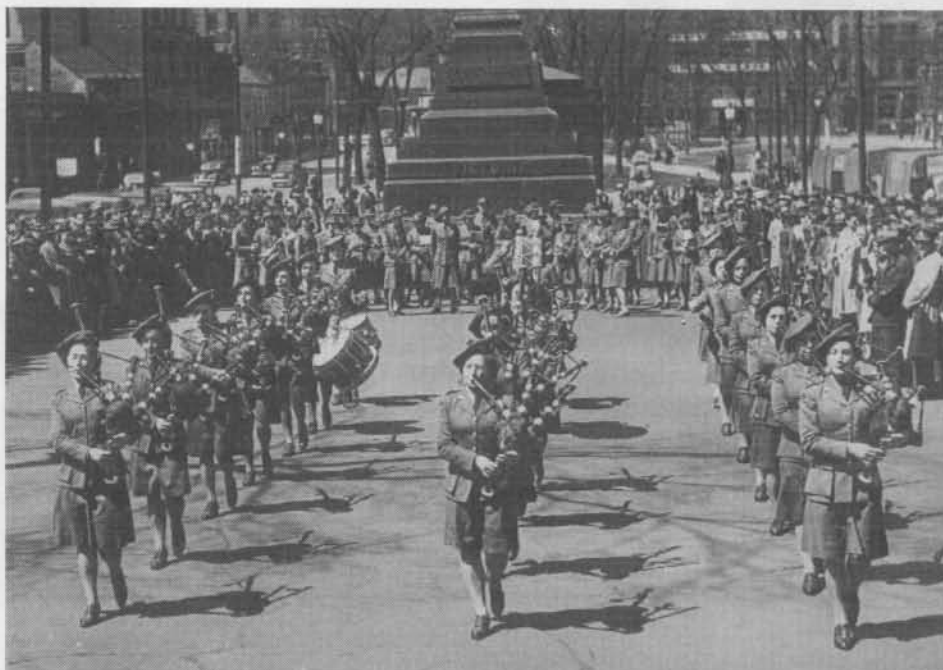


Marching Across Canada

BY NELLIE (FORREST) DUNVILLE



The author



*The CWAC Pipe Band in Montreal, 1944
(Front to Back)*

<i>Left</i>	<i>Centre</i>	<i>Right</i>
<i>Lillian Grant</i>	<i>Doris MacDonald</i>	<i>Marie Giviner</i>
<i>Helen Stephen</i>	<i>?</i>	<i>Marion Gee</i>
<i>Lorretta Pitts</i>	<i>?</i>	<i>Nellie Forrest</i>
<i>Dorothy Holloway</i>	<i>Mary Barrick</i>	<i>Beryl Robinson</i>
<i>Flossie Ross</i>	<i>Kaye Christie</i>	<i>Isobel Henderson</i>
<i>Peggie Haines</i>	<i>Eleanor Hogan</i>	<i>Jessie Anderson</i>
<i>Bernice Magnus</i>	<i>Joan Turner</i>	<i>Josie Jarvis</i>

In the fall of 1942, my good friend, Hazel, and I decided to join the Canadian Women's Army Corps. I was not quite 18 and had to wait until March of 1943, at which time both Hazel and I received our call to report to Regina.

It was a most memorable day! Neither Hazel nor I had even been on a train and Regina greeted us with a blanket of hard packed snow.

We arrived in a blizzard, with snow up to our knees. In our call to report, we were advised that we would be met at the train station by a representative of the CWAC. At the same time we were also advised of the specific time we were to report to the CWAC office. There was no representative to meet us, which we readily understood, but we took literally the "order to report at a specific time." I guess we felt if we were to be soldiers, obeying orders started right now! So we trudged through the snow, breaking trail for anyone coming later, pushing our suitcases along on top of the drifts, and arrived at the camp about as cold as we'd ever been before. At least we were warmly welcomed by officers who could hardly believe we would not assume someone would pick us up when the streets were cleaned.

No time was lost in putting

us through our medical and necessary interviews. Soon we were sent off to Vermillion, Alberta for basic training. At this point we quickly found out what "orders" really were.

About this same time, and unbeknownst to me, Lillian Grant, Pipe Major of the Victoria Girls Pipe Band was approached by the military to join the CWAC and form a pipe band. Lillian took her lead piper with her, and in a short time they had recruited several girls anxious to become pipers and drummers. This group took up residence in the old Vancouver Hotel where they took piping and drumming lessons as many hours of the day they could manage.

The band was transferred to Ottawa for more instructions, and where they made use of Lansdowne Park in an effort to perfect their marching. Once the band was considered able to perform adequately, they were transferred to the East Coast from where they started their first cross-Canada tour.

Many of these young ladies had hardly been outside their own province, so everything was new, interesting and educational as they moved around the Maritimes and headed west.

Moving from city to city, they were able to pick up additional pipers and drummers, and so it was, when they arrived in Regina. Someone in that CWAC office recalled that I told them I had been a piper in the Prince Albert Girls Pipe Band which my father (Jim Forrest)

started way back in 1936. When this opportunity presented itself, I was not sure I wanted to be constantly on the move.

Gentle, but firm, persuasion by Jean Tyerman that it was a wonderful life, and a promise from my officer and Sergeant Major that if I found it too demanding, I could be transferred back and assigned to other training, convinced me.

My first performance with the band was the next day in my home town of Prince Albert. There was no turning back! Oh yes, I could see that it would be demanding, but without a doubt, it would be a wonderful experience. After our appearance in Prince Albert, two more of the girls from the Prince Albert Girls Pipe Band joined our band group.

We continued to travel west, visiting cities and towns along the way. It was my hope that when we arrived in Alberta one of our stops might be where my father was stationed at a Prisoner of War camp, and where he was Pipe Major of the 28th Company, Veteran's Guard of Canada Pipe Band. But the closest we got was Suffield, a very secretive type of camp, where many military experiments took place. Dad did manage to get to Suffield to have a short visit with me, but he had to sign a multitude of documents before he was allowed into the camp.

Continuing West we visited numerous cities, towns and villages and ended our tour in Vancouver.

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We took up residence in what we called "the Staff House" on the Pacific Exhibition grounds, spending long hours learning new tunes. We were called on many occasions to perform at some celebration or Fund Raiser for the war effort while we spent about three months in Vancouver. It was a pleasant change to settle in one place for more than a few days.

Being on tour, parading many miles a day, holding concerts in the evenings, made a very demanding life. The following is a sample of one of our days on tour. This information came from the National Archives in Ottawa:

0700; Reveille; we had spent the night in railway sleeping cars at Fort William
0800; Drove to Current River camp about 25 miles
0830; Breakfast in Current River camp
1100; Driven to CPR station at Port Arthur
1130; Parade moved off to a civic reception; demonstration by the band; back to CPR station
1200; Back too Current River camp for lunch
1230; lunch (six members of each band remained at Fort William for radio program
1500; Practice at Current River camp for both bands
1600- 1715 Free Time
1730; Supper at Current River camp
1900; Moved by truck to CPR station
1930; Parade moves off
2000; March Past in the arena;

concert finished 2130
2145; Returned to railway sleeping cars at Fort William from concert in Port Arthur
2300; Lights out

While on tour, I recall how difficult it was to find time to do our laundry. There were no automatic washers, and no dryers. Often we had to do our laundry by hand; facilities were limited and had to be shared by the 20 or so members of the band and free time was not in abundance. It helped that we were issued with an extra uniform, shirts and shoes. Dry cleaning was always a "rush order" and had to be done when we were spending two or three days in one place.

Our modes of travel were varied. Many times we travelled by convoy, in the back of a transport truck with benches for us to sit on on, and a tarp overhead. Wanting to look cleaned and pressed at our destination, we would carry our clean uniform on a hanger and change in the back of the truck. On occasion, it was rather challenging.

All of us loved Vancouver with its mild temperature. The occasional rain did not bother us, so we were hit with reality when we were sent to Vermillion for a month or so. Cold as it was, we enjoyed Vermillion.

From Vermillion, I think we went to Kitchener — another basic training centre.

During the first tour across Canada, the band performed in 105 cities, towns and villages in

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nine months. The second tour took them to 200 cities, towns and villages in seven months. It was wonderful being with the band during the tour of the Maritimes. And it was a chance of a lifetime to visit so many historical and picturesque areas of Canada. This part of the tour seemed to pass so quickly and suddenly we were in Ottawa.

We got settled into one of the barracks and then several of us went out to explore the city where we would be settled for a few days. Our travels to the small towns out of Ottawa would be by convoy.

The next morning about seven o'clock we were picked up by a transport truck. I recall not feeling well. I had what I thought was a very bad chest cold, and over-active kidneys. While we were on our way to the other CWAC barracks where we would join the Brass Band, I became very ill and was in excruciating pain.

The doctor on call sent me off in an ambulance to Rideau Military Hospital. Diagnosed with pneumonia, and kidney stones, I could not be operated on until the pneumonia was cleaned up, and that took five weeks. My first operation for kidney stones was performed, and three weeks later, the second surgery took place. When I had recovered sufficiently, I was sent home to Prince Albert on 29 days sick leave. My mother and sister met me at the station in Saskatoon. They said they would never have recognized me if I had not been

wearing my distinctive Balmonal hat. I weighed less than 100 pounds, and I was still very ill.

In the military, things are done "by the book," so when 29 days were up I had to meet the Pipe Band in Saskatoon. Ironically, we went to Prince Albert the very next day for the second band visit to that city. From Prince Albert, we visited Regina, where I landed in hospital. Sadly, this was where the band and I came to a parting of the way.

I spent several days in hospital and was advised by the doctor it would be a very long time before I could rejoin my band group. Therefore, I was given the choice of remaining in the CWAC and taking training in another field, or taking my discharge. I took the latter.

It was impossible to visualize staying in the CWAC, but not being with the Band. We were a very close "family." One of our members, who only had brothers, always says we are the sisters she never had.

My family welcomed me home, doing what they could to restore my health. It took about three months before I was able to take a business course followed by employment by the Veteran's Land Administration. And this is how I met Stan, my future husband. But that is a whole other story.

Former members of the Pipe Band, since 1947, have kept in touch through an annual letter from each of us. One of our members duplicates the corre-

spondence, puts them together as a newsletter and mails them out.

It took 30 years before we managed to get together for our first reunion. There will never be another quite like it because most of us had not seen each other in all that time. The nostalgia was unbelievable.

It took another five years before our second reunion, but since then, we have managed a get together about every two years in Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, Victoria, Toronto and Oklahoma. We all expect to keep these reunions going until the last piper or drummer is gone. ■

