

A CAUSE WORTH FIGHTING FOR:
Chinese Canadians Debate Their Participation in the Second World War

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses the collective oral histories of the Chinese Canadian veterans, sixty years after their service in the Second World War, to explore the little-known debates that ensued in the Vancouver and Victoria Chinese Canadian communities when the men were called up in 1944 for compulsory military service. These debates uncover how Chinese Canadians understood their position in the community and the relationship that they saw existing between military service and citizenship.

When Canada entered the Second World War on 10 September 1939, tens of thousands of white Canadians enlisted for military duty, while "Orientals" were barred from serving. As military service had long been seen as the ultimate test of citizenship, the government anticipated that disenfranchised people who served Canada during the war would return home and make claims for equality and for all the privileges of citizenship, including the right to vote. Thus, by denying them the opportunity to serve, the government would save itself the humiliating task of defending its undemocratic position.

This all changed in August 1944 when Pacific Command called up the Chinese in British Columbia under the National Resources Mobilization Act. The British War Office had pressured Ottawa to recruit Chinese Canadians for employment in Special Operations Executive (SOE) throughout Southeast Asia in territories under Japanese control. This was the opportunity that many Chinese Canadians had been anxiously waiting for; for others, however, compulsory military service was resented.

When the 1944 directive came down from Ottawa for the Chinese community to mobilize, hundreds assembled in both Vancouver and Victoria to discuss whether they should accept or reject the call to compulsory military service. Although the Chinese population in BC was relatively small, there was, in fact, a considerable clash of opinions. Ultimately, it was agreed that their objective should be to obtain full citizenship rights by serving in the armed forces. Exploring the 1944 conscription debates uncovers valuable insights into reasons both for and against military wartime service, peoples' loyalties, as well as how they saw citizenship, community, and how they identified themselves. The military service of Chinese Canadians would prove their worthiness and would secure the government's complete support for their goal, as well as the collective granting of full citizenship rights to all Asian Canadians, regardless of whether or not they fought in the Second World War. These vanguards understood that military service would, ultimately, bring about equality.

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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

When the Second World War began in September 1939, tens of thousands of Canadians volunteered for the war effort, but Orientals¹ were barred from serving in the armed forces. The Chinese, in particular, had long been regarded as socially inferior to white Canadians and their service in the military was rejected by all levels of the Canadian government. This predisposition was based on the belief that if Chinese Canadians performed the duties of citizens in the Canadian armed forces, it would be almost impossible to deny them the vote.² Politically disenfranchised and labeled 'aliens', legal obstacles were set-up to exclude them from military service. According to the National Selective Service (NSS) Regulations, the official reason that the Chinese were barred from serving was because they were not of "pure European descent". Nonetheless, racial restrictions did not prevent numerous young Canadian-born and Canadian-raised ethnic Chinese from enlisting for war service. They wanted the opportunity to prove their allegiance by serving Canada — "their home and native land" — as this paper will show.

As the war continued and, eventually, as manpower shortages became a serious concern, restrictions were reluctantly loosened. The turning point was in August 1944, when the army's Pacific Command³ called up Chinese registered in British Columbia. This reversal was based on pressure from across the Atlantic.

Great Britain needed British Subjects who could blend into the populations of Japanese-occupied British territories in Southeast Asia, behind enemy lines. Chinese Canadians⁴ were ideal candidates for the job because most Southeast Asian countries had

¹ By definition, the word "Oriental" is Eurocentric, referring to things east of Europe. Formerly, Oriental was the common term used to classify Chinese, Japanese, and East Indians together. The common, more accurate term is now "Asian," which is more accurate, less Eurocentric, and less loaded with connotations. I have chosen to use the word appropriate to the time periods described.

² Attorney-General Gordon Wismer told Colonel L.R. LaFlèche, the Associate Deputy Minister of National War Services, that "... if these men are called upon to perform the duties of citizens and bear arms for Canada, it will be impossible to resist the argument that they are entitled to the franchise." (G.S. Wismer to Col. L.R. LaFlèche, 8 October 1940.) He also said to Defence Minister J.L. Ralston that the Oriental vote might eventually lead to Orientals in the Parliament. (Wismer to J.L. Ralston, 23 September 1940, in NAC, RG 25 G1, File 263-38.)

³ Pacific Command included British Columbia, Alberta, the Yukon, and adjacent parts of the Northwest Territories. This Command was formed at the time the Special Committee on Orientals in British Columbia was appointed by the Cabinet War Committee (CWC) in October 1940 to investigate the Chinese and Japanese in that province.

⁴ Dan Lee, a Chinese Canadian veteran from the Second World War, explained to me that the term "Chinese Canadian" was not used to describe the Chinese in Canada until they had attained Canadian citizenship, after the Second World War. For the sake of simplicity, I will utilize it, along with other terms, to describe the Chinese in Canada both before and after the war. (Lee, Daniel. Interview with Author, 7 March 2005.)

Chinese residents. This change of heart angered many Chinese Canadians, young and old, male and female. For so long they had been treated as pariahs, then suddenly, after years of discrimination and mistreatment, they were considered valued British Subjects and were conscripted. The 1944 summons to Chinese-Canadian men for active, military service duty provoked debates within the Chinese populations of Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia where the largest Chinese populations resided. While one might expect consensus in a relatively small group of about 11,000⁵ people, there was, in fact, a clash of opinions that reflected the hard experiences and frustrated hopes of the Chinese in Canada.

This disenfranchised group passionately debated the reasons for and against its participation: Why should they fight and possibly die for a country that would not recognize them as full citizens? Should enlistment be used to prove that they were deserving of the vote and citizenship? Would they gain equality and greater rights for their military service as some Japanese had done in the First World War?⁶ Should their service precede or follow the franchise? Were there other reasons to consider? After returning home with their record of military service, veterans did petition the government for the franchise and demanded equal social, economic, and political rights for themselves and their communities, as well as for other minorities in Canada. Fortunately, many of these Chinese Canadian veterans are still alive to see their service finally acknowledged and celebrated by the government of Canada.⁷

Until quite recently, few people realized that at the time of the Second World War, Canada's 'democratic' government handicapped some racial minorities while simultaneously

⁵ According to the Census of Canada 1941, the total Chinese Canadian population was 18,619, with 7,880 in Metropolitan Vancouver (42.3%), 3,435 in Metropolitan Victoria (18.4%) and the remainder comprising 7,304 (39.3%) in New Westminster, Nanaimo, Kamloops, Duncan City, Port Alberni, Vernon, Nelson, and various other places. Only cities with 100 Chinese residents or more were recorded.

⁶ "The franchise argument was based on precedent. During the First World War, at least one hundred and sixty-six Japanese (most of whom were not Canadian-born) managed, with difficulty, to enlist in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. After returning to British Columbia, the survivors persevered in a campaign for the right to vote. In 1931, by a one-vote margin, the provincial legislature enfranchised approximately eighty Japanese veterans who still lived in the province. (Roy, Patricia E. *The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want: Her Chinese and Japanese Citizens*, The Canadian Historical Review, LIX, 3, 1978, p. 343.)

Conversely, Chinese Canadians veterans from the First World War also sought to obtain the franchise, but they were unsuccessful. Author Marjorie Wong records that, "As early as 1919 over 500 Chinese Canadians in Victoria petitioned the federal government with respect to the franchise." This group of 500 included veterans and others from the Chinese community. (Wong, Marjorie. *The Dragon and the Maple Leaf*. Toronto: Pirie Publishing, 1994, p. 7.)

⁷ Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) has partnered with the Chinese Canadian Military Museum of Vancouver to video-interview the surviving Chinese Canadian veterans for posterity and for educational purposes. This project is one of the VAC's initiatives for 2005, the *Year of the Veteran*.

fighting the war against Fascism — a blatant contradiction in the Allied cause.⁸ Even fewer people are aware that Chinese Canadians served in all services and theatres during the Second World War, and that their war service provided them with the moral argument for an enlargement in Canadian human rights and immigration policies. Eventually, these changes made possible Canada's transformation from a once predominantly British and French nation into today's multicultural mosaic.⁹

This paper explores the debates in the Chinese Canadian communities of Vancouver and Victoria regarding the men's 1944 conscription into the Second World War. Through oral interviews with many of the remaining Chinese Canadian veterans, I explore their diverse opinions on conscription at the time and find out what was at stake: What were their feelings about Canada, China, and the war? How did they understand patriotic obligation, their social rights and responsibilities as a hybrid community of both Chinese and Canadian culture? Did they see matters strategically, with enlistment as part of a conscious plan to show that they were deserving of full citizenship? How did their families feel about their wartime service? What were the barriers that they had to overcome in order to be accepted by both the Canadian Armed Forces and by white Canadian society? From exclusion to inclusion, Chinese Canadians ultimately agreed that their objective should be to obtain full citizenship rights, and that military service would prove their worthiness and secure the government's complete support for their goal.

To set the stage for the debates, chronologically, I weave together significant historical dates and events that lead up to the federal government's 1944 compulsory call-up of Chinese Canadians. After this brief Introduction, Chapter Two follows with a review of Canada's role in the war, both at home and abroad, exploring how the Mackenzie King government resolved the issue of conscription. Chapter Three surveys the major discriminatory limitations on the Chinese living in Canada, from their first settlement up until their conscription, and shows how the war with Japan transformed white attitudes of toward the Chinese. Chapter Four covers the evolution of the Chinese communities' debates through recollections of some of the Chinese Canadian veterans from the Second World War. This chapter looks at the veterans' formative years growing up in Canada, their Chinese cultural influences, how discrimination affected them, and their views on the

⁸ British Columbia's provincial government was most culpable and the federal government was encouraged to take discriminatory measures by B.C. politicians, who supplied the initiative and the example.

⁹ Today, Canada represents a truly multicultural mosaic, a country where different cultural groups and values are not only celebrated, but have become part of our larger Canadian culture and identity. This has been the official policy of Canada since 1971. (Statistics Canada. *Canada's Ethnocultural Portrait: The Changing Mosaic*. 14 June 2005.

<<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/etoimm/contents.cfm>>)

conflicting policies regarding their enlistment. This framework will allow a deeper understanding of the circumstances that shaped their values and beliefs, in order to help us understand their loyalties, motives, and the evolution of the debates. The final chapter ties together

Although sixty years have passed since the end of the Second World War, the memories of these veterans are amazingly clear. This is not to say that these veterans have been able to retain their memories perfectly or that their perceptions have not been altered with the passing of time or by outside influences, but these debates took place at a pivotal time in their lives — in their late teens and early twenties — when they were old enough to make informed decisions. To ensure accuracy, their stories are compared with each other for discrepancies and verified against other sources. Young Chinese Canadians never forgot the big debates in their communities that allowed them to experiences of military service, training overseas, or being treated as equals to their white counterparts — all first-time experiences. These events were where their futures started and how doors opened for them as individuals and as Chinese Canadians.

To appropriately capture the 'mood' the era, I have used antiquated terminology: Oriental instead of Asian, Native Indian *versus* of First Nations People, East Indian as opposed to Indo Canadian, and old names for former colonies — i.e. Malaya (Malaysia), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Indochina (Vietnam), and others.

Although these community debates provide only a 'snapshot' of the feelings that these veterans recall, their stories will provide an understanding of how they conceived of their identities and how military service helped to liberate and transform them individually and collectively. This investigation will significantly enrich our understanding of the complicated relationship between rights, duties, obligations, and responsibilities in civil society. It will also provide insight into multiculturalism's emergence and racism's decline. This study will help to reclaim a largely uncharted part of Canadian history to mark the beginning of major changes in Canadian post-war social policy and to record voices unheard for future generations.

Chapter 2 CANADA'S WAR

Prime Minister Mackenzie King led Canada throughout the Second World War. At the outset, Canada was ill-prepared with a regular army of only 5000 and a militia of 46,251, but within the first month of the war, the standing army's ranks swelled to 70,000.¹⁰ Canadian manpower policies, and the views of politicians and the public upon it, were deeply affected by the course of the war abroad. Successive military and political crises shaped the policies of conscription.

In 1939, fighting a limited war seemed possible.¹¹ At the onset, enlistment was voluntary and only those volunteering for active service were sent abroad.¹² The first of several crises which changed the situation were the Allied disasters in Europe in the spring and early summer of 1940. The collapse of France and the Dunkirk evacuation of the British Army led both the King's government and the Opposition parties in Canada to the conclusion that the scale of Canada's contributions would have to increase — that is, universal military service for home defence was now necessary.

King faced an agonizing dilemma: although he had promised not to impose conscription¹³ in the 1940 election¹⁴, he needed to mobilize the nation for an all-out war. His reputed political dictum "Not necessarily conscription, but conscription if necessary"¹⁵ was intended to reassure the country that military conscripts would be employed in home defence only. Many people rightly suspected that this was just the first step towards full conscription for overseas service. The Prime Minister and his colleagues formulated the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA), enacted on 21 June 1940, which gave the government sweeping powers just short of conscription for overseas service. The effect of

¹⁰ By the end of the war, Canada had become a significant military power, with the third largest navy, the fourth largest air force, and an army of six divisions. (Byers, Daniel. "Mobilizing Canada: The National Resources Mobilization Act, the Department of National Defence, and Compulsory Military Service in Canada, 1940-1945," in *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, New Series, Vol. 7, 1996, p. 78.)

¹¹ Canadian politicians planned for a limited war with the Nation's primary contribution being the British Commonwealth Air Training Program (BCATP).

¹² "During the First World War, the issue of conscription had caused a bitter division in the country and in the Liberal Party. King hoped to avoid another confrontation on this question, so even before the Second World War began, the Liberals and Conservatives had agreed to avoid conscription for overseas service." ("Mackenzie King and the Second World War," *The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King*. National Archives of Canada. 30 June 2005. <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/king/053201/053201130207_e.html>)

¹³ Conscription can generally be defined as forced enrolment of persons for military service.

¹⁴ This promise largely contributed to the Liberals' re-election in March 1940, their second consecutive majority government and King's third term as Prime Minister.

¹⁵ This phrase was suggested by a reporter in an interview; it did not originate with King.

this statute was to legalize compulsory service at home, while still maintaining the position that no Canadian could be compelled to serve abroad. With that promise made, the Prime Minister convinced his cabinet and Parliament to take measured preparatory steps toward National Wartime Service.¹⁶

From September 1940 onwards, under the new law, men were being called up for home defence. Many of these men chose to "go active: and volunteer for general service; throughout the war men called up under NRMA volunteered in this manner for the Army, either on receiving their call-up orders or after a period of service. By the spring of 1941, however, some difficulty was encountered in obtaining the necessary numbers of men. In April, Ministers from the three services broadcasted their manpower needs. As recruiting for the army became an urgent matter, special publicity tactics were constantly being devised to encourage men to enlist. This national campaign to recruit volunteers was also King's way of avoiding the conscription issue. Although these measures were adequately effective, they were only achieved by steadily widening the field of call-up under the NRMA.

The second of the war crises, which fundamentally affected manpower policy, began in December 1941 with the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan. However, even before Japan entered the war, the leadership of the Canadian Opposition had changed its policy on conscription. At the same time, the Ministers within King's Cabinet who, unlike the Prime Minister, had some disposition towards overseas conscription and after much consideration, King came to the conclusion that the solution for the immediate problem was a national plebiscite in which the country might release the government from its commitment against compulsory service overseas. The manpower question entered a new phase.

By April 1942, when the Army and the Conservative Party put pressure on the Liberal government to provide additional infantry reinforcements for the war in Europe, a national plebiscite was implemented. When votes were counted on then question "Are you in favour of releasing the government from any obligation arising out of any past commitment restricting the methods of raising men for military service?", it showed that the plebiscite had backfired and left the country divided. Although the majority of Canadians approved of compulsory overseas service, French-speaking Quebecois, Canadian farmers, and disenfranchised minorities strongly opposed it.¹⁷ Canada was only a small nation with 11

¹⁶ The Act required that all men and women register for essential war-related work, so that a call-up list could be created.

¹⁷ Conscription threatened national unity with 72.9% of Quebec voting against it and overwhelming support elsewhere. (Stacey, C.P. "Manpower and Conscription," *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945*. Ottawa, ON: Queen's Printer, 1970, p. 400.)

million inhabitants¹⁸ — people began to wonder how many more men the government intended to send overseas. When the government proceeded to follow up the result of the plebiscite by introducing *Bill 80* — intended to remove from the NRMA the prohibition against compelling men to serve overseas — the Prime Minister had difficulties with both sides of his Cabinet.¹⁹ The conscription question effectively divided the country.

After the referendum crisis of 1942, there was a period of quiet. The new powers that had been granted to the government were largely held in reserve for the time being; the final crisis over conscription had, as it turned out, been merely postponed. The issues of providing an adequate pool of "reinforcements"²⁰ for the fighting formation and the "rates of wastage"²¹ were urgent and fundamental, yet difficult for army planners to calculate prior to Canadian soldiers entering their first protracted campaign. However, after losses in the Italy Campaign in July 1943, the Prime Minister could no longer avoid the army's need for replacements. King's government was anxiously looking for new, innovative ways to find more infantry recruits.

Several proposals were suggested to the Cabinet to induce NRMA men to "go active". Adjutant General Letson — as chronicled in *Arms, Men and Governments* — proposed "to ship some of the battalions in Canada, now composed largely of NRMA men, overseas as units and use them as battalions in reserve or as reinforcements."²² Resistance to "going active" had long been familiar to army officers who had been pressuring conscripts to volunteer. The Prime Minister himself suggested that consideration be given to increasing the financial incentives, such as "fighting pay" for general duty infantrymen in operation employment. Despite all efforts to counteract shortages, there were still chronic deficiencies.²³ Following in accordance with the general trend of enlistment, the numbers of NRMA soldiers converting to general service continued to decline. In the month of December

¹⁸ According to government census records mid-1939, Great Britain had a population of 41.5 million and the United States 131 million. Canada's population was very small in comparison.

¹⁹ There is a long list of reasons why there was little agreement amongst the Cabinet members: some disapproved of and were hostile to the amendment; others argued that war industry and production took priority over a large army; still, some disputed changed to "compassionate" or "agricultural" leaves. For a more detailed examination of the disagreements, please consult pp. 404-414 in Stacey's, *Arms, Men and Governments*.

²⁰ "Reinforcements" is another word for replacing of casualties.

²¹ Nevertheless, from August 1940 onward, the Canadian army overseas estimated its rates of wastage to be a slightly higher figure than those accepted for the British forces, as there was a time lag involved in shipping men from Canada.

²² Stacey, C.P. "Manpower and Conscription," *Arms, Men and Governments*, pp. 428-9.

²³ Colonel J.L. Ralston, King's Minister of Defence, complained of chronic deficiencies in the infantry. (Stacey, p. 429.)

1943, only 295 NRMA soldiers converted.²⁴ Then, after the Normandy Invasion of June 1944, when casualty rates proved to be far higher than anticipated, the military staff and the Cabinet War Committee insisted that the Prime Minister should now send NRMA men to the battlefronts. This produced further conflict within and between the political parties.

Mackenzie King had long opposed conscription for active duty. King's arguments, as noted by C.P. Stacey, included "... the threat to national unity, involving even a danger of civil conflict; and the political consequences of the Liberal Party ... [and] that conscription in Canada might ruin the prospect for a world organization which was to maintain peace ..."²⁵ His Cabinet was split into two camps: one wing that supported voluntary enlistment and the other wing that was pro-conscription. Stacey states that during the crisis, King sought the advice of Churchill on the necessity and risks of raising the overseas conscription issue at this stage of the war. On 27 October 1944, Churchill reported that his Chiefs of Staff advised him that the war in Europe could go on until the summer of 1945 and that "it must be anticipated that the Canadian Army will be engaged in large scale operations for the final defeat of Germany ...".²⁶ King's diary logs his reaction as "greatly surprised that Churchill had not indicated his desire to meet the situation,"²⁷ however, he was still unconvinced that Canada's NRMA men should not be ordered overseas.

On 20 November 1944, some senior officers under General Pearkes — area Commander of Pacific Command (Vancouver) — met members of the press at a Command conference at Vancouver. According to Stacey, the senior officers boldly stated that "They are waiting for the government to give the order and they are ready to obey" and "N.R.M.A. soldiers were waiting to be ordered overseas."²⁸ That evening in the news, King listened to the senior officers' frank comments and gauged their opinion. Even National Defence Headquarters, as King shortly discovered, had decided that the time had come to express a strong opinion. General Andrew McNaughton, former Commander in Chief of the First Canadian Army, proposed that "a limited number of men be taken and trained to meet the situation."²⁹ The Prime Minister carefully considered McNaughton's suggestion, and by 21 November the Prime Minister determined that overseas conscription was now a necessity. He called an emergency Cabinet meeting on the evening of 22 November and announced

²⁴ Stacey, p. 429.

²⁵ Stacey, p. 447.

²⁶ Stacey, p. 450.

²⁷ King, William Lyon Mackenzie. *The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King*. National Archives of Canada. 30 June 2005. < <http://king.collectionscanada.ca/EN/PageView.asp> > p. 7 (1059).

²⁸ Stacey, p. 471.

²⁹ Stacey, p. 473.

that he would be using conscripts as reinforcements. The next afternoon, King read the *Order in Council*, which authorized and directed the Minister of National Defence to dispatch forces to the United Kingdom and to operational theatres. As recorded in *Arms, Men and Governments*:

"... such personnel, in such numbers as may be approved by the Governor in Council (the number hereby approved being sixteen thousand, who are serving by reason of their having been called out for training, service or duty pursuant to the provisions of the National Resources Mobilization Act, 1940 ... [placing] all such personnel on active service beyond Canada for the defence thereof ..."³⁰

The news that 16,000 NRMA soldiers would be sent overseas produced alarming repercussions in British Columbia.

This news also sparked passionate debates amongst various minority groups who had experienced discrimination by the federal government. Although the Chinese had experienced the harshest immigration restrictions, it was doubly-ironic that not only were they summoned by the government to fight overseas for Canada, but Chinese Canadians were also conscripted for overseas duty more than three months before the national compulsory call-up.³¹ For years, the Canadian government and the official opposition had been ambivalent about the participation of Chinese Canadians in the Armed Forces. Then in 'one fell swoop', the British resolved the Canadian government's confusion by making the decision for it.

Finally, a decision had been made to conscript Chinese Canadians for overseas service. This was great news for those young Chinese Canadians who wanted to prove their loyalty to Canada. For others, however, it was an outrage to be ordered to risk dying for a country that would not even recognize them as full citizens. To determine whether the government's demand was fair or unjust, and to understand the complexity of being Chinese in Canada at that time, it is necessary to review some of the anti-Chinese laws and tragic experiences that circumscribed their existence and affected their attitudes. Only then can their mixed feelings of acceptance, rejection, and outrage be fully appreciated.

³⁰ Stacey, p. 474.

³¹ Ottawa advised Pacific Command on 24 March 1944 that the British government was setting up a special training school in that command to be operated by British Security Coordination, an agency of the War Office. Chinese Canadians received the call-up by Pacific Command in mid-August 1944. (Pearkes to Gibson, "The Disposal of Men of Chinese Racial Origin called up for Service under NRMA," DHH 322.009, D478.)

Chapter 3 **BOUND BY INJUSTICE**

While Chinese railway workers contributed to the economic development of Canada³², they endured incredible hardships. From the time of the Gold Rush up until the Second World War, the Chinese had confronted discriminatory restrictions set by those with political power. At the same time, many Chinese bore the pain of separation from their families and culture in China. These circumstances shaped their attitudes, as well as their ability to cope and persevere. An examination of many oppressive, anti-Chinese laws and some critical historic events will provide insight into the struggles, determination, and perspectives of the Chinese in Canada.

Prior to the discovery of gold in British Columbia in the late 1850s, there were few Chinese immigrants in Canada. Then, the 1858 Gold Rush brought thousands of Chinese north to Victoria, from California and overseas.³³ The sudden influx set off anti-Chinese agitation by whites. After the alluvial (or placer) gold petered out, Chinese workers were employed as labourers for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). Although their low-paid, backbreaking labour was the basis of linking British Columbia to the prairies, BC's white manual workers³⁴ considered the Chinese an economic threat and were eager to get rid of them.³⁵ Animosity toward the Chinese progressively intensified and, in time, the federal government yielded to pressure from British Columbia by enacting anti-Chinese legislation.

The history of racial discrimination in British Columbia can be traced back to the province's beginnings. When it entered Confederation in 1871, people of British origin accounted for 29.6 *per cent* of residents, while 61.7 *per cent* of the province's population

³² When the colony of British Columbia agreed to join Confederation in 1871, one of the conditions was that the Dominion government would build a railway linking BC with Eastern Canada within ten years. Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first Prime Minister, wanted to reduce costs by employing Chinese to build the railway. Notably, he said "No Chinese, no railway"; more precisely, he declared "Either you must have this labour or you cannot have the railway." (Ward, Peter. *A White Man's Province: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978, p. 24.)

³³ Victoria was the first major Canadian Pacific port of entry, only to be eclipsed by Vancouver in 1887.

³⁴ Employers preferred Chinese workers.

³⁵ Although the white majority agreed that the Chinese were socially inferior, it was divided when it came to economic advantage. To build the railway and work the mines, white capitalists wanted cheap Chinese labour. Chinese middlemen played a significant role that was simultaneously self-defeating: setting up Chinese immigrants in jobs that undercut white workers created animosity, prejudice, and marginalization of the Chinese in the host societies. In the end, middlemen suffered equally from these same prejudices — they, too, became outcasts. White capitalists removed themselves from any business connection to the Chinese by hiring Chinese middlemen to be responsible for organizing the cheap Chinese labour. In the end, it was only the Chinese who were viewed as the enemy, not the capitalist employers.

was Aboriginal or Chinese.³⁶ In an attempt to create *their* "white outpost" of Empire, the municipal and provincial governments of British Columbia selectively discriminated among residents, based on race.³⁷ In 1872, the BC Legislature amended the *Qualification and Registration of Voters Act* to bar the Chinese from voting.³⁸ Later, after the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1885, Canada's first anti-Chinese immigration laws were introduced: every person of Chinese ancestry was required to pay a head tax to enter the country.³⁹ A few years later, in 1887, disgruntled, unemployed white workers started a riot in Coal Harbour against several hundred Chinese, who undercut their wages by half. It was not until 1907, while Vancouver was experiencing an economic slump, that the next major assault on the Chinese occurred. A rally to protest Oriental Immigration ended with angry mobs vandalizing and looting buildings in Chinatown and neighbouring Little Tokyo.⁴⁰ White British Columbians were influenced by a combination of their own ignorance of Orientals, a belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority, misconceptions of the Oriental character, rumour of economic threat, fallacies, and white nativism transplanted from California and beyond — all of which convinced the Chinese that they were not welcome.

In the summer of 1914, when Great Britain's government declared war on Germany and Austria on behalf of the British Empire, some Canadian-born and naturalized Chinese Canadians were willing to fight to prove their loyalty to Canada, regardless of the \$500 discriminatory Head Tax. In 1917, the *Military Service Act* employed conscription, however,

³⁶ These figures are approximate because the Native Indians were estimated rather than enumerated. (Ward, p. 27.)

³⁷ Discrimination against the Chinese was a common feature in many countries that had a white majority. For example, Chinese in the United States and Australia experienced similar anti-Chinese legislation as their counterparts in Canada, whether it was disenfranchisement or exclusion.

³⁸ In British Columbia, Aboriginals, people of Chinese and Japanese origin, and "Hindus" — a description applied to anyone from the Indian subcontinent, regardless of whether their religious affiliation was Hindu, Muslim, or any other — were all disenfranchised. Saskatchewan also disenfranchised people of Chinese origin, but due to the small Oriental population there far fewer were affected than in British Columbia.

³⁹ In 1885, the Chinese Immigration Act or Head Tax was legislated, with an initial charge of \$50 per Chinese person; this increased to \$100 in 1900 and further increased to \$500 from 1903 until 1923, when another restrictive law replaced this tax.

For sake of comparison and relative value of Canadian currency, properties in Strathcona could be purchased for \$100 in the early 1900s. (Nicolls, J.P. *Real Estate Values in Vancouver: A Reminiscence*. City of Vancouver Archives, 1954, p. 3.)

⁴⁰ "When news of the Vancouver riots reached Ottawa, Governor-General Earl Grey was furious and requested a report on the riots. He later appointed W.L. Mackenzie King as a commissioner to go to British Columbia and investigated the losses sustained by the Chinese. After his inquiry, King recommended compensation for them totaling \$26,900 ... The compensation was later paid by the federal government." (Lai, David C.Y. *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988, p. 84; Canada, *Report on Losses Sustained by the Chinese Population of Vancouver B.C. on the Occasion of the Riots in that City in September, 1907*. Royal Commission: W.L. Mackenzie King Sessional Papers, in NAC, No. 74f, 1908, p. 18.)

this did not apply to the Chinese. As author Marjorie Wong explains, recruiting officers in "British Columbia refused all such recruits and it was necessary for them to travel outside of their home province to enlist."⁴¹ Records are sketchy, but at least one platoon of sixty men in the 52nd [New Ontario] Battalion was predominantly Chinese Canadian.⁴² In total, no more than three hundred Chinese Canadians enlisted in the Canadian Army for the First World War.

Also in 1917, the *Wartime Elections Act* stipulated that only those who qualified for provincial franchise could vote in federal elections. Since the Chinese could not vote in provincial elections in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, they were, in effect, disenfranchised in federal elections. Despite their wartime service, the government did not grant Chinese veterans the franchise as it had done for Japanese First World War veterans.

Legal restrictions on the Chinese were unremitting. Shortly after the Great War, the new *Dominion Elections Act of 1920* was passed, which stated that those provincially disenfranchised for "reasons of race" would also be excluded from the federal franchise.⁴³ This was amended in 1929 to include a clause that required all provincial voters to be British Subjects⁴⁴ — this even excluded Chinese born in Canada, as they were considered 'aliens', not British Subjects.⁴⁵ These laws were in addition to the already-restrictive head tax, although its effectiveness was under review — the monetary deterrent was not curtailing Chinese immigration into British Columbia, as hoped; in fact, the number entering the province was on the rise.⁴⁶ Consequently, in 1923, all capitation taxes were suspended and

⁴¹ Recruiters in Alberta and Ontario accepted Chinese into the Canadian Army. (Wong, p. 3.)

⁴² This group fought at Ypres in 1917, as communicated to James Morton by General George Pearkes. (Morton, James. *In the Sea of Sterile Mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia*. Vancouver: J.J. Douglas Ltd., 1977, p. 229.)

⁴³ Statutes of Canada 1923, Vol. I and II, c. 46.

⁴⁴ Statutes of Canada 1923, Vol. I and II, c. 40.

⁴⁵ As late as 5 August 1944, the Honourable Mr. Justice A.M. Manson — Chairman of the Vancouver Mobilization Board and sympathetic towards Chinese Canadian enrollment — questioned use of the word 'alien' because "about 60% of the men who are shown as aliens on their registration cards are not aliens at all." (Manson to Assistant Director, Mobilization, in NAC, RG 27, Vol. 997, File 2-114, pt. 5.)

⁴⁶ Under the *Chinese Immigration Act of 1923*, only four classes of immigrants were allowed to enter Canada: (a) merchants, (b) university students granted entry for the period of their degree program, (c) native-born Chinese returning after several years of education in China, and (d) diplomatic personnel of the Chinese government. Terms were carefully defined: "Merchant" excluded operators of laundries, restaurants, retail produce dealers, and the like; "Students" were required to show proof of registration at a university. Some Chinese had entered Canada by purchasing real or forged birth certificates of Chinese Canadian children, bought and sold in Hong Kong. These children carrying false identity papers were referred to as "Paper Sons." Others claimed (and had documents to prove) that they were relatives of those Chinese who qualified as exempt. The Act was intentionally and legally designed to prevent all of these categories from meeting the qualifications, whose interpretation was left to the discretion of immigration officers, rather than the statute. (Roy, p. 32.)

replaced with the *Chinese Immigration Act*, better known as the *Chinese Exclusion Act*, which remained in effect throughout the Second World War. This Act brought about near-total restriction on Chinese immigration to Canada and many separated families were never reunited. Nevertheless, the provincial government of British Columbia and municipalities continued with their legislative restrictions on the Chinese.

There were other anti-Chinese laws enacted by every level of government in BC: Chinese were prohibited from living outside of Chinatown, denied government employment, barred from working in the professions, banned from city-owned public swimming pools,⁴⁷ relegated to sitting in Chinese-only sections in movie theatres, and so on.⁴⁸ With few Chinese women of childbearing-age in Canada and an economic depression in North America, the Chinese population slowly declined and Chinatowns began to wither away.⁴⁹ As Jean Barman notes, "By 1931 just twenty-seven thousand British Columbians, totalling under 4 *per cent* of the population, were Chinese by ethnic origin."⁵⁰ The dwindling Chinese population, to some extent, eased the fears of the dominant white society. However, anti-Chinese regulations remained in force and hardships in Canada were compounded by tragic, international events.

As time passed, life became even more challenging for the overseas Chinese. While the *Exclusion Act* eased anti-Chinese agitation, it bound most Chinese men to a lonely, miserable existence. Meanwhile, in China, factionalism within the *Guomindang* Nationalist Party created rifts within the overseas Chinese communities, along political lines.⁵¹ Then in

⁴⁷ The Crystal Swimming Pool had separate hours for Orientals and European Canadians. Originally located on Beach Avenue, it was acquired by the Vancouver Parks Board from a private club in 1940, renovated and reopened in 1941. In November 1945, the Parks Board was petitioned by the Vancouver School Board for segregation and, ultimately, resolved to no longer segregate the public on the basis of "race, colour or creed." The Crystal Pool was later demolished in 1975. (E-mail correspondence with Terri Clarke, Communication Coordinator of the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 2 August 2005.)

⁴⁸ There were endless restrictions on the Chinese in Canada, extensively listed in the following books: Peter Ward's *White Canada Forever*, James Morton's *In the Sea of Sterile Mountains*, Wickberg *et al. From China to Canada*, David Lai's *Chinatowns*, Kay Anderson's *Vancouver's Chinatown*, and Patricia Roy's books, to name a few sources.

⁴⁹ In those days, most Chinese that immigrated to Canada were men. Thus, with the Act in place, much of the Chinese population remained a "bachelor society."

⁵⁰ Barman, Jean. *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* - Revised Edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 233; Statistics Canada. *Consensus of Canada, 1881-1981*.

⁵¹ Until 1927 the *Guomindang* Nationalist party was split between leftists, who supported cooperation with Communists, and rightists, who opposed it. In places dominated by radicals, relations between the GMD and local elites were characterized by mutual hostility, culminating in campaigns against local elite. After 1927 factions, no longer based on their approach to Communism, became a main component of politics at all levels. Until 1937, the Jiangsu GMD remained the private preserve of the central party headquarters. Factionalism resulted in rapid personnel changes and diminished power. The GMD became a meek, quiet and unassertive adjunct of the government, unable to mobilize people and resources.

September 1931, Japanese troops seized China's industrialized province of Manchuria.⁵² Chinese Canadians closely followed the political developments in Asia, concerned about their relatives' well-being. In 1937, the Japanese invaded the rest of China; by 1938, Japan controlled a large part of eastern China.⁵³ Although the Japanese government justified expansionism on the pretext of population pressure and Japan's need for raw materials, few had any illusions about Japan's imperialist and economic designs on China.⁵⁴ This invasion was the first step on the path leading to the Second World War in the Pacific Ocean.⁵⁵

The war in China promoted solidarity within the Chinese Canadian communities and every effort was devoted to helping the mother country. In 2004, Second World War veteran Roy Mah recalled "The Chinese community — not just in Vancouver, but throughout Canada in Victoria, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal ... everywhere there was a Chinese community — rallied to the support of the Chinese war effort to resist the Japanese aggression."⁵⁶ The local Chinese formed alliance networks — like Mah's *Chinese Youth Association of Victoria* — to protest against shipments of scrap metal to Japan and urge the boycotting of Japanese goods.⁵⁷ The Japanese invasion of China provided an impetus to form many Chinese community-wide [anti-Japanese · united-Chinese · national-salvation] war relief associations. For the course of the war, between 1937 and 1945, overseas Chinese responded by establishing fund drives for almost every military purpose.⁵⁸ Altogether, the Chinese Canadian communities' contributions went well beyond providing manpower.

Overseas Chinese communities in the United States and Australia had comparable experiences. Munson Kwok and Suellen Cheng render the American experience in *Duty & Honour*, "Activities ranged from fundraisers and Chinese bond drives, to shipping supplies,

⁵² Japan's path of aggression began when it forcibly encroached on Korea. By 1907, Korea was completely under Japanese control — its annexation in August 1910 was simply a formality. Korea became Japan's stepping stone to the Asian mainland, where it subsequently targeted Manchuria.

⁵³ Unfortunately, the Nationalist (or *Guomindang*) government was more preoccupied with anti-Communist extermination campaigns than with resisting the Japanese invaders and protecting their people. It was not until 1937 that the Nationalist formed a united front with the Communists. By this time, it was too late to block the Japanese.

⁵⁴ With every aggression, the rationale for Japan was the removal of European colonialism and the creation of the *Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere* under Japanese leadership.

⁵⁵ Japan's invasion of China occurred long before the Second World War started in Europe.

⁵⁶ Interview with Roy Mah, 15 November 2004, Vancouver.

⁵⁷ Roy Mah was one of the founding members of the Chinese Youth Association of Victoria. During this time period, Roy sought to block shipments of scrap metal [for making weapons] to Japan and to have the government enforce sanctions on imported Japanese goods. (Interview with Roy Mah, 15 November 2004, Vancouver.)

⁵⁸ Money was raised for hospital beds, to pay for labour, to equip field clinics and provide clinical care, for Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalists.

to rolling bandages, to even protesting the shipment of iron to Japan."⁵⁹ Fundraising for the war effort was also a feature of many Chinese Australian communities. Regarding Chinese Australians, Morag Loh and Judith Winternitz describe some of the contributions made in *Dinky-Di*: "raising money, making gifts for troops, holding functions to boost morale, working as plane spotters ... some were quite experienced at organizing support services, having since 1937 raised funds to help China resist the Japanese invasion."⁶⁰ The responses and experiences of many overseas Chinese communities were very similar to each other.

Support of the anti-Japanese war effort also created opportunities to collaborate with white Canadians across the country. Besides participating in the Red Cross campaigns and other service work, Chinese Canadians in BC also contributed \$5 million to Canada's Victory Loan Drive — more, per capita, than any other group in Canada, according to Ed Wickberg's research.⁶¹ As terrible as the Sino-Japanese War was, it did have the benefit of unifying the Chinese Canadian communities, at least temporarily. It also helped to win sympathy among other Canadians for China and for Chinese Canadians.⁶²

White British Columbians followed the Sino-Japanese War with interest and generally took the side of China. Sympathy for China led to cooperation between white British Columbians and local Chinese. The war also helped whites differentiate between the two Asian peoples. As Patricia Roy describes in her recent book, *The Oriental Question*:

⁵⁹ Kwok, Munson and Suellen Cheng, "Americanization of the Chinese Angelinos," in *Duty & Honor: A Tribute to Chinese American World War II Veterans of Southern California*, edited by Marjorie Lee. Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1998.

⁶⁰ Loh, Morag and Judith Winternitz. *Dinky-Di: The Contributions of Chinese immigrants and Australians of Chinese descent to Australia's defence forces and war efforts, 1899-1988*. Canberra: AGPS Press publication for the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989, p. 33.

⁶¹ In Ed Wickberg's *From China to Canada*, he records the success of Chinese Canadian fundraising efforts: "Adding together all sums of monetary aid, Vancouver Chinese contributed an estimated C\$1 million to China between 1937 and 1945" and "How much did the Chinese in Canada contribute? Taking into account all kinds of financial contributions, the usual figure given is Can \$10 million — or about \$125 per capita." (Con, Harry and Ronald J. Con, Graham Johnson, Edgar Wickberg, William W. Willmott. Edgar Wickberg, Ed. *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd. in association with the Multiculturalism Directorate, Dept. of the Secretary of State and the Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, 1988, p. 191 and 189.)

This was an incredible feat, considering that Chinese Canadians made approximately half the wages of white people, had some of the worst jobs, there was high unemployment because of the Depression, and many supported a family in Canada as well as relatives in China.

⁶² The reaction in the United States was similar, however, the U.S. took this sympathy one step further. On 7 July 1942, the U.S. issued a postage stamp to commemorate China's five-year resistance against Japanese aggression. On the stamp is a map of China in the background, shown with U.S. President Abraham Lincoln on the left and Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Chinese Revolution, on the right. (Lee, Marjorie, Ed. *Duty & Honor: A Tribute to Chinese American World War II Veterans of Southern California*. Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1998, p. 9)

Consolidating a White Man's Province, "Whites attended war films, concerts and bazaars arranged by local Chinese to raise money for war relief."⁶³ The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), a national political party, supported the embargoes on shipments to and from Japan. White Canadians also provided aid in other ways: such as the *Chinese War Relief Fund*, another white initiative, which provided medical and other aid to the homeless in China⁶⁴; and Victoria's *Rice Bowl Festival*, which was attended by the city's Mayor Andrew McGavin and a Brigadier General J.G. Austin, who represented the Canadian Red Cross Society.⁶⁵ Japan's military aggression helped people distinguish between Chinese allies and Japanese enemies. As the Sino-Japanese War progressed, white agitation against the Chinese diminished⁶⁶ and anti-Japanese sentiment intensified.

By the end of the 1930s, it was likely that Canada would be drawn into another global conflict. Under the banners of democracy and anti-fascism⁶⁷, British Commonwealth forces marched to war in September 1939. Chinese Canadians, like many other Canadians, were eager to defend Britain and rushed to enlist.⁶⁸ However, they were excluded from serving in the armed forces while other Canadians were accepted.⁶⁹ Chinese Canadians did not pose a demographic threat: immigration had ceased and, according to one newspaper, those of fighting-age in British Columbia numbered just over one thousand.⁷⁰ Further,

⁶³ Roy, Patricia E. *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004, p. 96.

⁶⁴ The Chinese War Relief Fund was estimated to have raised over \$4 million, mostly because of the efforts of white Canadians, in the five-year period from December 1941 to December 1946. (Wickberg *et al*, p. 192.)

⁶⁵ "Huge Crowd Attends Elaborate Festival Given to Aid China," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 27 October 1939, p. 8.

⁶⁶ The Chinese continued to experience racial discrimination right into the 1930s: a 1920 law forbade white and aboriginal women from working in Chinese restaurants, in 1926, the British Columbia legislature proposed that Chinese be forbidden to own real estate; in 1935, the Vancouver City Health Department proposed that Chinese cooks working in Western-style restaurants be required to pass a physical examination; the idea of school segregation was revived from time to time, but without success in Vancouver.

⁶⁷ And communism, after 1941.

⁶⁸ In the first month alone, over 58,000 Canadians enlisted. (Byers, p. 78.)

⁶⁹ Some political screening excluded leftists. However, almost all Chinese in British Columbia experienced the beginning year of the war as civilians.

Then again, the University of British Columbia "decided that *all* able-bodied male students should take military training." (Roy, *The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want*, p. 344.)

Chinese Australians experienced a similar dilemma. The Defence Act 1909 exempted those not of 'substantially European descent or origin' from combatant duties, nevertheless, many Chinese Australians joined up as soon as they could. (Giese, Diana. *Courage & Service: Chinese Australians and World War II*. Marrickville, NSW: Courage and Service Project, 1999.)

⁷⁰ At the beginning of the Second World War, there were only a little over one thousand Chinese of military-age living in British Columbia. "Vancouver Chinese are facing racial extinction, while Japanese

Japanese atrocities in China had made the Chinese victims of the Japanese.⁷¹ Still, BC politicians did not want the federal government to summon Chinese Canadians for military duty. They urged the Prime Minister and his war ministers to cancel any orders to call up Chinese for compulsory military training.⁷²

In mid-February 1940, the Cabinet War Committee (CWC) approved the principle of compulsory military service for all Canadians, but specifically excluded Orientals and enemy aliens.⁷³ By June, the government had adopted conscription for home service under the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA), which allowed the government to register men and women and to move them into jobs considered necessary for wartime production, but did not compel them to perform overseas military service. Chinese Canadians could enlist voluntarily in any of the provinces,⁷⁴ but officially, at this time, they were not called up under NRMA.⁷⁵ This rule was confirmed by September 1940, but it only applied to BC. That same month, a number of Orientals were summoned for medical examinations — "the first stage in the general call-up for compulsory training for home defence under the NRMA," according to historian Patricia Roy⁷⁶ — but they were never sent to military training centres. One Chinese man in B.C. complained in a newspaper letter,

"The majority of private citizens are ready to accept us as their equal; but official BC still consistently, for many prejudiced reasons, refuses to grant us equal rights and privileges as are to be expected of our God-willed birth in this land ... British fairplay is proverbial. Many of us are glad to serve the country in any way most beneficial to her ... but where is our voice and where our encouragement?"⁷⁷

are increasing in number twice as fast as other races in Vancouver." (*Chinese Face 'Racial Extinction'*, Vancouver Province, 15 October 1941, p. 17.)

⁷¹ "During the late 1930s and early 1940s, British Columbians had increasingly fretted about the possibility of Japan attacking their undefended coast and about the true loyalties of the Canadian Japanese." Consequently, Japanese civilians on the west coast were monitored closely by the Canadian government. (Roy, Patricia E. *A White Man's Province*, p. 266.)

⁷² Similarly, Australians of Chinese descent and Chinese Americans were barred from the armed forces. They were not allowed to enlist because all three countries considered the Chinese 'aliens'. However, the U.S. was the first to change this designation in late 1942, and by 1943 Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, to strengthen the alliance between China and the United States. This legal amendment allowed American Chinese to become naturalized citizens.

⁷³ From Sept 1939, Chinese Canadians could usually enlist voluntarily in any of the provinces, but officially they were not called up under NRMA until September 1944. (Cabinet War Committee Records, 13 February 1942.)

⁷⁴ Application of the government policy allowing Chinese to enlist in the Canadian army varied across Canada.

⁷⁵ The CWC made this decision on 1 October 1940. (Wong, p. 71.)

⁷⁶ Roy, Patricia E. *The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want: Her Chinese and Japanese Citizens*, The Canadian Historical Review, LIX, 3, 1978, p. 342.

⁷⁷ Lin Yu Yong. *A Chinese Speaks*, Vancouver Sun, 23 November 1940, Editorial Section.

By the end of 1940, Canada needed to increase its war effort — including the expansion of its overseas forces — as, by this time, France and most of western Europe had fallen to Nazi Germany, the Axis alliance had been formalized, and British forces had been driven off the continent. With most west European democracies under Nazi domination, Canada remained Britain's chief ally in the struggle against tyranny. Yet, the Canadian federal government continued to make excuses for its discriminatory policies aimed at Orientals.⁷⁸

The issue of conscription continued to divide the country. In January 1941, the CWC ban on compulsory military service for Orientals in British Columbia was extended nationwide. Concurrently, Prime Minister King was being pressed by the Conservatives and the Armed Forces to introduce conscription for overseas service. By this time, the federal government realized that its plan for waging a war of "limited liability" was unrealistic. Meanwhile, U.S. President Roosevelt hindered the flow of war materials to Japanese, and in an effort to discourage Japan's attacks on China, the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands imposed a selective trade embargo against Japan.⁷⁹ This later induced Japan to retaliate by attacking the British colony of Hong Kong⁸⁰, the International Settlement in Shanghai, the British colony of Malaya, and the U.S. protectorate of the Philippines. Not long after that, on 7 December 1941, Japanese forces launched a massive air strike on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor. That day, Canada promptly declared war against Japan — one day before both the United States and Great Britain. This attack brought the US into the war and also established China as one of the Allies. Moreover, it provided the Canadian federal government with the justification it needed to remove all Japanese in Canada from the western coastal region and into internment camps further inland. Japanese Canadians were officially branded as "Enemy Aliens."⁸¹ In contrast, Chinese Canadians were now recognized as "Registered Aliens,"⁸² however, they still remained legally handicapped.

⁷⁸ Reported excuses for barring the Chinese from military service ranged from "not of pure European descent" and "difficulties of mixing races" (Wong, pp. 19 and 70) to "the harmful effect on the moral of white soldiers" (Roy, *The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want*, p. 345); for Indo Canadians, excuses for rejection included "not able to accommodate their special diets" and customs. (Wong, p. 80).

⁷⁹ This included a ban on oil and steel, both vital war staples. Without these resources, Japan's military machine would grind to a halt.

⁸⁰ In November 1941, Canada sent approximately 2000 soldiers to help garrison the British colony of Hong Kong: the Winnipeg Grenadiers and the Quebec Royal Rifles of Canada. Most of the soldiers were in need of training and were not combat-ready, but they fought hard and suffered high casualties.

⁸¹ In the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor, some Chinese wore badges or displayed signs in shop windows asserting that they were Chinese, not Japanese.

⁸² German and Italian Canadians were also branded as "enemy aliens" because they were from a country hostile to Canada.

Nonetheless, following the declaration of war against Japan, the Canadian government attempted to deal with the issue of racial equality in the services.

The three armed services had difficulty coordinating their own war policies into one coherent national policy. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Department of National Defence (DND), the National War Services, the Department of External Affairs, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) unanimously recommended reversing the CWC policy of 1940 by calling up Orientals. Pat Roy explains that the RCMP believed that, "... this would prevent a sense of racial discrimination among Asian-Canadians and forestall any white Canadian jealousy of relief (*sic*) from military obligations."⁸³ Disregarding the recommendation, one month later in early 1942, the CWC confirmed its policy of racial separation. By spring, this rule was challenged by the proposal for an all-Chinese Canadian battalion; in addition, an officer in the Canadian Corps of Signals suggested the formation of a Chinese Signal Unit. Nevertheless, approximately eight months later, the Toronto Chairman of the National War Services Committee could not understand why the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) would not accept any qualified Chinese pilots in any category — he was not aware that Chinese Canadians were *not* being called up under the NRMA; only then was the chairman being informed that Japanese Canadians and Chinese Canadians were presently *not* being called for military training across Canada — not just in BC. Endless arguments about race, misunderstandings, and confusion undermined every possible initiative. Although the government claimed to be in favour of racial equality, no one official was willing to take the lead and give practical effect.

In April 1942, Prime Minister Mackenzie King's government held a national plebiscite, which asked the population to release the government from its promise not to send conscripts overseas. King's reputed stance made during the 1940 election, "Conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription," reflected the ambiguous nature of the plebiscite. As expected, the plebiscite was supported by most English-speaking Canadians, who voted 80% in favour, but hardly at all by French Canadians, especially in Quebec.⁸⁴ Subsequently, the sections of the NRMA that did not allow the use of conscripts for overseas service were retracted. Despite the lack of support from many Canadians on this issue, changes in policies were under way.

The RCAF was the first of the Canadian services to accept Chinese on an 'equal' basis, although they were restricted to ground duties until the racial requirement that aircrew be white was officially dropped. Changes to the racial requirement had been

⁸³ Roy. *The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want*, p. 348.

⁸⁴ Stacey, p. 257.

proposed as early as 1941, but it was not until October 1942 that *The King's Regulations and Orders for the Royal Canadian Air Force* were amended to allow Chinese Canadians to enlist for aircrew.⁸⁵ Not everyone in the RCAF was informed of these changes: an RCAF spokesman announced at a meeting in April 1943 that the air force's policy should be amended "to accept aliens after vetting but not enemy aliens. Special regulations, however, apply to Orientals ... [but] the general policy is to discourage their enlistment."⁸⁶ Clearly, he did not know that several Chinese Canadians were already serving in the RCAF. Restrictions did not prevent some Chinese from attempting to enlist early on.

In 1943, Ottawa set up the Bureau of Public Information to promote patriotism and 'Canadianism' among all ethnic groups in English-speaking Canada. The federal government also established the Nationalities Branch of the Department of National War Services to attempt to combat widespread anti-immigrant attitudes,⁸⁷ evident during the 1930s. With its staff of two, the branch was a token response to a very serious problem. As the Wartime Information Board reported, "It is obvious that prejudice against 'foreigners' in general and Jews in particular has grown."⁸⁸ The government's faint-hearted gesture to racial equality combined with its tolerance for unequal, discriminatory policies sabotaged initiatives to end racial antagonisms.

As with the RCAF, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) also had a 'whites only' policy. Blacks who were British Subjects and Indians (native and Asian) from British Columbia were not allowed to enlist in the RCN until the *King's Regulations* changed; even if a Chinese was Canadian-born, he could try to enlist in the RCN, but would be refused on the grounds that he was not white.⁸⁹ At an inter-departmental meeting in April 1943, the Navy had stated that its policy was to accept "any British subjects, but not aliens. Consequently, Canadian Chinese or Chinese born in Hong Kong may enlist in the Navy if they wish and are acceptable."⁹⁰ All racial restrictions were removed in March 1943; the only specification that remained was that a recruit must be a British subject.⁹¹ However, no similar relaxation of

⁸⁵ Order signed by AM L.S. Breadner, CAS, 1 October 1942, in NAC RG 24, Vol 17. 17.800, File 828-21, Vol. 14; and Order in Council PC 79/11160, in NAC RG 2, Vol. 1784, approved 9 December 1942. Paragraph 227(1) of *The King's Regulations and Orders for the Royal Canadian Air Force*, 1924.

⁸⁶ Note for External Files, 27 April 1943, in NAC RG 25, Vol. 2818, File 1154-40.

⁸⁷ Anti-immigrant attitudes were usually whites against visible minorities.

⁸⁸ Pal, Leslie A. "Identity, Citizenship, and Mobilization: the Nationalities Branch and World War Two," *Canadian Public Administration*, Vol. 32, No.3 (1989), p. 46.

⁸⁹ Wong, p. 60.

⁹⁰ Note for External Files, 27 April 1943, in NAC RG 25, Vol. 2818, File 1154-40.

⁹¹ NAC, RG 2, Vol. 178, File 12 March 1943, Reel T5152.

regulations applied to the merchant navy. It was not until after the war that the RCN made a concerted effort to welcome visible minorities.

The colour bar in the Canadian Army was much more subtle and more complicated than the other two services. Within the army, Chinese could enlist voluntarily in any of the provinces east of the Rockies, but they were not called up under NRMA until 1944. Marjorie Wong writes, "Initially, ... [the] Prime Minister Mackenzie King had acted on the request of BC Premier T.D. Pattullo not to call up Chinese and Japanese Canadians [in British Columbia]. If, said Pattullo, the Chinese and Japanese are 'called up for service, there will be a demand that they be given the franchise, which we in this Province can never tolerate.'" ⁹² The Chinese were well aware of the connection between compulsory military service and the franchise, and they petitioned the Minister of National War Services in Ottawa indicating that Chinese Canadians would be eager "to give whatever service should be expected of Canadian citizens in connection with compulsory military training, but that in turn they should receive complete recognition as Canadian citizens and should have all the privileges of citizenship, particularly the right to vote." ⁹³ Ignoring the petition, one month later, the federal government confirmed the ban on Chinese from the army; this only applied to BC, as of October 1940. Chinese young men who wanted to serve expressed their disappointment, however, recruiters east of the Rockies were accepting Chinese as they were more equal standing with the white majority there. In Daphne Marlatt's *Opening Doors*, Dr. So Won Leung proudly stated, "I joined up back east." ⁹⁴ From January 1941 onward, however, the CWC extended this ban to all of Canada. ⁹⁵

Not everyone in the federal government agreed with this decision, but the majority were behind Pattullo and King. Throughout the war, numerous time-consuming meetings at all levels of government, in both Ottawa and Victoria, focused on 'the Oriental problem'. Government departments and civil servants were shuffling off responsibilities and making excuses to keep the Chinese out of the army. At this early stage of the war, it was still quite easy to be selective about recruits, when some still believed that a limited war was feasible.

⁹² Wong, p. 70.

⁹³ Since jobs in the professions of law, pharmacy, accounting hinged on being on the voters' lists, the right to vote was far more significant than merely casting one's ballot. (NAC, RG 25, Vol. 2818, File 1154-40, 20 September 1940.)

⁹⁴ Marlatt, Daphne. *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*, compiled and edited by Daphne Marlatt and Carol Itter. Victoria, BC: Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Provincial Secretary and Government Services, Provincial Archives, 1979, p. 162.

⁹⁵ "The CWC on 22 November 1941 included a ban on compulsory military service for Chinese as well as Japanese Canadians all across Canada not just in British Columbia." (The *Report and Recommendations of the Special Committee on Orientals in British Columbia December 1940*, in NAC RG 27, Vol. 1500, File 2-K-184, N.W.S. Oriental BC.

A great deal of secrecy was involved in the CWC decision to exclude the Chinese from the army, so much that various levels of government were not receiving this information. People were misinformed and there was tremendous disorder. Nine months after the CWC had come to its decision, the Toronto chairman of National War Services (NWS) was not aware that Chinese Canadians were not to be called up under NRMA. For some reason, there was also a delay in getting this vital information to the mobilization boards. Despite the CWC decision, Chinese continued to be called up under NRMA, especially in Ontario and Quebec.⁹⁶

Discrimination and selectivity went out the door when the need for reinforcements became urgent. The collective and substantial losses in the ill-fated Dieppe Raid in 1942, the campaigns of Italy in 1943, and the Battle of Normandy in 1944, as well as the shortage of volunteers, forced Canada's government to realistically confront its severe infantry shortage. At this point, the army could no longer afford to forego any valuable reservoir of much-needed manpower. Because the government had refused to allow Chinese into the army, many white servicemen who had been risking their lives for five long years might see the Chinese as cowardly war dodgers. And to further complicate the situation, many Chinese Canadians sought permission to leave Canada to join the American armed forces while the Mobilization Board in Vancouver, desperately in need of men, and "was scraping the bottom of the barrel," as printed in the *Victoria Daily Times*.⁹⁷ It did not seem to even matter to King's government that Canada was allied with China. Manson, the Canadian Army, the NSS, and the CWC continued to press the government for changes in manpower policy. Change came about when the British War Office contacted Ottawa in the spring of 1944 regarding "fifteen Canadian Chinese [who are] wanted for dangerous duties."⁹⁸ British subjects were needed for espionage operations in British territories occupied by the Japanese — Canada was now obliged to help Britain against their common, and real, enemy. This important change — a change only made under obligation to the motherland — demonstrates the King government's fear of exacerbating racial tensions in British Columbia and in the army, whose members were drawn from the entire country. Chinese Canadians were now permitted active duty in all of the services.

Since their arrival to Canada, discrimination against the Chinese had been based on their physical appearance, their language, and their culture — all of which were strikingly

⁹⁶ L.R. LaFlèche, Associate Deputy Minister, NWS, to External Affairs, 6 October; Keenlyside reply, 9 October; LaFlèche to The Honourable Mr. Justice J.G. Gillanders, Toronto, 10 October 1941, in NAC RG 27, Vol. 1489, File 2-184, NWS Orientals.

⁹⁷ *Victoria Daily Times*, 22 Aug 44; A.M. Manson to Arthur MacNamara, 3 May 44, PAC, DLR vol. 127A.

⁹⁸ Chinese Canadians were wanted for special duties with Special Operations Executive (SOE).

different from European Canadians. However, now that British territories were under Japanese control, the Canadian and British governments found Chinese Canadians to be indispensable to winning the war: British subjects who could easily blend into Southeast Asia with local Chinese immigrants and significantly change the course of the Pacific war. The physical appearance of the Chinese was no longer considered an impediment, but an advantage. Knowing this, many Chinese Canadians saw their participation in the Second World War as a way to redefine their status. How they should proceed with this monumental task?

The following chapter explores the 1944 debates regarding compulsory overseas service, in the Chinese Canadian communities of Vancouver and Victoria. Through oral interviews with many of the remaining Chinese Canadian veterans, their memories of the debates will uncover insights into their motives both for and against active duty. These interviews will also reveal how they identified themselves within their hybrid communities of both Chinese and Canadian cultures and how they understood what their responsibilities were. The debates — evolving from a clash of opinions to a singular resolution — will explain much about their feelings for Canada, China, Japan, and the Second World War.

Chapter 4 **EVOLUTION of the DEBATES**

When the first general mobilization call came in 1939, many Chinese Canadians tried to enlist in the armed forces, but were rejected. In British Columbia, almost all of them experienced the beginning years of the war as civilians. It was not until mid-August 1944 when Chinese Canadians were conscripted for compulsory overseas duties — three months before the national overseas call-up — that they were given the opportunity to fight alongside other Canadians. However, overseas conscription deeply divided their much-persecuted ethnic communities: some young Chinese Canadians were thrilled that their opportunity had come; others, however, did not support military service; and the older generation was split on its views. To further complicate things, reasons for and against service were not consistent, nor did some individuals limit themselves to just one standpoint. In order to understand all the intricacies of the debates, I will begin by looking at the upbringing of and influences upon these military-age Chinese Canadians to see what they felt was at stake. Other considerations that should be taken into account are the conflicting war policies of the government and armed forces, family and peer influences, plus a number of other details, to appreciate their undeniably complex situation.

With the onset of the Second World War, many Chinese Canadians in BC joined the rush to enlist but, due to their race, they were not called to active duty. The BC government did not favour the enlistment of Chinese Canadians in the armed forces; later, this ban was extended nationwide as the federal government gave way to pressure from the western province. Historian Pat Roy indicates that the primary reason for this ban on Orientals in the forces was that,

"Attorney-General Gordon Wismer of British Columbia ... told Colonel L.R. LaFlèche, Associate Deputy Minister of National War Services, 'if these men are called upon to perform the duties of citizens and bear arms for Canada, it will be impossible to resist the argument that they are entitled to the franchise' ... and ... Premier T.D. Pattullo declared that British Columbia would 'never tolerate' a demand for the franchise."⁹⁹

The participation of Chinese Canadians in the military was unwanted by all levels of government — from the Defence Minister and Prime Minister to the Attorney General and the Premier of British Columbia — and restrictions were legislated to prohibit their involvement because military service had long been seen as the ultimate test of citizenship. By keeping them out of the services, the government would be able to preserve the *status*

⁹⁹ Roy. *The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want*, p. 342.

quo on the Chinese: disenfranchised 'aliens', as they were legally defined.¹⁰⁰ What the government failed to realize was that young Chinese men and women of military-age were far more Canadian than they appeared to be.

Many young Chinese Canadians were first or second-generation Canadian-born, and, as such, they had grown up highly assimilated to European-Canadian culture and with white Canadian friends.¹⁰¹ They were not only Chinese, but a bicultural blend of Western and Chinese heritages. Prof. Lisa Mar explains, "They attended Canadian public schools that extolled the superiority of the British way of life, the Empire and the accomplishments of British civilization."¹⁰² And because their parents wanted them to retain their Chineseness, most had a Chinese education as well. Many were sent to Chinese school, Monday to Friday, after their regular public school education. Some even had the opportunity to study overseas in China. Veteran Harry Con told Daphne Marlatt that he had such an upbringing:

"In those days my parents, or any other parents, would like their children to learn some Chinese culture ... so they took me and my sister back to China to study Chinese. I lived in China about nine years, and I came back around 1934."¹⁰³

Roy Mah also had a similar experience:

"I was born in Edmonton and I was raised, partly, in China. The entire family moved back to China when I was three-years-old, then I came back to Canada when I was eleven and settled with my father in Victoria."¹⁰⁴

More than fifty percent of the Chinese Canadian veterans spent time in China. Others, like siblings Frank and Bing Wong, who grew up in Alert Bay, or brothers Albert and Cedric Mah and Peggy Lee, who grew up in Prince Rupert, never did live in China nor did they experience discrimination in their predominantly Native Indian fishing communities.

Whether or not young Chinese Canadians spent any time in China, almost all of them felt a dual loyalty to both countries. Their commitment to China was predominantly based on the heritage that their parents had instilled in them, was confirmed by their physical appearance which separated them from non-Chinese, was reinforced by their residential

¹⁰⁰ The Chinese had to register under the *Exclusion Act of 1923* and were, thus, categorized as 'registered aliens.'

¹⁰¹ Marjorie Wong notes that, "Chinese of callable years in British Columbia were nearly all born in Canada — 93% were Canadian-born." (Wong, 76.)

¹⁰² Mar, Lisa R. *From Diaspora to North American Civil Rights: Chinese Canadian ideas, identities and brokers in Vancouver, British Columbia, 1924-1960*. PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, August 2002, p. 142.

¹⁰³ Harry Con was a member of a secret British commando group, Force 136, which specialized in sabotage and reconnaissance behind Japanese enemy lines. (Marlatt, Daphne. *Opening Doors*, p. 157.)

¹⁰⁴ Roy Mah. Interview with Author, 15 November 2002.

segregation to Chinatown,¹⁰⁵ and was due to discriminatory experiences. As a result, when the war first broke out in China in 1937, Chinese communities across Canada rallied to the support of the Chinese War effort to resist Japanese aggression.¹⁰⁶ Then again, many having been born and raised in Canada — and most knowing no other homeland — were instilled with a strong sense of duty and the desire to defend Canada. In the case of John Ko Bong, his father had always encouraged his children to be loyal to both China and Canada.¹⁰⁷ Many young Chinese Canadians were eager to do their share for Canada's war effort, despite their second-class citizenship.

Discrimination did not restrain them from attempting to gain entry into the forces. Brothers Albert and Cedric Mah, born in Prince Rupert, already had their pilot's licences when they tried to enlist in the RCAF in 1939 — they were both rejected. Walter Joe of Vernon, made two attempts to enlist in the air force but was rejected on both occasions.¹⁰⁸ Douglas Sam, of Victoria, tried to enlist in the RCAF in 1940 but was advised that volunteers must be of European descent. When I interviewed Dan Lee concerning his effort to join the forces, he said:

"Friends I went to school with joined. So when I went to enlist in 1940 and was rejected, I couldn't understand why. I thought that maybe my marks weren't good enough."¹⁰⁹

In 1940, the *Vancouver Sun* published a letter from a young Chinese Canadian who was frustrated with the hypocrisy of the system:

"Sir: I am one of the hundreds of Canadian-born Chinese, of military age, and glad of the privilege of fighting and dying for Canada.

Here are the facts that I would like to place before the Canadian public to get their opinion on whether it does or does not constitute British fair play.

First — Although my parents are naturalized British subjects for 35 years and myself born in Vancouver, I am not allowed to vote. The government's reason, I am an alien.

Second — Although I possess registered firearms for hunting, I must surrender them by September 30, 1940. The government's reason, I am an alien."

¹⁰⁵ Usually, only bigger BC cities like Vancouver and Victoria confined their Chinese populations to Chinatowns.

¹⁰⁶ War-related activities brought them into integrated settings with other non-Chinese Canadians.

¹⁰⁷ Ko Bong, John (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 7 April 2004.

¹⁰⁸ Instead, Walter joined the BC Dragoons in 1939. Then in 1942, Walter made one last attempt to join the RCAF. This time he was accepted as the rules had changed.

¹⁰⁹ 'Friends' that Dan is referring to here are his non-Chinese friends who had no problem enlisting. (Lee, Daniel. Interview with Author, 10 November 2004.)

Third — Canada adopts conscription [under NRMA], therefore I am drafted into the Canadian army. The government's reason, I am a British Subject."¹¹⁰

When Chinese Canadians volunteered for the forces they were rejected, but as of June 1940, when the government enacted the National Resources Mobilization Act, they were legally obliged to register for the war effort.¹¹¹ Many thought that this rejection, then a complete reversal, was outrageous. Consequently, this inconsistency led some to challenge the government's authority.

Many Chinese youths who wanted to actively participate in Canadian society, took this opportunity to protest against the government's double standard. One young Chinese Canadian publicly raised the issue of citizenship in Victoria's *Daily Colonist*:

"Chinese-Canadians, at this critical hour of Canada's history, are not attempting to raise an issue for equal citizen rights. However, they will fight with happy hearts and heads held high if they know for certain that the land whose liberty they are defending can truly be called their own, that the stability (*sic*) as full-fledged Canadians is in no way lower than their compatriots. They will thus fight with a spirit unconquerable, and can really sing with full pride and joy 'Oh Canada! We stand on guard for thee!'"¹¹²

Others, such as Roy Mah and John Ko Bong, founders of the politically active Chinese Youth Association of Victoria, began sending petitions to BC Premier John Hart about the contradiction of British Columbia's democratic values.¹¹³

"We suggest that you, as the leader of the British Columbia government, exert your power in helping to abrogate these antiquated and unnecessary legalities which are basically contrary to the true democratic principles for which we are now fighting."¹¹⁴

Only a few Chinese youths understood the connection between compulsory military service and the franchise, but activists like Mah and Ko Bong were slowly rallying support to lobby for a change. However, the irony regarding the 1940 military registration was that the federal government had yet to resolve the discriminatory *Regulations* — which excluded Blacks, Chinese, Japanese, and Native and East Indians from military service across the country — and to coordinate a national policy that applied to all of the services and in each

¹¹⁰ "Case for B.C. Chinese," *Vancouver Sun*, 2 October 1940.

¹¹¹ Men and women could be enlisted into military service, government service, or as part of companies supplying the war effort.

¹¹² Lee, Daniel. Interview with Author, 10 November 2004.

¹¹³ Roy Mah and John Ko Bong joined the 16th Scottish Battalion (Reserve) in 1939, when they were rejected from active service due to their race.

¹¹⁴ "Canadian-born Chinese," *Daily Colonist*, 18 October 1940, p. 4.

of the provinces. This presented quite a challenge to the civil servants and army officers who were at odds with one another.

Despite all the complications, change began to take place in 1942. The Royal Canadian Air Force allowed Chinese Canadians to enlist for aircrew that October, although RCAF *Regulations* were not officially amended until December. This was the first of the services to make these changes. Those that had enlisted prior to October 1942, and were consigned to ground duties, like Albert and Cedric Mah,¹¹⁵ now qualified for active status. Douglas Sam,¹¹⁶ Walter Joe, Daniel Lee and many others were now eligible to be in the RCAF. There was one catch: Pacific Command did not call up Chinese Canadians under the NRMA, although they were called up in the eastern provinces. Not exempt from military service under the *Regulations*, but not called up for military duty represented the prevailing no-win situation of Chinese Canadians.

The next major change was in March 1943, when the Royal Canadian Navy removed its racial restrictions. Chinese could now enlist in this service, however, no similar directive applied to the merchant navy. In total, not more than ten Chinese Canadians enlisted in the RCN, with William Lore — an exceptional case — preceding the Order in Council by a month or so.¹¹⁷ As mentioned earlier, although the change in the Navy's *Regulations* did allow Chinese Canadians to enlist, it did not improve the Navy's receptiveness toward minorities.

Implementing changes to the Canadian Army *Regulations* was not as simple as in the RCAF and RCN. There were always unresolved conflicts between the CWC decision and the

¹¹⁵ Although they were rejected by the air force, they were accepted as civilian instructors for the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP). Both brothers went on to have distinguished careers as pilots. Albert and Cedric were contracted by Pan Am in 1942 to fly for the China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC), over the Himalayas between China and India; subsequently, Albert became a NATO instructor and pilot for Canadian Pacific Airlines and Cedric continued as a commercial pilot. A mountain in the BC coastal range was named Mount Ced Mah in 1953 for his "outstanding service transporting and supplying a government survey party under difficult flying conditions." (*Vancouver Sun*, 15 February 1946; and *The Star Weekly*, Toronto, 11 September 1954, p.6.)

¹¹⁶ As Marjorie Wong describes, "Douglas Sam was advised that a request had been made to Ottawa for removal of this restriction. When the new *Regulations* were issued in 1942, he was informed by Ottawa." Doug Sam became a bomber pilot for No. 426 Thunderbird Squadron of No. 6 Bomber Group that bombed key enemy targets in German-occupied France to clear the way for infantry in the Normandy Campaign. On his last bombing mission, his aircraft was hit, but he survived and managed to link up with the French Resistance under the direction of MI 9. He worked with the French Resistance to liberate Paris from the Nazis. In later years, he became the Chief Intelligence Officer for Immigration Canada. (Wong, pp. 36-9.)

¹¹⁷ In 1939, Bill was employed as a radio operator with the Department of Transport, Radio Division, Marine Branch and Air Services Branch. In January 1943, however, Bill joined the RCN at the request of Vice-Admiral Percy F. Nelles, Chief of Naval Staff, and was assigned to the Operational Intelligence Centre, Naval Service Headquarters in Ottawa. Bill served in Canada, Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Also noteworthy was his work with General Douglas MacArthur. William Lore remained with the Canadian Civil Service until 1957, when he resigned to study law in Hong Kong and London, England. He practiced law in Hong Kong from 1962 until at least the mid-1990s, and introduced legal aid in Hong Kong. At 96, Bill is still living in Hong Kong. (Wong, p. 61)

Regulations. There were conflicts between federal recommendations and what British Columbia's government wanted, and responsibilities were shuffled around and decisions deferred. There were also endless excuses to exclude Chinese, and other minorities, for reasons of physical appearance, culture, and so on. Marjorie Wong describes the added complications: "The RCAF ... never became entangled in definitions as to whether they were British subjects or Chinese nationals, unlike the Canadian Army."¹¹⁸ There were always disagreements about categories: Canadian-born *versus* Canadian nationals, defining who was a Chinese Canadian, what the British Subject classification consisted of, who comprised an Allied Alien and whether there should be separate and/or special groupings for them. The colour bar in the army was very subtle, but the general policy was to discourage Chinese Canadian enlistment. Because Chinese had great difficulties enlisting, many requested permits to enlist into the United States armed forces. Wong summarizes, "The difficulty of enrolling individuals for compulsory military training who were denied the franchise appeared to be an insurmountable hurdle."¹¹⁹ All this bickering, ultimately, raised a major problem: that there was no official definition of what a Canadian citizen was. And, to make matters worse, in the summer of 1943 the army began to formulate its own rules for 'aliens', irrespective of what the federal government decided. Despite all these obstacles, some Chinese Canadians still wanted to be a part of Canada's war effort.

Challenges to enlistment seemed insurmountable, yet many Chinese youth still wanted to fight for Canada. In 1942, Frank Wong came to Vancouver with some of his friends from Alert Bay — he had no problem joining up.¹²⁰ Frank's situation was quite unusual, but not an isolated case. It proves there were serious communication problems, not only between the government and the army, but also within the army's structure — between Mobilization Boards, Selective Services, Recruitment, Reception and Training Centres — and many Chinese 'fell through the cracks.'¹²¹ In 1943, Glen Wong enlisted in the army in Vancouver.¹²² George Kwong was also able to bypass restrictions and join the army

¹¹⁸ Wong, p. 59.

¹¹⁹ Wong, p. 75.

¹²⁰ In February 1943, Frank Wong was shipped to England where he joined the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. He was being trained for the Normandy Invasion.

¹²¹ Many Chinese Canadians 'fell through the cracks' because "A great deal of secrecy was involved in the CWC decision to exclude the Chinese from the army, so much that various levels of government were not receiving this information" (as written on page 26). Recruiting Centers wanted all able-bodied men to report for duty, so unless Centres were given instructions to restrict certain people from the armed forces, no one was rejected.

¹²² Glen started with the Seaforth Scottish Highlanders for 10 days, then he was transferred into the Air Force. Glen served from the fall of 1943 to August 1945. He did not go overseas for active duties.

in 1943.¹²³ His brothers, however, refused to serve a country that denied Chinese-Canadians the vote. They said, "If Canada won't give us the right [to vote], the hell with them."¹²⁴ Evidently, the appeal for voting rights was gaining popularity, but it also created a lot of unrest in the Chinese and non-Chinese communities. Many Chinese elders did not want to challenge Canada's laws, while many young Chinese did not hesitate to contest inequality. In the non-Chinese communities, although many white Canadians were not ready to accept Chinese as equals, many others advocated for the fair treatment of Orientals. Enlistment in the armed forces raised many concerns and revealed the communities' conflicting opinions.

Political campaigns for equal civil rights were attracting the younger generation. Although the Chinese Youth Association (CYA) publicly focused on aid and support to China, it also had a local objective of building public support for racial equality. Roy Mah explained the CYA's cause:

"I was a firebrand when I was younger. I fought for justice when I saw injustice. The Chinese Youth Association was a vehicle for this. We wanted to raise our status in Canada, so we fought for equal opportunities. It was more than just the act of casting one's ballot. It was the right to practice in the professions – such as law, pharmacy, accountancy – to fight in the Canadian forces, and in many other areas of Canadian life."¹²⁵

Roy Mah, John Ko Bong, and their CYA peers wanted other young Chinese Canadians to understand that they were just as Canadian as their non-Chinese counterparts and that they had the right to enlist in the forces like anyone else. John Ko Bong urged Chinese to as soon as they were eligible, believing that they should make every effort to help win the war. Members of the CYA inspired young Chinese Canadians, making them aware that political equality was possible for all Chinese Canadians. Lisa Mar writes, "These hybrid Western-Chinese identities served as an important means of projecting their readiness for democracy ... Even though BC voters had rejected any hint of Asian Canadian enfranchisement in 1937, during the first few years of the Second World War, subtle sympathy and joint struggle against a common enemy helped build toward more direct challenges to come."¹²⁶ Fighting against a common enemy created opportunities for Chinese and white Canadians to work together and develop connections of mutual understanding and empathy. This generation,

¹²³ George fought with the First Canadian Army in France, Belgium, and Holland in the July 1944 D-Day landings.

¹²⁴ Smedman, Lisa. "Moving Pictures," *The Vancouver Courier*, 23 May 2001, Vol. 92 No. 41, pp. 1, 4-5.

¹²⁵ "Canadian-born Chinese," *Daily Colonist*, 18 October 1940, p. 4.

¹²⁶ Mar, p. 207.

having been raised in Canada, had a more optimistic and more Western outlook than their parents. Chinese youth were slowly realizing that the key to their desire to belong was their need to be validated as Canadians, and many, now, had faith that this change would come. They believed that it was just a matter of time and dependent upon their determination. Then the unexpected happened in the spring of 1944: the CWC reversed its decision and called up Chinese Canadians under the NRMA.¹²⁷ This was the opportunity that they had been waiting for.

The change in the Canadian Army's *Regulations* was based on pressure from across the Atlantic. The British War Office needed Chinese for special duties, so Ottawa instructed the army to accept Chinese Canadians for this service. British Security Coordination knew that Chinese Canadians could pass as 'locals' in Japanese-occupied British territories, whereas Europeans would be easily detected. Chinese Canadians were also highly valued because — according to the British government — they were British Subjects. Britain wanted to employ them in the Special Operations Executive (SOE) to work behind enemy lines in occupied territories.¹²⁸ Regardless of the Canadian Army's shortage of men, Pacific Command would not have changed its policies had it not been for Britain's intervention. This policy-reversal did not result in unanimous jubilation or relief, but was, instead, very disruptive to the Chinese communities.

When the Canadian government announced compulsory overseas service in the 1944 call-up, the Chinese in Vancouver and Victoria — which, at the time, had the largest Chinese communities in Canada — were divided on how this demand should be handled.¹²⁹ The mobilization call affected Chinese communities locally as well as every Chinese person in

¹²⁷ This decision only applied to Chinese who were Canadian-born or naturalized. (Meeting 24 May 1944 in office of Brig. J.A. de LaLanne, in NAC RG 27, Vol. 3004.)

¹²⁸ Japan was a major Axis power in the Second World War. After occupying French Indochina in 1940, Japan expanded rapidly across Asia. On 25 December, the Crown Colony of Hong Kong fell. January 1942 saw the invasion of Burma, the Dutch East Indies, New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and the capture of Manila and Kuala Lumpur. After being driven out of Malaya, Allied forces in Singapore surrendered to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. Bali and Timor also fell in February, and, soon after Japan, attacked Darwin, Australia. By March, Java surrendered; the British had also been driven out of Ceylon. Under intense pressure, the British made a fighting retreat from Rangoon to the Indo-Burmese border. This cut off the Burma Road, which was the western Allies' supply line to Chinese National Army (commanded by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek). In the Philippines, Filipino and US forces put up a fierce resistance to the Japanese until 8 May 1942 when more than 80,000 of them surrendered.

In October 1943, Churchill appointed Lord Mountbatten as the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia Command (SEAC) of the South East Asia Theatre. Realizing the value of Chinese-looking British subjects, SEAC employed Chinese Canadians in SOE's Force 136 and in Operation Oblivion.

¹²⁹ There was a common misconception that the Chinese in Canada only lived in British Columbia. Although BC had the largest Chinese population, there was a substantial number of Chinese living in Ontario. They resided across Canada.

Canada. Within British Columbia, there were numerous gatherings before two key general public meetings took place. In Vancouver, this meeting was held in August 1944 at the Chinese United Church in Chinatown, at Dunlevy and Pender Street. There was also a town meeting at the Chinese United Church in Victoria.¹³⁰ The meetings in both cities were comparable, revealing the complexity and diversity of opinions regarding how military-age Chinese should answer the call to duty. Attended by young men and women, fathers, elders, and community leaders,¹³¹ these meetings incited very emotional debates.

There was no single reason *for* or *against* compulsory military service, but rather numerous reasons for each side, with everyone having the opportunity to argue their case. Some people, like Roy Mah, presented critical reasons to join-up:

"We thought that serving in the armed forces would be an opportunity for us to prove to the general public that we are loyal Canadians, that in time of need, they would see that we have no hesitation to don the King's uniform and go overseas to fight for our country, fight to preserve democracy."¹³²

Roy believed that serving in the military would demonstrate the loyalty of Chinese Canadians and would convince the public that they deserved the right to vote.

Bing Wong supported Roy's views, but from a different angle:

"We were conscious of not letting the Chinese down. We wanted to prove to the whites that we were good soldiers, too. We knew that we'd be judged by our military competency and other abilities. Every soldier's behaviour could effect others' perception of the Chinese."¹³³

Bing said that at eighteen-years-old, he did not want to go behind enemy lines in territories under Japanese control. He said that he had heard what the Japanese were doing to people in China, through his parents and from newspaper reports — "everyone knew." Although Bing expressed fear of the Japanese, most of the veterans that I interviewed said that they were not concerned about the possibility of being killed. Some of the Vancouver boys said:

"Nobody's prepared to die ... at 21, you can't even conceive of death."¹³⁴

"Did give it some thought, but didn't dwell on it."¹³⁵

¹³⁰ The article "No Vote, No Fight!" (*Vancouver Sun*, 24 August 1944) verifies the Chinese United Church as the place of the Vancouver debates. In regards to Victoria, Roy Mah and John Ko Bong confirmed the Chinese United Church as the location of the Victoria debates.

¹³¹ There were a few non-Chinese people at the smaller gatherings, but not the bigger meetings. ("Meeting Endorses Votes for Chinese," *Vancouver Sun*, 2 September 1944).

¹³² Mah, Roy (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 15 November 2002.

¹³³ Wong, Bing (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 4 January 2004.

¹³⁴ Wong, Glen (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 3 December 2004.

¹³⁵ Chow, Marshall (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 11 March 2005.

"The thought of danger never entered my mind."¹³⁶

"No."¹³⁷

Some of the Victoria veterans recollected:

"When you're young, you think you are immortal."¹³⁸

"Not afraid, just accepted that I might not be coming back."¹³⁹

"No."¹⁴⁰

Bing recalled peer pressure from friends, like fellow veteran, Daniel Lee, to uphold the image of the Chinese Canadian soldier. Dan Lee remembered urging Bing to enlist. He clarified their discussion regarding joining up:

"I said to Bing that we're Chinese and if we don't join up, then people are going to say that we're afraid to fight the Japanese. It's also our duty to help China in its war of resistance against Japan."¹⁴¹

As Dan mentioned, he believed that Chinese Canadians needed to "measure up" and defend their public reputation, as well as show their support for China's war. In my interviews, several veterans expressed a hatred for the Japanese and a need "to do something about it" — such as Dan or Glen Wong of Vancouver, and Victor Wong of Victoria — while simultaneously arguing that they needed "to serve their birth country"¹⁴² or that they felt "patriotic reasons to defend Canada."¹⁴³ Additionally, many saw this as their chance to complete equally with other Canadians. At the Victoria meeting, John Ko Bong explained:

"We needed to fight to represent our community, to fight shoulder-to-shoulder along with other Canadians ... to fight for Canada."¹⁴⁴

Others optimistically believed that the government recognized that this was their fight, too. Hardly anyone claimed only one viewpoint on conscription, but, rather, quite a few reasons *for* and/or *against* military service.

Chinese Americans had similar experiences. Historian Scott Wong interviewed many of these veterans who "felt more American than Chinese" or that they were "Americans first and Chinese second."¹⁴⁵ They also wanted to fight the Japanese. As James Jay told Wong:

¹³⁶ Lee, Ed (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 18 March 2004.

¹³⁷ Mah, Cedric (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 7 November 2002.

¹³⁸ Wong, Victor (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 3 December 2004.

¹³⁹ Quan, Gordon (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 10 March 2005.

¹⁴⁰ Ko Bong, John (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 7 April 2004.

¹⁴¹ Lee, Daniel (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 10 November 2004.

¹⁴² Wong, Glen, 3 December 2004.

¹⁴³ Wong, Victor, 3 December 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Ko Bong, John. 7 April 2004.

"I think that I wanted to fight the Japanese because of all that I read in the papers about the rape of Nanking and all these killings of civilians. I said that I wanted to go to China and fight Japanese. I was born in China so it's part of my heritage. I live in the United States. I don't want to see those two countries go to the Japanese. So they're sort of interlinked together."¹⁴⁶

Chinese Australians also saw the connection and wanted to participate in the war effort. Ms. Eunice Leong, who joined the forces with her brother and sister, described to Historian Diana Giese:

"We tried to raise people's awareness of what was going on in China because people in Australia didn't know very much and didn't care very much about what was going on in China at the time. When Australia came into the War, we felt that we were on the same side, and that what we were doing for Australia was also doing something for China. It was part of the same fight."¹⁴⁷

Some young Chinese Canadians had complementary reasons for joining the Canadian war effort, while others had conflicting beliefs. As the Chinese Cultural Centre Archives records indicate, Bevan Jangze did not want to fight for Canada after the RCAF had rejected him, but later he had a change of heart:

"Once I tried to sign up for the Air Force and they wouldn't accept me. They said that I didn't fit in. I didn't have any rights, so why should I fight for a country that I didn't have any rights in? Then there was a rally in Chinatown and a Brigadier from England came to talk to us and promised that if we joined we could have the rights of the regular [Canadian] citizen. We didn't know what our job was, but we volunteered to go overseas."¹⁴⁸

For others, the need to defend their reputation, in addition to fighting for Canada and China, was combined with the desire for better alternatives to their confined existence.

Young Chinese Canadians hoped for a better life than was offered to their parents' generation. Having grown up in the confines of Chinatown during the Depression and unable to envision any professional and social opportunities greater than their parents', many potential recruits found the mystique of the military appealing to their aspirations, and desire for adventure. It was also an ambitious option for those with few educational and employment prospects, such as Chinese Canadians. For example, Albert Mah said that

¹⁴⁵ Wong, K. Scott. "The Meaning of Military Service to Chinese Americans During WWII," in *Duty & Honor: A Tribute to Chinese American World War II Veterans of Southern California*, edited by Marjorie Lee. Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1998, p. 9.

¹⁴⁶ Wong, K. Scott. "The Meaning of Military Service to Chinese Americans During WWII," p. 8-9.

¹⁴⁷ Giese, Diana. *Courage & Service: The Australian Chinese Ex-Services National Reunion Monument Project*. 30 August 2005. <<http://www.caf.org.au/autumn2003/giese2.html>>

¹⁴⁸ Chinese Canadian Veterans Oral History Program Collection, Chinese Cultural Centre of Vancouver, Chinese Cultural Centre Museum and Archives, Vancouver, BC, 1996.

compulsory overseas service was a way "to get a job and help my family."¹⁴⁹ Marshall Chow explained that he wanted to join "for adventure and to learn a trade ... everyone seemed to be joining."¹⁵⁰ Ed Lee simply stated that, "It was a way to travel for free."¹⁵¹ Like Canadians, Chinese Australians were also interested in opportunities for travel and new experiences. Lionel Nomchong explained to Diana Giese:

"We were country boys ... We'd have probably stopped there all our lives. The War opened up everything."¹⁵²

Even women found the armed forces appealing. Peggy Lee, a veteran of Canada's St. John's Women's Ambulance Corps, said that she hoped that military service would provide her with "comradeship, feeling a part of [something], and helping."¹⁵³ Peggy also wanted to do her part, as well as escape the routine of her daily life. Chinese Australian women felt similarly. Kathleen Quan Mane, who served in the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force said to Diana Giese that,

"I came out of the RAAF still a young girl of 19, but my time there gave me the experience and courage to venture further afield. There I learned my capacity to live a collective life, I learned independence, new skills, both social and technical, and developed tolerance and understanding."¹⁵⁴

Women found the armed forces to be a place where their abilities and intelligence were valued.

The arguments *for* participation in the armed forces appealed to team spirit, manliness, and athletic ability. As Alex Louie succinctly described in an interview with Rosalie Sayer,

"We were excited because we thought war was a big adventure. We were young and didn't think of the dangers at first. Besides, times were tough. It was hard to support yourself because there were no jobs."¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Mah, Albert (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 21 March 2004.

¹⁵⁰ Chow, Marshall, 11 March 21005.

¹⁵¹ Lee, Ed, 18 March 2004.

¹⁵² Giese, Diana. *Courage & Service: The Australian Chinese Ex-Services National Reunion Monument Project*. 30 August 2005. <<http://www.caf.org.au/autumn2003/giese2.html>>

¹⁵³ Women did not see active combat, therefore, their contribution to the war effort did not carry the weight that the men's active service did. (Lee, Peggy (WWII veteran). Interview with Author, 28 December 2004.)

¹⁵⁴ Giese, Diana. *Courage & Service: The Australian Chinese Ex-Services National Reunion Monument Project*. 30 August 2005. <<http://www.caf.org.au/autumn2003/giese2.html>>

¹⁵⁵ Sayer, Rosalie. "Chinese Conscripts: Setting Asia Ablaze," unpublished paper, *History 304*, University of British Columbia, 24 November 1999, p. 2.

Although there seemed to be unlimited reasons why Chinese Canadians should fight, conscription was fiercely resented by others. One simple reason not to fight was highlighted by Harry Con:

"Because after all, even though we were born here, we didn't have full rights as Canadian citizens."¹⁵⁶

Not only did Chinese Canadians lack social, economic, and political rights, but many had parents who had paid the Head Tax and many had been cut off from their families as a result of the *Chinese Immigration Act of 1923*. A large segment of the Chinese community, whether Canadian-born or not, believed that it was unjust for the government to demand military service from a group of people that had been treated so unfairly.

Nevertheless, some Chinese elders had another view regarding the responsibilities of those eligible to serve. As noted in the *Vancouver Sun* 24 August 1944:

"Chinese community elders attempted to persuade young men that they had citizenship duties even if they did not have citizenship rights."¹⁵⁷

Canadian-born Chinese youths disagreed with their traditional, more culturally Chinese elders. To the younger generation, these reasons seemed out-of-touch and unworthy of consideration.

The Chinese were entitled to feel contempt for the discrimination that they had endured. However, it seems as though the greatest sense of injustice resulted from their rejection when attempting to enlist. Although Frank Wong never experienced rejection when he enlisted, he does explain how discrimination affected the younger generation:

"When we were young, we just take it [discrimination] for granted; we were just raised that way, in that environment."¹⁵⁸

Roy Mah also said that,

"We accepted our situation because we didn't know any better ... we were brainwashed into thinking that this is how it is and it's not going to change."¹⁵⁹

For some who experienced rejection, this insult was the breaking point. Lisa Mar recorded an interview with veteran Andrew Joe:

"Earlier in the war, the air force rejected my brother twice on racial grounds, so when the army drafted him, he refused to report ... Perhaps out of sympathy the army didn't prosecute him."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Marlatt, 159.

¹⁵⁷ "No Vote, No Fight!" (*Vancouver Sun*, 24 August 1944).

¹⁵⁸ Wong, Frank (WWII). Interview with Author, 10 May 2004.

¹⁵⁹ Mah, Roy, 10 December 2004.

¹⁶⁰ Mar, p. 227.

Many men who were first excluded from the forces were determined not to fight, while others — like Walter Joe, who was rejected twice before he was finally accepted into the RCAF, or Roy Mah who started in the Reserves and advanced to clandestine work with Force 136 in Southeast Asia — persevered.

To many, it made no sense to fight in a war for democracy when the Canadian government betrayed the ideal of equal opportunity by discriminating against the Chinese and other minorities. Some fathers opposed the call up of their sons, saying that they should not have to fight without the franchise.¹⁶¹ The majority believed that the franchise would be a fair reward for their military service.

Harry Con drew attention to the future. In Daphne Marlatt's interview with him:

"At that time, many of us were thinking, you know, of a better future, not only for us, but for future generations if we answered the call ... But if we didn't, well, maybe the government would have the right to say, 'You guys didn't serve in the war, didn't answer the call, and you don't deserve it.' Maybe this discrimination would therefore be permanent."¹⁶²

Public shaming occurred during these debates. Lisa Mar documented that those who supported military service were called "suckers" or, amongst those that wanted to volunteer, they joked around about how foolish it was that they wanted to fight.¹⁶³ Ed Lee pointed out that,

"When you're a teenager, you do daring things. It's not like we thought it over ... you just do wild things."¹⁶⁴

Further, Roy Mah said that many of those who refused to join came from more prosperous families, so they could present reasons why the Chinese should not fight in the war.

Still, some felt that they were going to be conscripted anyway — like Bill Chow and Glen Wong — so they "might as beat them to it by volunteering."¹⁶⁵

The debates came to a head when there was agreement that the call-up was not merely a political issue, but a moral concern, too. In Victoria, Roy Mah put in his two-cents' worth:

"The community was very divided about how they should proceed with this call-up. One side said, 'We're second-class citizens. If you want us to

¹⁶¹ "No Vote, No Fight!" *Vancouver Sun*, 23 August 1944.

¹⁶² Marlatt, p. 159.

¹⁶³ Mar, pp. 225-6.

¹⁶⁴ Lee, Ed, p. 18 March 2004.

¹⁶⁵ Although these were Glen's exact words, Bill Chow also said the same thing when I interviewed him. Glen and Bill know of each other, but have not interacted before. (Wong, Glen. 3 December 2004.)

serve for Canada, then give us the right to vote first.' I led the other side and said to everyone, 'Numerically, we're too small to pressure the government. They will not submit to our demands for the franchise.' I suggested, 'Serve first, then when we come back with solid credentials, we can demand rights later!'"¹⁶⁶

Roy said that, in the end, not everyone agreed with this choice, but most decided that this was the best strategy to get the franchise and raise their status.

Similarly, in Vancouver, Harry Con recalled that at the community meeting:

"We wanted to get our franchise back, so for that reason, we voted to answer the government's call."¹⁶⁷

The Chinese Canadian community was the only minority community that was specifically recruited by Britain for the Allied war effort in Asia, and upon realizing this Chinese Canadians carefully selected the most advantageous route to pursue for their community's future. Regarding Black Canadians, there was no prohibition against their enlistment, although most experienced isolated incidents of discrimination. The Black community did not have to face legalized discriminatory policies like the Chinese, and even if they did, it is doubtful that the blacks' much smaller and less cohesive community would be able to influence changes. For Japanese Canadians, conscription was not an issue as most had been interned during the war.¹⁶⁸ Native Indians, like the Chinese, had been discriminated against, yet were eager to serve Canada. However, the differences were that Native Indians were recognized as British Subjects, and instead of community debates, many Native Indians Bands separately responded to the government with protest marches and petitions. Because there was no unified response or spokesperson or community representative, Aboriginal displeasure carried less negotiating influence on the federal government.¹⁶⁹ East Indians were also considered British Subjects, but after receiving their notices to report for basic training, the temple intervened and employed legal services to counsel them. They were advised not to go to war until they were granted full franchise rights, and although they did not fight in the Second World War, they received the franchise some time after Chinese Canadian veterans. The military service of Chinese Canadians was the first step towards the end of disenfranchisement.

Newspaper headlines across the country reflected the call-up controversy, the debates and the results: "Army Calls Up 132 Chinese," "City Chinese Oppose Call Up," "Half

¹⁶⁶ Mah, Roy, 15 November 2002.

¹⁶⁷ Marlatt, p. 159.

¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, there were a handful of Japanese Canadians — such as Joe Takashima — who were employed as translators for Force 136. (Source: Chinese Canadian Military Museum.)

¹⁶⁹ Status Indians also lacked the vote.

of Chinese Pass Army Exam," "Chinese Join Active Army," "Chinese Lads 'Go Active'," and many similar headlines. The relatively unanimous agreement to participate in the war also resulted in an avalanche of conscripts either reporting for duty or volunteering. As noted in the *Daily Province* after the war's end, "95% of the soldiers of Chinese descent volunteered for this special work (posting to Southeast Asia)."¹⁷⁰ As one young man proudly explained to the press:

"I feel that what I am doing is right," said Maurice Eugene Jang, 122 Powell. I know I am fighting to protect our rights. That includes the right to vote, even for those who do not join up."¹⁷¹

And, in his interview with Rosalie Sayer, Alex Louie had a poignant memory:

"I remember walking down Granville Street with my friends when we got our new uniforms. People just parted as we walked toward them! I felt proud wearing the uniform, and I understood what it was like to be a man who was respected by whites. It felt good."¹⁷²

In March 1945, approximately four hundred Chinese Canadian servicemen from British Columbia were granted the franchise, with remainder of Chinese Canadians and other minorities receiving enfranchisement in 1947. Chinese Canadian servicemen were vanguards that publicly challenged racial barriers and opened doors not only for themselves and future generations of Chinese Canadians, but also for other visible minorities.

¹⁷⁰ "Troops Ignore Speeches in Hurry to Get Home," *Daily Province*, 21 December 1945.

¹⁷¹ "Troops Ignore Speeches in Hurry to Get Home," *Daily Province*, 21 December 1945.

¹⁷² Sayer, p. 2.

Chapter 5 **CONCLUSION**

The 1944 debates regarding compulsory overseas service are a very significant, yet little-known part of Chinese Canadian history. The community-wide consultations and discussions — concerning whether or not young men of military age should enlist in the armed forces — demonstrates the significance of their cultural connections and multigenerational relationships. And the issues raised exposed the irony of Canadian democracy, the double standards of governments and of the armed forces, and revealed who a real Canadian was.

As the community debates uncovered opinions both *for* and *against* conscription, we saw how complex and layered these views were: how individuals identified and aligned themselves, beyond their physical appearance and birthright; how motives for service could be contradictory, multifaceted, and/or strategic; how participants saw civil rights and civic duty; and their views gave us further insights into their motives and aspirations. The debates also showed how war could create solidarity or divisions, strengthen or discourage people, and elevate status and confer opportunity where there was none previously. The decision for most to serve marked the beginnings of positive and progressive change in Canada and for Chinese Canadians, results that were far beyond the veterans' and communities' expectations.

It is hard to say whether this decision could have been possible without Japanese aggression in the Pacific theatre. What we do know is that Japanese hostilities did create 'spaces' for interaction and facilitated collaboration between whites and Chinese, a pivotal opportunity to get to learn about each other and work towards a common cause — whether collaboration were on the homefront, in the integrated armed forces, or the frontlines of battle. These occasions permitted whites to interact with Chinese and come to the realization that the two groups were, in fact, not that different from each other. They were both Canadians.

Out of the 41,000 Chinese Canadians across Canada at the time, approximately 600 served in the Second World War. They were the only ethnic minority group that served in all services and every theatre of the war. Their military service demonstrated their worthiness for full government support, justified the removal of all discriminatory legislation, and

allowed them to obtain full citizenship rights, including the right to vote.¹⁷³ Individual enfranchisement after military service of Chinese Canadians was a likely precedent for the collective granting of full citizenship rights to all Asian Canadians, regardless of whether or not they fought in the Second World War. Chinese Canadians are no longer second-class citizens, but are on equal footing with other Canadians.

Exploring the 1944 conscription debates uncovers the reasons both for and against military wartime service, peoples' loyalties, as well as how they saw citizenship, community, and how Chinese Canadians identified themselves. Furthermore, the opinions from American and Australian overseas Chinese communities confirm their similarities and connections to Canadian Chinese, as indicated by claims of dual loyalties, by collaborative and integrated experiences with whites, discriminatory legislation that excluded them from the forces, and many others. Fortuitously, the recovery of this history coincides with the Canadian government's designation of 2005 as *The Year of the Veteran*, to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. We forever owe gratitude to these veterans for despite all the rebuffs they had experienced, and for their faith that other Canadians would accept them as fellow citizens. It is also timely that their histories are now preserved for posterity.

¹⁷³ Although it is commonly believed that the military service of these veterans provided a compelling argument for extending the franchise to all citizens of Chinese ancestry, this argument was not made in the parliamentary debates on the 1947 bill.

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