



THE DUKE



SPECIAL EDITION

As we approach the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of Saint Julien, The Duke is publishing this biographical essay of Victor Odlum, who went overseas as Second in Command of 7th (First British Columbia) Battalion, CEF. Then-Major Odlum took command of the Battalion when the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Hart-McHarg, was killed early in the fighting. Odlum provided dynamic leadership and initiative over the next three days as the Battalion fought with distinction in its first battle of the War. Odlum later commanded 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade in the First World War and 2nd Canadian Infantry Division in the Second World War. He led a life of significant distinction - here is his story.

VICTOR WENTWORTH ODLUM, CB, CMG, DSO*

Soldier, Diplomat, Journalist, Businessman

A Remarkable Canadian

By: Colonel (Retired) Keith D. Maxwell, OMM, CD



Victor Wentworth Odlum, age 38. As a Brigadier General, 1918.

Early Years of the Odlum Family – to Canada

The remains of the early 19th Century settlement of Tullamore, Ontario sit on the flat, fertile farmland some thirty kilometres northwest of downtown Toronto. It is at the edge of suburban encroachment sprawling out from Canada's largest city, with a newly built subdivision of upscale, brick façade homes taking over the erstwhile farmland. Little is left of the original settlement - the countryside is very different from when the Odlum family arrived in Canada and settled in Tullamore in the early years following the Napoleonic Wars. The Concert of Europe was taking hold, providing unprecedented peace and economic growth which was flowing to the British colonies in North America as well. The War of 1812 had passed into history in Upper Canada without too high a cost in manpower and materiel for the underpopulated and rapidly expanding colony.

Abraham Odlum, originally from Tullamore, Ireland, came to Canada in 1820 and exercised a Crown Grant of 100 acres of land for his service as an officer in the British Army fighting Napoleon. The family farm and merchant store thrived for a time and two generations of Odlums formed part of the emerging establishment in this expanding community. However, the farm and business fell on hard times in 1850 and the family was forced to leave their lands when they defaulted on mortgages they had placed on their properties and they fell into poverty. Canada, even then, was a land of opportunity, and young Edward Odlum, a third generation Upper Canadian of strong character, found himself apprenticed to a cabinet maker in 1865, just as British North America was about to undergo a major political transformation.

Edward was intelligent and a diligent reader. He spent a great deal of his limited spare time studying, with the intent of gaining a formal education. He eventually secured a position as a rural school teacher, then was admitted to the University of Toronto where he attained three degrees before returning to teaching. He subsequently took up a position at Cobourg Collegiate Institute, an education institute of significant distinction at the time. He became known in the family as "the Professor." Edward settled in Cobourg, on the shore of Lake Ontario midway between Toronto and Kingston, where he met and married Mary Powell, who came from a long-established Upper Canada family. The son of one of Mary's first cousins, Vincent Massey, became Canada's first native-born Governor General.

Victor's Early Years

Victor Wentworth Odlum, the middle of three sons, was born into this interesting and ambitious family in Cobourg in 1880, and spent his early years in that community. The family was very active in the Methodist Church and Edward was a strong proponent of various aspects of British Imperialism. They seem to have been a typical upper middle class Upper Canada family of the era. Edward was a strong advocate of the missionary movement, and in 1886 he secured a position as the principal of a Methodist College in Tokyo, Japan under the sponsorship of the Canadian Methodist Mission Board. He and his young family proceeded by way of San Francisco, arriving in Tokyo in February 1887. Victor and his brothers were schooled by Japanese tutors and all learned the Japanese language. Their adventure in Japan was cut short in 1888 when Mary died giving birth to fourth son, Joseph. The family, consisting now of a single father and four young boys, returned to Canada in 1889.

After visiting their family in Ontario, Edward and his sons settled in Vancouver, where Edward returned to teaching, became involved in local politics and served on the Vancouver City Council for two terms. The west coast became the family home and they thrived in that rapidly growing transportation and shipping centre. Victor eventually entered Columbia Methodist College in New Westminster, BC, where he studied for a year, then moved to Toronto and attended Victoria College at the University of Toronto. Victor showed an early interest in journalism and worked diligently on the College newspaper, the *Acta Victoria*, and participated in various sporting activities.

Service in the Boer War

As his second year at Victoria College was getting underway, war broke out between the United Kingdom and the combined forces of the South Africa Republic and the Orange Free State. Victor had joined the Non-Permanent Active Militia with the 48th Highlanders of Toronto while attending Victoria College and developed an early affinity for soldiering; like so many young men of the time, he rushed to join the adventure heading to South Africa and he and his younger brother, Garnet, soon found themselves members of the 2nd (Special Service) Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry and on their way to war. Their three week journey on the SS Sardinian, a cattle boat, was crowded and uncomfortable, and the troops were happy to step onto firm land at Capetown on 30 November 1899, only seven weeks after war was declared. The Regiment immediately went into a preparatory and training period combined with duties protecting the British lines of communications. They shipped north in February 1900 where the Canadians fought their first overseas battle at Paardeberg in Orange Free State. Victor missed the battle – he was attached to the Imperial Gordon Highlanders on guard duty and was later hospitalized for persistent dysentery, a malady that cost more Canadian lives than Boer gunshot in South Africa. Victor returned to the Regiment in time to take part in the forced march to capture and occupy Bloemfontein, the capital of Orange Free State. Following a particularly gruelling four day march Victor was evacuated again, this time for long term medical treatment in the United Kingdom.

When he recovered he volunteered to return to South Africa as the war dragged on as a low intensity guerrilla conflict for a number of years. He was commissioned in the 3rd Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles, where he served on security patrols and counter insurgency operations for another year. During his service in South Africa Victor was wounded and suffered a broken jaw – on return he could truly claim the status of a blooded war veteran.

A Mind for Business and Journalism

Victor Odlum returned to Canada and Vancouver in early 1902 and immediately set about finding employment. He was eventually hired as a reporter for the Daily World newspaper and worked his way up to editor; eventually he joined the venture led by Louis Denison Taylor, a local politician and future mayor of questionable repute, to purchase the paper in 1905. Victor was active in the local Methodist Church and soon met an attractive young lady, Miss Tressa Rogerson, who sang in the choir – they married in August 1904 and Tressa gave birth to twins a year later.

Victor was an energetic and adventuresome young man; he had a restless streak and was always looking for new opportunities. He moved his young family to Nelson BC in 1905 and became the editor of the town's newspaper, the Nelson Daily News. Nelson was a true boom town in those days, at the juncture of two railroads and at the heart of a large mining district. As always, Victor met with significant financial success but his ambition led him to seek out still greater opportunity. In 1908 the family moved again, this time to Winnipeg, where Victor entered the financial investment and insurance business. He was hired by the firm of Clapp and Anderson. Three years later he was a partner in the firm and moved back to Vancouver to continue the firm's business on the west coast.

Victor Odlum clearly had a talent for business and investing. He was very successful financially and earned a reputation as a reliable businessman and business partner. He had a large family home built in the Grandview district of Vancouver, then a very fashionable neighbourhood, and settled in to his career.

Service in the Non-Permanent Active Militia

The whole time that he had been establishing himself in business and raising a family Victor also continued his close involvement with the Non-Permanent Active Militia as a reserve officer. He served as a Lieutenant in Nelson in the Rocky Mountain Rangers and later in the Winnipeg Grenadiers. When he moved to Vancouver he became a Captain in the 6th Regiment, the Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles and took a number of courses to advance his professional standing. In 1913, as the city of Vancouver grew rapidly, the

Department of Militia and Defence decided that another reserve force infantry Regiment was needed in Vancouver. That summer the 11th Regiment, the Irish Fusiliers of Canada, was established and Victor, now a Major, transferred to that fledgling unit from its outset, becoming the right hand man of the Regiment's first Commanding Officer and City Alderman, Lieutenant-Colonel George McSpadden.

In 1914 the extended Odlum family were on holiday camped at Cadboro Bay near Victoria, following Victor's two week military encampment near Vernon in early July. Victor and his father, Edward, were keeping up with the news of growing tensions in Europe, with Edward advising that war was unlikely, given Britain's strong financial position and naval protection. Victor was not so sure. In the event, Victor was right; the United Kingdom declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914 following Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality. Canada, as a component of the British Empire, automatically went to war as well. The family packed up their camp and returned to Vancouver, where Victor immediately reported for duty with the Irish Fusiliers.

Mobilization for War – Camp Valcartier

The Department of Militia and Defence had a well-developed and current set of plans to mobilize, but those plans were tossed aside by the mercurial Minister, Sam Hughes, as he dispatched individual telegrams to all Commanding Officers of Militia units telling them to mobilize their men and dispatch them to Valcartier, Quebec, where they would be trained and organized into fighting formations. Major contingents were raised by both the 6th Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles (DCOR) and the 11th Irish Fusiliers of Canada; Victor was the senior officer of the Irish Fusiliers' contingent and his group of 357 men departed for Quebec in mid-August. Amongst that contingent was Victor's 26 year old youngest brother, Joseph, who had also been serving in the Irish Fusiliers and had joined the mobilized contingent as a Corporal. Upon their arrival in Valcartier, Victor's soldiers were combined with a similar sized group of men from the 6th DCOR and smaller contingents from the 88th Victoria Fusiliers and the 104th Westminster Fusiliers, along with a contingent of 102nd Rocky Mountain Rangers from the Kootenays. These BC soldiers were combined in Valcartier in early September to form the 7th (1st British Columbia) Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). The more experienced leader of the 6th DCOR contingent, Major William Hart-McHarg, was promoted and appointed as Commanding Officer (CO) of the battalion, while Major Victor Odlum became the Battalion's Second in Command. The battalion was assigned to the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade of the newly formed 1st Canadian Division; that Brigade was commanded by an old colleague of Victor's, Brigadier-General Arthur Currie, a reserve officer from Victoria who would rise to command the Canadian Corp in the field. As they organized the contingent in Valcartier and carried out individual, small unit and weapons training, ships were formed into a convoy to take this first contingent overseas. The entire contingent of more than 30,000 troops departed from Quebec City on 27 September, and then rested at anchor for several days, awaiting the Royal Navy escort to the United Kingdom for their 30 ship convoy.

They arrived in England ten days later and settled in to a wet winter, mainly under canvass, in the Aldershot area of Sussex, England, where they trained and re-equipped to ready themselves for active service in France. Victor proved to be a vigorous, competent and personable officer who was greatly appreciated by his CO and the Brigade Commander. As the second in command he was responsible for supplies and administration for the battalion, as well as understudying his CO. Victor had a good eye for detail and the Battalion was well administered. The senior officers of that first contingent, almost all of them reservists, formed an interesting brotherhood; many would go on to serve in positions of great responsibility commanding large formations of Canadian troops. Collectively, they would help earn an enviable reputation for the Canadian Corps, particularly toward the end of the war, as the finest formation of its size on the Western Front. Victor was well known amongst that first contingent of officers and earned a reputation for being a competent commander and a brave leader under fire.

Operational Service with the 7th (1st British Columbia) Battalion, CEF

The 7th Battalion moved to France with the rest of the Division in February 1915 and took their first turn in the trenches in a quiet sector in northern France in early March. In mid-April, following a rest period behind

the lines, the Division was assigned to a more active sector of the line north-east of Ypres, Belgium. There they formed the left flank of the British Expeditionary Force, with a division of French colonial troops on their left. Late in the afternoon of 22 April 1915 all hell broke loose as the Second Battle of Ypres began and Victor found himself at the centre of this maelstrom. For the first time in history the Germans used poisonous gas as a weapon of war, releasing almost 200 tons of chlorine gas from well concealed pressurized canisters along the front. As the prevailing winds are from the west, they had to await the unusual conditions where the wind was blowing in the opposite direction at the right speed, and when they did release the gas it worked with frightful efficiency. The gas attack mainly fell against the French colonial troops and the Canadian Division soon found itself with an open left flank. A desperate night counter-attack and redeployment of units stabilized the line temporarily and the 7th Battalion found itself as the Brigade reserve, being plugged in to hold precarious stretches of the line where ever they were needed. A Company of the battalion under Major John Warden held the line at "Locality C" on the Brigade's right while other companies were rushed into the apex of the folded left flank to counter renewed German attacks.

Victor Takes Command

On the afternoon of 23 April 1915 Victor and his CO, Lieutenant-Colonel Hart-McHarg, were conducting a forward reconnaissance during a lull in the fighting when McHarg was mortally wounded by sniper fire. Victor tended and bandaged his friend's wounds then made his way back to the lines, where he dispatched a medical team forward and ordered McHarg's evacuation as soon as darkness allowed a stretcher bearer team to get to his position. McHarg died at the Casualty Clearing Station the next day and Victor took over command of the 7th Battalion in the heat of battle. He reorganized the remains of his Battalion, whose numbers had been significantly reduced in the fighting, and dug in the best possible positions to defend the apex of the flank guard.

The German onslaught the next day was very strong, with several fresh Divisions taking over the vanguard following a renewed gas attack, this time directly against the Canadian lines. The Canadians held fast under this pressure, then made an orderly withdrawal, maintaining continuity of command and mutually supporting fire as they retired. Victor Odlum proved competent, cool and inspiring to his troops - his Battalion had the most difficult task in the Division that day. He moved from company to company, remained under fire throughout, and reformed the soldiers of his unit who survived the fighting into a defensive position two kilometres to the rear that night, where they formed a reserve line as insurance against a German break through. The fighting over those three critical days came to be known as the Battle of St Julien, named for a nearby Belgian village. The apex of the flank guard where the 7th Battalion held fast became known as "Vancouver Corner," named for the home city of those stalwart soldiers. The centre of the 7th Battalion's lines was chosen after the war to house the "Brooding Soldier" Canadian Monument to commemorate that battle. Victor, as the Commanding Officer of the battalion, is given significant credit for the dedication and accomplishments of his unit. He proved himself to be a brave and competent combat leader under the most strenuous and trying of circumstances. After the battle Victor Odlum was confirmed in his new position and promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel, and he led to the rear the 350 surviving soldiers of the thousand-man Battalion that had entered the trenches a week earlier. In the rear area they were reinforced and reformed, and made ready for battle once again. Amongst those killed in the fighting was Victor's brother, Joseph.

The First Trench Raid

Victor then commanded the 7th Battalion for well over a year - a long time for a Battalion commander in that war. His battalion took part in a number of minor actions through the winter of 1915-1916 and rotated into and out of the front line at regular intervals. One of the most intriguing operations took place in southern Belgium near the French border at Petite Douve, a small settlement on a stream that traversed the front line. Under Victor's supervision, the battalion staff planned a large scale trench raid for the night of 16/17 November 1915. During the operation a raiding party consisting of five officers and 85 non-commissioned soldiers captured a two hundred metre section of German trench lines in a *coup de force*, captured a dozen German prisoners and killed more than thirty enemy soldiers. They gathered significant intelligence in the process and inflicted a blow to the morale of the German units in that sector, who felt significantly less safe

in their defended positions, wondering what might be sneaking up on them in the dark. The raid received significant publicity and all ranks were praised for their initiative and gallantry. The raid became a model for further operations in the future, and the raid is sometimes noted as the birth of Special Operations in modern warfare.

Just north of the 7th Battalion the line was being held by the 6th Battalion, the Royal Scots Fusiliers. That unit had just received a new and rather famous Commanding Officer - Lieutenant-Colonel Winston Churchill. Churchill, who was an experienced soldier, had resigned as the First Lord of the Admiralty after the failure of the Gallipoli operation and had volunteered to serve on the Western Front. Following the Petite Douve raid, Churchill asked to visit the battalion and speak to them, which he did most eloquently, notwithstanding some rum-fuelled heckling from one of Odlum's soldiers. Victor was quite proud that Winston had visited his unit and he remarked on the occasion in his papers.

Ever the newspaperman, Victor initiated a Battalion news sheet for the 7th Battalion called "The Listening Post." It was the first of its kind in the Canadian Expeditionary Force and became famous throughout the Canadian Corps for its quality and its positive effect on morale.

Promotion to Brigadier-General and Command of 11th Canadian Brigade

The Canadian Corps continued to expand through the winter of 1915 - 1916, with 2nd Division coming into the line in September 1915. The 3rd Division came into existence in early 1916. Victor was one of the best known Battalion commanders and was considered for higher command on several occasions, notwithstanding his relative youth. Finally, in the early summer of 1916 Victor Odlum was promoted to Brigadier-General and took command of the 11th Brigade in 4th Canadian Division, which had just arrived in France. He took command of that 5000 man formation at the age of 36 – a significant responsibility for a man of his age – and led the Brigade through its final training efforts prior to being employed on active operations. They entered the trench line in early October 1916 in the final phases of the Battle of the Somme. His Brigade received a severe bloodying but acquitted themselves well, taking part in the final capture of Regina Trench, the last objective taken by Canadians in that infamous battle. Victor was a remarkably dynamic commander and spent a great deal of his time in the front trenches, visiting and encouraging his men, checking on the condition of the trenches and stores, and keeping his subordinate commanders and their staffs well informed. He was famous for taking part in more than one attack accompanying the forward battalions in his Brigade over the top of the parapet with his pistol drawn ready to engage the enemy.

Battle of Vimy Ridge

Throughout the winter of 1916 – 1917 the Canadian Corps was assigned to the Vimy Ridge sector of the front. The ridge was the highest point of the line in northern France and dominates the countryside. Both the French and the British Army had carried out major operations against the formidable German defences on the ridgeline in the previous two years, but were singularly unsuccessful. The Canadian Corps was then assigned to capture the Ridge as the opening operation for the notorious 1917 Spring Offensive. On the morning of 9 April 1917 all four Canadian Divisions attacked in line – the only such instance in the First World War – and captured the Ridge and all follow on objectives in a sustained six day operation. While subsequent British and French operations bogged down, the capture of Vimy Ridge was considered a significant tactical and strategic success, further enhancing the reputation of the Canadian Corps as the "Shock Troops" of the Empire.

General Odlum proved to be an agile and determined commander at Vimy Ridge. His formation was assigned the crest of the hill at point 145 where the Canadian National Monument stands today - it was the most heavily defended position on the ridge. Victor planned the Brigade attack with special care and his lead battalions fought forward, taking most of the German fortifications at the crest line on 9 April 1917. The following day his units were reinforced and finally drove the German defenders from the high ground, breaking the last holdout on the ridge, triggering a wholesale German withdrawal back into the Douai plains

east of the ridgeline. Victor's reputation was boosted significantly when it became known that his formation had captured the highest ground in a battle that would become known as a critical milestone on the path to full Canadian nationhood.

The Final 100 Days Offensive

During the final 100 days of the war the Canadian Corps found itself at the vanguard of the offensive that ended in the German capitulation. Odlum's Brigade took part in all of these operations. Perhaps the most memorable was the breaking of the Drocourt-Queant Switch, one of the most heavily defended fortifications on the supposedly unassailable Hindenburg Line. In fact, two Canadian and one British Division, under the command of General Arthur Currie, broke the line in a dozen places on 2 September 1918. Victor's Brigade assailed one of the most heavily defended sectors and were then exposed to long range German fire as they attempted to consolidate on exposed ground on the forward slope just past the German fortifications. The operations were remarkably successful and greatly exceeded the expectations of the chain of command. Victor was happy to receive praise for the role his Brigade played in the attack, but his after action report tells another side of his character. It is thorough, self-critical and introspective. General Odlum looked carefully at the mistakes that were made as well as the successes and distributed the lessons learned both up and down his chain of command. He was careful with the lives of his men and took every effort to enhance their chances of success whenever he could do so.

Victor remained in command of his Brigade through to the end of the war and came out of that conflict with an impressive array of honours. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for gallantry in the field twice, was mentioned in dispatches on seven occasions, and was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath and a Companion of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George. He was wounded seriously enough to require hospital admission on three occasions and received at least two additional minor wounds, returning to front line duty on each occasion.

General Odlum – Command and Personal Conflict

General Odlum earned an interesting personal reputation during the war. He was clearly a competent military officer and commander; he was well liked by his friends but could be ruthless in matters of discipline. On one occasion while commanding the 7th Battalion he found one of his junior officers, off duty but in the trench line, moderately under the influence of alcohol. Odlum immediately ordered him to the rear and drew up Court Martial proceedings – with no warning, no second chance and no forgiveness. Perhaps because he was a Methodist, Victor was a teetotaler and, as a brigade Commander, earned the nickname "Pea Soup Odlum." At one point he ordered the substitution of warm refreshments in lieu of the traditional strong tot of rum that was issued on a regular basis. As can be imagined, this was far from popular with most of his soldiers and the grumblings were heard far and wide. In response to the pervasive complaints of the troops and under pressure from above, he rescinded the order with some reluctance. In the family narrative, Victor's grandfather and great-grandfather had both been heavy drinkers and their drinking had been a factor in the family going bankrupt and being forced off their original family farm in Tullamore, Ontario. On one occasion, Victor mentioned to a confidant that his strict abstinence was at least partially motivated by a fear of losing control to alcohol as had happened to his grandfather. Interestingly, Victor did indulge himself with the odd gin and tonic in a social setting in his senior years, a habit he perhaps acquired in the course of his long service as a diplomat.

There was also a hint of vanity and glory hunting about Victor, and a tendency to seek out recognition, which brought him into conflict with his subordinates. Certainly, his superior officer and Division Commander, Major-General David Watson, was vain and indulged in intrigue to make himself look better in the eyes of his superior officers. One of Victor's senior Battalion commanders was an old friend of his, Lieutenant-Colonel John Warden. Warden commanded a company in the 7th Battalion and was badly wounded at "Locality C" during the Battle of St Julien in April 1915. Warden was sent back to Vancouver to convalesce following the severe wounds he received; he subsequently recovered well and re-entered active service. He was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel and formed the 102nd (North British Columbians) Battalion,

leading them to France in early 1916. The battalion was subsequently assigned to General Odlum's 11th Brigade where Warden proved to be an outstanding battalion commander. In January 1918, after serving for almost a year and a half in charge of a Battalion in the front line under General Odlum's command, Warden applied for a formal interview with Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie, the Corps Commander, who was the senior Canadian General serving on the Western Front. Warden intended to submit a formal complaint against Brigadier-General Odlum and the Division Commander, Major-General David Watson. Extracts from Warden's diary (which are published as an Annex to this paper) clearly show Warden's state of mind and his intentions.

His diary for early January 1918 probably speaks as much about Warden's fatigued and stressed condition as it does about Odlum's behaviour, but there is undoubtedly a degree of truth in the accusations. However, Warden was unaware that he was in a position where any complaints he made about Generals Odlum and Watson were unlikely to have any consequences. General Currie, who knew all of the officers involved very well and had served with them for several years on the western front, was undoubtedly Canada's most competent and capable officer of the war. Currie also had a secret. He had been a Militia Lieutenant-Colonel in 1914, commanding the newly formed 50th Gordon Highlanders in Victoria. In civilian life Currie was a real estate dealer and the real property market had undergone a significant drop in prices in 1913. Currie used money that the Department of Militia and Defence had sent to him to form the Regiment to cover his pressing real estate debts. He had also ordered a significant amount of material from suppliers in England to outfit his unit, including uniforms, band instruments and supplies, but had no money to cover the bills. His plan had been to juggle accounts and pay off the debts as the market recovered. In the meantime war broke out, Currie was selected for promotion and command of 2nd Brigade and he proceeded overseas with the first contingent. Eventually the debtors wrote repeatedly to the Department of Militia and Defence demanding payment. A number of senior bureaucrats, politicians and generals were aware of the situation, but they were reluctant to take action against Currie, who had developed a reputation as an outstanding field commander. Finally, when Currie was selected to take over as the first Canadian to command the Canadian Corps in 1917, he was counselled by the Overseas Minister that he would not be able to take the post until he cleared the debt. He did so by borrowing money from Generals Watson and Odlum, both of whom had substantial private means. Accordingly, Lieutenant-Colonel Warden was unlikely to meet with much sympathy in his complaint against the two Generals when he had his interview with Currie! In the end, Currie smoothed things over by arranging a new and challenging assignment for Warden outside the Canadian Corps.

Business Activities and Politics between the Wars

General Odlum demobilized and returned to Canada in early 1919, resuming his life as a businessman and newspaperman in Vancouver. He joined a financial institution as a financier and, in 1923, formed the investment firm Odlum Brown & Co. in partnership with Colonel Albert "Buster" Brown, with whom he had served overseas in the war. The firm fared very well in the prosperous and exciting investment environment of the 1920s and survived the crash of 1929. Four years later the firm was known by its long title, Victor W. Odlum, Brown & Company - Merchant Bankers - Buyers and sellers of Government, Municipal and Corporation Securities, which provides some insight into the firm's activities and areas of emphasis.

The Odlum family moved to a new home on Point Grey Road in Kitsilano in 1927, and maintained a summer residence named "Rockwoods" near Whytecliff in West Vancouver. Rockwoods was later donated by the Odlum estate to the University of British Columbia.

Victor was always interested in politics. In 1921, recently returned home from the war, he ran for a seat in Parliament in the Federal election as a Liberal candidate. He ran as an 'exclusionist' on an anti-Asian platform and was defeated. He subsequently ran successfully for a seat in the British Columbia Legislature in 1924, winning a Vancouver seat. Victor was a life-long Liberal and became very well connected politically; he remained politically active as a party member for most of his life. He served on a number of Legislative Assembly committees while serving as a MLA but found the political process disagreeable and declined to run again in 1928.

In 1924 he purchased the Vancouver Star newspaper, a scandal sheet that had been founded only a year earlier and had run into financial difficulties. Victor had proven his skills as both an investor and a newspaper man. He ran the Star with a very hands-on approach, writing editorials and opinion pieces regularly. He also indulged in some unseemly yellow journalism that was very heavily tinged with racism. When a Scottish nursemaid, 22 year old Janet Smith, was found dead from a gunshot wound in the upscale Shaughnessy Heights residence where she was employed as a live-in servant, suspicion immediately fell on her colleague, Wong Foon Sing, the 27 year old houseboy who had recently emigrated from China.

The autopsy concluded it was suicide, but The Star, led by Victor, challenged the finding and agitated strongly to re-open the investigation, accusing the houseboy, without any evidence, of being the perpetrator. It was clearly racially motivated agitation as the newspaper went on to call for legislation that would prohibit employees of different races from being employed together as servants in the same household.

Under public and political pressure the case was re-opened and the second autopsy concluded that Janet had been murdered. Shortly after the investigation was revived Wong Foon Sing was kidnapped by a group of men dressed in Ku Klux Klan regalia, who tried to force a confession of murder – Wong Foon Sing never broke. He was released by his kidnappers six weeks later and was subsequently charged with murder. Much to Victor's chagrin, Wong Foon Sing was unequivocally acquitted in court, with the judge commenting on the weakness of the evidence against the accused. The case severely damaged the career of the British Columbia Attorney General and muddied the reputation of both Victor Odlum and his newspaper.

Victor continued in the newspaper business for another two years, but finally sold The Star in 1929. When the business fell on hard times after the stock market crash later that year as the depression got underway, Victor bought the newspaper back in 1931. He closed the business for good in 1933 following a strike and union demands that Victor was unwilling to fulfill. His personal philosophy was adamantly anti-union and he was later involved with training Special Constables that were hired to break a dock workers strike in 1935. In line with his anti-socialist political philosophy, Victor headed the movement to form the Non-Partisan Alliance. Now called the Non Partisan Association, the NPA continues today as a civic political party in Vancouver. This political movement was specifically founded to counter the rising popularity in municipal politics of the left-leaning Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the precursor of the modern New Democratic Party.

With his background in journalism and as a highly respected citizen and war hero, Victor was often sought out to join formal and informal organizations doing the good works of civil society. He was active in the Methodist Church and continued in a leading role when it merged into the United Church of Canada in 1925. When the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was formed as a crown corporation in 1936, Odlum served on its board of governors until the outbreak of World War II.

1940 – Command of 2nd Canadian Infantry Division

Victor had maintained his connections to the Militia throughout the inter-war period and was well connected politically, particularly within the Liberal party, which held office for most of the period between the wars. He was 59 years of age when war broke out again September 1939 and he was keen to take an active role. An old friend, George Pearkes, was tasked to take the First Canadian Division overseas in late 1939, and the Department of National Defence got on with raising the Second Division. Victor remained in close contact with his friends in power and exerted his influence to attain a position in the expanding army. In some ways, he was an odd choice for a senior position in the Army. At 59 years of age he was older than all of the serving senior officers and he had not served in uniform since the early 1920s. However, he had kept himself up to date on military matters and had been an active participant in the social scene with the local Military establishment in Vancouver. He was also very good friends with Ian Alistair Mackenzie, who was a Vancouver Member of Parliament and a member of the McKenzie King cabinet, serving as Minister of National Defence until 1939.

Around the same time that Victor was arranging a position in the newly mobilized Army, his business partner was asked to go overseas as well. Albert Brown was appointed to the rank of Colonel and departed Vancouver for London, England before the end of 1939. In his new duties he established and headed up the Canadian Army Overseas Record Office.

Both of the principals had their eldest sons working in the firm in 1939 – Roger Odlum and W T (Tom) Brown – and both sons were officers in the Active Militia. As such, they also undertook full time military duties shortly after war broke out. They were followed into full time military service by two younger Odlum sons and a young Brown son later in the war. With the departure of Victor Odlum, Albert Brown and their sons, all of whom were likely to be absent for some significant period of time, the business office was closed in late 1939 for the duration of the war and, in fact, the partnership was dissolved.

To the chagrin of many senior Canadian Army Permanent Force generals, the government selected Victor in April 1940 to take the 2nd Canadian Division overseas and appointed Victor to the rank of Major-General. Victor attacked his new duties with considerable energy. He immediately travelled to the United Kingdom, visiting key personnel in the growing Canadian Military presence in the UK and travelled to France to meet with several senior officers in the British Expeditionary Force. During that trip he had lunch with the Commander of II British Corps at his Headquarters Mess. Then Lieutenant-General Alan Brooke, who would later become the commander of Home Forces after the Dunkirk evacuation and still later the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, wrote of Odlum in his diary that, "I should classify him as a political general." Odlum and Brooke had known each other in the First World War when Brooke served as a senior artillery planner with the Canadian Corps.

Odlum returned to Canada and led his division overseas in July 1940; upon its arrival the formation was one of very few available for operational employment in the event that the expected German invasion was launched. The Division was stationed in the south of England and had a very busy schedule of training, operational employment in defence of the beaches, and large scale exercises to prepare themselves as a counter-attack force. The Division seems to have advanced well in its preparations and General Odlum was both energetic and spry. His Division was inspected by the King in March 1941, to the General's delight. However, things were not all going well. Senior commanders are always under evaluation by their superiors and so it was with General Odlum.

Following the Dunkirk evacuation and early operations in North Africa, a premium was put on youth in senior command positions. During exercises in England senior observers, including General Bernard Montgomery, were unimpressed with General Odlum's leadership and he was under significant scrutiny. In this process General Brooke, who was then the Commander of Home Forces, wrote to General Andrew McNaughton, stating that, in his opinion, General Odlum was too old and set in his ways to adapt to modern operations. Odlum was characterized as spending too much time and effort on trivial matters and not enough on serious preparations for active combat operations for his Division. It is interesting to note that Odlum was older than all the officers in his operation chain of command at the time – McNaughton, the Canadian Corps commander (who would also eventually be replaced on Brooke's recommendation), was seven years his junior and General Brooke was three years younger than Odlum. General Odlum's replacement in Command of 2nd Division was General Harry Crerar, who had been serving as Chief of the General Staff in Ottawa at the time. Crerar was eight years younger than General Odlum.

1941 - High Commissioner to Australia

The news that he was to be replaced was couched in the kindest of terms. He was interviewed on 21 October 1941 by the Minister of National Defence, James Ralston, who had commanded a Battalion in the 4th Division in the First World War. The two were friends and political allies. Ralston hand delivered a letter from the Prime Minister and advised Victor that the Army was being reorganized and that he would not retain his command position in the new structure. He was asked to remain in service to his country and the government had considered Victor for a number of posts, including the Ambassador to Japan; presumably his ability to speak the Japanese language was a factor in the deliberations. In the event, Victor was asked

to become the High Commissioner to Australia, which he reluctantly accepted. Victor remained in uniform for the remainder of the war and served in two successive diplomatic posts while on active service as a General Officer.

General Odlum left his position with the Canadian Army Overseas on 10 November 1941 and made the rounds in London to prepare himself for his new post. He left for Australia by way of Ireland and Portugal on 5 December, and arrived in Lisbon to news that Japan had attacked Pearl Harbour. This brought the Pacific into the spotlight and General Odlum no longer considered that he was headed to a sleepy outpost far from the action. It took him the better part of a month to get to Australia, by way of colonial outposts in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, India and British holdings in the Far East. Most of his travel was on the *ad hoc* RCAF air transportation service set up to support operations in Middle East and Far East.

The Australian government was very concerned about its security in the light of the Japanese military occupation of most of the Far East and Victor found himself very busy as the High Commissioner, though there was little comfort he could bring in terms of enhancing Australia's security. He found himself in august company, and often visited General McArthur at his Headquarters in Brisbane, Australia. His main role in Australia was to provide information to the Canadian government on matters as they developed in the Pacific and he was well known and well liked in the diplomatic community.

1942 - Ambassador to China

In August 1942 Victor was recalled to Canada and made his way home by a route as circuitous as his outbound journey. He spent a short period on leave at his home in Vancouver and was then ordered to proceed to Ottawa for a new assignment as the "Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to China." He went to Ottawa for preparations, then to New York to meet as many people in the relevant diplomatic and military circles as he could. The only way to get to China was using the US Army air transportation service and he had to wait some time for a suitable flight. Meanwhile, he cooled his heels in New York and learned as much as possible about what was going on in China.

He finally departed in early April 1943, travelling by way of South America to sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and India. He arrived in Chungking (Chongqing), China, the temporary seat of government, on 30 April 1943. As the Canadian Ambassador Victor's main duties were to provide a visible presence, facilitate communications between the two governments and keep Ottawa informed regarding the situation on the ground in an area from which very little information was available. The Chinese Nationalists and Communists had called a ceasefire to their ongoing civil conflict when China was invaded by Japan in 1937 and were fighting the Japanese in a loose coalition. Victor met with leaders of both factions, providing interesting and informative observations on the personalities of some significant historical figures. He seems to have gotten on quite well with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his wife, Soong May-ling, and met on several occasions with senior Communist leaders, including Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. Victor was an effective Ambassador for the three years he represented Canada in China; he witnessed the end of the war with Japan and saw the renewal of the Chinese Civil War, returning to Canada in late 1946, well before the Nationalists were forced to retreat to the island of Taiwan and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

While still serving in China in early 1946, Victor was contacted by Colonel Albert Brown and his son, W T (Tom) Brown, both recently returned from overseas. They wished to re-establish themselves in the investment business and wanted to use the Odlum Brown name for their new business as the name was widely known in financial circles and had a good reputation. Victor's son, Roger, would be a minor shareholder, lending credibility to the proposition. Victor provided his consent to the arrangement but had no role in the company, which was incorporated in February 1946 as Odlum Brown Investments Ltd with a paid-up capital of \$12,800 (the equivalent of approximately \$156,000 in 2014). In 1958 the company absorbed the investment firm, James, Copithorne & Birch, in an amalgamation. In the mid-1960s the Company merged with another investment firm, Thomas B Read & Co Ltd, taking the name Odlum Brown & TB Read Ltd.

Shortly thereafter, the company reverted to the name Odlum Brown Ltd. A final merger took place in 1969 when Odlum Brown Ltd acquired Okanagan Investments Ltd, retaining its original name.

When Victor arrived back in Vancouver from China in late 1946 he was physically exhausted and in need of a long vacation – his family encouraged him to retire all together. While Victor was recovering his health and strength in Vancouver the world was evolving rapidly as a confrontational relationship developed between the western democracies and the Soviet Union. While most of the attention was in the Central European area, there was significant concern for the southern flank as well.

1947 - Canada's First Ambassador to Turkey

Turkey had been neutral for most of the Second World War, keeping its head down in a geostrategic area that bordered on both German and Allied areas of operations. Following the war the Soviets demanded access to bases in the Turkish Straits (the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles) and there was fear of Turkey slipping into the Soviet sphere. The US then exerted its influence, and the President Harry Truman announced a new doctrine that would soon take on his name, declaring that America would support the independence of Greece and Turkey with economic and military aid to prevent them from becoming Soviet-dominated satellites states. The Cold War was underway in spades!

Victor had proven to be an effective and well-respected diplomat in both Australia and China and the Prime Minister asked him to take on one more diplomatic position, this time as a civilian in the role of Canadian Ambassador to Turkey.

In 1947 Victor, at the age of 67 and this time accompanied by his wife Tressa, proceeded to Turkey to take up duties as the first Canadian Ambassador to that country in the capital city, Ankara, in central Turkey. After an interesting month-long sea voyage they arrived and established both the embassy and their official residence. As always, Victor became well liked in the diplomatic community and kept Ottawa well informed as to the internal politics and strategic factors affecting Turkey. He used his limited influence to support Turkey's entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), recognizing the critical role Turkey could play in the geostrategic balance in northwest Asia, vis-à-vis the growing Soviet bloc. Victor and Tressa served four years in Turkey and returned to Vancouver in 1952, just as Turkey was admitted to the NATO alliance, much to Victor's satisfaction.

Victor's Later Years

Victor and Tressa settled down to a long and busy retirement in their West Vancouver property, later moving to a newly purchased home in Shaughnessy. Victor tried his hand at politics one last time, running as a Liberal and losing to the Social Credit landslide in the Provincial election of 1953. Victor remained active with the Liberal party both provincially and federally, considered and rejected a re-entry into the newspaper business, and enjoyed a very active social life with Tressa. Victor Odlum remained a strong supporter of many civic organizations in the areas of arts, education, charitable works and promoting civil society. He was given an honorary Doctor of Laws degree by the University of British Columbia and was often invited to speak publicly on his experiences in three wars and three diplomatic tours of duty. He remained a supporter of a strong relationship for Canada with both the United Kingdom and the United States and supported Canada taking an active role in international politics, including a strong role in NATO. As ever, he supported a strong military and retained good personal connections to the Militia in British Columbia.

The Odlums had a healthy and prosperous retirement; Victor was devastated when his wife of 65 years passed away in 1970. Victor Odlum died the following year at the age of 91 years.

Conclusion

Victor Odlum is a significant personality in the history of his city, province and country. As a senior soldier and commander, General Odlum was energetic, competent and highly skilled. He was brave, perhaps to the point of recklessness, and was an innovator, always looking for ways to do things better and reduce the casualty rate suffered by the men he commanded. He was a ruthless disciplinarian and did not suffer fools gladly. He was not an easy leader to serve under and his subordinates, particularly subordinate commanders, found him difficult and overbearing. He was quite willing to bring his political and personal influence to bear to enhance his own opportunities and career progress. He certainly left the impression with those serving under him that he took credit for the good works of his subordinates. To what extent that was perception or reality was known only to Victor; however, perception in such matters is all important and Victor was not able to change that perception – it followed him throughout his life.

Victor was a very successful businessman and journalist – he was a self-made man of substantial means and his business endeavours were consistently successful and profitable. He clearly had a penchant for the newspaper business and ran a series of successful daily, weekly and periodical publications. As in his other endeavours, Victor had a reputation for being ruthless in business if it was needed to further his own interests.

In the context of the modern social milieu in Canada, two personal attributes stand out. Victor had strong political beliefs and was very partisan in his outlook. He was a staunch Liberal his whole life, and in this he differed from his father, who was a Conservative supporter. Victor believed in the free market and creation of wealth through private enterprise; he also believed in small government and advocated for fiscal and budgetary constraint in public finances. He strongly opposed the labour union movement and took steps to thwart their endeavours on several occasions. He believed that socialism would undermine the country's wealth and development, and he was clearly alarmed at the rise of the CCF and the militant socialist leanings of many in that political party. He was particularly alarmed at the rise of the Soviet Union, even before the Second World War, and he vocally advocated for a strong, collective international response to counter the threat of Communism. In that context, he advocated for a strong and flexible Canadian military contribution to the NATO alliance.

Victor was also a racist. In the context of the first half of the 20th Century and Victor's position as a leader in the political and social establishment of the time, that is not particularly surprising, though it is no less distasteful. Through his influence as a newspaper owner and editor he hounded and accused a young Chinese house boy for no apparent reason other than the fact that he was Chinese. His newspaper writings were a significant factor in bringing criminal charges against the young man. In the end, the house boy was acquitted of all charges and the clear cut judicial ruling to acquit him was a blow to Victor and his reputation.

Victor proved to be very effective as a diplomat. He got along well in diplomatic circles, enjoyed the entertainment and social circles, and was an observant analyst of the happenings of the day. He kept his government well informed with detailed and meaningful reports and gave well thought out advice on how to use Canada's influence most effectively.

Victor Odlum is an interesting personality who figured large in the history of his country. His skill, bravery and competence as a soldier contributed significantly to the success of the Canadian Corps in the First World War. He was amongst the best of the twelve Brigade commanders in the Corps and would likely have been considered for Divisional command at a very young age had the war continued. He also made a significant contribution to the development and business success of British Columbia and Vancouver during a period of significant growth, development and transformation. Victor helped develop Vancouver into a leading centre for global trade, shipping, commerce and communications. His personal beliefs reflect the times – he was racist and violently anti-union. He had another difficult side to his personality – he developed close and loyal friends at the same rate as he made dedicated opponents and enemies. Few were neutral when it came to Victor Odlum.

Victor Odlum accomplished a great deal in his life and made a positive and significant contribution to his country in peace and in war, as a business leader, as a soldier and as a diplomat. Notwithstanding his very human faults, he deserves to be remembered as a remarkable Canadian.

The Author – This biographical essay of Victor Odlum was written by Colonel (retired) Keith Maxwell, OMM, CD. Colonel Maxwell served in the Canadian Forces and with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for forty-one years, including sixteen years in Europe. He has a degree in History from the University of Manitoba and is a graduate of three levels of Staff and Defence College studies, where he concentrated on political science and military history. He has written and presented extensively on Canadian Military History and especially on the history of the First World War. He teaches history and security studies for the Elder University program with Capilano University on the Sunshine Coast. Colonel Maxwell is a co-author of “Swift and Strong: A Pictorial History of the British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught’s Own)” which was published in 2011. The book won the Silver Prize for the Lieutenant-Governor’s Awards for Historical Writing in British Columbia in 2012. Colonel Maxwell went to High School in Vancouver and first joined the military as a Trooper in the British Columbia Regiment at the age of sixteen. He subsequently served in Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry and the Royal Canadian Air Force. He lives in Sechelt.

Sources – This paper is written as a biographical essay. Victor Odlum’s personal papers are held as a personal collection at the National Archive and Library in Ottawa. A copy of the fonds’ holdings is held at the British Columbia Regiment Museum and Archive in the Beatty Street Drill Hall in Vancouver. Other primary sources include the diaries of Field Marshal Lord Alan Brooke and the War Diaries of the 7th Battalion, CEF and the 11th Canadian Brigade, CEF. General Odlum is also featured in a number of secondary sources written on the history of the both World Wars, mainly by Canadian military historians. Victor’s son Roger privately published an undated biography of Victor sometime in the 1980s, which provides interesting insight into the family’s perspective of Victor’s life. WT (Tom) Brown wrote a memoir, Tom Brown’s School (& Other) Days, published by his children in 2002, which provides information on Tom’s life as well as an insight on his father Albert Brown’s and Victor Odlum’s business dealings and personalities.

Annex - Extracts from the personal diary of Lieutenant-Colonel John Weightman Warden, DSO, MBE, ED, Commander, 102nd (North British Columbians) Battalion, CEF –

“France Jan 1st 1918

“Made application for my transfer from Canadian Corp. G.O.C. [of 11th Brigade] would not forward it on to Corp Comdt, as he would have to ask for an investigation, & he was not anxious to have one. He (Brigadier-General Odlum) finally asked me if I would let him withhold it & he would give me leave to England & extend it until I secured a situation myself (this was after he had offered me a brigade in Eng., a staff appointment with both the Portuguese Army & the new American Army at Paris, also a Govt. situation at home, all of which I refused, as I would not accept anything from him) this I agreed to, this kept him at my H.Q. talking from 8 am till 1.30 pm, he also apologised (sic) very sincerely for the disagreeable way he had acted toward me & my Battalion & tried to dissuade me from leaving.

“France Jan 8th 1918

“Volunteered for service with secret mission to the east, in the Caucasus, & interviewed Corp. Comdr. Lt Gen Sir Arthur Currie & Col Byron who was O.C. mission. Corp Comdr consented to my leaving & issued an order for me to be seconded to Imperials. I should never have left the Canadians, but for the fact, I could not stand my Brigadier Gen. Victor Odlum any longer nor Major Gen. David Watson Div Comdr. Both very mercenary men & political with [politicians], who used their Commands to make to gain Public notice & repute. Odlum was the most clever schemer of the two. He was working for Watson’s job, & was making balls for Watson to fix an order to make him (Watson) unpopular, & Watson was not smart enough to know

it, & fixed the balls, a most incompetent officer, & Odlum is a most avaricious decoration hunter, as are most of the staff.”

* **Note on Decorations** – Victor Odlum was decorated on four occasions in the First World War. He was appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB) for extraordinarily meritorious service in a position of senior military command and was also appointed a Companion of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (CMG) for meritorious service to the British Empire in a position of great responsibility. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) on two occasions for gallantry and bravery in the field; the DSO was normally awarded to senior officers in command of a unit in combat.