

### Consent Form

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Signed

Esther Farnsworth  
interviewee

Signed

Neil Burns  
interviewer

Date

April 9, 1979

## Regional History

May 1979.

Miss Esther Farnsworth.

Neil Burns

- 0-5 - teaching in Noranda
- talk of war & declaration
  - Mounties patrolling trains
  - bridges lit to prevent sabotage
- 5-10 - unhappy time (German descent workers)
- men enlisting
- 10-15 - WWI relived
- receiving letters from former students
- 15-20 - no close family members enlisted.
- rationing (candy hard to get) (less preserving).
- 20-25 - problems of rationing (nylon stockings)
- no real difficulties.
  - war savings stamps
  - ~~four~~ junior red cross work
- 25-30 - knitted wash cloths, mittens, socks
- father kept track of all army movements
- 30-35 - kind of grim at times
- troops in mediterranean & africa
- 35-40 - conscription
- 40-45 - end of war
- military installations Farnham POW Newington
  - Crown Jewels in Mtl (Sun Life Building)
  - victory gardens
- 50-55 - effects on Canadian economy
- savings stamps
- 55-60 - compulsory education
- 60-65 - afterthoughts of war
- ~~enlistment~~ fellowship of veterans
- 65 - separation allowances.
- volunteer work at St. Anne de Belleme Hospital (wounded from Dieppe)

Interviewee- Miss Esther Farnsworth

Interviewer- Neil Burns

So you weren't in the Eastern Townships during the war?

I was aeh of course my home was here and I was teaching in Noranda during those days copper mining area. Now I was on my way back to my school by train going CNR when we were leaving Montreal there was a great deal of talk of war. On the train I remember one of the porters saying old Tom went down and enlisted today. There was talk of a preparation. They were conscious that it was coming close. On the way between Montreal and Ottawa, the porter came in and said, "We are at war." McKenzie King has just delcared and we have delcared war on Germany. This man sitting near said, "That means the end of the British Empire." And my friend and I just wondered could it happen and it didn't seem possible. At Ottawa the mounties came on and the train was patrolled from then on. They were handsome in their red tunics and I could hardly see that ... and they were patrolling the car and I didn't want to loose sight of them they were such handsome men. But anyway when we got to Noranda, on the way there the bridges were flood lighted.

This would be to what? To

Provention against sabotage. And you know we hadn't thought of sabotage and it all came and it was hard to realize what was happening. When we reached Noranda the Germans had been

let out and it was an unhappy thing. There was a German boy in my class whose name was Shultz and there was sort of a all the classmates turned against him. Always felt badly they'd be caricatures of Shultz drawn on the blackboard. I'd try to put a stop to it, but it would happen. But back here in the townships young men would be enlisting and up North we were more conscious of the Air Force. That year's graduating class joined the Air Force and then later on at the time of the invasion of Normandy of Norway, they seemed to be caught up in that and many of them were shot down. But anyway those were my impressions from the outbreak of war.

How did W.W. II most affect you?

I think in my experience I relived our impressions of the first world war. I was thirteen when the first world war broke out. My father enlisted that summer which meant we gave up our home on the farm which meant we lived for four years frightened when the telephone would ring and messages that it would bring because he had had French fever and had been wounded and eventually wounded home. Those impressions came back and I thought of the other families and of young people going through the soil that we went through and the anxiety over a parent and my mother's sorrow. I thought of those and I thought of the young men that I had been teaching. I would get letters from the lads that had been in my classes that I had kept after school at night because they hadn't learned their Latin verbs. And I remember one boy writing we will never let you down. I'd changed my entire

course of teaching in those days. Before those I'd aim for discipline and they must learn their Latin verbs and they must learn that ancient history and they must memorize the old ... or something like this. I began to wonder have we let them down in our educational system. Did those Latin verbs or memorizing the old ... were those the things that really mattered? Could we have made their school year happier. Those boys didn't have long to live and that is the letter I have kept all these years. But it did change my entire outlook in education too. When I began to get them. I think my impressions, cousins of mine went over but it was more the fact that these young men and young women too whom we had and thought few responsible and careless and yet they had their ideals and they were giving their lives for those ideals. Those things don't die out.

Did you have any family members in the second world war?

I had cousins. Jimmy French's sons hired me. Well I did have some first cousins and they were more the second cousins who were in the second world war.

How did it affect your living conditions like?

Well, it affected the living conditions in the shortages of sugar and tea.

There was rationing.

There was rationing and aah most people gave up having sugar and tea and coffee. Weren't able to buy candy very easily.

That's right with the sugar in it aye?

Women who did preserving weren't able to do preserving much.

They became very conscious of sugar, tea, and coffee.

What problems did rationing propose for you?

Nylon stockings I remember my last pair of nylon stockings going in 1945 before the close of the war. And I think I remember that. As far as I was concerned rationing didn't I could have done with more sugar, but I have no grife about that.

Was there a sense of national unity or a pulling together for a common cause?

I think there was. Now I'm thinking once again in terms of our schools. We were very conscious of our war saving stamps. You could buy them from the post office for \$.25. And you'd think if I didn't spend this \$.25 I could a buy a war saving stamp and eventually you would have enough for a \$5.00 certificate. And those became aims in the schools particularly and our work in the Red Cross. Before during the war I became principal of the school here in 1943 and I was very proud of the work we were doing with the Junior Red Cross work. Louisia Elliot was their elementary teacher and she was very keen about this and her brothers were in the Navy and they had been issued supplies for the Red Cross and they had had the knitted wash cloths that we were doing in the schools. You began to see that those things were going into use. I became quite a ferious knitter in those days for the Red Cross.

What sort of articles did you send?

We sent everything from stockings and mittens, wash cloths in

our parcels. Those who could sew made articles. Now these were done both for the people the men and women in the armed forces. Heavy stocks for those in warfare and for those on the ships in particularly. Air Force mittens or rifle mittens that were knit with the fingers so that the fingers were free. Then, of course, for refugees. We did a lot of baby articles for refugee children.

You were telling me before about your father listening to the radio, would you mind ...?

Yes, my father by this time was getting elderly and not well and he had the map of Europe within the war area fastened on the wall over the radio. He would keep the positions. It was all very well the first year of the war. There was a stalemate. But in the second war when the Germans ... became intensified and the forces were driven bad and it was in July or August in the mid-summer I think it would either be the latter part of July or early in August when the allied forces were evacuated from ... and the radio was keeping this that was a pretty terrible time. Then, of course, news would come more of the Air Force. The Air Force raids became more intensified over the Germans occupied Holland. The king of Belgium that was a terrible day surrendered, King Alfred, and he did save his country being run over by his surrender. I still don't know whether he turned traitor or not. And then, of course, the Germans occupied France, northern France particularly, entered Paris and by this time it was pretty grim looking at the map.

And then when they began fighting in Russia and Finland held out against them and then after a while they came plans and the D-day was going to take place when they invade did invade Normandy. But before that they sent the British sent their troops or the allied troops into the Mediterranean pass Gibraltar and against Italy. It was there that John McKena fought. He was there at the destruction of Monte Casino the fortress half way up the spine of Italy. I remember John telling about this they didn't know where they were going. They went pass Gibraltar they knew they were in the Mediterranean. Lord ... the uncle of Prince Philip addressed them and John was very impressed by this and I often thought about it in those days. Lord Mount <sup>batter</sup> ... was taking an active part in the leading of the war. Now others of our men fought across Northern Africa through Morocco and Algeria. As they were fighting against <sup>Rome</sup> ~~Rome~~ in Northern Africa. Much of that I think you begin to forget and then it begins to come back.

Do you remember either of the conscription crises?

Yes. It aeh feelings begin to run rather high cause many of the French and they sit on the porch again with many of them their attitude was it wasn't their war why should they take part in it. During those years they came and bought up our farm.

Do you remember the end of the war? How it came.

Yes. The end of the German war the it seemed so incredible to think of these things happening when the allied offensive when we did land on the Normandy beach and the began to advance from



there eastward and the Russians were closing in from the West and from the East coming westward from the North and the Germans were encircled. Now course Italy was due for the war first of all and Mussolini was taken hanged shot and hanged. You wonder if such things can happen to their leaders. It doesn't seem possible. You meet the Italians today and their happy laughter loving people and yet they could let these things turn them there must have been a strong feeling in the air against that Facsism that would come. And then as Hitler was being surrendered and the ... was burning in Germany and the news came through that Hitler had jumped into the fires of the <sup>Reichstag</sup> ~~Rushtag~~ it seemed incredible even yet that these things could happen. During earlier in the war and I forgot just which year this could happen when Hess <sup>f/lover</sup> ~~Fluer~~ from Germany had landed in northern England and of course Hess is still a prisoner a war and that happened probably back in <sup>1940</sup> ~~143~~. He was tried with the war criminals, but he has remained as a prisoner of war. I think he is about the last of the war criminals who were tried at Nuremberg to be living. Course many of them were put to death any way.

Do you remember of any military installations around? I heard stories told of

Well there were military I can't remember them Britain. I'm thinking of the Britain of war camps at Farnham because many of those fellows were left out to work on the farms and I have friends who had prisoners of war from Farnham and they became very friendly with them. There is one, Kurt, whom I met in

*Saltsburg (?)*

Sulsberg two years ago with my friend Lila. Kurt came to spend the day with us. He is an officer in Hitler's army and a very charming man. I met his wife and his two daughters on a farm in Germany near Austria in western Germany.

You mentioned the POW camp in Stanbridge. I understand there was also one here in Sherbrooke?

Yes there was a prisoner of war camp here. In east Sherbrooke somewhere off Bowen Avenue.

I've heard about stories about we've been discussing it in class. Where were the prisoners from? Were they brought over from Germany?

They would be captured from Germany and brought over here in ... And of course many children were brought over here for safety. Another thing, we knew the <sup>*Crown*</sup> ~~Krung~~ Jewels were hidden. Now they were in the Sunlife building in Montreal during the war in their basement parts.

Do you recall of any I suppose many people had victory gardens?

Oh yes everybody who could raised as many vegetables as they could to help with the economy. And England was high pressed for food and of course there were refugees to be fed. Land in England, <sup>*3P*</sup> airible land was being destroyed and England was full of refugees from the European countries. Now the ~~Royal~~ heads, the Dutch royal families were in Ottawa consist of Queen <sup>*3P*</sup> Vilimina and her daughter who now has become Princesse Juliana and some of the some of Queen Juliana's children were born in Ottawa while they were there, but there were many of the royal families

took refuge in England.

How did the war affect the Canadian economy? Being right after the depression.

Yes well there becomes worse because of the ammunition plants clothing for the armies and there is work and of course in the case of war there is profiteering and prices soar. I remember my friend Miss Helen Buck going through one day and she had a banana and she said she paid \$.05 for that banana. Now I don't remember what bananas were before, but at that time it seemed an exorbitant price and I thought well that's the price of a chocolate bar which seemed very big.

I suppose a chocolate bar then was

was \$.05 you could get an O-Henry or any chocolate bar for \$.05 and that was quite a sum. And often times we would think well now I will not buy this chocolate bar I will not buy this banana at \$.05 and then by the time I have five \$.05 I can borrow war savings stamps and then when I get more I can have a five dollar certificate to fit the cause.

Did many people buy war bonds, victory bonds?

Yes people were buying victory bonds and whenever we could support the cause.

Cause we found some posters at home advertising the victory bond and they are very interesting.

Yes, yes and in our schools we for our war saving certificates we used to have graft and whenever a child would get a war saving certificate of five dollars his name went further up on this graft

and he was contributing toward the cause.

So it was sort of peer pressure? Yes. Would cause him to cut back on the sweets and everything. Yes.

That was a good way to underhand

No not really well you had an incentive for saving. Yes there was.

Do you have any objects or mementoes of the war period?

Well I have letters that were written to me by the young men who went into the forces. I think those are the mementoes I have particularly of the second world war.

Oh yes. Compulsory education came in when just before the war or around then?

That came in during the world war. It came in I think that came in in <sup>1942</sup>1943 in the summer of <sup>1943</sup>1943.

How did that affect school children, enrollment?

Well, the hum I think in particular one boy who had not been to school. He'd probably been in the primary grades. Now he was a lad of about 14 and he come to school and would probably be enrolled in grade three. I let him go in to a grade seven because the teacher assisted him and lads who hadn't been going to school, older ones, it was pretty difficult to come back for them to come into school.

It would be because they wouldn't be able to go with students of their own age.

No, but of course for those whose families hadn't been very keen about it did mean from then on children did get to school and had to.

How did it affect the family? Having to send their child to school.

I don't know how. I think they would rather be proud of the fact their children were going to school. Of course, I'm thinking in terms of just a small school here that I don't know about other families.

I think this is quite good. I've learned a great deal.

Yes, because your parents during those years your parents were in the schools. Your grandparents as farmers were conscious of the war efforts. Your grandmother as a teacher was very conscious of the war effort and she was going through the same experience as the other of us as teachers went through those who had gone to her school and whom she'd watched and loved were going into the forces and this was affecting her personally very much.

It would because she was very involved with her students.

She was very involved in her school work.

And my mother and father, my mother even more she remembers very little about the war. The main thing that she does is when her brother would come up come home on leave she said she never leave him she was always on top of him hanging on his sleeve.

Yes, because I remember that from the first world war. When my father would come home and then I'd think time he would go over-sea wondering what would happen to him and it is it gives you impressions and experiences that nothing else could ever give you.

It gives those men who served the generation where we are living now we figured it was a waste and of course it is a waste too of young lives and the nation loses by it, but the ideals of ... and there is a ... I don't think any group of men stand so close together as veterans of a war. There is a great fellowship and a comradeship there. And nothing else gives.

I've seen them at parades the legion members all together.

Yes, it is it's what happens to one affects all of them. And when we look at our cenotaphs and the names on them and for an instant it all back. The memory lives on the ideals for which they gave their lives and their time lives on. Many of them enlisted out of the sense of adventure and that was the thing to do and all of that. But even in spite of that they are serving a great purpose and these are ideals that do help enhance a nation.

Did most of the young men around your area enlist right away or did they wait or what did most of them do?

Well, I think that depended a great deal on the family. Some of them when they finished school enlisted because their comrades were enlisting. Young men in the colleges enlisted because it becomes the thing to do. Others stayed back. Their families discouraged them, but there does come a certain feeling of excitement and they want to get into the army. And, of course, the girls loved to see the fellows in uniform. There is nothing quite so exciting and thrilling. Other fellows who had gone through a depression and it did mean pay it meant separation

allowances for families to go into uniform it meant seeing foreign places.

You just mentioned something, severance allowance? Yes. What is this?

There was a there was a separation allowance for the wife when the man enlists he has his pay and then certain pay goes to her and to her children.

To support the family left behind.

To support the family. And then there is the pension for widows becomes ...and there is a second pension that she receives.

So the family at home was well taken care of by the government?

Yes.

This was by the government?

By the government. The Department of Veteran Affairs that looked after this support. And there were the hospitals and I came to the school here in 1943. Now I left Noranda in 1940. I was there for say the first year of the war and I went to McDonald College because the teachers men had enlisted and they needed a teacher. While I was there I was doing volunteer work at the hospital of St. Anne de Bellevue and there many of those who were wounded at ... were brought over. Now many of those men were from shell shock and all were unconscious some of those were young men with white hair!