

Military Service and Training for Deaf People



Deaf members of the Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron #154

The New Scotian/Photo reproduction credit: Chun Louie and Joan K. Schlub, Gallaudet University Photo Services

Many people erroneously believe that deafness prevents a person from becoming involved in military training and service. Although very little has been verified regarding military enlistment by deaf people in other countries, it *is* known that a number of deaf Canadians have served their country in the Canadian Armed Forces. In addition, deaf students at several residential schools have drilled in student cadet corps, and

deaf civilians have contributed hours of volunteer labour to war efforts, especially during the two World Wars.

Deaf Soldiers

Joseph Stephen Doherty (b. Mar. 19, 1878; d. June 15, 1960) of Saint John, N.B., became the first known deaf Canadian to



Joseph Stephen Doherty (identified by arrow) with part of his regiment (circa 1906)

Courtesy of Katherine "Kitty" (née Doherty) Howe (Saint John, N.B.)

serve in the military.¹ He joined the army in 1904, despite his deteriorating hearing, and was assigned to No. 7 Company of the Canada Army Service Corps.² Doherty was sent to a training camp in Sussex, N.B. for three weeks each summer. He remained in the army after becoming completely deaf and attained the rank of lance corporal. The exact date of his discharge is unknown.

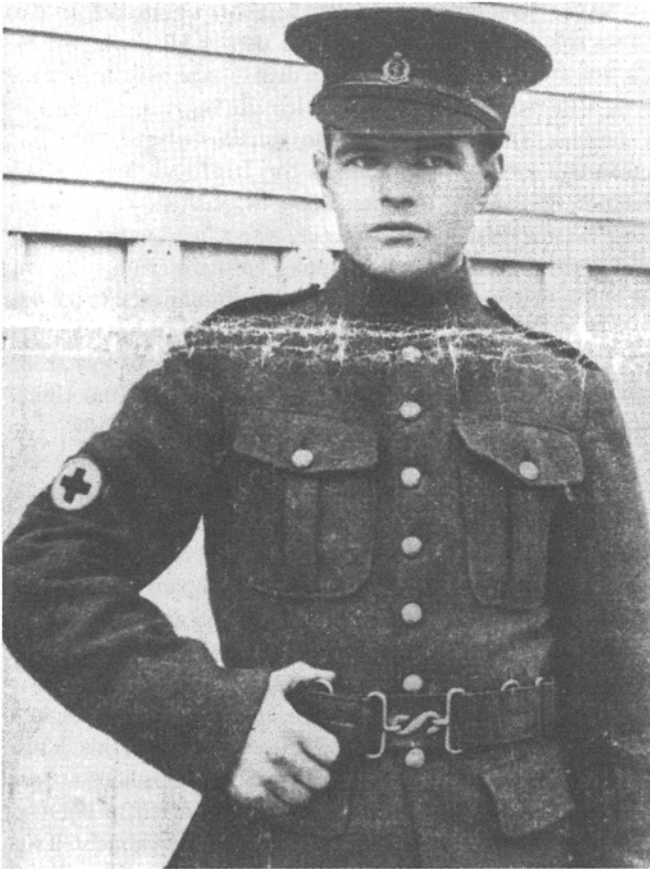
Dubbed the "big soldier boy from St. John" by his deaf friends, Doherty was an active member of the Maritime Deaf-Mute Association (MDMA) and held the position of vice-president for two terms (1906-1907 and 1907-1908).³ In 1907, he served as founding president of the Saint John Deaf-Mute Association. He married Ellinor Logan on June 30, 1909. Over the years, Doherty gradually lost his eyesight. He was the first person to receive a pension for blind persons (\$25 dollars a month, Pension #1) when the provincial legislature of New Brunswick began issuing them in the 1930s.⁴

Doherty may have been the first deaf Canadian to serve in the military, but he was not the last. A number of deaf people were included in the thousands of men who tried to enlist in the Canadian Armed Forces during World War I (1914-1918). Although the recruiting officers often rejected them because of their deafness, a few managed to get through the line by

lipreading. Most were discharged when their hearing losses became apparent, however.

One determined enlistee was Thomas Edgar Noble (b. Oct. 10, 1892; d. Jan. 6, 1953), deaf since the age of two and a graduate of the Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb (1900-1909) in Belleville. Noble volunteered for the Canadian army in the fall of 1914 but was rejected because he was deaf. However, he appealed this decision to the federal minister of militia, the Hon. Col. Samuel Hughes, who later granted Noble permission to enlist.⁵

On January 5, 1915, Noble joined the Canadian Army Medical Corps as a Red Cross orderly and was stationed with the third contingent at the Canadian National Exhibition grounds in Toronto. A short time later, he was transferred to the second division, where he was in charge of one of the diet kitchens in the hospital. In January 1916, Noble received his Corporal stripes.⁶ His request for a transfer overseas was turned down because of his deafness. The next year he and two other soldiers escorted prisoners from Toronto to Kingston; he paid a visit to the Ontario School on his way back.⁷ After the war, he lived in Vancouver for many years. Not much else is known about him, except that he had suffered from heart trouble and had been in and out of hospitals for



Private Thomas E. Noble (1915)

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three years prior to his death. His obituary mentioned that he had been married twice (both wives predeceased him) and that he had a daughter, Carol, by his second marriage.⁸

Another former student of the Ontario Institution (1906-1910), Howard Joshua Lloyd (b. May 2, 1895; d. Dec. 10, 1974) of Brantford, Ont., successfully enlisted in the army and served in the war zone in France during World War I. Affectionately known to his friends as “Howsie,” his hearing was damaged by a bout of whooping cough when he was two years old. When Lloyd was a teenager, he quit school to work and support his deaf parents.⁹

The first three times he applied, Lloyd was unsuccessful in enlisting in the army. He was finally accepted in the summer of 1916 when he signed up to become an infantry man in the 215th Overseas Battalion, and then was transferred to the 125th Battalion in England. In February 1917, he was transferred again, this time to the “38th Batt. in France, where for three months, he served in the trenches on the Arras Sector.”¹⁰ The following is an excerpt from an unedited account of Lloyd’s experiences:

His deafness was too well known in Brantford for him to pass his physical examination. On one occasion when he tried to enlist there, the doctor was chewing gum. Howard, watching lips and straining ears in his effort to pass the examination, finally asked the doctor to remove his gum so he could understand what was



Howard J. Lloyd in Canadian uniform at a camp in England (1917)

Courtesy of Dorothy Ellen (née Ouellette) Beam/Ontario Association of the Deaf (Toronto)

being said. It came out, again, then that he had defective hearing and he was hastily shown the door.

Howard trained in Canada for six months and then in England for one year. He spent one and one-half years in France, in the war zone, four months of which were in the front-line trenches. He volunteered for bombing inside the German trenches. On such forays he was loaded with hand-bombs or grenades and could carry no other weapon. He and his fellow bombers were each defended by a bayonet-man, who kept a pace behind the bombers to protect them from rear attack. They would wait for darkness and then stealthily cross No-Man’s Land and enter the German trenches. Once there, the bombers disposed of their lethal weapons where they would do the utmost damage — tossing them into huts, gun positions and supply dumps — as speedily as possible before hurrying back to their own lines.

Howard was wounded only once. A German egg-bomb sent a piece of shell into the back of his neck. These bombs were treated with some kind of poison which set up infection. While the wound itself

was not serious, the infection caused by the poison put him in a front-line hospital for two weeks.¹¹

After serving several months in the front lines, Lloyd was transferred from the trenches but remained within the firing zone until the end of the war. He was demobilized on Wednesday, June 18, 1919, and received his discharge papers on July 1st. Four months later on November 8th, he married Mary Ann Deliva Edwards (b. Oct. 31, 1895; d. Jan. 11, 1967), a red-haired graduate of the Ontario Institution (1905-1911) who had moved to Toronto from her parents' home in Boulter, Ont.

Gordon William Joseph Betts, a student at the Mackay Institution for Protestant Deaf-Mutes in Montréal until 1912, was a member of the 5th Royal Highlanders' Guards, "C" Company, 2nd Battalion.¹² At 15 years of age, Betts was stationed at Canal de Solanges in the St. Lawrence near the southern part of Montréal. In 1914, while on sentry duty at Lock No. 4, he was accidentally shot in the head by the other sentry. He died almost instantly.

The October 7, 1914 issue of *The Deaf Canadian* reports a story that is symbolic of the patriotism and pride that many deaf Canadians exhibited during the First World War. Four deaf men went to the Highlanders' recruiting office in Montréal to sign up for military service. "One of them, who was particularly anxious to serve his country, informed the recruiting sergeant that his grandfather had fought in the battle of Waterloo and his father in South Africa and now he had come forward and offered his services.... But the recruiter had to tell him, though it might be permissible for a man who could not speak to join, a man that could not hear as well, was not eligible."¹³ Three of the men were identified as David Tatarinsky (an alumnus of the New York School for the Deaf [Fanwood]), C. Hart, and a Mr. Turner. The article concluded with the comment, "Had the military authorities accepted their services, we have no doubt they would have given a good account of themselves on the battlefield."¹⁴

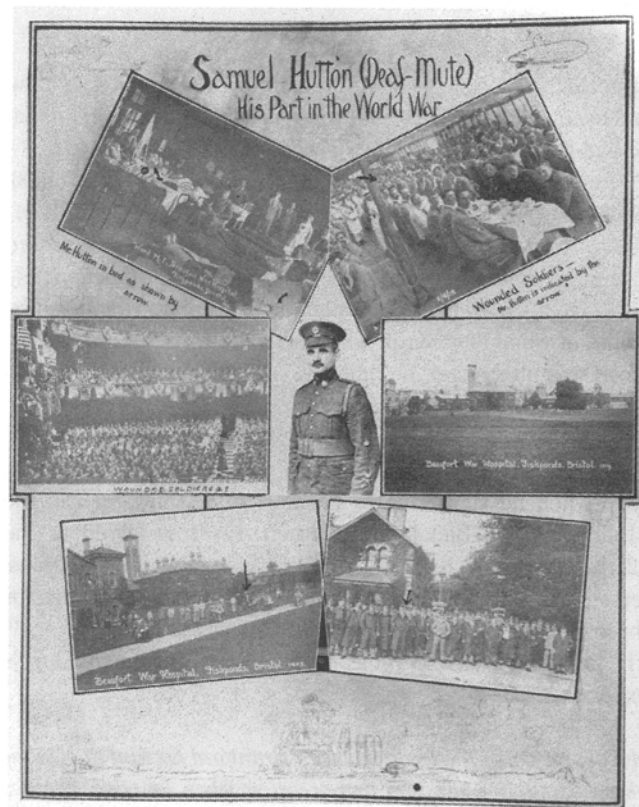
In early 1915, John Edward Crough (b. Dec. 27, 1880; d. Oct. 14, 1967), profoundly deaf since three years of age, successfully joined the Canadian Home Guards in Peterborough, Ont. as a member of the military pay master's staff.¹⁵ Following his graduation from the Ontario Institution (1888-1897), Crough became a popular athlete in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, and Manitoba. On April 7, 1915, he demonstrated his prowess in shooting at a practice field of the Canadian Home Guards. His total was an almost perfect score of 103 points at the following ranges: thirty-five points at 400 yards, thirty-five at 600 yards, and thirty-three at 1000 yards. The highest mark required in each category was thirty-five points.¹⁶ How long Crough remained with the Guards is not clear. However, he probably resigned in 1917 when he moved to Windsor, Ont. to work in the Ford automobile factory.

The Silent Worker of March 1915 reported that the Toronto branch of the Canadian Home Guards also had a deaf soldier on duty. This person, Adam E. McHardy (b. 1883; d. June 16, 1971), who had immigrated to Canada from Scotland some years before, was assigned "to prevent the Germans from the United States or anywhere else invading here."¹⁷

Samuel Hutton (b. Sept. 26, 1878; d. Unknown) of Port Dickinson, N.Y., was an American deaf soldier who served Canada during World War I. Born deaf to deaf parents, brother of a deaf sister (Nevada Beatrice Hutton), and native of Columbus, Ohio, Hutton was an alumnus of the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb (1894-1895) in Washington Heights (Upper Manhattan).¹⁸ On June 3, 1917, he was visiting New York City with a hearing friend. After seeing the sights of the "Big Apple" on this warm spring day, he and his buddy went to a Canadian recruiting station inside a U.S. Post Office on 23rd Street and enlisted in the Canadian Engineers Corps. Hutton's acceptance by the corps was probably due to his experience as a deaf "hostler" in the United States army during the Spanish-American War (1898).¹⁹

Hutton was immediately sent to Montréal to board the ship *Beltana* for Halifax, N.S. On June 6, 1917, he left Halifax for Europe with a convoy of soldiers. Shortly after being stationed in Sandwiches, in the county of Kent, England, he was transferred to the Royal Engineers, Company A, British Expeditionary Force. On July 6, his battalion was dispatched to Thiécourt, France, where Hutton rose to the non-commissioned-officer rank of regimental burial sergeant.

A few weeks later, while stationed in Zonnekecke, Belgium, a mustard gas shell hit near Hutton, damaging his lungs, throat, and eyes. After being treated in field hospitals at Aire, Belgium and Arras, France, he was transported to Beaufort War Hospital in Bristol, England for long-term treatment. It was not until March 14, 1918 — almost a year later — that Hutton



Hutton at Beaufort War Hospital, Bristol, England (1917-1918)

The Silent Worker/Gallaudet University Archives

was able to stand up for the first time. He was ordered to remain in a convalescent ward until the papers could be processed for him to return home. Finally, on July 23 of that year, he left England for the United States with a convoy of soldiers, but three days later their ship, the *Justiciania*, was heavily damaged by two German submarines. Hutton and the other soldiers changed to a nearby ship, the *Laplant*, and (in Hutton's words), "arrived in New York [City], all safe, on August 6th, 1918."²⁰

The Canadian government sent Hutton a monthly war pension, and the British government covered all of his medical expenses.²¹ A member of the New York City Deaf-Mutes' Union League, Hutton often described his war experiences at meetings. One of his stories is printed below:

While walking with a friend through the streets of a Belgian village ... after the Germans had retreated, his attention was attracted to a little girl who wished to tell them something, but could not speak any language they understood. Finally bidding them to follow her, she led them to her home where they found her mother hung up by the thumbs and her body badly bruised. The father was hung on a tree near the home, badly mutilated, and died before he received help.

When the soldiers untied the ropes, the mother of the little girl sank unconscious to the floor. The little girl then led them to a room in the house where they found four Germans in a drunken stupor. Placing Sapper Hutton's revolver in the little girl's hand and pulling the trigger, they shot and killed the four soldiers. Then



Samuel Hutton in uniform with his medals
The Silent Worker/Gallaudet University Archives

*the little girl and her mother were taken to the Red Cross Field Hospital, where the mother recovered.*²²

There is no known record of any deaf persons who joined the Canadian Armed Forces when World War II (1939-1945) broke out, probably because enlistment requirements were much more stringent than during World War I. This did not stop deaf Canadians from trying to enlist, however. For example, Douglas George Ferguson (b. June 7, 1923) of Edmonton, Alta., deafened at eight years of age from spinal meningitis and a former student at the Manitoba School for the Deaf (1932-1939) in Winnipeg, attempted on more than one occasion to enlist in the Canadian army. In a letter dated Aug. 10, 1943 from the National Selective Services, Mobilization Section of the Department of Labour, Ferguson was told that he would not be accepted into the army and was issued a certificate of medical unfitness (No. N10939) dated April 22, 1943.²³ Similar certificates were also given to other deaf Canadians who tried to enlist, among them Edward Petrone (b. Jan. 27, 1918; d. Dec. 27, 1991) of Hillcrest, Alta., another product of the Manitoba School (1931-1940), who received certificate No. N14358 dated May 18, 1943.²⁴ Each certificate reads (in part), "... because of his physical condition [deaf], he is not, for the time being, required to report for military training."²⁵

School Cadets

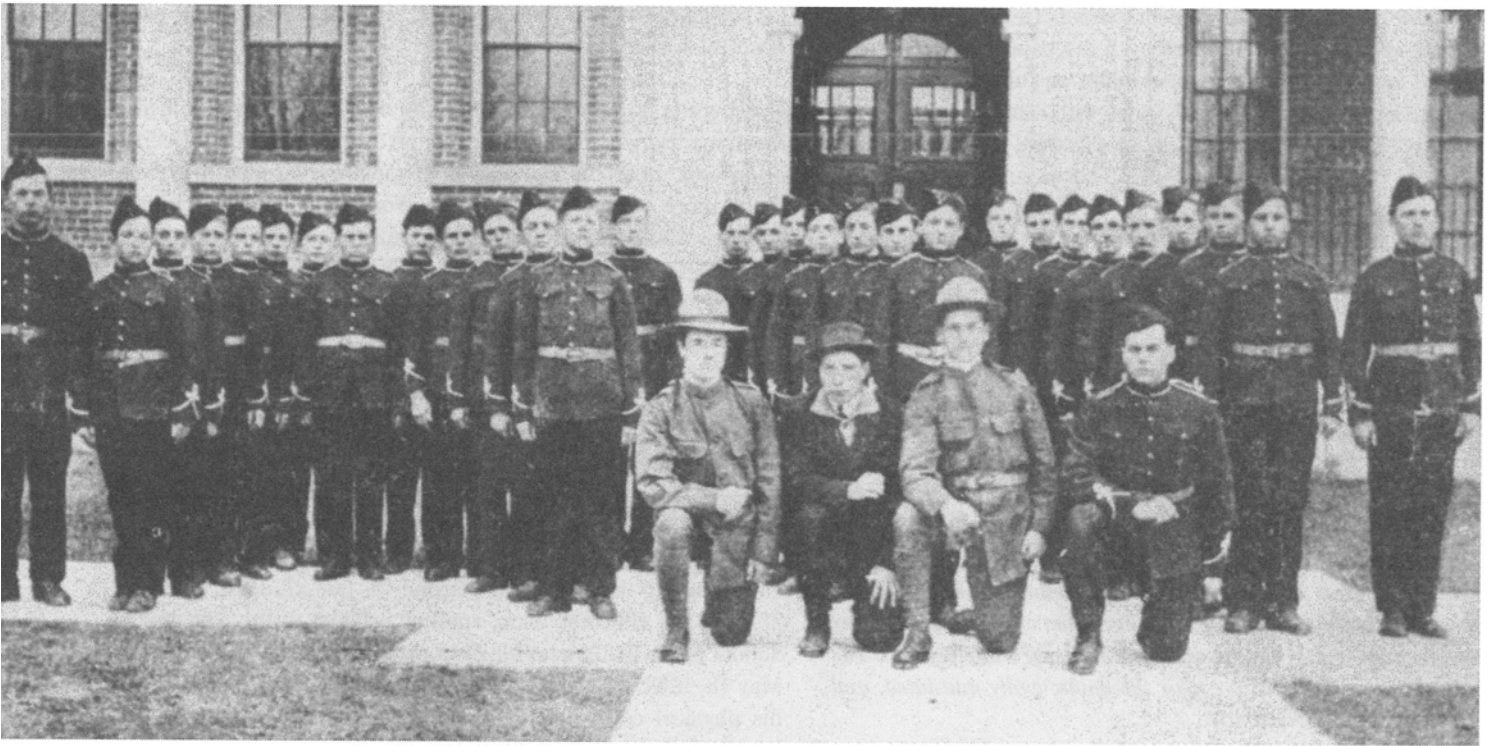
In 1914, a group of 40 male students at the Ontario School for the Deaf in Belleville formed a non-combat military company. They were issued uniforms, but not rifles. Stanley Nurse, a hearing school employee, became their drill instructor. The deaf cadet officers were: James Green, captain; Peter McDougall and Wesley McAdam, lieutenants; Asa Forrester, Absalom Martin, Charles Dorschner, and Ernest Hughes, sergeants.

These cadets, all wearing "red coats," made their first public appearance on October 30, 1914 when the new Boys' and Girls' Residences at the school were formally opened. Led by a bugle band composed of hearing soldiers from the city, they formed an honour guard for the distinguished visitors and escorted them to the school grounds, where the student body had gathered for a flag-raising ceremony.²⁶ The cadets were highly complimented for their soldierly appearance and precision marching.²⁷

Air Cadets

On May 31, 1966, His Excellency, Georges-Phileas Vanier (b. Apr. 23, 1888; d. Mar. 5, 1967), governor general of Canada from 1959 to 1967, visited Amherst, N.S. There he was met by an honour guard comprised entirely of deaf air cadets — the only such squadron in Canada and possibly the world.²⁸

The deaf air cadet squadron was the brainchild of Joseph Harry Wells (b. Mar. 29, 1915), a hearing dormitory supervisor at the Interprovincial School for the Education of the Deaf in



The O.S.D. cadets forming the guard of honour (1914)

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Amherst (1963-1980). A veteran of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders' service arm in World War II, Wells had previously been a regimental sergeant major for a reserve army unit and a civilian drill instructor for the Royal Canadian Air Cadets. He saw no reason why deaf students could not excel in cadet training and decided to form a squadron.

Wells applied to the provincial committee of the Air Cadet League of Canada and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) during the 1965-1966 school year. The committee had some doubts about the venture, but approved his application because the stated objective was to produce good citizens rather than to obtain recruits for the RCAF.²⁹ On April 20, 1966, a flight of deaf air cadets was officially formed as part of the 154th Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Cadets, under the command of a deaf senior, F/Sgt. Eric Steel.³⁰

Twenty-four boys, ranging in age from 14 to 18 years, were accepted as cadets, issued uniforms, and given lessons in air navigation, meteorology, airmanship, citizenship, first aid, local history, current events, self-discipline and appearance, civil defence, and the use of small arms. Wells devised a system of visible hand signals to compensate for the verbal commands used with hearing cadets during drills and parades. The flight commander had to stand "three and one half paces to the left" of the squad, rather than directly in front, so that "all members can see his hand signal commands. He must be in full view of his cadets at all times so is on the move more than a regular NCO."³¹

In May 1966, six weeks after its formation, this special unit of deaf air cadets made its first public appearance as an honour guard when Governor General Vanier visited Amherst. The vis-

iting dignitary praised them, saying, "I am extremely impressed by the manner in which these boys conduct themselves on the drill field."³² Their outstanding performance soon attracted much attention to the Interprovincial School. The unit was invited to participate in many public ceremonies and in such events as the Remembrance Day parade, Air Cadet Inspection, and drill demonstrations at local armouries.

Unfortunately, class size began to decrease in the late 1960s, causing a lack of cadet-age candidates at the school. The deaf air cadets unit was disbanded in 1970.

Army Cadet Corps

In the fall of 1979, the 2965 Royal Canadian Army Cadet Corps (RCACC) was formed at the Newfoundland School for the Deaf (NSD) in St. John's. The non-deaf founders were Jack Jardine (then a guidance counsellor at NSD), Cyril Coffin (then vice-principal of residence at the school), and Bill Jardine (Jack's brother, who had an interest in and some experience with cadets). Twenty-seven deaf students completed the cadet training course that year.³³

Known as the 2965 RCACC NSD for short, the corps has been sponsored by the Stokers Group of Rotary International for more than 10 years. The program provides cadets with practical training in such areas as first aid, canoeing and canoe building, map and compass reading, wilderness survival, swimming, winter camping, skiing, snowshoeing, and similar activities. Each summer, many of the deaf cadets travel to Camp Argonaut in New Brunswick for further leadership training.

More than 90 deaf students of the Newfoundland School have participated in this program, which is the only army corps for deaf cadets in Canada. Some have become cadet leaders themselves. In 1988, a former cadet lieutenant, Thomas Wiseman, became the first deaf civilian instructor with the Corps. The same year, Cadet Lieutenant Doreen Fowler became the first deaf female commanding officer.³⁴



Inspection of Newfoundland School for the Deaf Army Cadets (1990)

Courtesy of Newfoundland School for the Deaf

Civilian Support

During the two World Wars, many deaf women spent their spare hours volunteering with the Canadian Red Cross. In 1915, for example, the Dorcas Society (the former name for today's Women's Auxiliary) of the Toronto Mission to the Deaf met weekly at the Toronto Bible College on College Street to knit mittens, wraps, and stockings for Canadian soldiers at the war front in Europe.³⁵ Issues of *The Gospel Light* (the Mission's monthly publication from 1908 to 1917) reported that there was also a Red Cross sock knitting class for deaf women held each Thursday in the home of Annie (née Fraser) Byrne, a popular Toronto interpreter and wife of a deaf man, John Rutherford Byrne. As the members of this group became more proficient in their knitting skills, their output increased, and the ladies were

*now able to contribute to the health and comfort of our men at the front.... Before separating for the Christmas holidays, thirty-six pairs of socks were sent to a friendly connected Red Cross Association. Twelve pair were sent to relatives of the deaf at the front and ten pair were sent to the Fred Victor Mission for Soldiers there.... The funds for material amounts to thirty-five dollars, being contributed by collections at our Sunday meetings.*³⁶

For those individuals who could not spend time actually sewing clothing, George William Reeves, a deaf man active in the Toronto Mission, "started a subscription, which enabled us to secure 56 pair of first-class hand knitted socks," which were presented to the officers of the Red Cross League.³⁷ Each pair

of socks came with a card bearing the donor's name and the following message: "With the compliments of the deaf of Toronto, Canada. May the wearers of these socks be made comfortable, and may the comfort thus obtained be the means of spurring them on to greater efforts to bring the war to a speedy and successful termination. God bless and save the loyal and brave men from Canada now at the front."³⁸

With the outbreak of the Second World War, deaf Canadians once again were actively concerned about their country's soldiers. In a 1939 article in *The Star Weekly* (a Toronto newspaper), David Peikoff (noted Canadian Deaf leader) described the Deaf community's willingness to participate in war efforts:

War, and the national social and industrial emergency which goes with it, is providing the totally deaf with a splendid opportunity to prove that their services, when rightly placed, are as valuable as those of hearing people.

Already in Toronto, as in other Canadian cities, we have merged our various clubs together for the more efficient prosecution of war work, and daily increasing quantities of socks, sweaters and similar support are piling up.

*All across Canada we have shown a united determination to "do our bit," and every society and club has its list of volunteers ready, for action whenever called ... an increasing number of totally deaf workers are taking their places at the machines of munition and armament factories.*³⁹

As Peikoff mentioned, deaf men and women worked at factories and plants while hearing men were off fighting the war. Many of these factories were engaged in producing goods for the war efforts. Ottawa, Ont. had its share of deaf civilians working in jobs vacated because of the war, as evidenced by the following news brief:

*There are quite a number of deaf Civil Servants in Ottawa. The typists are Miss Hazel Blair, in R.C.A.F. branch; Miss Jean McLaren, Medical Army branch; Miss Mary Yureck, Dept. of Munitions and Supply. Miss Molly Brigham is a clerk at Income Tax branch; Miss Jean Goowin [sic], United Kingdom Payment Office branch. Other clerks are: Lloyd Greene in Dept. of Transport; Mr. Alonzo Charron in Dept. of Public Works; Romeo Dallaire is a mimeograph operator at the Administration of Ordnance Services office. Archie Wright and H. Johnson are chemists at John & Sussex Laboratories. Bill Baillie clerks at Dept. of Munitions & Supply. Those in the Post Office are G. Huband, Murray Brigham, John Dunn and Tom Brigham, who are clerks. June Arnold of London is with the Ottawa Aircraft Co.*⁴⁰

Windsor, Ont. also had deaf civilians filling in for hearing employees who were off fighting in the war:

Since last spring all the local industrial firms have willingly hired deaf people to work on war jobs. They have found that most deaf



Deaf war workers in Winnipeg (circa 1943)

The Tribune (Winnipeg, Man.)/Courtesy of Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf (Winnipeg, Man.)

Back row (left to right): James Hayward, Lawrence Ranger, William Gluchy, L. Vant Hull, Blanche Alfray, Jack Borsa, Alice Laigneault, Evelyn Nazar, J. Hanson, W. Pugh, Sophie Ladyshevski, Gertie Malyk, Steve Boyko, foreman.

Front row (left to right): Andy Malyk, John Ladyshevski, Scott Drake, R. Patkau, Fred Laran, Joe Chaikowski.

Seated: Paul LaPorte.

*workers have proved highly satisfactory — 17 deaf men are working at the Canadian Ford plants; 7 at the Chrysler plant. About 12 are at the Auto Specialities Co. now.*⁴¹

In Winnipeg, Man., 26 deaf people worked at Leader's Ltd., six worked at McDonald Aircraft, and about a dozen were employed at the No. 3 Wireless Training School (which had taken over the property of the Manitoba School for the Deaf a year after the outbreak of war).

During the 1940s in Winnipeg, Man., deaf women gathered once a week at the Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf on Balmoral Street, where they sewed brightly coloured or navy flannel dressing gowns for the soldiers.⁴²

Deaf children, too, contributed to the war efforts. For example, three students at the Ontario School for the Deaf in Belleville — George Margo, Jessie E. Auld, and Jack L. Hooey — collected \$25 from 72 girls and 55 boys at the school and donated it to the Canadian Red Cross Society "to be used in the war efforts of the organization."⁴³ The Belleville branch of the Red Cross was so pleased with the students' efforts that they formed a new organization known as the "Pupils of the O.S.D. Red Cross Unit."⁴⁴ The next year, a group of female students at the school made marmalade, which they sold to raise funds for the Red Cross. The girls in this class were Phyllis Thompson, Olga Witruk, Eileen Barrett, Lucille Bourdeau, Geraldine Taylor, Florence Rivando,

Isabel Watson, Loretta Hoy, and Audrey Baker. The boys got into the act as well by collecting waste paper, which they sold so they could donate the money to the societies serving the soldiers.⁴⁵ Through these and similar activities, deaf civilians of all ages contributed to Canada's well-being during times of war.



Deaf female Winnipeggers sewing for the Canadian Red Cross (1940)

The Tribune (Winnipeg, Man.)/Photo reproduction credit: Chun Louie and Joan K. Schlub, Gallaudet University Photo Services