

Title: A woman can starve before she gets any relief : poverty and hardship amongst service families during the Second World War in England

Author: Vegoda, Helen

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Abstract:

This dissertation explores the ways in which service families experienced poverty and hardship during the Second World War; the measures taken by service men and their wives to overcome this privation; the attitudes and support given by the philanthropic workers who assessed their circumstances; and the campaigns mounted in Parliament and the press to improve their financial position. My interest was prompted by the collection of letters exchanged between my parents from 1941 to 1946 when my father was conscripted, and my mother remained in London caring for their daughter. I became aware from the correspondence, that conscription had brought greater financial hardship for my mother, leaving her struggling and largely dependent on army allowances. To set my parents' poverty within a national context and gain a greater understanding of the extent of disadvantage amongst families of conscripted citizens, the dissertation draws on a wide range of archival sources, including prominent charities like Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association [SSADA], the Charity Organisation Society [COS], and The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Regimental Aid Fund. The Ivory Cross Dental Aid Fund and Bristol Corporation War Services Allowances [Hardship] Fund also proved to be rich sources of information. I drew on *Hansard* and newspapers to analyse the contemporary debates on service remuneration. The dissertation uncovered widespread hardship, a situation that sparked off Parliamentary and national debate during the war years. It highlights the plight of those unable to afford medical and dental care and whose other basic needs were compromised by lack of means. It reveals the partnership existing between the state and philanthropic organisations and the pivotal role played by charities in bridging the gap in welfare provision. Most importantly, it gives a voice to those service individuals and their dependants who suffered at the state's failure to address their needs.