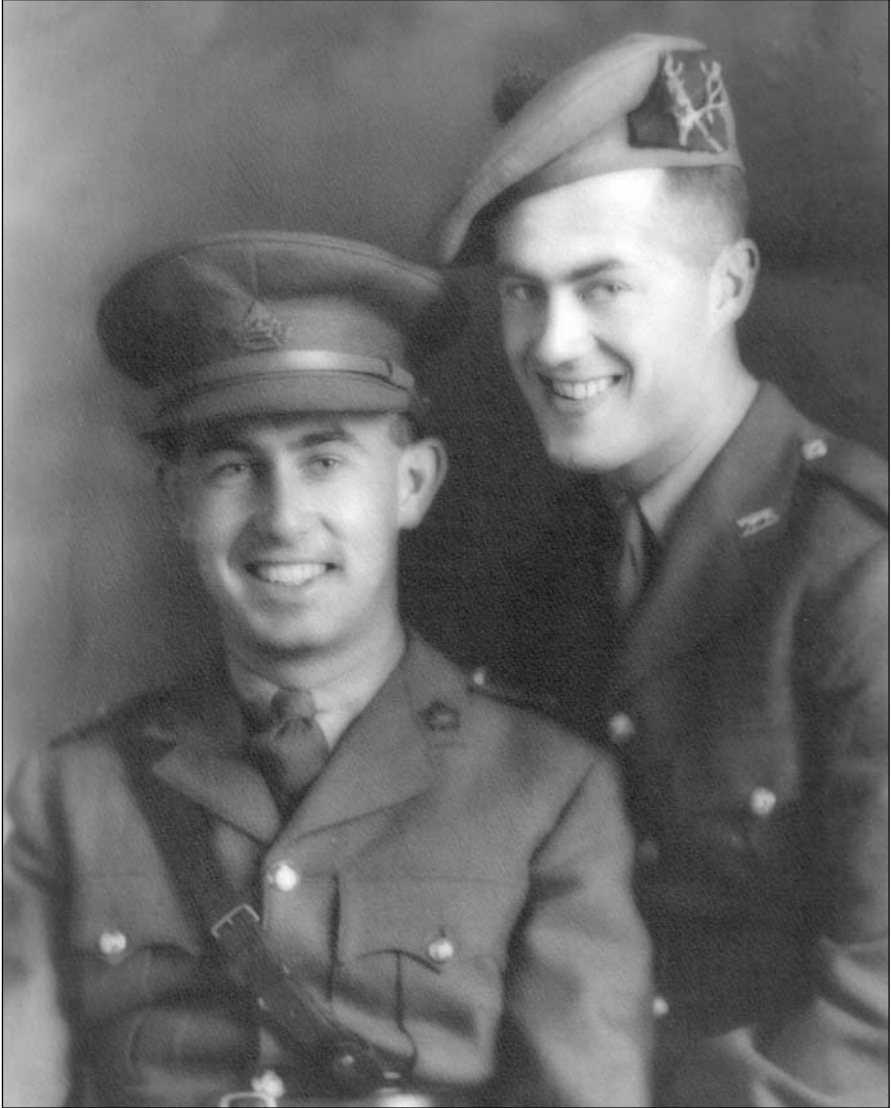


Kenneth Gilbert McBride of Nelson lost his life in that battle on September 16. He was advancing near the front line when the carrier in which he was riding struck a mine, killing both Ken and his driver. Ken was a widely known and popular young man who was already a captain with the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada at the age of 24. Ken and his older brother, Leigh, were both officers with the Seaforths during the terrible battle for Ortona the previous Christmas. Ken had written home to his parents on New Year's Day 1944 about his meeting with his brother there:

Well, I never will spend another Xmas like my 1943 one—what a nightmare. You will have read about it in the papers by now, but Leigh and I were in the middle of it. I'd call it Stalingrad No. 2. Only time I saw Leigh was on Christmas night—his platoon took over my platoon position so we could pull out and have Christmas dinner. We wished each other a Merry Xmas—he gave me a cigar and I gave him the dope on the enemy so he'd know where to expect the Germans in the morning. Leigh said he got a thrill when orders were issued from C. Coy, HQ "McBride to relieve McBride."... And here's wishing my Mother and Dad a wonderful New Year, and keep your chins up—Leigh and I will look after ourselves."⁹⁷

Four months later Leigh was to lose an eye in battle and be taken prisoner for the duration of the war. He was on the "missing in action" list for four months. His parents learned he was a prisoner just two days before they were notified that their son, Ken, had been killed. Their father wrote to a friend:

We had two happy days. On Sept. 20 we received a wire from Ottawa saying that Leigh was a prisoner of war in Germany. On Sept. 22 we received another wire from the director of records, saying that dear old Ken had been killed in action on Sept. 16. The distressing news almost stunned us. We had been worrying a



The McBride Brothers

Leigh (left) and Kenneth were officers in the Seaforth Highlanders.

Photo courtesy of Deedee and Sam McBride

great deal about both boys—Leigh being missing, and Ken in the thick of the fighting around Rimini. But during those two days, we were so completely happy that we forgot, for the time being, the danger that might occur to Ken.... Ken wrote us three lovely letters dated Sept. 4-6-10 which we received on the day that we heard Leigh was safe. He told us about being through two heavy

weeks previously. He was happy and told of going in swimming and the big yellow moon, and of the German night raider that kept circling overhead. He wrote more letters which arrived after we heard the very sad news.... Ken and Leigh never let us down. How they wrote us as often as they did is more than we can figure out. They were both good soldiers—and they did their part.⁹⁸

Ken McBride was born and raised in Nelson. He was a natural athlete, excelling at badminton, basketball and softball, but especially at golf. A verse about him in the Nelson High's *Mountaineer* for 1939 speaks of his popularity and athletic abilities:

Ken is the dark-haired class Romeo
 For amongst our gals he is not so slow!
 He's also NHS's great badminton ace
 And in golf he is always sure to set the pace

After attending the University of Alberta for one year, Ken moved on to UBC, and while there enlisted in the army. It seems likely that he would have made a name for himself as a golfer. He won many championships in the Kootenays and also while he attended university, winning the UBC championship in both 1940 and 1941. In his last year there he captained a UBC team that toured Washington, Oregon and California, "competing against the best golfers on the Pacific Coast." In 1946 the cup for the Nelson Invitational Open Golf Championship was named the Kenneth McBride Memorial Trophy, in honour of the hometown boy whose promising golfing career was cut so short.

By the fall of 1944 the heavy losses of men in Italy and Normandy were creating severe shortages of manpower for the army. The many advertisements urging conscripts to "wear the GS badge" that signified the choice of "General Service on any battle front, anywhere in the world," were not producing the desired number of volunteers.

I signed up to fight—to go overseas—to do the work of a real soldier! That's why I'll wear the GS badge on my arm. It's a decoration—something any man can be proud to wear—because only those willing to do their *full share of service* are permitted to wear it.

"You're on the *wrong* beach fella!" headlined another ad that pictured soldiers storming a beach while a young man sat idly sunbathing. Canadian soldiers at the front, after having survived so many bloody battles and

YOU'RE ON THE WRONG BEACH FELLA!

OVERSEAS BADGE OF HONOR
GS
WEAR IT ON YOUR ARM

IT'S the beaches of Europe you ought to be on, mister, where men are fighting for freedom — your freedom, world's freedom.

Canada's Army needs men like you to take your place on the right beach to wear the G.S. badge on your arm. The badge that means General Service on any battle front, anywhere in the world.

Remember, it's going to take months of training to make you fighting fit. So, today, now, decide to get on the right beach.

Ad Promoting Overseas Service

Conscripts were urged to volunteer for overseas service, allowing them to wear the "GS" badge. Until late in the war, Canada's overseas forces were all voluntary.

being so long away from home, were showing some impatience with the war, and in particular with men who had been drafted under the *National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA)* but had not volunteered for overseas service. These home-service conscripts were popularly given the derogatory name of "zombies." One gunner on the Italian front, complaining about the lack of conscription for overseas service, told a war correspondent, "...what we would like is a policy for getting us home, five years overseas is a damn long time."

140 / Homefront & Battlefield

The MacKenzie King government had promised “conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription” for overseas service. But in November 1944 the government decided that “necessity” had come. Anti-conscription demonstrations broke out in late November at six BC centres: Vernon, Chilliwack, Nanaimo, Courtenay, Prince George and Terrace. There was a sit-down strike by Home Defence soldiers at Terrace, and nearly 1,000 soldiers from the Vernon Military Camp paraded through the streets shouting “Down with Conscription!” According to statistics of the Department of National Defence, 4,029 “zombies” were residents of BC; only 36 of them were from Nelson.⁹⁹ In the fall of 1944 the hunt was on in earnest for “draft dodgers,” men who had failed to answer their military call-up notices. But there turned out to be very few actual draft dodgers, only 36 in all of British Columbia. The *Daily News* reported the findings:

It was found in many cases that the men had not received their notices, that they already were in the services, or that they were dead. In one case a man reported to be delinquent, had lost a leg at Dieppe and was sitting in a wheel-chair at home when the RCMP arrived with his call-up notice.¹⁰⁰

The British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught’s Own), nicknamed “The Duke’s,” had landed in Normandy in the third week of July 1944. It was part of the Canadian Army that fought its way through Caen and the Falaise Gap and across the Seine to Belgium. Nelson native Maxwell Carne served in the 28th Armoured Regiment (BCR) and survived bloody battles through France, Belgium, the Netherlands and into Germany. He was the only member of his original tank crew that was not killed or taken prisoner, and was the driver of the tank in which Lieutenant Colonel Donald Worthington was killed in the disastrous tank battle for Hill 195 between Caen and Falaise in early August 1944, in which 48 of the regiment’s 52 tanks were knocked out.

Among the casualties of the 28th Armoured Regiment was *Trooper Evander Donaldson Rogers* of Slocan City. Maxwell Carne remembers him as the driver of a water truck for the regiment, killed by a sniper’s bullet in Belgium on September 26, 1944. One of the soldiers in the regiment was so incensed at the killing that he insisted on staying behind when the regiment moved on, in order to dispatch the sniper, which,

according to Maxwell Carne, he did. The name of Trooper Rogers is among those inscribed on the Nelson Cenotaph. He was 35 years old.

The South Saskatchewan Regiment was with the Canadian Army liberating the Channel ports, including Dieppe on September 1, 1944, where they had been part of the disastrous raid two years earlier. They battled through Belgium and into the flooded polders and knee-deep mud of Holland, crossing canals and taking heavy casualties. ***Private Stanley Frederick Castle*** of Nelson was with the regiment when on October 29 he was killed as they crossed the canal at Gravenpolder, just into the Netherlands from Belgium. Stan Castle had been a member of the 111th (Nelson) Field Battery before the outbreak of war. His father, Fred, a veteran of the First World War, was quarter-master sergeant for the battery and together father and son were among the first contingent to leave Nelson for training in Edmonton in October 1939. Stan went overseas during the winter of 1940–41. He grew up in Nelson, where his father operated Van de Camp's Bakery. John Norris, survivor of the HMCS *Athabaskan*, was a boyhood friend and neighbour of Stan's and recalls the pink buns Fred Castle used to make for the kids. John had also been a sparring partner with Stan, who built quite a reputation as an amateur boxer. Stan was 23 when he was killed.

Many Nelson servicemen had interesting stories to tell about their experiences: near-misses, lucky escapes or special assignments. Flying Officer Gib Goucher of Nelson piloted a Stirling aircraft which was towing a glider during *Operation Market Garden*, the massive landing of an airborne army in Holland in mid-September 1944. An RCAF press release described his terrifying brush with death:

Just after taking off [the aircraft] twisted to port and started down in a spiral dive. A glider which apparently had hit the slipstream and gone out of control, dragged the tow ship's tail and made it momentarily uncontrollable. Goucher...stood up at the controls in an effort to bring the Stirling out of the spiral which started 2,500 feet from the ground. He finally controlled it only a few hundred feet above the ground. Meanwhile the glider's tow rope broke and the glider pilot landed in a corn field nearby.¹⁰¹

142 / Homefront & Battlefield

After 572 flying hours as an air gunner, Pilot Officer Peter Melneczuk, who grew up in Nelson, had a near-miss on the very last mission of his second operational tour. A RCAF press release told his story:

Peril pursued PO Peter Melneczuk of Nelson, BC, Bluenose Squadron gunner, right up to the end of his second operational tour. His last target was Hamburg, a daylight raid. Clouds concealed the enemy town so well that it was decided to return to Britain without dropping the bombs. Over England disaster caught up with his aircraft. Both starboard propellers flew off. The bomb-burdened aircraft slanted toward earth and the skipper ordered the crew to “hit the silk.” There was no question of jettisoning the bombs; the pilot could only try to land and he didn’t want his crewmates to share the risk. Melneczuk headed into space about 5,000 feet up, floated safely down, manipulating the cords of his chute so as to fall in a river. He landed in the soft mud on its bank, unhurt as were the other flyers. Meanwhile the pilot attempted to belly-land in a field, the petrol exploded and he was killed.¹⁰²

H.W.R. “Bert” Ramsden, a pilot with the RCAF’s 404 (Buffalo) Squadron, survived one of the fiercest air battles of the war. One of the squadron’s jobs, as part of Coastal Command, was to attack enemy shipping in the North Sea along the Norwegian coastline. Bert and his squadron were part of an attack over the icy waters of Forde Fjord on February 9, 1945, when rocket-firing Allied planes seriously damaged German shipping and tangled with a dozen Focke-Wulf 190 German fighters. Nine Allied aircraft were lost in the raid, which was labelled “Black Friday” by their home base at Dallachy, Scotland. Bert told me how his small stature possibly had saved his life earlier in the war. When his air crew was assigned to larger bombers, Bert found that his feet could not easily reach the rudder controls, so he transferred to smaller aircraft. His crew was taken over by a pilot, Frank Morrow, who had worked with Bert for a short time at the Bank of Commerce in Nelson. In June 1944 Frank and Bert’s old crewmates went down over Germany; three were killed and four were taken prisoners.

Sub-Lieutenant Victor I. “Vic” Graves of Nelson was a survivor of the sinking of the minesweeper, HMCS *Clayoquot*, a victim of U-806 off Halifax harbour on Christmas Eve day, 1944. The minesweeper was on convoy escort duty when the torpedo struck in mid-afternoon of December 24. The crew was praised for its orderliness and “cool

behaviour” in abandoning ship. All of the 73 men who managed to get off the ship were rescued by a corvette after about a half hour in the icy water. “Their teeth were chattering but they were still bravely singing *Oh, Come All Ye Faithful*.” The *Clayoquot* was the first Canadian warship to be built in Prince Rupert, and the twentieth to be lost in the war.

In the summer and fall of 1944 the first V-1 flying bombs, popularly known as “doodle-bugs,” “buzz-bombs” or “robot bombs,” had begun bombarding London. Some Nelson servicemen, on leave in Britain, experienced them first-hand. Leading Aircraftman Jim Coleman required hospital treatment for injuries he received from a V-1 in September. Signalman John McGinn wrote home of his experience:

We heard one coming over. The motor quit and we went on to the floor under the table. The windows just folded up and the splinters flew in all directions. None of the pieces hit any of us, however.... The blast of one of them is terrific. You’d almost think someone was pushing you around.¹⁰³

There were Nelson men among the engineers and skilled technicians who played an important role in the war. Sapper S. Jorgenson of Nelson was among the Royal Canadian Engineers honoured by Canadian Army Commander, Lieutenant-General A.G.L. McNaughton, for the work the company did in Gibraltar by tunnelling out great sections of “The Rock” for gun emplacements, underground water systems and a hospital.

Private George “Scotty” Williams of Blewett, who left Nelson with the 111th Field Battery in 1939, was part of a Light Aid Detachment in Italy that repaired shot-up artillery pieces, tanks and motor vehicles, often in the thick of battle. An article in *The Maple Leaf* magazine in May 1944 featured Scotty:

“Scotty” is no spring chicken, but he hops around the big guns in the midst of engagements, repairing, balancing gears, charging them with air and oil, and considers it “just an ordinary job.”... [He] is officially a gun fitter but to the boys he’s a “gun doctor.”

Flying Officer Ian Carne, brother of Maxwell Carne, had the novel assignment of flying copies of *SEAC*, the daily service newspaper of South East Asia Command published in Calcutta, to men in the forward lines, scattered over a 700-mile front. A feature article on the airmen in an issue of *SEAC* told how they often had to face worse enemies than the Japanese:

144 / Homefront & Battlefield

Flying through the jungles in all kinds of weather, including the monsoons which cause great damage, they also have to battle the hawks for whom the aircraft seems to have a special fascination.¹⁰⁴

Private Fred Thompson was with the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, serving in casualty clearing stations and sometimes as a stretcher bearer, first in the Mediterranean, then in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and after D-Day in France, Belgium and Holland. Corporal Tudor Rutherglen served overseas with the British Columbia Regiment (DCO) as a mail clerk, collecting and distributing mail for over a thousand men.

Two Nelson men were on the personal staff of General Harry Crerar, who commanded the First Canadian Army in 1944. Major John Weir, who had spent his boyhood in Nelson, was personal assistant to General Crerar in Ottawa and in Europe; and one of General Crerar's personal drivers in Europe was Eddie Leeming, who was a meatcutter in my father's butcher shop in Nelson.

On the homefront throughout 1944, Nelson citizens, young and old, continued their enthusiastic support for the war effort, and in both civic and school activities the war was central. The junior high and high school cadet corps distinguished themselves, not only in British Columbia, but nationally. In December the high school cadet corps won the Earl Grey Challenge Trophy, awarded to the corps achieving the highest general proficiency in Canada. In one of their inspection manoeuvres, two attacking sections of the cadets had seized Gyro Heights, part of a popular Nelson park, while another section defended it. A First Aid team and a Signals Squad were also in the action. Inspecting District Cadet Officer, Major W.R. Critchley, spoke highly of the citizens of Nelson for their "noticeable and outstanding" support of their youth. He pointed out that there was no other corps in BC with as many efficiency chevrons. The girls' corps was also highly praised. And in the spring the junior-high corps had been called "the best in British Columbia" by inspecting officers.

The war hung heavily over young people despite their patriotic zeal, having seen so many of their older friends, brothers and neighbours go off to battle, and expecting that they would be next. It was the sobering theme of the Nelson High valedictory address by Bruce Arneson in 1944:

With the war going into its fifth year, the things we have begun to learn in school must be carried on with greater force outside. We must be able to sacrifice many forms of pleasure. We must have courage, especially those who are going to be leaving easy forms of living to take up harder tasks in our country's service....¹⁰⁵

The students, of course, were aware of how they were being rushed into adulthood. A letter to the editor of the *Daily News* on October 9, 1944, signed "A Student," raised an important question:

Sir – Perhaps some reader could explain to me why Canadian youths are not allowed to vote until they become 21, yet these same youths are accepted to fight for the defence of Canada when they are 18? If 18-year-olds are old enough to fight for their country, why should they not be old enough to share in the governing of their country?

The pressure on school children to contribute even more was relentless. In November 1944, Nelson schools were visited by the director of School War Savings for the BC-Yukon district, who had a chastising message for Nelson's youth. Their per-student purchase of War Savings Stamps ranked only fourteenth in the province, while the record of students in another Kootenay centre, Cranbrook, ranked third. Once again, the traditional Hallowe'en "trick-or-treating" that October had been turned into a fundraiser for the Kinsmen's Milk for Britain campaign. The children not only collected the Hallowe'en Shellout tickets instead of candies, they also had helped in the sale of tickets to householders. The proceeds "turned their Hallowe'en fun into an estimated 8,000 quarts of milk for their cousins in Britain." Children also played a large part in the numerous paper drives that took place in 1944. Under adult supervision, they worked in teams to collect paper from homes throughout the city, and helped in the loading of the paper into city street cars that picked up the bundles on their route. Two railway boxcars of paper were sent to Vancouver in the summer of 1944, each carrying over 20 tons of paper.

On October 23, 1944 the 7th Victory Loan Campaign got underway with the blowing of whistles, fire and police sirens for one minute, and a parade, with bands and decorated floats, through the centre of town. The Victory Loan flag-raising ceremony took place during a concert featuring the 44-piece CWAC (Canadian Women's Army Corps) Military Band before an "overflowing crowd of 700" in the Capitol Theatre. The effort that went into organizing and coordinating the Victory Loan drives is

impressive. Once again, a civic holiday was proclaimed so that canvassers would find residents at home when they called. Fifteen teams of service-club members, divided into three competing groups, acted as salesmen who set out to visit every home in the city. Team members could win prizes for the largest sales, and the winning group members would be guests at a banquet, with the second-place group serving the tables, and the third-place group providing the food.

On October 16 a military convoy had toured the Kootenays in support of the coming drive, parading through Nelson and stopping at the schools, to the thrill of “swarms of Nelson school children who scribbled their names all over the vehicles.” According to the *Daily News*:

All day long the kids swarmed in and out of the armored reconnaissance cars and squeezed themselves into the turret tops to handle the Bren guns. Imitating the chatter of the Bren gun, they “potted” scores of watchers. Others handled rifles and were shown how to operate them by the troopers who seemed to be enjoying themselves hugely.

In the afternoon the convoy toured the North Shore as far as Balfour.

Nelson businesses took out many ads in the local newspaper, urging support for the Drive. “Feed the Guns” was one advertising theme:

...We at home cannot fire the guns—but we can feed them—we must feed them. Not with hundreds—or with thousands—but with millions of shells.... Thousands of our Canadian guns fire as many as 700 shells in an 8-hour attack! *How many shells are you planning to buy?*

Individuals, too, used the local newspaper to urge support for the campaign. One instance was a letter to the editor from Frances Carne, mother of Maxwell and Ian who were serving overseas:

I have only two boys to represent me in this war, Max who is 24 today, being with a tank regiment in Belgium, and Ian, with the RCAF in India.... I am very proud of my corporal and my lieutenant and they are doing their work every bit as well as the lowest or highest in rank in all the services, but their part in life is to come back home as soon as possible and get into a normal stride.... Cannot those of you who are holding back, come and give in an application at any bank or with a canvasser from the loan committee, so that we can get these boys home?¹⁰⁶

The Nelson district's campaign collected over one million dollars in the Seventh Drive, 32 percent over its quota. H.A. Matthews, a provincial organizer, commented:

Nelson district's response has in every way been a creditable one.

Not only did it meet its biggest war loan assignment, but, as far as we can ascertain, it has set a record in Canada by receiving 14 honour pennants for over-subscription in its various sub-units.¹⁰⁷

In 1944 the WA to the Active Forces sent out 980 Christmas parcels; they went to every fighting front as well as to POWs and Nelson servicemen and women across Canada, in the United States and Great Britain. On December 29 the *Daily News* reported the typical parcel contents, and how much appreciated they were:

Best known Nelson address overseas is, undoubtedly, 1023 Front Street. To the home of Secretary Mrs. A.D. Oliver have come hundreds of letters of thanks to the auxiliary from appreciative men in strange lands. Into each man's parcel went: a cake, sox, cigarettes, hankie, shoe laces, comb, razor blades, chocolate bars, powdered chocolate, pencil, tooth powder, gum and a Christmas card. A waxed maple leaf, Canadian symbol, was a well-received addition to the service women's parcel, each of which included: a cake, a box of paper tissues, comb, chocolate bars, gum, cigarettes, hair net, powder puff, tooth powder, talcum, shoulder straps, bobby pins, pencil and a Christmas card.

Individuals could purchase pre-packaged parcels from The Hudson's Bay, with four different prices from which to choose. A box for \$3.36 contained mentholatum, shaving cream, shoe polish, tooth paste, a pocket mirror, a sewing kit, a writing kit, a pencil, a novel, a half pound of cheese, and a tin of Prem. The Bay offered a personal shopping service to customize the gift boxes with additional items such as sweaters, shirts, wallets and "air force diaries." Thank-you letters from the servicemen and women provided "perhaps the most welcome Christmas present" for many Nelson families and the committee in charge of sending the parcels. One Nelson soldier wrote his thanks through the newspaper:

From France to Nelson seems a long way, but when one received such remembrances as your box it makes us feel we are very close to home. I've seen an awful lot of France, and a great amount of Belgium, but none of it can compare to our Kootenays.



FROM THE "BAY"

Be sure you get that overseas parcel away in time! Below are four different box ideas—These can be ordered by number. Let us have the complete address and our personal shopper will do the rest. For further suggestions visit our Christmas Dept. of Gifts for the Services Everywhere!

SOLDIER'S BOX No. 1	SOLDIER'S BOX No. 2	SOLDIER'S BOX No. 3	SOLDIER'S BOX No. 4
1 Shave Cream 1 Gillette Blades 1 Pocket Mirror 1 Writing Kit 1 Sewing Kit 2 Handkerchiefs 1 Pair Socks 2 Suits, Noodle Soap	1 Mentholatum 1 Gillette Blades 1 Shave Cream 1 Blade Sharpener 1 Shoe Polish 1 Tooth Paste 1 Writing Kit 1 Novel 1/2 lb. Cheese 1 Tea Press	1 Soap 1 Soap Box 1 Tooth Brush 1 Tooth Powder 1 Shoe Polish 1 St. Cards 1 Writing Kit 1 Novel 1 Handkerchiefs 2/4 1 Stereo Cubes	1 Styptic Pencil 1 Shave Cream 1 Gillette Blades 1 Tooth Brush 1 Tooth Powder 1 Soap Box 1 Pencil 1 Novel 1 Chrome Cracker 1 Money Belt
Price Delivered \$3.36	Price Delivered \$3.36	Price Delivered \$4.19	Price Delivered \$4.74

OTHER GIFT SUGGESTIONS

Sleeveless Sweaters, Khaki, Air Force \$1.95	Handkerchiefs 50¢
Long Sleeve Khaki Sweaters \$3.50	Suede Money Belts \$2.50
Airforce Shirts \$2.75	Writing Cases \$4.00
Black Dress Ties \$1.00	Pen and Pencil Sets \$2.50
Black Dress Socks 65¢	Wallets \$3.00
Shirts and Shorts 85¢ and 75¢	Air Force Diaries \$1.25

Parcel Post Hints

- Wrap in strong paper or cotton—tie with heavy cord.
- Secure each article firmly in parcel.
- Address correctly—always include return address!
- Prepay postage fully.

Mailing Dates for Christmas Parcels

- MIDDLE EAST — October 5.
- MEDITERRANEAN — October 10.
- BRITAIN AND FRANCE — October 25.

MAIL EARLY



Overseas Christmas Gifts

The Women's Auxiliary to the Active Forces mailed out hundreds of Christmas parcels each year to men and women overseas, but families could also purchase gift packages for their loved ones.

The Red Cross work rooms, the Women's Institute and the IODE continued to ship out an enormous number of items for "V" Bundles to go overseas. The women took pride in the congratulatory messages they received about the high quality of knitting that came from Nelson. R.L. McBride reported that on his visit to the Vancouver headquarters of the Red Cross he found that Nelson was known as "the knitting city." In 1944 the Red Cross had also shipped out 36,656 pounds of jam, plus money collected for the Jam for Britain Project. Eighty-four "nursery bags" for British children were sent out, and "ditty bags" for sailors. These were being assembled and sent out from City Hall by various organizations and individual volunteers. The newspaper reported how the ditty bags "fill a real need in the lives of Canada's fighting sailors, as well as being a remembrance from the folks at home." They contained "the little necessities from the corner drug store, the tobacco shop, the variety store or the book store, necessities that cannot be obtained on shipboard."

In September 1944 the IODE began collecting items for bridal trousseaus to be sent to Britain for Canadian war brides. The brides had already begun to arrive in Canada, many with young children. The first war bride to arrive in Nelson was Mrs. David Matthews, who was presented with a bouquet of flowers from the soldiers' wives of Nelson and the City when she arrived at the CPR station in March 1944. In November a Welcome Home Service Organization was formed by the Legion, Red Cross, IODE and the WA to the Active Forces. Their plan was to greet war brides as well as returning servicemen and women at the train station. An information desk was set up and light refreshments were offered, as well as taxi service if needed.

There was more tragic news to come for Nelson residents at the end of 1944. Another young man of great promise, *Flying Officer Norman Holmes Boss*, was killed in a flying accident in England on the night of November 15. Norman was the navigator in a Halifax bomber on a routine cross-country flight when it was in a mid-air collision with another aircraft. They crashed five miles southeast of Winkleigh, Devon. The crew was part of #1661 Heavy Conversion Unit, converting from two- to four-engine aircraft. Norman was born and raised in Nelson. He was an outstanding student and from high school won a scholarship to Queen's University, where he studied forest engineering. He transferred to UBC and was a bursary winner in his fifth year of studies. Immediately

150 / Homefront & Battlefield

after graduating with an Honours B.Sc. in 1942, Norman joined the RCAF. He was engaged to be married to a Grand Forks girl who was in nurses' training in Vancouver. Norman was 25 years old.

The last Nelson man to lose his life on the Italian front was *Private William Allen*, who was with the Westminster Regiment (Motor), nicknamed "the Westies." They were part of the attack on the Gothic Line in northern Italy, where tanks, vehicles and men battled the Germans through roads and fields of mud. From September 1 the fighting went on unabated for almost two months in the flood plains of the Foglia River in the push toward Ravenna, which was finally taken in early December. It was in this attack that 29-year-old Private Allen was killed on November 18. Not much is known about William Allen's life before the war. As a child he spent some time in an orphanage in Victoria, then travelled for a time with his father, who worked for a circus.¹⁰⁷ He was working as a cook in Nelson when he enlisted in the army.

The British forestry industry was unable on its own to supply the huge amount of wood needed to support the war. It was estimated that every soldier consumed five trees: one for living quarters; one for crates to ship food, ammunition, and war machines; and three for explosives, gun stocks, ships and factories.¹⁰⁹ As they had in World War I, the Canadian and British governments cooperatively established the Canadian Forestry Corps (CFC) in May 1940. The main areas of operation were in Scotland, where CFC camps were constructed from scratch, and logging operations provided the timber for the building of barracks, roads, bridges, ships, power plants and some 130 rafts to support the Normandy invasion. The CFC operations cleared an estimated 230,000 acres of forest in Scotland.

Recruitment to the Forestry Corps was heaviest, as one would expect, in areas of the country where the forest industry was thriving; many men from the Nelson district signed up. Among them was *Lieutenant James Robert "Jim" Hughes*, who was the only Nelson member of the corps to lose his life in the war. He died in Scotland on December 3, 1944, from multiple injuries he suffered when the vehicle he was driving overturned. He was 28 years old.

Jim's family had lived in various parts of BC and Alberta. He attended elementary school in Kelowna, and had moved with his family to the

Kootenays in 1928, residing in Queens Bay and Boswell. He attended high school in Calgary. In Nelson he worked as a truck and tractor driver and later as a salesman. He was well known in the city for his singing abilities and was often a guest soloist at Trinity United Church. Jim also was a sports enthusiast and was active in badminton, tennis, soccer and hockey. While overseas he had married a Scottish girl; she came out to Canada after the war but later returned to Scotland.

By the fall of 1944, with the Germans retreating on all fronts, victory seemed inevitable. Kirke L. Simpson's daily column, *Interpreting the War News*, was increasingly optimistic. But the major offensive by the Germans through the Ardennes, beginning on December 16, brought it home that the killing and the misery were a long way from over. The Christmas Day editorial in the *Nelson Daily News* reflected that mood:

Our Christmas of 1944 is clouded by our fears for our boys in the services, our deep desire for their return home...but it is brightened by the solid grounds for hoping that within a year victory will have crowned the gallantry and endurance and self-sacrifice of the armies, the navies and the air forces of the United Nations.... We can extend Christmas greetings with that knowledge and with full confidence that, while some of the hardest battles of the war have yet to be fought and that there must be ever more vigorous endeavour and self-denial by all of us at home to support with munitions and reinforcements our warriors in all the services, the cause of Democracy will be triumphant, that our freedom and our liberties will be preserved.

The loss over Christmas of 25-year-old ***Patrick Henry George*** was the final blow of 1944. Pat was a technical sergeant with the US Army Air Force, and was a top-turret gunner in a B-24 bomber that went down on Christmas Eve in a raid on the transportation and communication centre of Euskirchen, Germany, during the Battle of the Bulge. Pat was flying with the 714th Squadron of the 448th Bombardment Group (8th Army Air Force) out of Seething Airfield in Norfolk. After completing high school in Washington State, he had joined the Air Force in January 1941 and graduated from training as a technical engineer. He had served for a year with the 10th Air Force in the China-Burma-India theatre of war, but contracted polio and was returned to the United States for hospitalization. After his recovery, Pat trained for service in Liberator

bombers and returned to active service in England in September 1944 with the 448th.

Pat was born in Nelson and spent most of his boyhood there. He left after junior high school for Anacortes, Washington to reside with his sister; he attended high school there. In November 1945 Pat was to receive a Purple Heart, and in January 1946 a special ceremony was held in the Nelson City Council chambers. US Colonel J.H. Harrington presented Pat's mother with the US Air Medal, with two oak-leaf clusters. The citation for the Air Medal reads:

For meritorious achievement in accomplishing with distinction, several aerial operations missions over enemy occupied Continental Europe. The courage, coolness, and skill, displayed by this individual in the face of determined opposition, materially aided in the successful completion of these missions. His actions reflect great credit upon himself and the armed forces of the United States.¹¹⁰

In May 1949 when his body was returned to the city for burial, citizens of Nelson paid him special tribute. A procession wound its way through town at the slow march, along Baker Street to St. Saviour's Anglican Pro-Cathedral, where Reverend T.L. Leadbeater conducted the funeral service. Members of the Canadian Legion, various service clubs and cadets, and city council members attended, along with family and friends.

Mrs. Paddy George, Pat's mother, was the widow of a Nelson pioneer who had located the Molly Gibson Mine at the head of Kokanee Creek. She had two other sons in the service: Lawrence, with the Canadian Scottish Regiment; and Dennis, a paratrooper with the Special Service Corps. Sergeant Dennis George was wounded three times in battle, twice in Italy and once in France. He was a member of the First Special Service Force, composed of hand-picked American and Canadian soldiers, popularly known as "The Black Devils" and largely misrepresented in the Hollywood movie *The Devil's Brigade*. They carried out dangerous commando raids behind enemy lines, were the leading force in the invasion of the south of France, and were the first Allied troops to enter Rome.