

# INTRODUCTION

Seventy young men left the small Canadian city of Nelson in the early 1940s, never to return. They died on battlefields, at sea, and in the air, thousands of miles from home. Most of them had grown up together, many had been classmates, close friends and neighbours. Some were brothers or brothers-in-law. Every November 11th they are officially remembered when veterans and townspeople gather around the cenotaph that records their names.

Maurice Latornell is one of those names. He taught me how to skate when I was three years old. He was in his early twenties, fun, and full of life, and his death four years later made that far-off but ever-present war a reality for me. Over the years I remembered Maurice and decided finally to find the answers to my questions of how and where he died. I began with the Nelson Cenotaph to confirm the spelling of his name, and was struck by the other names of men who lost their lives in that six-year-long conflict we call World War II, family names so familiar to me and anyone else who grew up in Nelson. And so began the quest to uncover who they were and how they lost their young lives.

This, then, is the record of what I learned about their short lives and their too-early deaths. Included are accounts of other casualties of that war, young men who had strong connections with the Nelson district but who are not remembered on the Nelson Cenotaph. Some who came home, who survived terrifying experiences, tell their stories. It is also a record of the community itself as it went to war on the homefront, how Nelson sent its young men and women off with patriotic zeal, how it grieved their losses, celebrated their victories, marshalled its resources and devoted its civic life for six tumultuous years to this one purpose—winning.