt their own interests and needs to those of their husbands, thereby reinforcing traditional gender roles. According to Hartmann, women assumed a crucial responsibility in solving this major post-war problem, but undoubtedly at the price of their own autonomy.²

Contrary to Hartmann's victimization interpretation, Penny Summerfield described British wives' resumption of traditional roles after the war as often being part of their own post-war aspirations. Although proud of their contributions to the wartime work force, many women readily relinquished these roles when they could and welcomed the subsequent marginalisation of paid work in their lives. According to Summerfield: "The end of the war for these women was both an opportunity to return to women's work, and above all a chance to fulfil feminine expectations within marriage by having a family".³ In "Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada", Veronica Strong-Boag described Canadian women as also eagerly accepting the opportunity to own their own homes and concentrate on raising their families after the war. The rise of suburbia afforded these women welcomed respite from the crowded conditions of cities and the realization of a popular domestic ideal. Certainly, the suburban dream celebrated a gendered division of labour, but as Strong-Boag contended,

² Susan Hartmann, "Prescriptions for Penelope: Literature on Women's Obligations to Returning World War II Veterans", *Women's Studies*, 5, 3 (1978), 223-239.

³ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, 213.

it also “captured the hopes of a generation shaken by war and depression”.⁴ Later generations of women would ultimately rebel against these isolated, financially dependent roles, but to many wartime women, the suburban lifestyle represented the fruition of a long awaited dream.⁵

The tantalizing lure of post-war fantasy wafted throughout servicewives’ wartime experiences in Newfoundland. They were continually assured that their “waiting” was not in vain and that their sacrifice in the war effort would be duly rewarded in a new post-war order catered to their needs and desires as housewives. “Electronics in Every Home!”, a General Electric advertisement expounded in late 1943:

In the electronic home of the future there will be many electronic servants at your command. Electron tubes will mind your baby, while other types are cooking your dinner. The house will be heated, or cooled, by electron tubes hidden in the walls. And the air will be amazingly pure and clean - electronic devices will make it so. At the turn of a knob, your radio will transform itself into a television receiver and you will see your favorite program in rich, full color. Doors will open automatically and lights will switch on as you enter the room. Yes, everything will be done by electronics in the future.⁶

The “new age” would certainly be a pleasant change for Newfoundland women, many of

⁴ Veronica Strong-Boag, “Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-60”, *The Canadian Historical Review*, 72, 4 (December 1991), 504.

⁵ Strong-Boag, “Home Dreams”, 471-504.

⁶ “General Electric Advertisement”, *The Evening Telegram*, 13 November 1943, 12.

whom were still hauling water and chopping wood. "A Radio Worth Waiting For", "The Bathroom of the Future", "Sewing Without Needles or Thread!" - advertisers pummeled housewives with promises of a brighter, cleaner, less arduous post-war home.⁷ Appliance companies had been forced to curb their consumer production to aid the war effort, but they reminded housewives that their products were "well worth waiting for":

Gone Today and Here Tomorrow - Norge! Today Norge is helping win the war with all its might and ability...When victory and peace are with us again, you may be sure that Norge will get back to peacetime operations in the shortest possible time. Then Norge's war achievements will be translated into new miracles of economical and efficient home appliances.⁸

The post-war home would be automated, electrified and modernized. At a time when servicewives could barely afford to feed and clothe their children, promises of a post-war world filled with electric washing machines, televisions and automated baby minders offered a welcomed escape. Appliance companies capitalized on the fantasy, presenting dream-like images as plausible realities thanks to wartime technological advances:

"Norge Makes Dreams Come True!"⁹

Recruiting officers similarly presented the war, and particularly military service, as an educational, self-improving experience which would help many

⁷ "Admiral Radio Advertisement", The Evening Telegram, 19 November 1943, 7; "The Bathroom of the Future", The Evening Telegram, 5 January 1944, 6; "What's New", The Evening Telegram, 19 November 1943, 12.

⁸ "Norge Appliances Advertisement", The Evening Telegram, 28 January 1944, 8.

⁹ "Norge Appliances Advertisement", The Daily News, 15 June 1945, 12.

Newfoundlanders get “a leg up” in the post-war order. “Every man that goes over will probably return better mentally and physically,” the Director of Recruiting guaranteed, “and parents have not the right to prevent their sons from serving in our forces and improving themselves by so doing”.¹⁰ Newfoundland servicemen were described as being trained as “signallers, motor transport operators, and gunners” - training which “cannot help but be useful in life after the war”.¹¹ Aside from the valuable training servicemen would receive in battle, they would also return better men, confident in the knowledge that they had served their country well. “Every shell fired showed their determination to give their utmost, so that they can return to us with their heads high and their hearts proud”, the Director of Recruiting regularly reported.¹² But school boy descriptions of the war as a “scrap”, destined to toughen young men’s resolve and hone their skills, cast a nostalgic vision of football fields and hockey rinks which held little resemblance to the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific.¹³

Once in service, paramount in most soldiers’ minds, next to survival, was the question of what would greet them when they got out. The Liaison Office hounded

¹⁰ “Newfoundland Militia Command”, PRC #35, Box 42, File 35, PANL.

¹¹ “Ibid.”

¹² “Ibid.”

¹³ The Director of Recruiting enthusiastically assured one recruit: “The whole method of recruiting men for the different services is slow at present, but if this keeps up much longer, I guess they will change the methods and we’ll all get a chance if we want to get in on the scrap”, 4 May 1940, PRC #35, Box 143, File 25, PANL.

the Commission of Government with requests for information of their post-war reconstruction plans. "I may say", wrote the Officer-in-Charge in one such appeal, "that all such matters dealing with post-war construction in Newfoundland are of very great interest to the men over here".¹⁴ Attempting to sketch out some of the preeminent concerns of the soldiers overseas, the office forwarded a rather detailed questionnaire to the Commission, listing servicemen's questions as to pensions, post-war employment, vocational training, subsidized housing and social security schemes. "The course of the war is causing many of our chaps to think about post-war problems and at the moment we have very little to guide us in answering their queries", the office explained.¹⁵ The pointed enquiry naturally elicited a rather chilly reaction from the Commission in Newfoundland. "I have no idea as to the real origin of this questionnaire though it seems to me the work of some official in London and to be a sort of composite of questions asked by various Service Men", confided the Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education, adding:

In any case I feel my colleagues will agree that it should be carefully considered whether the Questionnaire should be answered at all and, if so, how far we can safely go in giving categorical replies. Such replies seem to be possible to some of the questions but others concern matters of large policy which has not yet been fully determined, and upon which it might not be safe to commit this or any future

¹⁴ "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 30 September 1942, PRC #35, Box 97, File 33, PANL.

¹⁵ "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 4 October 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 109, File 61, PANL.

administration.¹⁶

Responding in the most vague and non-committal terms possible, the Commission assured Newfoundland servicemen that they were studying the problems and making adequate arrangements for their post-war rehabilitation:

In the larger sphere of national policy, important and far-reaching developments in the fisheries, agriculture, land settlement and communications are envisaged. These schemes, which are of a long range nature, require careful study and are under continual examination by the appropriate Departments. Substantial progress has been made, but as is the case in other countries, it is not possible to make more than the above general statement at this stage.¹⁷

Trust was the keynote of the message, shrouding the Commission's plans from public view yet assuring servicemen of a just and deserved reward at the end of the war.

Since 1940, the Great War Veterans' Association had been complaining to the Commission about the lack of information regarding the country's plans for post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction.¹⁸ Local newspapers, like The Bay Roberts Guardian, similarly denounced the Commission's reticence in relation to this far-reaching issue:

What are we doing to make sure that Newfoundland's war veterans do not return to a country that has nothing to offer but dole? Perhaps a great deal is being done that nobody except those who are making the plans know anything about. But it is wrong that the country should not be better informed about post-war planning. It is a matter of vital concern to every citizen that he should have some conception

¹⁶ "Confidential Memorandum from Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education", 17 November 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 11, PANL.

¹⁷ "Draft Response to Rehabilitation Questionnaire", November 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 11, PANL.

¹⁸ "Great War Veterans' Association to Secretary of Commission", 23 November 1940, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 9, PANL.

of the kind of economy his Government envisages in the difficult days that will follow the defeat of Germany.¹⁹

A committee, presided over by the Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare and consisting of representatives of the Newfoundland Patriotic Association, had been duly appointed in 1940 to study the problems associated with civil reestablishment and offer recommendations to the Government.²⁰ The committee's influence on public policy, however, was largely intangible.²¹ In 1941, the Commissioner for Justice and Defence dismissed "this conjoint committee" as little more than a public relations tool:

There have recently appeared in the local papers a number of articles which indicate that the public is looking for some statement from the Government in this matter. I find difficulty in deciding as to whether at this stage this conjoint committee is in a position to add very much to our knowledge or to make recommendations. In any event if this is so I think they should have meetings and discuss the problems generally and give to the Government some general statement which could be issued to the public.²²

For the most part, the Commission's post-war plans were incubated and hatched behind closed doors, shielded from the glare of public interest and intrusion. Broad descriptions

¹⁹ "When the Boys Come Home", The Bay Roberts Guardian, 24 June 1944, 4.

²⁰ "Secretary of Commission to Secretary, Newfoundland Board of Trade", August 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 32, File 121, PANL.

²¹ An editorial in The Grand Falls Advertiser blasted the committee for "fail[ing] to accomplish anything whatever. Expenses for traveling and otherwise have been used but nothing has been done for the men of Newfoundland who have fought in every field of battle in this present war", "They Failed", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 16 September 1944, 2.

²² "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to My Dear W.", 23 July 1941, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 9, PANL.

of land settlement schemes, the encouragement of new industries and specialized training programs were intimated, but in deliberately "vague, optimistic terms".²³

One area of post-war planning in which the Newfoundland public demanded that its voice be heard was the issue of veterans' pensions. According to the Great War Veterans' Association, the amounts issued to the men discharged from service with disabilities and to the dependents of men killed-in-action were "pitifully inadequate to provide for anything approaching a decent standard of living".²⁴ Like their standardized rates of pay, the pensions which Newfoundland servicemen received were based on the Imperial Scale of Pensions designed to meet the relative costs of living in the United Kingdom. The system made no allowances for the much higher cost of living which existed in Newfoundland at the time.²⁵ Thus, the Great War Veterans' Association, in conjunction with the Newfoundland Patriotic Association, pressed the Commission of Government to introduce a system of supplementary grants which would bring pensions and benefits up to the rates prevailing for men who had served in the previous war. Certainly, the country could afford this modest gesture, the Veterans' Association contended, as a reflection of its appreciation for the men who had so

²³ "Director of Civil Reestablishment Report", GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 13, PANL.

²⁴ "Great War Veterans' Association to Secretary of Commission", 28 July 1942, GN 13/1/B, Box 32, File 121, PANL.

²⁵ "Brief submitted by committee appointed to interview Committee of Government to discuss the whole question of pensions, separation allowances and kindred matters", GN 38, S6-2-1, File 1B, PANL.

gallantly sacrificed to serve. The Association further argued:

The surplus in the Treasury was derived from the increased earning power of those who remained at home gainfully employed in activities created by wartime necessity. In fairness to those who sacrificed the opportunity for monetary reward on the altar of Patriotism, the first charge on the accumulated surplus and on the Income built up during the war period should be the primary and pressing needs of those whose service made the surplus and income possible.²⁶

Upon receiving a customarily curt refusal from the Commission, the Association warned that the matter would be placed “squarely before the Country with a view to securing the full support of Public opinion”.²⁷ A series of articles were published in the local press and a personal canvass of the entire island was organized along the lines of a plebiscite. Nearly 80,000 ballots supporting a pension increase were collected, representing, according to the Association, “practically everyone who would have been entitled to vote under Responsible Government”.²⁸ Unlike the matter of divorce legislation, here was an issue which presented a clear indication of the will of an overwhelming majority of the people. In the opinion of the Veterans’ Association, the Commission had no choice but to accede to the country’s demands:

It cannot be reasonably maintained that the present Government is not the competent authority to deal with this issue. The problem cannot be shelved by the statement that it is one ‘which must be settled by the Government of the day when the proper time arrives.’ If this were true the Government should not face any

²⁶ “Ibid.”

²⁷ “The Great War Veterans’ Association to the Secretary of Commission”, 11 February 1944, GN 38, S6-2-1, File 1A, PANL.

²⁸ “The Great War Veterans’ Association to the Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare”, 25 July 1944, GN 38, S6-2-1, File 1A, PANL.

major problems of administration, fearing to commit the country to expenditures or taxation designed in the best interests of the people. This is a problem which is a sacred duty of the present government to face, at a time when it is in the best possible position to face it.²⁹

The Commission's precarious position on the fence was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain.

The Commission had always countered criticism of its miserly spending policies with the necessity of establishing "an adequate reserve" for the rehabilitation of servicemen after the war. "We shall need every cent we can save, and even more, to do all that will be necessary to provide for our men adequately, wisely, and to the best advantage", the Commissioner for Finance had repeatedly assured.³⁰ But now the Commissioners were faced with an issue which directly involved the financial security of returned veterans and they still refused to commit public funds in anything but a piecemeal fashion. Discretionary payments were offered in "cases of need", but a general system of supplementation was never put forward.³¹ The Commission admitted that "some men regarded the temporary assistance offered as in the nature of charity" and that they were "finding it more and more difficult to maintain in the face of public criticism

²⁹ "Brief submitted by Committee appointed to interview Committee of Government to discuss the whole question of pensions, separation allowances and kindred matters", GN 38, S6-2-1, File 1B, PANL.

³⁰ "Budget Speech", GN 38, S6-1-4, File 2, PANL.

³¹ A description of the piecemeal concessions offered to returning servicemen is found in Neary, Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 196.

the attitude that no immediate increase is justified".³² Publicly, they argued that it was premature to commit Newfoundland resources to a charge which might prove heavier than the country could afford. Privately, the Commission hesitated to respond to the mounting public pressure for fear of "embarrassing" the War Office, which was currently battling criticism in Britain as to the inadequate rates of pay for United Kingdom forces.³³ The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs advised the Commission to "explore possible compromises" but definitely not to bow to the public's demands.³⁴ By early 1945, with public pressure still intense but the worry of heavy casualties and losses largely past, the Commission again appealed for permission to institute the further supplementation:

Newfoundland casualties have so far been light and end of war appears to be sufficiently near to preclude likelihood of heavy losses...Public is still pressing strongly for the increase to the 1935 rates and it will be still more difficult to defend refusal when it is announced in the budget that the revenue surplus for 1944-45 has exceeded \$7,000,000. The Commission feels that the announcement

³² "Minutes of the Commission of War Pensions", GN 38, S6-2-1, File 1C, PANL; "Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", 4 April 1943, GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL; in 1943, the Great War Veterans' Association similarly demanded that "the matter of pensions...be very clearly both in principle and action, disassociated with the idea of relief or charity, but that such disbursements be regarded as the token of the gratitude of the country and empire to those who are compelled to accept such", The Veterans' Magazine, 14, 2 (December 1943), 9.

³³ "Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland", 22 April 1943, GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL; "Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland, 14 March 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 12, PANL.

³⁴ "Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland", 7 April 1944, GN 38, S6-2-1, File 1A, PANL.

of the further supplementation should be made in forthcoming budget.³⁵

Approval was eventually authorized, but the fact that the Commissioners could hold their position as long as they did denoted the extent of their absolute power among politically voiceless Newfoundlanders.³⁶ The experience suggested little hope for a cooperative relationship in other areas of post-war planning.

Servicewives were exceedingly interested in the Government's plans for post-war rehabilitation, but more than that, they simply desired the return of their spouses after years of enforced separation. When victory over Germany was finally achieved in May 1945, the horn blowing and flag waving held special significance for these women, as it seemed to signify the end of their waiting and sacrifice. After all, their husbands had enlisted to serve "for the duration" of the European war - a war which was now over, aside from some general "mopping up" and police keeping. The prospect that their husbands might have to serve even several months longer, appeared unbearable to these war-weary women. "Are they compelled to go to [the] Pacific?", a distraught wife enquired, "My husband has been away since October, having had only 14 days leave last April for 19 months service without home leave. Will he be getting leave? Excuse me

³⁵ "Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs", 6 April 1945, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 13, PANL.

³⁶ "Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland", 7 April 1944, GN 38, S6-2-1, File 1A, PANL.

for asking you these questions but I am so anxious to know what they have to do".³⁷ As the weeks stretched into months and there was still no indication of husbands' return, more wives appealed to the Government for information:

I am writing to ask you if I can get my husband home before winter because I am alone with two small children...I should think that he would be able to get home now the war is over. We understood when they joined the Navy that they could get back home soon as the war was over but it don't seem much like it.³⁸

I am the wife of ___ and am living on my own...My husband has served 5 1/2 years in his majesty's navy and I think he has done his part. If there is a chance of him getting a discharge I hope and pray it will be very soon for I really need him, can't very well do without him.³⁹

We have property at Codroy, but until it is possible for my husband to be discharged this will be ruined due to neglect. I feel that after five years of Active Service it should be possible for the authorities to discharge my husband. There must be many young men who have never seen Active Service and who could be used to replace the men that have borne the brunt of battle for so long.⁴⁰

The sense of fatigue and exhaustion in these letters was self-evident. The "home front soldiers" had obviously reached their breaking points.

Stranded thousands of miles from home, many husbands similarly longed for the completion of their service to the State. "I definitely do not think this is fair", a

³⁷ "Mrs. __, North River, to Secretary for Defence", 27 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 81, File 76, PANL.

³⁸ "Mrs. __, St. Albans, to Secretary for Defence", 30 September 1945, PRC #35, Box 84, File 38, PANL.

³⁹ "Mrs. __ to Secretary for Defence", 13 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 104, File 27, PANL.

⁴⁰ "Mrs. __, Codroy, to Secretary for Defence", 28 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 84, File 60, PANL.

disgruntled gunner wrote in May 1945:

I volunteered to serve during the emergency and now that is definitely finished I want to get home and besides I don't feel like staying another year in India. Can't our own government do something about it? I'm not moaning but it's rather tough because I've been away nearly six years now. Please see what can be done.⁴¹

Servicemen's frustration and impatience with the entire bureaucratic war machine can be heard clearly in the voices of these letters. A poignant sense of anticipation was also evident as these men "chafed at the bit", so to speak, eagerly anticipating familial reunions and the beginning of their new post-war lives:

I do not wish to stay in the RAF no longer than I have to for I only joined for the duration and as far as I am concerned the war is over and I wish to get home to my wife very soon. So please let me know how soon I shall return to my wife.⁴²

I have completed two operational tours in England and now finished operational flying. I am also married with a son a year old, and also my job with Bowaters Pulp and Paper Mills Ltd. Corner Brook is waiting for me. I also have trouble with my stomach and have been in hospital twice for treatment...I have no ambition to stay in the Royal Air Force any longer now that the job for which I volunteered is finished, and I should be very pleased if you can do anything for me.⁴³

I would like to know if there was any possibility of my discharge now that Germany is defeated...I will have completed five years service the 26th of June this year...There isn't much my wife can do herself as to getting a home together when I am away most of the time. We are expecting our first baby the end of this

⁴¹ "Serviceman to Director of Civil Reestablishment", 10 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 83, File 87, PANL.

⁴² "Serviceman to Secretary for Defence", 2 November 1945, PRC #35, Box 83, File 55, PANL.

⁴³ "Serviceman to Combined Services Liaison Officer, Newfoundland Forces", 6 June 1945, PRC #35, Box 115, File 50, PANL.

month and more than ever I would like to be able to get started for our future life... We have been married three years the fourth of January past, and I think its about time we got started doing some-thing for ourselves for the future years, which we haven't been able to do during these years of War.⁴⁴

Servicemen looked forward to the day when they could finally shed their military uniforms and begin picking up the pieces of their civilian lives.

Of course, the Commission of Government was not nearly so eager for the commencement of general demobilization. Although men who had signed up for the "duration" expected their immediate discharge upon the completion of hostilities, in reality, the playing field could not be cleared nearly that quickly. Demobilization procedures took time, and thousands of men could not be dumped into the civilian community all at once. Under the United Kingdom Age and Service Scheme, men's age, length of service and marital status dictated the order of release, ensuring a gradual dilution of the civilian economy.⁴⁵ Men who found their names were low on the list naturally railed against the unnecessary protraction of the procedure. "I am doing nothing here in barracks, just wasting time", such men complained.⁴⁶ Naval and Air Force men were particularly perturbed, as they realized that they were being diverted to the Japanese war while the two Newfoundland artillery regiments were scheduled for demobilization.

⁴⁴ "Serviceman to Secretary for Defence", 14 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 98, File 68, PANL.

⁴⁵ "Secretary for Defence to Mr. J.G., Grand Falls", 22 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 107, File 34, PANL.

⁴⁶ "Serviceman to Secretary for Defence", 13 May 1946, PRC #35, Box 105, File 87, PANL.

One Newfoundland flier protested the injustice of this arrangement:

The Newfoundland Regiments are being discharged and fortunately for them, they have the picking of any good jobs - whereas we - who are forsaken - have to scrounge and take the leavings of any employment that is left over or handed out to us. I sincerely think that we are given a raw and rotten deal by someone.⁴⁷

The Liaison Office warned the Dominions Office and the Commission of Government of the rising "agitation" among the ranks following this realization.⁴⁸ The Dominions Office discussed the problem privately with the Admiralty, with the view of negotiating an early release for the 2,000 Newfoundlanders serving in the Royal Navy. In the interests of fairness, the Admiralty could make no "exception" for Newfoundlanders, but did offer the suggestion that the majority of the men might be released were the Commission to make the argument that they were "required for urgent priority work in connection with post-war development schemes", namely the fishery.⁴⁹ As fish supplies would be in great demand throughout Europe after the war, such "sympathetic consideration" would be in "the general interest and not merely in that of Newfoundland alone".⁵⁰ The Commissioners refused to consider the "confidential suggestion", however, explaining that they fully believed that "a good many of our men will be attracted by the prospect of

⁴⁷ "Serviceman to Governor of Newfoundland", 8 July 1945, PRC #35, Box 112, File 83, PANL.

⁴⁸ "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 1 November 1945, PRC #35, Box 112, File 93, PANL.

⁴⁹ "Dominions Office to the Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 2 January 1945, GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL.

⁵⁰ "Ibid."

service in the Far East, with its novelty and adventure, as well as by the promise of continued employment".⁵¹ Furthermore, the Commission reported that "the main trend" of its post-war fishery plans focused on a change-over from salt to fresh fish processing and marketing, meaning "a curtailment...rather than an increase" in the number of fishermen employed. The Commissioners unanimously agreed that the domestic reconstruction argument was neither "forcible" nor "logical" and that "it would be rather difficult for us to argue that the men are urgently needed".⁵²

What did the Commission have in mind for returning servicemen? How were they going to be reabsorbed into the civilian economy after the war? Occupational history forms had been distributed to Newfoundland servicemen in 1943 in an effort to show "how keenly interested people are at home about their rehabilitation and what energetic steps they are taking to assist their reestablishment in civil life".⁵³ After years of urgent requests, an informational booklet, entitled "When You Come Home", was finally issued to Newfoundland servicemen in early 1945. The publication briefly described the many educational and employment opportunities available for returning

⁵¹ "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to P.A. Clutterbuck, Dominions Office", 20 January 1945, GN 13/2/A, Box 447, PANL.

⁵² "Ibid."

⁵³ "Liaison Office Report", 4 March 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 109, File 61, PANL; "Civil Reestablishment Committee to Magistrates and Assistant Magistrates", 10 April 1943, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 11, PANL; "Government's Rehabilitation Scheme Praised", Newfoundland News, GN 13/1/B, Box 109, File 81, PANL.

servicemen, as well as their rights to pensions, deferred pay, and clothing allowances.⁵⁴ Servicemen were informed that “centralized planning” would form the core of the rehabilitation scheme, the Commission of Government continuing “to take the initiative in economic planning”.⁵⁵ “Classical economics and policies of self-sufficiency” would ensure the colony’s continued economic health during the period of post-war transition. “Scientific principles” would similarly be applied to all industries, the “Research Laboratory” contributing to the solution of long-standing problems in agriculture, fishing and forestry.⁵⁶ The Government guaranteed returning servicemen that they would receive vocational training and general education; government assistance if they decided to return to the fishery or take up farming; as well as government grants during the interim between their discharge and acquirement of civilian employment.⁵⁷ The Commissioners assured, “as far as an assurance can be given, that those who volunteered their services and risked their lives will find their niche in life with the least possible

⁵⁴ “When You Come Home: An Account of the Newfoundland Government’s Plan for the Reestablishment in Civil Life of Members of the Armed Forces”, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 13, PANL; “Guns Away - The Future Beckons”, The Grand Falls Advertiser, 27 October 1945, 6.

⁵⁵ “Civil Reestablishment Preliminary Survey”, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 12, PANL.

⁵⁶ “Ibid.”

⁵⁷ “Commission of Government Civil Re-Establishment Scheme - Introduction”, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 12, PANL.

delay".⁵⁸ Conquering servicemen could expect to return to a polished new economy, sporting a generously sized welcome mat at the door.

Of course, the publicized assurances tended to exaggerate the Government's actual state of readiness. In anticipation of "the big problem following the close of the war", the Director of Civil Reestablishment, L.W. Shaw, impressed upon the Government the need to appear prepared: "The psychological effect of such cannot, in my opinion, be overestimated...We must commence our work of Civil Re-Establishment by giving to returning men the impression that we are organized and ready to deal with them properly and adequately".⁵⁹ The "impression" was not always easy to maintain, however. The Secretary for Defence admitted that his "exceedingly small staff" was overwhelmed by "the tremendous volume of work in connection with repatriation".⁶⁰ Many returning heroes were greeted by empty train stations, their families having been misinformed, or uninformed, of their date of arrival.⁶¹ Other servicemen arrived home with incomplete discharge papers and were promptly taken into custody by military

⁵⁸ "When You Come Home", GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 13, PANL.

⁵⁹ "Statement Presented to Advisory Committee on Civil Re-Establishment and Post-War Planning", GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 10, PANL.

⁶⁰ "Secretary for Defence to Serviceman", 4 April 1946, PRC #35, Box 110, File 98, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Home Front Association, Grand Falls", 6 August 1945, PRC #35, Box 89, File 8, PANL; "Secretary for Defence to Serviceman", 29 April 1946, PRC #35, Box 105, File 16, PANL.

⁶¹ "Returned Soldier", The Evening Telegram, 4 November 1943, 2; "Secretary for Defence to the Editor, Evening Telegram", 9 November 1943, PRC #35, Box 143, File 30, PANL.

authorities.⁶² More disappointing, however, was the gradual realization that the colony was inadequately prepared for general demobilization. It lacked the necessary facilities to meet the enormous demands for vocational training; there was virtually no acceptable housing available for married servicemen; and most disheartening, there were simply not enough civilian jobs to go around.⁶³ The Grand Falls Advertiser condemned the Government's ineffective preparations in this regard:

The statement from the Office of Civil Re-establishment this week, that only about 200 out of some 600 men who have so far returned to Newfoundland after service in the armed forces have succeeded in obtaining permanent and suitable jobs in civil life, must surely be disquieting news to the whole country...Just about every week now men are returning after receiving an honorable discharge from the several services...They went to fight for an ideal and on their return they quite naturally expect that their country will absorb them into a good and substantial civil life. When they see that this is not so, as the Office of Civil Re-establishment has admitted, they ask just what their Government and their people have been doing during the past four years. Where is all the hope which was held out to them when they enlisted for active service?⁶⁴

Many returning servicemen quickly realized that "hope" was a cheap wartime commodity which they could no longer retain.

According to the requests and complaints received by the Secretary for

⁶² "Secretary for Defence to Liaison Office", 18 February 1945, PRC #35, Box 113, File 98, PANL; "Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence", 20 February 1945, PRC #35, Box 113, File 98, PANL; "Serviceman to Commanding Officer", 10 April 1948, PRC #35, Box 83, File 53, PANL.

⁶³ In January 1946, the Great War Veterans' Association reported that given the number of men desiring vocational training and the availability of courses, it would take over seven years to give all men the courses to which they were entitled. "G.W.V.A. to Secretary of Commission", 30 January 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 14, PANL.

⁶⁴ "Disquieting News", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 19 February 1944. 2.

Defence, married servicemen seemed to suffer most during the immediate transitional period. They had returned to the hopeful faces of wives and children who had anticipated their homecoming as the commencement of their new post-war lives. Struggling to find civilian jobs in an overcrowded market, many servicemen appealed to the Government for temporary financial help. "Could you please send an advance in pay", these men typically pleaded, "as I have a wife and child and we are trying to keep up a house and so far I have had no luck in finding a job".⁶⁵ "My wife is pregnant and expects to have to go in hospital soon", another man explained, "I am not working and won't get any work till at least April".⁶⁶ The colony's severe housing shortage further complicated husbands' post-war readjustment, forcing many to commence the immediate construction of houses as the only alternative to living with parents or other family. "I am trying to build a house, as you know we married men all have to face that and since there is no work for me to get and no sight of work until May, I will have to ask for some money to help me build and get by until I do get work", wrote one ex-serviceman.⁶⁷ Despite the Government's repeated assurances, many servicemen did not readily find their "niche" in civil life.

⁶⁵ "Serviceman to Secretary for Defence", 9 April 1946, PRC #35, Box 82, File 70, PANL.

⁶⁶ "Serviceman to Secretary for Defence", 22 January 1946, PRC #35, Box 82, File 121, PANL.

⁶⁷ "Serviceman to Secretary for Defence", 10 March 1946, PRC #35, Box 82, File 3, PANL.

The lack of employment for returned servicemen and their resulting destitution was apparently widespread. The Citizens' Rehabilitation Committee described the problem as being "particularly bad" in January 1946:

Some are not in actual distress as their families can assist them. However, there are eight Certified unemployed men who are receiving monthly help from the [Newfoundland Patriotic Association] and one who is not eligible for help anywhere. Mrs. Burke, President of the St. Vincent De Paul's Society, informs us that the truant officers are besieging her daily for assistance in obtaining clothing for children of able-bodied unemployed men. Mrs. Holmes of the [Women's Patriotic Association] has interviewed many who are unable to find work and has outfitted several families with clothes. Mr. Ellis, Secretary for the [Newfoundland Patriotic Association], states that his organization is finding it difficult to cope with the numbers of unemployed men who are applying for financial aid. Dr. Pottle of the Department of Public Health and Welfare has written a long memorandum to Sir John Puddester outlining in full the problems of those able-bodied unemployed who are in great distress now.⁶⁸

Also in January 1946, the Great War Veterans' Association denounced the Government's rehabilitation scheme as having deceived and misled the majority of returning servicemen:

Delay in placing Men in reasonable Employment or training for Employment is most demoralizing to them, and a considerable number of Men who returned soon after the end of the War in Europe have not received the training or treatment that was promised them on so many occasions and notable in the booklet 'When you come Home'. These men are rapidly losing heart and will shortly become unemployable and a liability to Society instead of honest workers and an asset to Newfoundland.⁶⁹

Among various points of contention, the Association pointed to the "total inadequacy of

⁶⁸ "Citizens' Rehabilitation Committee to Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education", 24 January 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 14, PANL.

⁶⁹ "Great War Veterans' Association to Secretary of Commission", 30 January 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 14, PANL.

vocational and other training facilities”, “the housing problem”, and especially the inefficiencies of the Department of Civil Re-Establishment, as contributing to the general demoralization of returned servicemen:

Although the Department [of Civil Re-Establishment] has been put there for his benefit and purpose, yet the Department considers it enough to have had the interview with him and they can then sit back and let the man do all the work and worry. There seems to be no contact or follow-up with him other than the form which has been filled out in his presence. Consequently he no longer believes any of the words spoken to him when he was officially welcomed home at Buckmaster’s Field, and which are continuously broadcast as each contingent arrives in St. John’s.⁷⁰

Many ex-servicemen were evidently disillusioned with the conditions and attitudes which greeted them in Newfoundland. “I have been home now and I haven’t got one days work yet. Before we came home the government was going to do a lot for us but it seems like we have [done] our job but the government did not do his”, these men bitterly complained.⁷¹ “Since returning home I can clearly see that a returned man is certainly treated rotten”, another man concurred.⁷² It was not so much the lack of work and available housing which discouraged these servicemen, but rather the apparent absence of appreciation which they felt they had earned. One sailor quite eloquently observed:

It seems to me that when cannon fodder is needed they go a long way with their

⁷⁰ “Ibid.”

⁷¹ “Serviceman to Secretary for Defence”, 26 September 1945, PRC #35, Box 110, File 107, PANL.

⁷² “Serviceman to Pay Duties, Newfoundland”, PRC #35, Box 14, File 49. PANL.

promises, empty speeches, and flag waving to secure the men, but once we have done the job they stand afar off to tell us we are no longer needed and certainly shows by their actions that as far as they are concerned there is no more interest in returned servicemen. It is a case 'to hell' with a man when the danger is past. If this is the so called English justice and freedom for which we fought it is rather a pity that so many of us offered our lives for this kind of farce and trickery. We expect at least to have fair and equal treatment which they promised. It appears, however, that the chaps who remained at home to work for their 50 cts per hour pay, were far wiser then those of us who risked everything for about 50 cts a day. Next time having learned from experience we may not be so willing to give a lot for so little and such dirty thanks...the kind of justice we get could have been had even from Nazi Germany.⁷³

A sense of bitterness towards those who had stayed at home often infiltrated these letters, especially in regard to the civil servants who now seemed to control their lives. One former Air Force officer irately responded to a labour officer's unsolicited advice: "It is very pleasing no doubt to people who had plenty during the war years to offer insults because they know they did not have the guts to do the same as I did".⁷⁴ A gunner similarly rationalized:

There is one thing about it all and that is, that nobody will be able to sling in the face of [O.] that he did not do his duty for King and Country when it was required of him like it can be said about the slackers, even though it has set me back four or five years at the age that I could have achieved something and been a swell chap today. Instead all I have is just what I am standing up in.⁷⁵

Disillusionment bred contempt for the system and government which had deceived them.

⁷³ "Serviceman to Chairman, Commission Government", 17 April 1946, PRC #35, Box 90, File 7, PANL.

⁷⁴ "Serviceman to Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 7 December 1945, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 13, PANL.

⁷⁵ "Serviceman to My dear Daddie", 2 May 1944, PRC #35, Box 41, File 68, PANL.

Many servicewives were also disillusioned with their lot in the post-war order. They had been assured that their "waiting" would be rewarded once the crisis had passed and their husbands returned. Vocational training would prepare their husbands for satisfying careers; employment programs would place them in suitable jobs; and the Government would help young couples finally secure permanent homes. Servicewives could stop worrying about the family's finances, raising children alone, and waiting for the ominous knock at the door. Whether servicewives believed in the fairytale wholeheartedly or not, to many, demobilization did represent the light at the end of the tunnel. That life would not at least get better was a conception which few wives entertained.

For many, the sight of their husbands clambering off trains or descending from troop ships did represent the end of their wartime suffering. Some husbands did find civilian jobs almost immediately after the war. Some couples did manage to find and purchase their post-war dream homes. And some families actually emerged closer for the experience, having braved the ominous threats and sacrifices of war. But for every servicewife who realized her post-war fantasy, many others were sorely disappointed. Often the men that returned to them were not the ones to whom they had waved good-bye years earlier. Some returned with obvious handicaps and disabilities. Other men returned home looking very much as they had when they had left. Of course, all injuries did not present a limp or obvious scar.

The scars of war were not always readily detectable. For many returning

servicemen, they were hardly detectable at all, handicapping them mentally rather than physically. The Government both recognized and attempted to make preparations to treat these hidden wartime injuries. The Commissioner for Justice and Defence broached the Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare on this problem in June 1944:

It has recently come to my notice that there are a number of men returning from overseas, both soldiers and sailors, who are suffering from nervous disorders which in the last war were covered generically by the term 'shell shock'...I am satisfied that this war is going to produce a greater number of these cases than did the last war and the question of the making of provision for their treatment causes anxiety. Apart altogether from the fact that our own Mental Hospital is already overcrowded it does not seem to be proper that these men should be confined in an institution of this nature. It places their illness in a classification which marks them for life.⁷⁶

The men released from enemy prisons at the end of the war were particularly scrutinized for signs of mental scarring. Exuberant accounts of their repatriation were often tinged with concern over the lasting effects of their wartime experience:

All the prisoners I have seen from home or from this country are looking - outwardly at any rate - fit and well. As was to be expected, they haven't put on any weight but they get double ration cards on their arrival here. Its wonderful to see how cheerful they all are and I sincerely hope that when the excitement of home-coming wears off, it will be found that their experiences as prisoners have left no bad effects on their constitutions.⁷⁷

Diagnoses of "psychoneurosis", "underlying psychoses", "dementia praecox" and "anxiety neurosis" crop up recurrently in the service records of the Department of

⁷⁶ "Commissioner for Justice and Defence to Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare", 13 June 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 12, PANL.

⁷⁷ "Services' Newsletter", 16 May 1945, PRC #35, Box 63, File 2, PANL.

Defence.⁷⁸ Some men were described as suffering from “anxiety state” or simply “lost his nerve”.⁷⁹ Whatever the terminology, men were returning to Newfoundland with serious mental conditions. If diagnosed before their official discharge, they were eligible to receive subsidized treatment and care. Unfortunately, many cases did not present themselves until after the serviceman had returned home to his family in Newfoundland. Civil authorities complained to the Government that the British Medical Boards were failing to diagnose such ailments before final discharge and that they were consequently being forced to undertake responsibility for the care of these men.⁸⁰ Other reports indicated that some men consciously concealed their condition from military officials as they assumed that such a diagnosis would follow them into their post-war lives.⁸¹ The

⁷⁸ “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”, 31 January 1946, PRC #35, Box 26, File 23, PANL; “Department of Public Health and Welfare to Secretary for Defence”, 9 October 1947, PRC #35, Box 104, File 7, PANL; “Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence”, 10 December 1943, PRC #35, Box 103, File 87, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Commanding Officer H.M.C.S. “Avalon”, 15 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 82, File 150, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commission for Newfoundland”, 25 February 1946, PRC #35, Box 103, File 34, PANL; “Magistrate to Secretary for Defence”, 10 January 1946, PRC #35, Box 109, File 21, PANL.

⁷⁹ “Secretary for Defence to Director of Civil Re-Establishment”, 19 June 1945, PRC #35, Box 84, File 18, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Commanding Officer”, 10 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 104, File 29, PANL; “Liaison Office to Secretary for Defence”, PRC #35, Box 101, File 1, PANL.

⁸⁰ “Home Front Association of Grand Falls and Windsor to Director of Recruiting”, 26 May 1941, PRC #35, Box 41, File 37, PANL; “Secretary Home Front Association to Director of Recruiting”, 3 May 1941, PRC #35, Box 37, File 139, PANL.

⁸¹ “Great War Veterans’ Association to Commission Government”, 16 November 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 12, PANL; “Director of Recruiting to Re-Establishment Committee”, 4 July 1941, PRC #35, Box 85, File 26, PANL.

Acting Superintendent of the Department of Public Health and Welfare appealed to the Commission to help reduce this justifiable anxiety:

I think that something should be done so that this type of illness does not become a handicap to a returned man...I have never seen a statement stating that a man was suffering from heart disease or other physical ailment, and I think that it is next to criminal to discharge a man with a Certificate saying that he is insane. I feel that you can perhaps do something to have this word removed from such certificates in future and it will save these people a great deal of hardship.⁸²

As long as the stigma was attached to mental illness, many servicemen evaded detection and treatment, preferring to deal privately with the problem at home.

A similarly "shameful" condition which many returning servicemen attempted to conceal was venereal disease. Wartime conditions generally fostered the spread of communicable diseases among armed forces personnel. While the incidents of venereal disease had been on the rise in Newfoundland since the outbreak of the war, the problem had appeared to center on the "prostitute class" and visiting servicemen. A division of venereal disease control had been established in late 1943, but for the most part, the office concentrated on locating infected persons, rather than encouraging widespread education and awareness.⁸³ The laws in place to deal with the problem were similarly described as being "completely ignored on the part of patients and almost

⁸² "Acting Superintendent to Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare", 4 October 1944, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 12, PANL.

⁸³ "Director of V.D. Control to Secretary for Department of Justice", 15 January 1944, GN 13/2/A, Box 454, PANL; "Prostitution and Venereal Disease", The Daily News, 16 May 1940, 2.

completely ignored on the part of those responsible for their enforcement".⁸⁴ Under the title "Too Much Hush", a local editorial criticized the Government's failure to respond publicly to this growing threat:

There has been altogether too much hush in this country about venereal disease. The facts are not made public and without the facts there is an absence of action. There is no doubt but that wartime conditions have multiplied the danger without corresponding remedial measures being taken. However, the fact is known, although it is not recognized, that this danger is reaching startling proportions in some parts of the Island. Unless and until the Department of Public Health comes out into the open and faces the danger instead of pursuing a bogeyman policy, the harm will increase and the danger will not be removed.⁸⁵

With the return of thousands of Newfoundland servicemen at the end of the war, the problem now threatened to encroach on a much wider class of "innocent victims". As general demobilization progressed, government and military authorities worried about the implications of allowing infected servicemen to return home to "outlying districts" where medical treatment was rarely available:

The Department [of Public Health and Welfare] is very concerned about the possibility of communicable diseases being spread in outlying districts...cases in need of continued treatment may easily be allowed to go to their homes with unpleasant results. Quite a proportion of the returning personnel live in districts where medical service is poor in summer and practically non-existent in winter.⁸⁶

The Department of Public Health and Welfare attempted to work with the Department of Defence and the Services Medical Board to ensure that adequate arrangements were made

⁸⁴ "A Necessary Survey", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 6 March 1943, 2.

⁸⁵ "Too Much Hush", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 15 January 1944, 2.

⁸⁶ "Naval Officer-in-Charge, Newfoundland, to Secretary of the Admiralty", 18 September 1945, PRC #35, Box 3, File 2, PANL.

for the treatment of infected men before they returned to their home communities. The detection of such cases was hardly a simple matter, however, and the enforcement of treatment even more problematic.⁸⁷ A local magistrate described the main objection to treatment as being a fear of publicity, “not because of the lack of secrecy on the part of the medical health officer but because of being seen by the public when visiting the clinic”.⁸⁸ The dishonorable label attached to venereal disease compelled many infected servicemen to risk their own health, as well as that of their spouses, so as to avoid public humiliation and judgement.

Other servicemen simply returned home restless and unable to settle down to the quiet lives they had known before the war. In relation to one former airman, the Liaison Office sympathetically explained:

It was evident that he was not very likely to settle down for some time and due to his physical and nervous state it was difficult to place him in employment...He has no doubt made an earnest effort to secure permanent employment. It appears, however, through his age and limited ability he cannot secure the position he desires. Hence his feeling of utter disappointment with all and sundry.⁸⁹

In fact, many servicemen returned to the colony unwilling to resume their previous roles

⁸⁷ “Commanding Officer to Secretary for Defence”, 3 April 1943, PRC #35, Box 42, File 52, PANL; “Venereal Disease: Defence Regulation 33B”, PRC #35, Box 10, File 17, PANL.

⁸⁸ “Magistrate to Director of Public Prosecutions”, 3 April 1943, GN 13/2/A, Box 454, PANL.

⁸⁹ “Officer-in-Charge to Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education”, 12 March 1948, GN 13/2/B, Box 192, PANL.

in the fishery and lumber industry.⁹⁰ While serving overseas, they had envisioned returning to new, more fulfilling careers after the war. Unfortunately, the Newfoundland economy was still organized around these primary industries. Men might dream of obtaining jobs as motor mechanics or as support staff at the local airports, but the truth was, there were just not enough of these jobs to go around. Predictably, some men began to look back on their war service as “the good old days”. By 1947, the Government was receiving requests from ex-servicemen to help them in their efforts to rejoin the armed services. “I want to find out if I can get a chance to join up again”, wrote a former gunner in the 166th, “because I am here with no work only to swing a buck saw and I dont think that I should have to do that after fighting for My King and Country for 3 years and 360 days. So sooner then do this I am going to join again if its possible”.⁹¹ Another ex-serviceman was described as having secured employment as a longshoreman with the Bowaters Pulp and Paper Company, but as the work was not steady he felt that “he would do better if he could return to England and join the Royal Navy”.⁹² Whether

⁹⁰ The Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare explained to the Dominion Secretary of the Great War Veterans’ Association: “Most of them [returned servicemen] although experienced fishermen or loggers express a desire to engage in other occupations, and are waiting for positions to be found for them”, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 12, PANL.

⁹¹ “Ex-serviceman to Recruiting Office”, 19 May 1947, PRC #35, Box 111, File 72, PANL.

⁹² “Stipendiary Magistrate to Secretary for Defence”, 29 June 1946, PRC #35, Box 101, File 12, PANL; other ex-servicemen reportedly contacted the Government about re-enlistment into the armed forces in the years immediately following the war. “Secretary for Defence to Trade Commissioner for Newfoundland”. 18 August 1947.

disappointed by the lack of opportunities in Newfoundland, or simply hankering for the excitement and adventure which they associated with their wartime experience, some veterans obviously felt constrained in their new peacetime roles.⁹³

Many ex-servicemen also encountered some discomfort squeezing back into their roles as husbands and fathers after the war. Aside from letters and packages, servicemen had been largely cut off from their wives and children in Newfoundland for years at a time. References in servicemen's letters home occasionally revealed their fear that they were being forgotten as their loved ones got on with their lives in Newfoundland without them. "How I would love to have Bunny and Tuts crawling up in my arms like they used to do when I used to ly down. But I suppose that they will soon forget me as well as all the rest", a discouraged serviceman had written in 1940.⁹⁴ In other letters, the serviceman asked his wife to send him pictures of "Bunny" and "Tuts" (their children) and promised that he would send a recent snapshot of himself as soon as he could. He asked them to save the postcards he sent so that he could tell them stories about the places he had seen when he returned. And he worried about the little problems around the house

PRC #35, Box 111, File 72, PANL.

⁹³ In 1946, the Great War Veterans' Association wrote to the Secretary of the Commission: "...[T]his Association feels that the Government do not fully appreciate the growing restlessness amongst Ex-Servicemen and it would emphasize that pious hopes and intentions are not of any avail to assuage this unrest; but that prompt and far reaching action is what is required, and it is long overdue", 30 January 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 14, PANL.

⁹⁴ "Serviceman to My Dear Wife", 28 February 1940, GN 13/2/A, Box 458, PANL.

for which he had always taken charge. "I am glad that you got the chimney shifting as that has been on my mind and I knew it was bad", he wrote his wife in 1941.⁹⁵ Such men desperately tried to stay involved in their families' lives in Newfoundland but young children have particularly short memories, especially of fathers they had rarely seen in the last six years. "[My husband] didn't see the first boy until he was nearly seven months old", one servicewife explained, "...but the babies were young so they didn't really understand much. They got used to him pretty quickly".⁹⁶ Most husbands would eventually slide back into their former role as head of the household, but a somewhat awkward period of readjustment would have been unavoidable.

Husbands' attempts to resume their position at the head of households were also hampered by the immediate scarcity of households to be had. The Commission had guaranteed returning servicemen that they would aid them in their search for and procurement of suitable housing after the war.⁹⁷ The island's severe housing shortage had been a topic of recurrent study since the beginning of the war, with the problem of providing returning servicemen with suitable homes of particular concern. As the war drew to a close, the Liaison Office pressed the Government to prepare an appropriate building scheme for St. John's, where it was reported that a full sixty per cent of the

⁹⁵ "Serviceman to My Dear Wife", 26 January 1941, GN 13/2/A, Box 458, PANL.

⁹⁶ Excerpt from interview conducted with Mrs. E.L., 4 November 1998.

⁹⁷ "Good Information for Ex-Servicemen", PRC #35, Box 142, File 1, PANL.

existing housing stock was deemed “substandard”.⁹⁸ Literally tacked onto the Government’s larger post-war housing scheme for the poor, it was proposed that one hundred houses should be built by the St. John’s Housing Corporation to be let on a rental basis to ex-servicemen and their families as they returned. The building of the additional houses was expected to cost approximately \$450,000, which would be provided through an immediate loan to the Housing Corporation.⁹⁹ Approval for this loan was hastily granted in March 1945, with the hope that construction could be completed by the end of the summer.¹⁰⁰ Predictably, however, the building program was impeded by material shortages and bureaucratic fumbling.

Fortunate servicemen were able to secure temporary accommodations for themselves and their families in converted military buildings. The rest competed for substandard rental accommodations or moved back in with their families. The stress created by such living situations is not hard to imagine. In Gander, the wife of a returned serviceman considered herself “lucky” to have secured a makeshift apartment in a converted army barracks:

It had a front door and a back door and twelve foot high ceilings but no tub, just a toilet and a vanity. We couldn’t even buy a tub, not for the longest time. They

⁹⁸ “Meeting of the Committee of the Commission of Government with the St. John’s Housing Corporation”, GN 13/1/B, Box 114, File 74, PANL.

⁹⁹ “Memorandum for Commission of Government”, 14 March 1945, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 13, PANL.

¹⁰⁰ “Minutes of the Commission of Government”, 23 March 1945, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 13, PANL.

just weren't available. Finally we got one but had no hot water hook up. [W.] rigged some pipes through so that they ran through the wood stove and so we could get hot water to the tub.¹⁰¹

The "unlucky" couples moved back in with their parents or other family members. "I am now living with relatives in a four room house", an ex-serviceman complained, "Altogether there are eleven of us sharing this house and my wife is expecting a child in May!".¹⁰² In January 1946, the Great War Veterans' Association reported that the housing problem for ex-servicemen had become "most serious". Many couples were reported to have been living with their parents in "cramped quarters where domestic peace is hardly possible".¹⁰³ The Veterans' Association warned the Government that unless the Housing Corporation accelerated its program for construction, many families would be "irreparably broken up" under the pressure.¹⁰⁴ One married serviceman pleaded to the Secretary for Defence in April 1946: "...[S]ince my arrival here I have been living in one room in my parents home but I now find that we just can't manage under such conditions".¹⁰⁵ He appealed for assistance to help relieve the situation, describing his

¹⁰¹ Excerpt from interview conducted with Mrs. M.F., 16 November 1998.

¹⁰² "Ex-serviceman to Secretary for Defence", 5 April 1946, PRC #35, Box 101, File 12, PANL.

¹⁰³ "The Great War Veterans' Association to Commissioner for Home Affairs and Education", 24 January 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 14, PANL.

¹⁰⁴ "Ibid."

¹⁰⁵ "Ex-serviceman to Sir", 29 April 1946, PRC #35, Box 104, File 2, PANL.

marriage as “slowly breaking up while living with my people”.¹⁰⁶ As difficult as it had been for servicewives to live with their parents during the war, it would have become even more unbearable after their husbands returned.

Many servicewives were undoubtedly disappointed upon the realization that their immediate post-war lives would not include modern new homes, filled with labour-saving technology. Still, the let-down could not compare to that of wives who finally realized that their husbands were never coming home. Throughout the war, wives routinely received telegrams “regretfully” informing them that their husbands had been listed as “missing in action”.¹⁰⁷ While this information was greatly disheartening, the vagueness of the description left them with some hope. Missing servicemen sometimes emerged from prison camps or from hiding in enemy territory.¹⁰⁸ For security reasons, as well as the military’s traditional aversion to assumptions of any kind, men’s names remained on the missing list until evidence proved otherwise.¹⁰⁹ A wife’s military allowance remained in effect, as did the sanctity of her marriage, barring her from dating

¹⁰⁶ “Ex-serviceman to Sir”, 5 May 1946, PRC #35, Box 104, File 2, PANL.

¹⁰⁷ Examples of such include: “Telegram to Mrs. ___ from Secretary for Defence”, 1 October 1943, PRC #35, Box 84, File 13, PANL; “Officer-in-Charge to Secretary for Defence”, 2 July 1942, PRC #35, Box 15, File 81, PANL.

¹⁰⁸ “Secretary for Defence to Secretary for Public Health and Welfare”, 24 January 1944, PRC #35, Box 82, File 150, PANL; “Liaison Office Report”, 19 January 1943, PRC #35, Box 98, File 39, PANL.

¹⁰⁹ “J.C. to Secretary for Defence”, 10 January 1944, PRC #35, Box 83, File 59, PANL; “Secretary for Defence to Home Front Association”, 22 February 1945, PRC #35, Box 101, File 81, PANL.

or marrying any other man. This suspended state could exist for years at a time, fostering a false sense of hope, as well as denying her any opportunity to begin rebuilding her life. With the completion of hostilities in 1945, however, military authorities were finally inclined to certify missing servicemen as "missing and presumed dead".¹¹⁰ Legally, however, a "presumption of death" did not denote definitive proof in the administration of estates or the settlement of life insurance claims.¹¹¹ Thus, by 1946, the Commission authorized the Secretary for Defence to issue certificates which would be considered "sufficient proof" of the death of "missing" servicemen.¹¹² For many servicewives, such closure offered a bittersweet conclusion to their years of waiting.

Sparkling dreams of comfortable new homes, crammed with labour-saving technology, sustained many Newfoundland servicewives through their years of sacrifice and waiting. Their suffering was made bearable by the promise of relief, escapism providing a necessary means of survival. Appliance companies cultivated such brilliant

¹¹⁰ "Secretary for Defence to J.G.H., Esq.", 1 June 1945, PRC #35, Box 47, File 139, PANL; "Mrs. ___ to Secretary for Defence", 20 March 1945, PRC #35, Box 83, File 35, PANL; "Mrs. ___ to Secretary for Defence", 6 September 1945, PRC #35, Box 112, File 44, PANL.

¹¹¹ "Fox, Higgins, Knight, Phelan and Hawkins, Barristers, to Commissioner for Justice and Defence", 29 April 1942, GN 13/1, Box 54, File 25, PANL.

¹¹² "Memorandum for Commission", 8 June 1946, GN 13/1/B, Box 54, File 25, PANL.

fantasies, founded upon the enormous technological advances which had occurred during the war. Like pre-release publicity surrounding the latest studio blockbuster, the post-war hype teased and titillated as it sought to establish an eager customer base for peacetime goods. The Commission of Government similarly assured the buying public that the post-war order would present a “new and improved” Newfoundland. The Government’s impressive assumption of control over the war effort and society’s growing faith in the attributes of economic management, tended to warrant such unbounded confidence. “Scientific innovation” and “centralized planning” would fashion an improved social and economic landscape, vastly superior to the economically depressed and demoralized society of the pre-war era. The dream had dangled before Newfoundlanders since the beginning of the war, but now wartime innovations promoted a sense of tangibility. Although rarely offering more than a vague impression of its post-war plans, the Commission assured Newfoundlanders that life would be better, “just you wait and see”.

Hazy conceptions of a new post-war order were difficult to sustain, however, once the dust of war had finally settled. By 1947, it was estimated that between 1000 and 1300 ex-servicemen were still unemployed in St. John’s.¹¹³ Eighty-four per cent of these men were described as being in “distress”, their unemployment benefits

¹¹³ “Memorandum for Commission of Government - Unemployed Ex-Servicemen”, 22 January 1947, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 15, PANL.

having expired, forcing many to apply for public relief.¹¹⁴ The Government was no longer expounding the merits of its land settlement scheme and the encouragement of new industries, but was exploring the idea of sending ex-servicemen to work in the mining and construction industries of the United Kingdom, to agricultural operations in Bermuda, and to enlist in the Canadian Armed Forces.¹¹⁵ Ex-servicemen themselves were similarly dispirited, now convinced that they had been duped into wartime service. “I am fed up with the Newfoundland Government’s petty way and I am sure every other man that served overseas feels the same”, a former gunner in the 59th seethed.¹¹⁶ These men had returned conquering heroes only to see their post-war dreams dashed on the rocks of indecision and compromise. Perhaps their hopes and visions had been idealized, but in their minds, the Commission of Government had sorely let them down.

While much evidence exists to corroborate servicemen’s post-war disillusionment, little exists to establish that of their wives. As is to be expected, servicewives’ plaintive letters to government officials ceased once their husbands returned. Neither is there further specific mention of their condition and problems in government correspondence. Once again, these women are hidden in the shadows of

¹¹⁴ “Memorandum for Commission of Government - Unemployed Ex-Servicemen”, 19 February 1947, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 15, PANL.

¹¹⁵ “Memorandum for Commission of Government - Unemployed Ex-Servicemen”, 22 January 1947, GN 13/1/B, Box 3, File 15, PANL.

¹¹⁶ “Serviceman to Secretary for Defence”, 24 February 1947, PRC #35, Box 96, File 58, PANL.

history, as voiceless as they are indistinguishable. Indirectly, however, certain assumptions can be made. The post-war rehabilitation program did not guarantee their husbands steady and gainful employment after the war. Few families could initially afford electric washing machines and refrigerators, let alone the automated baby minders of which they had heard so much. The persistent housing shortage also diminished their opportunities to establish permanent homes upon their husbands' return. Even if post-war savings could afford this nominal luxury, there were pitifully few houses to be purchased. Many couples remained in their parents' homes, husbands only exacerbating the overcrowded and stressful living conditions of such. Finally, the husbands who returned to them after the war were not always in better condition mentally and physically, as the Director of Recruiting had so confidently surmised. In reality, many returning servicemen bore little resemblance to the men which their wives had remembered or imagined. Certainly, the extended period of separation, as well as the brevity of their time together prior to enlistment, would have created this initial feeling of alienation and formality. But some husbands definitely exhibited much darker personalities upon their return. Some were obviously nervous and regularly awoke at night. Others simply refused to settle down to their previous jobs in the forestry and fishing industries. In either case, wives' dreams of forfeiting the reins of responsibility upon their husbands' return would have to be suspended, perhaps indefinitely.

Although servicewives were never mentioned specifically in the Government's plans for post-war rehabilitation, they figured integrally in most. After age

and length of service considerations, marital status dictated the order of demobilization. Similarly, married men received priority in the distribution of civilian housing after the war, as well as most civilian job opportunities. Special consideration was routinely directed toward men with wives and children dependent upon them, thereby establishing a two-tiered system for rehabilitation. In one respect, such preference was predictable given the Government's reluctance to assume responsibility for servicemen's dependents during the war. Aiding these men's reestablishment into civil life merely accelerated the shifting of the burden of dependency back onto husbands where it belonged. More subtly, however, the privileged treatment which married men were accorded represented a form of reward for shouldering the responsibility of dependents. In its continued promotion of the marital contract as the basis of a sound social order, the Government customarily offered incentives to men willing to undertake such a burden. Post-war rehabilitation was no exception, the Government intent on placing married servicemen in a more advantageous position compared to those men "shirking" familial responsibilities.

Finally, though servicewives figured in the rehabilitation scheme only by default, their post-war futures were irreconcilably tied to such plans. Their dreams of establishing comfortable homes in which to raise their children were dependent upon their husbands, and specifically their husbands' ability to obtain and retain suitable civilian employment. While both husbands and wives shared an idealized vision of post-war homes and families, the means to the fruition of such was gender based. Should their husbands be unwilling or unable to settle down to steady employment after the war,

servicewives would be left with few alternatives. Nowhere in the Government's rehabilitation scheme were there clauses protecting servicewives' welfare during the period of post-war transition. "Home front soldiers" did not merit vocational training, job creation opportunities or interim financial grants. They had been handed a generic dream for a better post-war life but had hesitated to read the illegible disclaimer at the bottom. Yes, new homes and electric washing machines could be theirs, but only if their husbands could make it so. Lassoing their dreams to the marital contract did not ensure their buoyancy. In fact, for many servicewives, post-war realities only intensified their weight.

Conclusion

The Second World War represented an extraordinary experience which tested the boundaries of many established norms in Newfoundland. The colony's war effort demanded the participation of nearly every segment of society and some loosening of traditional gender structures was probably unavoidable. In comparison to the Newfoundland women who enlisted in the military services or accepted jobs in the defence industries of Quebec and Ontario, however, servicewives' challenges to the social structure appear light. They continued to be defined by their roles as wives and mothers and predominantly worked within the traditional confines of the home and family. Theirs can hardly be described as a confrontational experience as they rarely challenged conventional stereotypes head-on. Yet in a quiet and unassuming manner, they confronted gender assumptions on a variety of levels, denoting the influence that wartime exigencies exerted on established gender systems in Newfoundland.

Of course, the challenges which servicewives presented to gender systems were neither uniform nor equal. Drawn from a variety of class, regional and economic backgrounds, these women represented a diverse cross-section of the population. Moreover, these servicewives did not live in the cloistered atmosphere of military bases but remained within the civilian community, living in homes they owned, in rental accommodations or with their parents. These varied living situations distinguished their experiences in a number of ways, forcing some to appropriate the roles which their husbands had performed in the home and family and others to forfeit even their

traditionally female responsibilities in same. Some wives faced isolation and loneliness in outport communities, while others struggled to secure personal space and privacy in overcrowded parental homes. And some servicewives were simply in a better position to cope financially during the war years, either because of their husbands' higher rank in the military or because they could move back in with parents or other family members. To be clear, servicewives' experiences were certainly marked by more diversity than similarity, and thus defy any attempts to provide definitive or conclusive accounts of the period. But by using a variety of sources and documents, it is possible to reconstruct some of the experiences and discourses which united the group and determine how they affected the systems of gender at work in Newfoundland at the time.

Most obviously, servicewives' experiences were characterized by their constant state of waiting. These years represented a period of postponement during which their lives were effectively placed on hold. The establishment of permanent homes, having children, planning for the future - servicewives were permitted none of these commonalities of married life. Shunted between various relatives' homes; cut off from their husbands for months and even years at a time; living in a state of terminal unrest, anxiously awaiting the arrival of bad news - this was the essence of their particular wartime condition. There was not an exhilarating experience upon which they would look back with fondness and regret. It was an excruciating period of extended torment throughout which they struggled under the constant glare of public scrutiny. For their waiting naturally took on the characteristics of patriotic obligation, society demanding

that servicewives present a circumspect front in all aspects of their lives. As if trapped in a prolonged state of mourning for their absent loved ones, a respectful countenance had to be maintained to venerate husbands' temporarily abandoned position within the home. To revel in their new found freedom and independence would have been obscene, and for the most part, impossible. Servicewives gained little "freedom" or "independence" during the course of the war as their dependency was simply shifted onto governmental departments and various relatives. Penned in by the bounds of their new indebtedness, servicewives could only wait patiently for the end of hostilities and the resumption of their rightful - although no less subservient - roles within the home.

For the most part, servicewives' dependent status remained unaltered by the wartime experience. Perceived as the foundation of a well-ordered society, the sanctity of the marital contract and wives' "rights" to dependency were consistently protected throughout the wartime period. The Government's institution of supplementary grants to waiting servicewives, refusal to introduce divorce legislation, and consistent efforts to compel deserting husbands to live up to their marital obligations, marked recurrent attempts to preserve the binding nature of the marital contract in Newfoundland, as well as the traditional gender structures defined by such. Wives were rarely provided with the means to live independently during the period of their husbands' absences and were usually encouraged to move back in with their parents or other male relatives. Servicewives' ability to secure wage labour outside the home was similarly hampered by government restrictions which prohibited the entrance of married women into the civil

service and recruitment into the defence industries of Quebec and Ontario. As wives' dependent status formed the nucleus of most systems of gender in Newfoundland, the preservation of the integrity of this condition assumed national importance, especially during these disruptive years of war.

Images presented in the wartime media also reinforced the perception of wives' inherent dependency. Idealized depictions of servicewives were used to encourage men to fight, symbolizing the homes and families and way of life which had to be preserved at all costs. But just as it called men to arms, the image of the servicewife also proved effective in rallying the philanthropic tendencies of the general population. Newfoundland society owed servicewives a measure of support and protection during the period of their husbands' service to the State. The Newfoundland Patriotic Association was particularly adept at wringing a sense of societal guilt and subsequent subscriptions from this unmitigated obligation. In both instances, paternalistic assumptions of female vulnerability were exploited to elicit a sense of communal protection. Yet "vulnerability" did not automatically qualify a servicewife for protection. The privilege was clearly reserved solely for those who were also considered to be "morally deserving", meaning faithful wives, devoted mothers and conscientious housekeepers. The terms of servicewives' dependency were conditional, determined by their compliance with social expectations of the "dutiful wife".

But while the condition of servicewives' dependency was largely maintained during the period of their wartime experience, the parameters of such did

become somewhat blurred. The Government had assumed responsibility for their financial support as a means to facilitate recruiting and protect traditional gender norms in Newfoundland. Yet servicewives and their families were only accorded a modicum of support, in fact “barely enough to keep body and soul together”.¹ This devaluation was perhaps inevitable given the State’s entrenched conception of women’s domestic contributions. While the sanctity of their roles as wives and mothers was pegged as the basis of “a sound social order”, their actual contributions to the economy were considered negligible. During the war, however, this estimation was reevaluated as wartime exigencies temporarily disrupted the traditional gauge of “productivity”. Suddenly, the efficiency of soldiers on the front lines was linked to servicewives’ roles within the home. Their maintenance of servicemen’s homes and families; the encouragement and support they rendered through regular letters overseas; and their fidelity and devotion during the period of wartime separation were now likened to patriotic duty. No longer was their dependency on the Government completely one-sided. With the general recognition of their subtle contributions to the war effort came a measure of increased assistance and appreciation. To some extent, the mutual dependency which had always existed was briefly routed out and verified.

Yet this financial validation was only one indication of the State’s recognition of servicewives’ wartime role. On another level, government intervention

¹ Reference to quotation cited in Chapter Two, “Memorandum re Unemployed”, GN 13/1/B, Box 166, File 70, PANL.

worked to compel servicewives' compliance through threats and punishment. Most particularly in the case of fidelity, wives were assured that they would lose all support and assistance should they waver in their devotion to absent husbands. Tactless investigations verified rumors of indiscretions, broadcasting to society the implicit expectations and dire implications of servicewives' adultery. True to the treasonous tones of this discourse, fallen wives were often stripped of everything they held dear - their homes, their children, their status in society - as justifiable punishment for their crimes. In acting against their temporarily canonized husbands, servicewives had effectively broken a code against all of Newfoundland society - an injustice only somewhat less despicable than "sleeping with the enemy". In this atmosphere of heightened patriotism and puritanism, servicewives' fidelity was nationalized for the war effort, an obligation which was not equally conferred upon their absent husbands. Indiscretions on the front lines were never compared to those committed on the home front, the psychological stresses of military life warranting and excusing such moral lapses. Unlike that of their husbands, servicewives' fidelity was a part of their service to the State and a precondition for their continued dependency.

Although newspapers and magazines translated stereotypic expectations for the "dutiful wife", empowered portrayals were also presented which validated servicewives' essential wartime role. The local press propagated an image of self-supporting, resilient wives, protecting the lifeblood of the home front in the face of overwhelming adversity. Servicewives were encouraged to learn to solve their problems

on their own and cautioned against complaining to their husbands overseas. "After all, he can't do anything about matters and you'll only make him miserable", the advice columnists warned.² But such publicized assurances that servicewives could and should take care of themselves during the period of their husbands' military service necessarily butted against the victimized portrayals of servicewives presented in recruiting propaganda and the Newfoundland Patriotic Association's fund raising appeals. Were servicewives defenceless casualties of the war effort or active participants in such? Were they the pampered goddesses presented in make-up advertisements or the feisty home front heroines portrayed on the opposite page? As other historical studies have well-established, the inconsistencies of wartime ideology promoted an image which both supported and defied established norms. Once again, the exigencies of crisis strained traditional assumptions of gender appropriate roles.

How servicewives interpreted this contradictory discourse is difficult to gauge, although evidence suggests that many wives actually absorbed and accepted the public expectations for their empowered wartime role. Whether a reflection of their own implicit understanding or simply a negotiating device, servicewives often referred to their own "patriotic responsibility" and "duty" in letters to government officials. They, too, seemed to equate new value to their wartime domestic roles. As their husbands dutifully marched off to fight for democracy, they dutifully remained in Newfoundland, "keeping

² Reference to quotation cited in Chapter Three, "Topics to Write to Servicemen", The Grand Falls Advertiser, 17 July 1943, 4.

the home fires burning". For as homes and families came to exemplify the very marrow of the war effort, servicewives' protection of such assumed greater relevance. Their recognition of this role naturally elicited assertions regarding their "rights" to government support and assistance. Though some of these requests predicably drew upon a sense of victimization, many others expounded a sense of righteousness and fair play. In removing their husbands from the home through military service, the State had forced servicewives to assume new roles and sacrifice for the war effort. When denied reasonable remuneration for their contributions, servicewives attempted to withdraw their services. "If you don't intend to pay me get my husband back and put a single man in his place", these wives routinely demanded.³ Consciously or not, servicewives had interpreted the value of their role in the war effort and, like their husbands fighting at the front, expected a comparable measure of reward for their national sacrifice.

Predictably, many servicewives would be ultimately disappointed with the final settling of accounts. Caught up in the intoxicating reverie of post-war plans and pipe dreams, they would find little solace in assurances that they had served their country well. For throughout their years of sacrifice, servicewives had assumed that wartime inequities would be rewarded with peacetime privileges and support. Yet in reality, high hopes quickly degenerated into post-war disillusionment, many husbands unable or unwilling to secure stable civilian employment after the war. Standing on the banks of a

³ "Mrs. __, Bell Island, to Sir", 18 April 1941, PRC #35, Box 115, File 25, PANL.

wartime economy which had offered Newfoundlanders one of the most lucrative and productive periods in the colony's history, servicewives could not help but feel excluded and misused. They had risked everything for a hazy conception of patriotism and valor which retained little validity once the immediate crisis had passed. As they floundered to find their bearings in the absence of military allowances and government support, they felt the constant tow of influences outside their control. For as in wartime, the bounds of their dependency never loosened from their moorings. The turbulent years of war had temporarily altered the complexion of that dependency, but the attachments remained secure. For a brief moment, however, the tangle of lines was tested and exposed, revealing both the inherent complexity and strength of the system.

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