

# 1942

## CHAPTER THREE

*Japanese forces sweep through the Pacific, winning major battles in Singapore, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands and Burma. In June the US Navy wins the Battle of Midway, effectively ending Japanese eastward expansion. Canadians of Japanese origin are removed from the West Coast to internment camps in the BC Interior, Alberta and Ontario. The Alaska Highway is built. Canadians vote three to one for conscription, but Prime Minister Mackenzie King promises “conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription.” In August 5,000 Canadian troops and 1,000 British commandos raid the French port of Dieppe; about 60 percent of the men who reach the shore are killed, wounded or captured. On the Russian front the Battle of Stalingrad begins. In North Africa, Montgomery’s forces defeat Rommel’s Afrika Korps at El Alamein and retake Tobruk. Submarine warfare is at its peak in the North Atlantic with disastrous losses in men and ships; 46 percent of all Allied tonnage sunk in the war is lost in 1942. The Royal Canadian Navy responds with increased convoy patrols. Destroyers, minesweepers and corvettes, many built in Canada, begin to make a formidable antisubmarine force.*

Early in 1942 Nelson was to lose another of her vibrant young men to the war. He was *John Balfour Gray, Jr.*, the younger son of a prominent Nelson jeweller and watchmaker. Jack was a flight sergeant with the RCAF, flying as a wireless operator / air gunner with RAF 144 Squadron. At 3:00 a.m. on February 27 his Hampden I bomber was returning from a mine-laying operation over the Kiel Canal in the Elbe Estuary when the aircraft ran out of fuel. It crashed into a railway crossing near Hexthorpe in the southern outskirts of Doncaster,

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Yorkshire, near their home airfield, killing all four crew members. Jack was thrown from the aircraft and died on impact. He had turned 21 six days earlier.

Jack Gray was the first overseas casualty of the war to reside within the city limits of Nelson. He was born in Trail, BC but grew up in Nelson. Jack was nicknamed Bull-Dog or J.B. in high school, and at six feet two was a popular young athlete, starring with the high school's Blue Bombers basketball team. He also excelled at hockey and lacrosse. He had a "cheery, mischievous nature," and as his mother said of her two boys, Jack was "more apt to be stirring up the fireworks." In fact, the story goes that Jack was the last student to be given the strap in the old Nelson High School, and that punishment was meted out by a teacher who was the sister of Jack Campbell, the young airman from Willow Point who was lost in 1940.<sup>28</sup> A verse in the high-school annual for 1939 suggested how Jack was vulnerable to "detentions":

Our friend Jack Gray has quite a line  
Especially when teacher gives him "time."

Jack joined the RCAF immediately after graduating from high school in June 1940. He was the first Nelson airman to graduate from the Commonwealth Air Training program, and he sailed for Britain in April 1941 on the SS *Georgic*, the last liner built by the White Star Line, in a convoy escorted by HMS *Rodney*. He was thrilled to be seeing his father's native land for the first time, and wrote home enthusiastically about the adventure of crossing the Atlantic:

It was really a thrilling sight when we went up on deck, to see green hills of Scotland about which I had heard so much. No fooling Dad, I really fell in love with Scotland right from the first. It was a beautiful spring day when we first saw land.... The voyage across was quite uneventful and smooth. We saw no submarines and if we had I need not say that we were well protected.... We had second class quarters as the first class were for officers. The bunks are not bad although when the mighty Atlantic gets rough you toss about like a cart. It was amazing to see the other troop ships bounding around in the heavy seas while the battleship hardly wavers.... There were all sorts of new things which I had never seen—such things as whales blowing and porpoises roaring and playing about.<sup>29</sup>

According to a buddy of Jack's who was with him in training and on the

same ship across the Atlantic, the young airmen spent most of the long voyage shooting craps.

Jack wrote admiringly about the spirit of the British people, and the welcome they gave to the servicemen from overseas.

Soon after we got ashore we boarded a train. The next six hours were the most pleasant I ever spent on a train. The trains, as you know, are not the same as ours but have little compartments seating about six—I like them. The first city we came to was Glasgow and the trip from [censored] to there was a revelation to me. All the way people were out waving and cheering us on—and they did mean it. The people here know there is a war on. I hate to say it but I have never seen anything like it in all my time in Canada. I felt like cheering myself when I saw these women and men in Glasgow standing by ruined homes but still waving us on.

He wrote also about life during the Blitz in London and witnessing its devastation:

I have been in London twice already now. It is a wonderful experience to see all these places about which we have heard so much. It is impossible to imagine the size of London until you have been there. We are 15 miles from the heart of London yet you can see no spot that isn't jammed with houses all the way. London at night is something too. There are a few weak lights around to guide you but when an alarm sounds it becomes pitch black there. It is queer when you think of being in the heart of a big city yet there is not a light to be seen. The Piccadilly Circus used to be an absolute blaze of lights but not one is to be seen now.... You never saw anything like the spirit of the people here. They just laugh and say he will get it all back and then some. It looks as though, to me, that the Nazis care little what they bomb as there are wrecked buildings all over London. Another thing that amazes me is the way they clean everything up after a raid. Buildings which have been ruined are cleaned up and fenced off—it is really amazing. It would do a lot of people in Canada good to see London in an air raid—they would know then what we are fighting a war for.

Jack's close friend, Flying Officer Henry "Harry" Humphries, recalled the wireless air gunner training they received together at Oxbridge in 1941, while the Battle of Britain raged.<sup>30</sup> Many of the men were "washed

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out” by air sickness, although they did little flying—“not more than twenty hours.” Partly because of the changeable weather, the Hampden planes in which they were training suffered many accidents. “The undercarriage would burst into flames on touchdown. Every other week we were on funeral parade.” There were 16 Canadians in their training group, fellows who had been together from the start. But because they became notorious for going AWOL while on leave in London, each of them was eventually assigned to different squadrons—a form of punishment for their misbehaviour. Jack spent his last Christmas in Edinburgh, on leave with his buddy Harry Humphries. Every day they visited the Castle, and would stop in at pubs to play darts all the way back to their lodgings at the George Hotel on Princes Street.

In 1941 they had both been in a documentary film, *Target For Tonight*, which received a special Academy Award certificate “for its vivid and dramatic presentation of the heroism of the RAF.” Made at Elstree Studios, the film follows one crew in the planning and execution of an actual bombing raid over Germany. Harry Humphries remembered that “every night they gave us a pound. That was beer money.” The documentary was shown as a main feature and was seen by an estimated 50 million people in North America alone, where its popularity was a propaganda coup, especially for the Victory Bonds campaign. Jack Gray was prominent in one of the promotional posters made for the film. In Nelson the film was shown in December 1941, just two months before Jack was killed.

Jack had a flair for life that was evident in his letters. He was anxious to share his adventures with the folks at home, and to report his meetings with fellow Nelson servicemen. He wrote about spending his first night on British soil at a canteen with Davy MacDonald, a Nelson boy with the Canadian Forestry Corps, who eventually came home from the war, and of meeting Jim Hughes, also of the Forestry Corps, who did not return.

The Gray family was very close. Jack’s older brother Hampton, or Hammy as he was called, was in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve in the Fleet Air Arm and was also stationed in Britain. The two brothers were able to meet occasionally, the first time shortly after Jack arrived overseas. He wrote to his parents:

I wrote [Hampton] a letter as soon as I got to London. Next I went to Canada House and learned his whereabouts. Of course on learning he was only 30 miles from London...I got on a train

and went there. I was sitting in the mess having a cup of tea when he came in. It was wonderful meeting so far from home.... Boy, I'm sure proud of my brother now. He had about 45 hours in the air but the real thing is to have a brother who is a pilot in the Fleet Air Arm. Those fellows have to be really good.... He still has lots of work ahead before he gets his wings but I am sure he will. Hope to get up to see him again.

The last time they met was in January 1942, about a month before Jack was killed. The telegram from his father telling of Jack's death was misdirected and reached Hampton after the funeral in Doncaster had taken place. Hammy visited Jack's grave in Yorkshire on more than one occasion. He wrote to his parents on his first visit about how the grave was "covered with turf and was tidy and neat. There was a card on top which I presume had been with some flowers 'from the Officers and NCOs of 144 Squadron.'" Later he wrote, "Jack's grave...is with a fairly large group of service graves and they all have nice white crosses up and a few flowers on each one."<sup>31</sup> Hammy was to lose his life three years later, and although he had no white cross to mark his grave, the Victoria Cross that he won would bring him many more memorials.

Jack's father, J.B. Gray, was broadcasting a speech over Radio CKLN advocating the purchase of Victory Bonds only hours before he received the telegram announcing the death of his younger son. He spoke of a young man's "great decision to enlist and fight for the defence of his country and the protection of the dear ones he left at home."

It [motivation] may spring from the spirit of adventure which caused our forefathers to sail the seas and seek new lands and new opportunities. Or we can imagine that somewhere within the heart of these young men there is a stirring of a spirit that has come down to him from generations of men who in the past gave their all in the fight for freedom.<sup>32</sup>

At every turn citizens were being bombarded by requests to support fundraising campaigns for the war. New causes were constantly emerging and Saturday "tag days" on the corners of Baker Street were weekly events. There was the Bomber Fund, the Army Huts Fund, the War Ambulance Fund, the Cigarette Fund, the Refugee Fund, Canadian Aid to Russia Fund, and the Greek Relief Fund. In Nelson, Dorothy Todd was organizing a local branch of the International Dorothy Spitfire



# CANADIAN PACIFIC TELEGRAPHS

*World Wide Communications*

C.D. 13

W.D. NEIL, GENERAL MANAGER OF COMMUNICATIONS, MONTREAL

3 VR B 68/67 VIA CABLE BGOVT COML

GLOUCESTER FEB 28 1010A

IMPORTANT PRIORITY

MR GRAY,  
815 BAKER ST,  
NELSON BC

DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON CAN/R58225 FLIGHT SERGEANT JOHN BALFOUR GRAY IS REPORTED TO HAVE LOST HIS LIFE IN ACTION NEAR WARMSWORTH DONCASTER YORKSHIRE ON 27TH FEBRUARY 1942 LETTER CONFIRMING THIS CABLEGRAM AND GIVING ALL AVAILABLE INFORMATION FOLLOWS THE AIR COUNCIL EXPRESS THEIR PROFOUND SYMPATHY AIR OFFICER IN CHIEF RCAF OVERSEAS 0358.

R C A F RECORD OFFICE GLOUCESTER

4.15 AM

**Come on Canada! — Buy the New Victory Bonds**



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The Queen and I offer you  
our heartfelt sympathy in your  
great sorrow.

We pray that your country's  
gratitude for a life so nobly  
given in its service may bring  
you some measure of consolation.

George R.I.

**John Balfour Gray, an Early Nelson Casualty**

**Left top:** Jack Gray (front row left) on the set of the Academy Award-winning documentary, *Target For Tonight*. Beside him is his buddy, Harry Humphries.

**Left bottom:** The telegram received by Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Gray telling of their son Jack's death in February 1942.

**Above:** The letter of condolence from the King.

*All, courtesy of Phyllis Gautschi*



**The Funeral of Flight Sergeant Jack Gray and one of his Crewmates**

A bleak February day of 1942, in Doncaster, Yorkshire.

*Photo courtesy of Phyllis Gautschi*

Fund for women with the first name of Dorothy; its purpose was to raise money for fighter planes.

In May 1942 the newly-formed Kinette Club, wives of the Kinsmen, staged a novel fundraising event in support of the Kinsmen's ongoing "Milk for Britain" campaign—an Air Raid Shelter Tea, in the basement of Wait's News Stand in the centre of town. My mother, Agnes Shorthouse, was one of the organizers. I remember advertising the event along the main street of town, wearing a sandwich board in the shape of a milk bottle. Since I was only five years old I had to peer around the sides of the milk bottle to see where I was going. Sand bags were piled up around the door to the tea, sirens sounded, and a recording of exploding bombs simulated the experience of a real air raid. Miniature sand bags were distributed, with a lucky number for a door prize. While the patrons made their contributions to the Milk for Britain Fund and sipped their tea, they watched first-aid demonstrations. According to my mother, the realism was too much for one elderly woman: she fainted and was carried out on the demonstration stretcher.

It was not only in their pocketbooks that people were feeling the effects of the war at home. In March the federal Wartime Prices and Trade Board, which had been set up in 1939, established an office in Nelson on Baker Street, their mandate being to enforce the prices and rationing regulations that were imposed, “not to persecute and prosecute, but to help the Canadian public” avoid inflation and war profiteering. Sugar was the first food staple to be rationed, along with alcohol, and that was followed shortly by tea, coffee and butter. Ration application forms for all residents were collected throughout the city, and in June women volunteers took over the library at Central School and worked in three shifts to make out ration cards for each applicant. Frugality was the order of the day. Volunteers were told to bring filled fountain pens. Daphne Wilson recalled how liquor rationing was a boon to some Nelsonites:

You had to apply for a permit, which allowed two bottles of liquor per month. The local taxi companies all ran a lucrative bootleg business, borrowing permits for two dollars a bottle. I sold my permit plus my mother’s to the bootleggers and used the money to buy hard-to-come-by towels, sheeting and blankets from Eatons catalogue whenever they became available. By the end of the war I had quite a stash.<sup>33</sup>

In March 1942 restrictions were put on the sale and purchase of tires. People who were in an “eligible class,” such as doctors, nurses and policemen, were allowed to buy a new tire and tube if a used set was turned in. Others must “get by” on the best used tires and tubes they could find. New cars could not be purchased for private use. In April restrictions on gasoline began, and the public street railway system in Nelson became more popular than ever. The annual gas allowance was 120 gallons. Gas stations could be open between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on weekdays, but closed from 7 p.m. on Saturday until Monday morning. And taxi drivers faced a fine for driving more than 15 miles beyond the city limits.

Brass and bronze articles, such as doorbells, nameplates, hat and coat hooks, were banned. Between sundown and sunrise no verandah lights, neon and other illuminated signs were allowed, including the big illuminated clock on the Medical Arts Building in the centre of town. Only street lighting was permitted.

Restrictions extended to clothing as well. In January 1942 the Wartime Prices and Trade Board announced that the manufacture of corsets,

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girdles and other articles made of all-elastic was banned. “Regulations completely changed the look of fashion, banning certain design elements that took lots of cloth, such as French cuffs. ‘Frills and furbelows’ were out, replaced by slim, spartan designs.”<sup>34</sup> On March 5 the *Nelson Daily News* announced:

Double breasted suit coats and Norfolk jackets will be a thing of the past when strict clothing regulations designed to conserve Canadian wool and textile supplies, come into effect. Men’s vests, sometimes colourful and sometimes ornate in the past, will be conservative. The back strap on vests, the inside breast pocket and special pencil pocket will disappear. The ornamental buttons on suit coat sleeves will be limited to one.

Cosmetics were affected also. Lipstick, rouge and face powder were to be manufactured in four shades only, and nail polish shades would be reduced from as many as 23 to 6. Silk was needed for parachutes, so silk stockings became unavailable. Women painted their legs and drew seams with eyebrow pencil.

Nelson’s bakers agreed to “cut out frills” in their products and to cut down on bread wrapping. Bread deliveries were reduced to three days a week; it was pointed out that fewer deliveries would “reduce the unhealthy habit of eating bread fresh from the oven.” Meat rationing and price controls were to begin a year later, and “Meatless Tuesdays” were enforced in restaurants, hotels and institutions other than work camps and hospitals. Once tea and coffee were added to the rationing list, one cup per sitting was the rule for restaurants. There were even regulations governing the amount of ice cream that could be served in a cone, and the size of milk shakes.

In 1941 the government had launched the National Salvage Campaign, with slogans such as “Dig In and Dig Out the Scrap,” and “Get Into the Scrap.” When the call went out for scrap metal, Nelson was quick to respond:

Old German guns from the last war which have decorated the boulevard on Vernon St.... for some years are soon to go into the scrap pot and be melted down for making munitions to be turned against the enemy.<sup>35</sup>

Newspaper stories throughout the war reported the success of various salvage campaigns. School children were among the enthusiastic workers and prolific collectors. In May 1942 members of the Veterans Guard and



**Wartime Restrictions**

When tea and coffee were rationed in August 1942, restaurants were not allowed to serve a second cup. Cartoon by Charles Knight, courtesy of Windsor Star

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the Junior High School Cadet Corps sorted and packed bottles from the Red Cross bottle drive. In June Central School won the cup donated by Fire Chief G.A. MacDonald and jeweller E.E. Collinson for the greatest quantity of rubber and aluminum collected per capita in a school salvage competition. The newspaper reported that Central School had turned in close to 3,000 pounds of rubber; St. Joseph's Academy, the local Catholic school, came in second, with 925 pounds, but its grades 3-4 and 5-6 classes led all other grades in the city in individual class returns.

Salvage drives were spurred on by a press release from the Department of Munitions in Ottawa, stating that enough steel could be salvaged from an old car to make 25 heavy machine guns. An editorial in the *Nelson Daily News* estimated that "based on that calculation, the 400 derelict cars in Nelson's dump could produce 10,000 machine guns."<sup>36</sup> The Red Cross, church organizations, service clubs, veterans' groups and school children all took part in the salvage efforts. They collected pots and pans, glass, old batteries, bones and fat, rubber, tin foil from cigarette packages, and scrap paper by the ton.

For young children like myself growing up in those years, war was the natural condition. When there was talk of the war coming to an end in 1945 it seemed logical that news broadcasts would come to an end as well. The predominant theme of everything was war: toys and board games such as "Blitz" and "Flying Aces," comic books in black and white that featured Johnny Canuck and caricatures of the merciless German and Japanese enemy. My brother collected comic books that were mini-biographies of the Allied leaders: Churchill, Roosevelt, Chiang Kai-shek and de Gaulle. "Big-Little books" featured corner pictures that when flipped showed diving Spitfires. Making balsa models of fighters and bombers was a popular hobby of the boys. Instead of baseball cards, cigarette packages had warplane cards. One favourite Christmas toy in my family was a toy battleship, spring-loaded so that if the torpedo shot by the accompanying submarine hit the target, the battleship would explode into several pieces; my brother added a thumbtack to the torpedo to give it more heft. Candy was in short supply, chocolate bars were generally unavailable, and grocery stores sold soybean spread instead of peanut butter. In school, children knitted khaki-coloured squares, ostensibly to be made into blankets, and in order to conserve paper, wrote in the margins of their notebooks when the pages were full. The Junior Red Cross group hand-hemmed dozens of "ugly khaki handkerchiefs for servicemen." We



**HOUSEHOLDERS! THESE ARE YOUR  
WAR WEAPONS**  
*Save them, Give them, and help WIN THIS WAR*

We cannot all march into battle—but we can march into the attics, the cellars and store-away places in our homes.

There are war weapons in these places—and in your household waste, which can be turned into a valuable contribution to Canada's war production and into funds for war auxiliary services.

Many local volunteer organizations have already completed plans for a Salvage Campaign in their districts. More will follow. Quickly, we hope, all Canada will be organized to "clean out and clean up on Hitler!"

Every day of every week until this war is won, every scrap of material which can be profitably salvaged in the area in which you live must be saved, collected and turned into war production material and money.

A careful study and survey is being made throughout Canada by this Department as to the type and class of salvage which will realize the greatest return in your community. If this information is not now in the hands of your local Salvage Committee or your Municipal Council, have them communicate with the Supervisor, National Salvage Campaign, New Supreme Court Building, Ottawa.

**EVERY SCRAP COUNTS**

- \* Put Them Out Carefully
- \* They Will Be Collected
- \* They Will Be Used

The complete facilities of the Department are at the disposal of local community organizations to aid in making their Salvage Campaigns a success.

When the Campaign starts in your community, we ask that you give it your unqualified support.

Issued by authority of Honourable James G. Gardiner, Minister

**DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL WAR SERVICES**

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kids played a lot of commando games and watched a lot of movies where the bad guys were Germans. In the 1929 musical *The Desert Song* the villains had been Arabs; in the 1940s version they were Nazis. Even the dance reviews and Nelson Skating Club carnivals had war themes. In our tap-dancing debut my brother and I did a military number to *Anchors Aweigh*. Dozens of Nelson children performed regularly in the annual skating carnivals; in 1942 the theme was “St. George and the Dragon,” an allegorical story of the ultimate triumph of outraged Britannia and her allies over the Hitler Dragon.