

Photo: Brad Lowe, CFB Kingston



SUSAN L. WIGG

C.D., B.Eng., M.P.M., P.M.P., Engineering and Management

Among the first women students at Royal Military College (RMC) and RMC's first woman Director for Cadets

Susan Wigg's military career is a history-maker from start to finish – and it's not over yet! In 1980, she was one of the first women to attend the Royal Military College. In 2010, she returned to become its first woman Director for Cadets, responsible for commanding 70 staff and developing officership and fitness of more than 900 officer cadets.

Between these landmark dates, Susan served the Canadian Forces with distinction. She took on a four-year assignment, from 2006 to 2010, at the Supreme Allied Headquarters Europe in Belgium, as a Senior Staff Officer for Strategic Operational Planning.

Responsible for the Balkans Joint Operations Area, with a focus on NATO operations in Kosovo, she planned NATO actions during Kosovo's declaration of independence. She also provided advice on strategic planning for NATO Headquarters Sarajevo.

As the first Military Chair, Susan was a founding member of the Defence Women's Advisory Organization. This voluntary group provides members' perspectives to Canadian Forces leadership regarding efforts to address diversity issues and to create a more inclusive environment.

For her service with the International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan, Susan received the General Campaign Star South-West Asia medal in 2009. Serving today in the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, Susan Wigg is a true inspiration and role model for all.

Susan lives in Kingston, Ontario.

OCTOBER 2011

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

**WOMEN IN CANADIAN MILITARY FORCES:
A PROUD LEGACY**



Status of Women
Canada

Condition féminine
Canada





KIT COLEMAN

Real name Catherine Blake Ferguson, 1864-1915
Journalist and War Correspondent

The world's first woman war correspondent

Irish-born Kit Coleman's story reads like a real-life adventure saga.

In 1884, as a young widow, Kit headed to Toronto by ship. A second marriage failed and with two children to support, she knew she had to work for a living.

Bolstered by her solid education and talent for writing, Kit started out cleaning houses, quickly moving on to writing articles for local magazines. In 1889, she became a columnist for the *Toronto Daily Mail* newspaper, earning her the title of "Kit of the Mail" and the honour of being the first woman journalist in Canada to head a section of a Canadian newspaper. A real trailblazer, she penned some powerful prose on social reform and women's issues, including sharp critiques about domestic violence and the poor working conditions women endured.

During the Spanish American War of 1898, the *Daily Mail* sent Kit to Cuba, where she became the first accredited woman war correspondent in the world, writing moving accounts of the war's horrendous human toll. In 1904, she helped establish the Canadian Women's Press Club.

Kit's columns were syndicated to newspapers across Canada. In May 1915, when she contracted pneumonia and died in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada lost a pioneering journalist and a passionate social activist.

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MOLLY LAMB BOBAK

Painter, War Artist and Art Teacher

Canada's first and only official woman war artist in the Second World War

Born to an art collector and a naturalist, Molly Lamb Bobak had art and aesthetics in her genes. She studied at the Vancouver School of Art. Her lifelong mentor was renowned artist Jack Shadbolt.

In 1942, Molly joined the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC). What made her a one-of-a-kind soldier and artist was her appointment in 1945 as an official Canadian war artist – the only woman to date to fulfill that role. Through this assignment, she met her life partner, Bruno Bobak, also a war artist. They married in 1945.

After the war, Molly and Bruno established themselves as Canadian artists and art teachers of note. Their work took them to Ottawa, Vancouver and Paris. In 1960, Molly was studying in Norway when Bruno was offered the position of Artist-in-Residence at the University of New Brunswick (UNB). In 1962, the couple moved to Fredericton, where they still live and work to this day.

Molly has served on several boards, including the National Gallery Advisory Board. She has received honorary degrees from UNB (1983), Mount Allison University (1984) and Saint Thomas University (1994).

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ELIZABETH LAWRIE SMELLIE

1884-1968, Nurse

First woman appointed as a colonel in the Canadian Army

An outstanding nurse, Elizabeth Lawrie Smellie was committed to the health and well-being of Canadian servicemen. Her great skill and proficiency as a nurse earned her the appointment as a Nursing Sister with the Royal Canadian Medical Corps in 1915. During the First World War, Elizabeth was honoured for her efforts, receiving the Royal Red Cross, First Class Award in 1917.

Returning to Canada, Elizabeth took on the role of Assistant to the Matron-in-Chief of the Canadian Army Nursing Service in 1920. In 1924, she joined the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) and was appointed Chief Superintendent.

In 1940, Elizabeth left the VON and rejoined the Canadian Army. As a result, she was able to direct her talent and skills to helping soldiers in the Second World War, and to expanding women's participation in the army. She helped organize the Canadian Women's Army Corps and carried out many important duties during the War. Elizabeth was commended for her dedication, and promoted to the rank of colonel, thus becoming the first woman to attain that level in the Canadian Army.

Elizabeth was born in Port Arthur, now Thunder Bay, Ontario. She died in Toronto. She is buried in Thunder Bay.

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Photo: Melanie Reid



MARY GREYEVES REID

1920-2011, Laundress, cook

First Aboriginal woman to enlist in the Canadian Army

Mary Greyeyes Reid, the first Aboriginal woman to join the Canadian Army, was a warm-hearted, selfless woman of great determination and tremendous self-discipline.

Born on the Muskeg Lake Cree National Reserve in Saskatchewan, Mary entered the residential school system at age five. Although she was a keen student, her formal education stopped after she finished grade eight, the point at which Aboriginal students' education ended. A nun continued to tutor Mary, while she helped at the school by cooking, cleaning, sewing and doing laundry.

In 1942, Mary joined the army, thus becoming the first Aboriginal woman in Canada's Armed Forces. She was stationed in Aldershot, England, where she worked in the laundry and as a cook. She served there until 1946, then returned to Canada, and met her husband, Alexander "Bud" Reid. They had two children, living first in Victoria and later, in Vancouver. Mary worked hard to give her children a good life, and was a deeply valued member of the staff at the restaurant where she worked. She later became an industrial seamstress.

Mary was in her 91st year when she died in March 2011. She is buried on the Muskeg Lake Cree National Reserve.

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ELIZABETH "ELSIE" GREGORY MACGILL

1905-1980, Engineer

First woman aircraft designer in the world

During World War II, Elizabeth "Elsie" Gregory MacGill became a living example of the many social and economic changes taking place in Canada. As the first woman aircraft designer in the world, she was best known for producing the Hawker Hurricane. As a Chief Engineer for the Canadian Car and Foundry Company, Elsie designed a series of adaptations to prepare the Hurricane to fly in cold weather.

Elsie supervised up to 4,500 workers in the production of 2,000 Hawker Hurricane fighter planes. She also designed the Maple Leaf trainer, which may still be the only plane to be completely designed by a woman. Her role in this successful project brought her several engineering awards. In March 1953, the American Society of Women Engineers made her an honorary member with a medal and named her "Woman Engineer of the Year." She was later awarded the Centennial Medal by the Canadian government in 1967. The Ninety-Nines, an international organization of women pilots, awarded her the Amelia Earhart Medal in 1975, and in 1979, the Ontario Association of Professional Engineers presented her with its gold medal.

Elsie was born in Vancouver and died in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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Photo: Andrea Hill



MONA LOUISE PARSONS

Civilian

Only Canadian woman to be imprisoned by the German army

Mona Louise Parsons was a woman of dignity and courage – qualities that proved invaluable when she joined a resistance unit that rescued Allied airmen. A Nazi informer betrayed the rescued Allied airmen, and reported them and their rescuers to the Gestapo in 1941.

Mona was arrested and sentenced to life in prison. There, she met Baroness Wendelien van Boetzelaer, with whom she planned to escape when the opportunity came. In 1945, the prison was bombed, giving Mona and the Baroness their opportunity. The women successfully disguised themselves by posing as German sisters dressed in woolen clothing. Mona was honoured for her bravery and received a commendation from the British Air Marshall and the United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Mona Louise Parsons was born in Middleton, Nova Scotia. She died in Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

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JEANNE MANCE

1606 1673 • Nurse

Canada's first unofficial war nurse

Jeanne Mance was a deeply religious and selfless woman whose life work focused on health care and religion. Born in France in 1606, she was one of the first women settlers in Canada, having already faced the hardships of the Thirty Years War in her homeland. She came to Canada in 1641, among the first settlers in what is now Montréal.

Jeanne is famous for being a founder of Montréal and of the Hôtel-Dieu hospital, which she operated in her home in 1642 until the facility was built in 1645. As conflict with the Iroquois First Nations continued and escalated, Jeanne tended to the wounded, both European and some Aboriginal injured alike, becoming Canada's first unofficial war nurse.

In 1657, Jeanne lost the use of her arm in a fall. The depth of her faith is evident in the fact that after she applied a religious relic to her injured arm, she believed it was healed, and was able to continue her work at the hospital.

The last 10 years of her life were spent in retirement, and she remained devoted to her faith.

Jeanne died in Montréal.

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Photo: Marie Louise Fish



MARIE LOUISE FISH

Sea naval officer

First woman to serve as a naval officer at sea

Marie Louise Fish is a trailblazer for women in non-traditional roles, particularly in the Canadian Forces, where her career began in 1974.

Louise's military career reflects many women's "firsts," including being the first woman to: serve as a naval officer at sea, as part of a pilot project to employ women in previously all-male naval units; qualify and serve as a ship's diving officer; and participate in the Canadian contingent in the rigorous annual 160-kilometre, four-day Nijmegen March, in commemoration of the liberation of the Netherlands.

Louise served at sea at a time when there were very few women in the Canadian Navy, and underwent arduous training alongside her male counterparts.

Upon retirement from the military, Louise entered the field of security administration, becoming the first woman to serve as president of the Ontario Association of College and University Security Administrators. At the Royal Military College, and at Queen's and Trent universities, Louise developed policies and practices to enhance women's safety, and increased the representation of women on security staff.

Louise lives in Elgin, Ontario.

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JOSÉE KURTZ

Naval commander

First woman to command a major warship in the Canadian Forces

Josée Kurtz joined the Canadian Forces in 1988, at a time when the idea of a woman commanding a warship was unheard of. In 2009, she took command of the HMCS Halifax, becoming the first woman to command a major warship in the Canadian Forces.

Josée specialized in navigation. From 1994 to 1996, Josée taught at the Naval Officer Training Centre. She was head of the Navigation Department there from 2000 to 2002.

In 2007, Josée became executive officer of HMCS Ville de Québec, which provided anti-piracy protection while escorting food aid being delivered to Somalia.

Josée holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Ottawa (2005), and a master's degree in defence studies from the Royal Military College of Canada (2007). She also graduated from the joint command and staff program at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto.

Josée was born in Joliette, Quebec. She lives in Halifax.

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Photo: Shirley M. Robinson



SHIRLEY M. ROBINSON

Advocate for equality for women in the military

Long-time advocate for equality for women in the military

Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Shirley Robinson served with distinction in the Canadian military for some 30 years, taking on a variety of challenging roles on both the operational and administrative side of the forces. Shirley originally trained as a nurse, a profession she credits for her strong self-discipline. For decades, she has been a passionate and dedicated advocate for equality for women in the military – both in employment and in the conditions women face as they serve. While in the military, one of Shirley's her key roles was as Deputy Director of Women Personnel. Hearing first-hand the experiences of discrimination and harassment faced by women in the military, she became convinced not enough was being done to address gender-based issues. Even in retirement, Shirley has dedicated herself to removing gender-based barriers in the military, opening doors so women can choose from the full range of career paths available today, including combat roles. Much of her work has been channeled through the Association for Women's Equity in the Armed Forces, which she co-founded in 1985. Shirley has authored a number of publications and articles on women in the military and their human rights. In 1992, she received the Governor General's Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case, in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the quality of life of women in Canada.

Born in Bruce County, Ontario, Shirley now lives in Ottawa.

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