

## **LADIES AUXILIARIES – ALBERTA/N.W.T.**

A number of Auxiliaries were formed to branches of the Great War Veterans Association following World War I. However, during the eight years of this organization's existence, many of the Auxiliaries, for various reasons, fell by the wayside. A small number remained active right up to the time the Canadian Legion to the British Empire Service League came into being in 1926. Many of these Auxiliaries were still going strong, along with a few new ones, when Provincial Command received its charter in 1934. These Auxiliaries were Canmore (who has the distinction of being the first Auxiliary, in Canada, to be chartered under the Canadian Legion – November 2, 1926). Medicine Hat, Vermilion (who has G.W.V.A. records dating back to 1918), Delia, Gleichen, Redcliff, Ponoka, Calgary, Claresholm and Bellevue.

In the beginning, the role of the Auxiliary was usually to provide refreshments for Legion meetings, socials and smokers. Some assisted with children's picnics and Christmas parties and a few helped with the Poppy Campaigns. Members of the Auxiliaries formed in the 1920's, 30's and 40's, carried on through many desperate times with both courage and devotion. Since those early years, there have been many changes. Few realize, or remember, how great these changes have been. The older members remember though! They remember the catering in primitive conditions, with no water and smoky wood stoves. They remember cooking the food at home and trying to get it to the hall, still warm, sometimes miles away, along with the necessary cutlery and dishes. They remember the hard times of the depression years and worrisome, fearful days of World War II. They remember taking turns on meetings nights, going early to start the fire and even bringing the firewood from home. But, they also remember, and agree, that it was not all bad. They were many good times, with good friends, working side by side, for a common cause. They remember the pleasant meetings, in members' homes, knitting or sewing during their meeting while their small children played underfoot. They remember the card parties, with the children asleep on a pile of coats, and wood heated halls that only became warm when it was time to go home.

It was during World War II when members of the Auxiliaries truly showed their real worth. Despite the responsibility of keeping homes and raising families, in many cases, without the companionship or assistance of husbands, these ladies carried bravely on doing many worthwhile and time consuming tasks. They visited hospitalized veterans distributed candy, cigarettes and note paper. They met troop

trains with doughnuts and coffee. They knitted and sewed for the Red Cross. They packed "Bundles for Britain" and helped sell Victory Bonds and War Certificates. They also distributed Ration Books.

On September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1934, the Alberta Command Ladies Auxiliary received its Charter. At that time, there were ten Auxiliaries, with a few hundred members, already formed in the province. Over the past five decades, the number grew to 184 with a membership of 15,250 (1979). The number of Auxiliaries have decreased since then and the reason is that many of our members have passed away, some are in nursing homes, and unable to participate. The monetary contributions from the Ladies' Auxiliary Alberta/N.W.T. over the years have been in the millions of dollars to our Hospitals, Bursary Winners and Sporting events.