

## Anchor Stories

Developed to mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, **Forever Changed** explores the human experience of war across Canada and around the world.

Each zone in **Forever Changed** contains one or more central stories to anchor the exhibition, along with accounts from dozens of additional Canadian service personnel and civilians, whose artifacts and eyewitness testimonies offer unique insight into the many experiences of war.

The six central stories present a range of important wartime activities, at home and abroad, as Canadians supported the war effort, both in and out of uniform.

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### Edith (Vollrath) Whitford (1925–)



Checking airplane engines for cracks and pouring liquid explosives into bomb casings may seem like unusual work for a teenager — but not in Canada during the Second World War. Edith Vollrath began her wartime career at 18, working close to home at Aircraft Repair Limited in Edmonton, Alberta. She later moved 3,000 kilometres away to a job as a “bomb girl” at Defence Industries Limited in Ajax, Ontario.

Edith was one of 300,000 Canadian women who held factory jobs during the Second World War, contributing to the Allied victory from the home front. Their efforts helped make it possible for Canada to produce \$11 billion worth of munitions, equipment and food — equivalent to more than \$125 billion today.

Two of Canada’s most important contributions to the war involved training aviators and producing material for the Allied war effort. Through her work at Aircraft Repair Limited and Defence Industries Limited, Edith contributed to both.

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### Able Seaman George William Boyer (1922–1979)



A Métis descendant of Louis Riel, George Boyer moved from the Saskatchewan prairies to the sea. He served on several ships in the North Atlantic, where the Royal Canadian Navy was charged with protecting merchant vessels against German attacks.

George was stationed aboard the escort carrier HMS *Nabob* in August 1944, when a torpedo ripped a 10-metre hole in the steel hull, killing 21 crew members and putting the lives of the 815 survivors in danger. George volunteered to stay aboard and help keep the heavily-damaged carrier afloat during the perilous 1,770-kilometre journey from the Barents Sea, off the northern coast of occupied Norway, to Scotland’s Orkney Islands. In the aftermath, he wrote a heartfelt letter to his mother, telling her about the death of a close friend in the U-boat attack.

# FOREVER CHANGED

STORIES FROM THE  
SECOND WORLD WAR

There could be no invasion of Europe — or extended campaigns in other theatres of war — without military supplies from North America. George did his part to ensure the safe transport of those goods, while also battling German surface raiders and U-boats.

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## Major Alexander “Alex” Railton Campbell (1910–1943)



For Alex Campbell, the war against Germany was an opportunity to make his family proud and avenge the death of his father during the First World War. He served first in North Africa, then in Italy. As an officer in The Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, he inspired the men under his command, including future author Farley Mowat, who immortalized Campbell in the book *And No Birds Sang*.

Leading from the front, Alex was shot twice — once in the arm and once in the head — but neither wound stopped him. His luck ran out on Christmas Day in 1943, when he was killed in battle near Ortona, Italy. An artist and poet as well as a fierce soldier, he penned the poignant poem, “A Prayer Before Battle,” shortly before his death.

Close to 1.1 million Canadians served in uniform during the war. They understood that their service would lead them into danger, and might require the ultimate sacrifice. As Alex’s story shows, even the best soldiers were not invulnerable.

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## Sergeant Hugh McCaughey (1906–1973)



As a combat cameraman with the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit, Hugh McCaughey spent two years capturing history as it happened. On D-Day, he was stationed by the British coast, ready to document returning casualties and German POWs.

For the rest of 1944 and 1945, he followed the army through France, the Netherlands and Germany, filming combat, liberation celebrations, and daily life for servicemen and servicewomen. Having proven himself on the battlefields of Europe, Hugh had high hopes for a postwar career in the movie industry. Instead, following the war, he worked as a camera salesman in Vancouver, British Columbia.

In the 75 years since the end of the war, Hugh’s film footage has been used and reused countless times. His story highlights the risk involved in capturing this priceless footage, as well as its enduring importance to Canadians’ understanding of the war, both at the time and today.

## Nursing Sister Winnifred Laura “Winnie” Burwash (1910–1987)



“You don’t have to be on the front lines to see tragedy,” Nursing Sister Winnie Burwash wrote from the British hospital where she was treating Canada’s wounded in 1944. Following VE Day in early May 1945, she was sent to Germany to care for the desperately sick and starving people emerging from German concentration camps and labour camps.

Later posted to the Netherlands, Winnie continued to work hard, but her letters also included frequent accounts of parties, drinking and men, as she made the most of her time overseas. The war led to many changes, including social norms. Winnie returned to Canada in February 1946, one of many veterans who came home with mental health problems. According to her family, she suffered from depression, but it is not known if this was exacerbated by her experiences in Europe. She died by suicide in 1987.

Winnie’s story shows that many service personnel and civilians, although traumatized by the war, made the most of whatever enjoyment they could find. Although dangerous and stressful, war also loosened social restrictions.

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## Flying Officer William Joseph “Will” Kyle (1922–1945)



Will Kyle was a recently engaged office worker when he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1942. He served in Britain, then went to India to fly missions delivering personnel and supplies to Allied ground forces fighting under brutal conditions in the Burmese jungle (today’s Myanmar). Although the war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945, the war against Japan continued until August 15.

On June 21, 1945, Will and five fellow RCAF airmen took off on a supply mission, but never returned. Their families waited for decades to learn what had happened. In 1990, a hunter came across a wrecked aircraft in northwestern Myanmar, and retrieved an engraved watch belonging to Will. Veterans Affairs Canada learned of the discovery, recovered the bodies, and held a military funeral in Myanmar, attended by the crew’s families.

Will’s story sheds light on the Far East theatre of war, and speaks to the anxiety and uncertainty endured by families waiting to learn the fate of loved ones who went missing.