

# SASKATCHEWAN

Since entering Confederation in 1905, Saskatchewan has had a rich military legacy, full of sacrifice. Many memorials and cemeteries throughout the province bear lasting testimony to that sacrifice, as do the lakes and other geographic features named for those who gave their lives in the service of the country.

Despite having a relatively small population, Saskatchewan contributed mightily to the Canadian effort in the First World War. The 5th (Western Calvary) Battalion fought as the 1st Canadian Division. The 28th (Northwest) Battalion of the 2nd Canadian Division became an infantry regiment, primarily from Regina. These units participated in all of the important battles on the Western Front, from Vimy Ridge to the Final Hundred Days. Western Canada proportionately endured more losses during the war than any other area of the country. In fact, the 46th Battalion, recruited exclusively from southern Saskatchewan, became known as the "Suicide Battalion" because of its extraordinarily high number of casualties. The bravery of Saskatchewan's soldiers was recognized by the fact that during the war eleven of them were awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest honour for military valour that can be won by a Canadian.

In the Second World War, the Winnipeg Grenadiers, garrisoned in Hong Kong in December 1941, included many soldiers from Saskatchewan. After fierce and brave fighting against the attacking Japanese forces, the Canadians were ordered to surrender. Three hundred Canadians died in the engagement. One of them, Major John Osborn, from Wapella, was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross, one of three

Saskatchewan soldiers to be given the honour in the war.

On August 19, 1942, Canada suffered one of its greatest military disasters, when more than 6,000 Allied troops attacked the Nazi-held northern French coastal town of Dieppe. More than 3,600 casualties were suffered. The Second Canadian Division, which included the South Saskatchewan Regiment, comprised the largest part of the assault force.

The Saskatoon Light Infantry fought in all of the battles of the Italian Campaign, both on the island of Sicily as well as on the mainland.

In the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944, the Regina Rifles were selected to lead the Third Division's assault at Juno Beach. Of the five beaches where Allied troops landed that day, only the Canadians met their objective and established a secure beachhead. The Regina Rifles fought through Normandy, taking part in important operations at Caen and Falaise. Major David Currie, born in Saskatchewan, was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions in leading the attack on Falaise.

Saskatchewan has played a significant role in many major Canadian peacekeeping operations. In the words of former Deputy Premier Ed Tchorzewski: "Our province's history in United Nations peacekeeping operations has been a long and proud one. Many individuals from Saskatchewan have committed a portion of their secure lives in Canada to ensure safety, give humanitarian aid and prevent conflicts in countries where security is not always present."



## SASKATCHEWAN



## Bruce Little

### Second World War

I served in World War II for five years, in Canada, England and Italy. And then I was odd enough to go back and serve three years during the Korean War. In the Army, I started off in artillery, went through infantry and armoured before I got out. And the second time I was an electrical technician.

On our way to England in February of 1941, we boarded the Warwick Castle in Halifax. We sat in the harbour for seventeen days, and during that time we changed our cargo three times. On the last load to fill the seventh cargo hold with ammunition, we'd been led to believe that it was a no-no for a troop carrier.

February is a terrible month to cross the North Atlantic. The weather is usually the pits. I was so seasick for the first three days, that I never made it on deck, or to any of the meals. When I finally did surface, the ship was dipping and diving over and through mountainous waves.

After a lull of a few days, we came under attack by German submarines. The destroyers and Corvettes were going nuts, charging this way and that, dropping dozens of depth charges. Several of our convoy were sunk. We were reassured that a man overboard would last less than five minutes in those frigid waters. That was little consolation.

One night, I was awakened by a thunderous noise. I was laying in water. Had we been torpedoed? The ship was leaning far to the starboard, and a wall of water shot by our cabin door. Two sailors fought their way along our companion way and slammed the porthole closed. I could hear one of them snarl: "Stupid bloody soldiers. Looked out the bloody porthole and never closed it properly!" The water quit flowing, the ship was still floating. I was wet, but alive.

A couple of years later, our journey to Italy was aboard a Yankee vessel. We were only served two meals a day because of the crowd, but their food was fantastic. The trip wasn't all gravy, though. Part-way through the Mediterranean, a flight of German Junkers 88 hit us just before sundown. An aerial torpedo scooted down on one side of our ship - a near miss - and then a string of bombs provided a good imitation of Old Faithful on the other as they hit the water. The air was filled with bomb explosions and answering gunfire. Machine guns, pom-poms and the sharp crack of light ack-ack joined in to drive off the attackers. About that time, the ship's officer drove us... all of us open-mouthed spectators below deck. We missed the rest of the battle. One enemy plane was destroyed and three of our ships sunk, one which carried a Canadian field hospital. The nursing sisters were tossed into the brink before it sank, but all were rescued, or so we were told afterward.

**Listen to Bruce Little's story at [www.thememoryproject.com](http://www.thememoryproject.com)**

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## SASKATCHEWAN

**Ron Myers**  
**Canadian Forces**

I enlisted in the RCAF in 1951 and served until 1976 in the regular force, and I did five years with the Air Reserve after retirement. During my service time, I served on four overseas postings, the first being with 4 Fighter Wing in Germany from 1955 to '57. My first United Nations posting was with the United Nations Emergency Force, Middle East, with 115 Air Transport Unit in the Sinai Desert, near the village of Al-Arish, Egypt. That was from 1961 to 1962, approximately a fourteen-month period. During that period, we flew DeHavilland aircraft, which was the standard Otter at the time, plus the twin-engine Caribou. Our commitment was to do observations along the ADL, which spread from the Mediterranean down to the Gulf of Aqaba—the tip of the Sinai Peninsula—re-supplying army and UN outposts along the ADL by air.

I returned to the Middle East again in 1975-1976 with the United Nations at a city called Ismailia. That was in the period after the Yom Kippur War. During my service with the United Nations, especially with 115 Air Transport Unit, we had close contact with all the local residents and Bedouins, and it became clear that they were lacking medical care as far as the young children were concerned. Our flight surgeon committed three hours twice a week of his time to set up a medical clinic for the children, which we all supported and the accommodations were very substandard, so all of the airmen on their off-duty hours put in their time to build a building for him to have his little medical clinic in. This is just one of the few things that we did to help the local population, and especially the young children.

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## Classroom Activities and Questions

- 1 What features and events help make Saskatchewan's military contribution unique?
- 2 Imagine that it is 2005, Saskatchewan's Centennial. What aspects of Saskatchewan's military history would you highlight in a presentation to provincial representatives?
- 3 Working with a partner, see how many of Saskatchewan's geographic and physical features that you can find that have been named for a member of the military. If time permits, you might include a brief biography of the military person after whom the features were named.
- 4 What do you think is Saskatchewan's greatest military triumph? Why?
- 5 Imagine that you invited Bruce Little and Ron Myers to dinner (or they came to your class as part of The Memory Project). What three questions would you like to address to each of them?
- 6 Working with a partner, identify the similarities and differences in the two men's military experiences.
- 7 How easy or difficult do you think it is for the two men to tell their respective stories? Why? What would you identify as the major lesson/message that each one of them wants to convey in relating their personal story?
- 8 What experience does Bruce Little identify as "one of the most exciting and rewarding periods of my military career"? Explain why you think he feels that way about the experience. How do you think you would feel if you found yourself under similar circumstances? Why? Which experience do you think Ron Myers would identify as "one of the most exciting and rewarding periods of [my] military career"? Again, explain why you think he feels that way about the experience. Finally, how would you feel if you found yourself under similar circumstances?
- 9 The experiences of Bruce and Ron took place decades ago. Do you think that the experience of Canadian military personnel today is substantially similar or different from the experiences of Bruce and Ron? Working with a partner, brainstorm two lists – those factors that have changed the military experience and those factors that have kept the military experience largely the same.

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