



**Nelson's Silver Cross Mother, 1969**

Mrs. Wilhelmina Gray lays the wreath from "The Mothers of Canada" at the Ottawa Remembrance Day ceremony. She lost two sons in the war. *Photo courtesy of Phyllis Gautschi*

Much has been written about Hampton Gray as one of Canada's military heroes. There are many memorials to him, and one near home that is a memorial to both Hammy and his brother. Grays Peak in Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park is named in honour of them both. In Nelson the Post Office is named for Hammy, plaques in his honour sit on the bridge at Nelson's Gyro Park and on the Canadian Legion building, and a mural by artist L.X. Forde depicting Hammy's action in Onagawa Bay hangs inside the Legion Hall. Farther from home there is a school named for Hammy in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and also a community centre in Shearwater, Nova Scotia. Gray Lake near Edmonton bears his name; and in Elgin, Scotland, home base of the Fleet Air Arm, Gray's Walk is named for him. A memorial to Hampton, dedicated in 1989, overlooks Onagawa Bay where he was killed.

Hammy is to be part of a major memorial to Canada's wartime heroes planned for Ottawa, called the "Valiant Group." He is one of only 16 men and women chosen from the length of Canadian history whose

statues will line Elgin Street to the War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Of the “Three Musketeers,” Hammy Gray, Jack Diamond and Peter Dewdney, only Peter survived the war. Lieutenant Jack Diamond was killed in 1942 in action with the Fleet Air Arm, flying an Albacore over the North Sea. Peter Dewdney, a lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, captained a number of Fairmiles, motor launches that played a vital role as convoy escorts, patrol and rescue boats, in the North Atlantic and in the Caribbean. Over five years he saw much action, but did not lose a single boat. Canada’s only two naval Victoria Crosses in the war were awarded to men very close to Peter: his uncle, Frederick Peters, and his boyhood friend, Hammy Gray.

Nelsonites welcomed the long-awaited news of the Japanese surrender with “the blaring of horns, shouts and showers of confetti.” People crowded the downtown streets cheering and waving flags. The *Daily News* reported the excitement on August 15:

An announcement of a Victory Ball to be held at the Civic Centre interrupted the celebrations, but they resumed again as soon as the touring car with the loud-speaker left the main streets.... Cars wildly decorated with flags of all nations and sizes paraded the streets, drivers and passengers shouting and singing and honking. The CPR whistles, fire sirens and bells and the Brewery horns added to the noise. Flags appeared on the streets, and stores and offices closed.

The liquor store had a rush. Firecrackers were set off on the main street. Youngsters blew horns and decorated bicycles in preparation for the V-J Day parade to be held the next day. The CPR stopped work at 4:30.

Amid the celebrating there were many moments of sadness and reflection. The newspaper reported one such moment:

There was one girl with the gay smile and the hurt brown eyes, cheering and laughing, her hair blowing like a victory banner. “Your boyfriend will be home now,” someone said to her, pausing for a moment from blowing a striped horn. Her gay smile spread, the head raised proudly. “Yes, yes,” she replied, “I don’t know when but he will be back—soon.” The smile faded and her eyes looked bravely into a liberated world. “But my brother won’t.”

Next moment she was as gay as the rest, her hair blowing like a Victory Banner.

On April 13, 1945, the day of a special flag-raising ceremony in Nelson to celebrate victory in Europe, a *Daily News* editorial note had summarized, with considerable pride, the city's contribution to the war effort:

Men and women from Nelson entered all branches of the services for World War II. Many lost their lives; many received decorations. At home, Nelsonites served in the home militia, raised funds through the Victory Loan Drives, hosted airmen training with the Commonwealth Air Training Plan, and worked in the war industry projects in Nelson. Children saved for War Savings Certificates, and helped with collecting war materials, the "recycling" of the day. Servicemen and women were sent parcels with everything from socks to cigarettes to cake. Assistance went to war orphans, prisoners, and those in hospital. Nelson adopted a ship and her men. And all the while they kept praying for the safety of their loved ones on the sea, on the land and in the air.

Each year, as part of the Remembrance Day service, the Nelson Pilots Association salutes the war dead with a fly-past. Several aircraft fly in loose formation over the cenotaph as the ceremony on the ground is ending. There are still relatives and townspeople who gather at the cenotaph each November 11<sup>th</sup> who knew some of the men and boys whose names are recorded there. They remember them as vibrant young men, most of them fine athletes, some with talents for music or scholarship, many of them leaders among their peers. Most of us know only their names. We honour the sacrifice they made for our sake, and the sacrifice their loved ones made as well. And we grieve the lost years, the further contributions they might have made. Now, through these pages, we can at least know them a little better—what they accomplished in their short lives, and how they died.

# SOME WHO CAME HOME

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Telling the story of the Nelson men, most of them mere boys, who were lost in this war, fills one with an overwhelming sense of loss, even after all these years. Lives barely lived, promises unfulfilled, families forever changed. The nephew and namesake of one of the Nelson casualties, Stan Smith, has described the traumatic effect his uncle's death had on his family:

My uncle's death was a dark, brooding theme in my family life, one that ebbed and flowed sporadically through time but always came up, even if not spoken about, certainly on Remembrance Day. My father and my grandfather almost never talked about it and when they did it was with few words, hushed tones and great sadness and regret. When I was a child it was as though we had entered a church whenever the memory of his death visited us. I swear the light in the house changed to somber tones when this topic came up. It was as though something deeply unfair had been done to them and there was no redress.<sup>123</sup>

The loss was felt by the community itself. Robert Smillie, who was on the staff of Nelson High School from 1918 to 1942, taught so many of them. In 1945 he described for the *Daily News* sentiments that were shared in the community by other residents who had watched these boys grow up and go off to war:

Teachers of the Nelson schools have been called upon often in the last few years to suffer hard blows when the news would tick off the wires—"missing or killed in action." No one, I'm sure, can realize the loss to our district and country more than these teachers for they learned to know these boys well, both at work

and at play. Nelson High School gave to the services a host of grand boys, but it seems a hard fate that so many of the boys lost were the very cream of the high quality group ...<sup>124</sup>

Of course, most of the boys who fought in the war did come home, many of them as heroes whose feats of bravery and stoic endurance won them medals. The Distinguished Flying Cross, one of the high awards made to air force officers, was won by several Nelson men who survived the war. The *Daily News* reported that Flight Lieutenant Harry Sandgren was the first city boy to win a decoration in service with the RCAF. He was awarded the DFC in October 1943 for “the determination with which he has pressed home his attacks in the face of intense opposition.”

Many who won the DFC flew an unimaginable number of sorties, some of them only a day or two apart. Their citations speak of outstanding ability, cool courage, fortitude and leadership. Pilot Officer Ted Rutherglen completed almost two tours, a total of nearly 60 sorties, as a wireless air gunner. He suffered shrapnel injuries to his face which he carried for the rest of his life. He was to become “one of the finest game wardens in the business” and was to have a lake, situated below Kokanee Glacier, named for him: Ol’ Tedi Lake.

The Emmott brothers, Flight Lieutenant Alan and Flying Officer Norman, both DFC winners, each flew well over 30 missions as navigators with Bomber Command, Alan in a RAF pathfinder squadron, and Norman with 433 (Porcupine) Squadron. Norman flew in the same raid against Hamburg in which Nelson boys John Dingwall and Clarence MacDougall were killed in July 1944. After the war Alan was to serve as reeve, later mayor, of Burnaby for 12 years in the 1950s and ’60s.

Flying Officer Lewis Rees was a gunner, observer and bomb aimer who took part in 30 operational flights, most of them against the most heavily defended targets in Germany. A letter home read, “We only got hit twice, and that’s pretty good,” a testament to his “calm and quiet manner,” which his DFC citation praised. It credits him with being “largely responsible for the high standard of morale and efficiency attained by his crew.” He took part in the same operation in which Nelson’s Bud Ruppel was killed in January 1944.

Flight Lieutenant Stan Horswill, awarded a DFC in October 1944, was the brother of Syd Horswill who was killed in a flying accident early in the war. Stan completed 36 sorties as a navigator with the RCAF’s 424 (Tiger) Squadron, during which he survived a fighter attack over

Schweinfurt, was coned twice by searchlights in a raid over Berlin, and took part in a low-level raid at 1,000 feet over Bonnetot. The brother of another RCAF casualty was to win the DFC: Flight Lieutenant Ralph Flynn from the Slocan Valley, the older brother of Larry who was killed in 1942. Ralph had been in action from mid-1942 until 1945, first in North Africa, and later with the 420 (Snowy Owls) Squadron over such heavily defended targets as Mannheim, Cologne, Hamburg and Essen. He flew a total of 46 sorties.

Gordon Smith was only 19 when he won his wings and commission in 1942. Flight Lieutenant Smith flew Spitfires with the RCAF's 421 and 411 Squadrons, and was credited with destroying at least three enemy aircraft and destroying or damaging 65 mechanical vehicles.

Flying Officer L.P. Horace Lapointe, who made his home in both Nelson and Trail, flew with the RAF's 101 Squadron. His DFC citation calls him "a navigator of outstanding ability," and refers to his "outstanding cheerfulness in the face of danger" which was "an excellent example to his crew." In the five-month period between December 1944 and April 1945 he flew a total of 32 sorties.

Norman MacLeod was a well-known Nelson athlete and lifeguard at Lakeside Park before he joined the RCAF in the spring of 1940. He was a pilot with 431 (Iroquois) Squadron in over 30 attacks on enemy targets. His DFC citation records one attack over Arras on June 12, 1944, when his bomber was attacked by an enemy fighter, just prior to the target run. "By excellent evasive action, this captain evaded the attacker and carried on to the target." Flight Lieutenant MacLeod married Syd Horswill's widow, Peggy, in England in 1945, and after the war had a chiropractic practice in Nelson.

Another prominent Nelson all-round athlete, Joe Gallicano, was nicknamed "Joe The Tiger" when he played and coached lacrosse with the Sheep Creek Bombers before he was recruited by the New Westminster Salmonbellies in the Coast Intercity League. To play in this league was Joe's boyhood dream, but it was short-lived when the war intervened and he enlisted during his rookie year. He completed 34 operational flights over Germany and occupied countries as a flying officer with the RAF's 514 Squadron. His DFC citation tells of an attack on Osterfeld in February 1945 when the starboard outer engine of his Lancaster was hit and set on fire. He managed to extinguish the fire and successfully complete the mission.

There are other stories of harrowing experiences by DFC winners. Flying Officer Walter Nisbet, son of a Nelson judge, was a pilot with the RAF's 226 Squadron in February 1945 in an attack against a strongly defended railroad bridge at Deventer, Holland. When his aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire he received shrapnel wounds in his leg, but managed to maintain his position in the formation and release his bombs on schedule. His citation records the flight home:

Without informing his crew of his injury, Flying Officer Nisbet, unaided, flew the aircraft back to the nearest available airfield and executed a safe landing. His wound was so severe and the loss of blood so great that Flying Officer Nisbet was given a blood transfusion before he was lifted from the aircraft.

After the war Walter became a lawyer and Queen's Counsel.

Nelson native Flying Officer Ed Matheson was navigator on a Canso Flying Boat with 162 Squadron, doing antisubmarine and convoy patrol out of Iceland and Northern Scotland. On June 14, 1944, they successfully attacked and sank U-1225, but anti-aircraft fire from the U-boat downed the Canso. The pilot, Flight Lieutenant David Hornell, managed to bring the flaming plane down in a "gale-lashed" sea, and to bring it to the water's surface, enabling the crew to climb into their dinghy. They landed on waves 12 feet high. The dinghy blew up while crew members were attempting to scramble aboard, leaving room for only five of the eight in the dinghy. The men took turns in the dinghy and in the water, and after five hours they were sighted by an aircraft that stayed with them for the next 15 hours until they could be rescued. Altogether they spent 21 hours in the water. Three of the crew died, including the pilot Hornell, who was later awarded the Victoria Cross. The citation for Ed Matheson's Distinguished Flying Cross reads, in part:

During the run in to attack a U-boat, in face of devastating anti-aircraft fire and at a time when the aircraft was being hit repeatedly, the starboard engine out of action and on fire, [Ed Matheson] coolly and courageously stood to his post and operated a hand-held camera, because the automatic camera had been wrecked by flak.... During the subsequent 21 hours in the water, this officer did all in his power to assist the others, to such an extent that due to over-exertion he was himself receiving artificial respiration when a high speed launch arrived.



**Flying Officer Ed Matheson, DFC**

*Photo courtesy of Nelson Museum*

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Several Nelson district men were recipients of other high honours. Major Gordon (Gary) Bowell, a graduate of Nelson High School, Queen's University and a Rhodes Scholar, was made a member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) for his war service. Lance Corporal E.P. Hogan was cited for distinguished conduct for his part in repairing the bulkheads of a ship which had been in a collision while crossing the Atlantic, "with full knowledge that there was small chance of escape should the bulkheads give way or the ship be sunk by enemy action." Lieutenant W.D. "Doug" Elsdon, a native of Nelson and graduate of Nelson High, was awarded the George Medal for "great bravery in rescue work during an ammunition explosion in Holland" in May 1945. Ignoring personal safety, he had rushed into the inferno and carried seriously wounded men to safety. It was not reported at the time that the men he saved were German prisoners of war.<sup>125</sup>

A number of award recipients were Nelson boys serving in the US armed forces. Among them was Second Lieutenant Paul Brook, a Nelson High graduate, who had joined the US Army Air Force while a student at the University of Washington. He was awarded the Air Medal "for exceptionally meritorious achievement while serving as the navigator of a B-17 Flying Fortress on a number of sustained bomber combat missions over Germany and German-occupied countries." Another graduate of Nelson High School, Machinist's Mate Second Class Ralph Johnson, served with the US Naval Reserve and participated in eight invasions, including Iwo Jima, Guam, Lingayen Gulf and Bougainville. He received a citation for gallant performance of his duties.

Many of the men who returned came home with brides. Among them was Fred Castle, father of Stan Castle who was killed in October 1944 in Holland. Fred's brother had married an English girl during World War I but had died shortly after from the gassing he received in the war. When Fred went overseas he called on his brother's widow and subsequently they were married. By the fall of 1945 over 20 war brides had arrived in the Nelson district.

We are indebted to the boys who survived the war, and came home changed men, some with scars and memories too terrible to share. So many families lived through years of anxiety, of hoping the telegraph boy or girl would pass them by. So many families had two, three or four loved ones overseas, among them the following: Rutherglen, Breeze, Winlaw, Beattie, Read, Brook, McCuaig, Harper, George, Horswill, Jarrett,

Limacher, Dalgas, Matheson, Gallicano, Dyck, Campbell, Noakes, Burgess, Cox, Grant, Norris, Ruppel, Spiers, Gray, McBride, Flegel, Hartridge, Mitchell, Stout, Carne, Fleming, Flynn, Smith, Jackman, Forbes, Barwis, Gibbon, Cornfield, Leno and van Ruyskenvelde.



**A Nelson High School Class in 1939**

Many boys in the NHS classes of '39 and '40 went off to war. Among many who did not return are three who are seen here with teacher "Pop" Smillie, on the front steps of the high school: Iverson "Bud" Ruppel 2<sup>nd</sup> row, middle), Jack Gray (to his left), and Wilbur "Wib" Bentz (back row, 2<sup>nd</sup> from the right). *Photo courtesy of H.W.R. "Bert" Ramsden (back row, far right).*

The story of Nelson during those dark years, of a community that came together in a united effort to face an imminent danger, is the story of towns and cities across the country. But there is something special about this community, in times of peace or war—its "sense of family," its pride of place, the "atmosphere" and "personality"—that Bruce Hutchison wrote about in 1940, and that remains to this day.