

Voices of **WAR**



THEATRICAL PRODUCTION FEATURING
CHARACTERS BASED ON LOCAL VETERANS OF
WORLD WAR ONE AND TWO

Produced by **Settlers, Rails & Trails Inc.**
Argyle, Manitoba

OFFICIAL SCRIPT

Saturday, Nov. 21st, 2015

1pm – **Domain Community Hall** (Domain, MB)

7pm – **Selkirk Royal Canadian Legion Branch #42** (Selkirk, MB)

Saturday, Nov. 28th, 2015

11am & 1pm – **Heritage Arts Centre** (Stonewall, MB)

7pm – **Argyle Community Hall** (Argyle, MB)

Friday, Nov. 27th, 2015

7pm - **Teulon Collegiate Gym** (Teulon, MB)

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Voices of War

Rev. November 15, 2015

Part One – World War One
Setting: Argyle, 1914

Bagpipe cast into theatre (playing *The Maple Leaf Forever*)

- Followed by Cadet & Farmer's Wife with flags, Soldier, Sailor, Nurse, Air man, Mother/War Bride with banner.

Narrator:

Have you seen the newspaper today? (Reading) *August 4, 1914 Britain declares war on Germany*. We Canadians were at war too. As a former colony of Britain and part of the Commonwealth, we went to war when Britain went to war. We saw this coming you know, Europe has been in turmoil since the Archduke was assassinated back in July.

Canadians far and wide are rushing to the recruiting stations, volunteering for service with the Army and the brand new Royal Canadian Navy. I know two men and one woman from my town that joined up with the Canadian Miltiary. I will let them tell you about it themselves.

The first is an infantry soldier who traveled far from his home to fight in the trenches of France.

WWI Infantry Soldier:

My name is Wellington Willson. I was born in 1891 and raised on my family's farm in Argyle, Manitoba. After attending high school, I was lucky enough to attend the University of Manitoba – taking Engineering.

In 1914 Britain declared war on Germany, many of my classmates signed up for the armed service immediately. I decided to stay here in Canada and help my father with the farm. Two years later, in 1916, I realized that Canada desperately needed more troops and I too needed to serve my country. I joined the 108th Battalion in Selkirk, Manitoba and by the end of 1916 I was aboard the RMS Olympic, steaming across the Atlantic Ocean towards England.

I trained with the Canadian Army in the south of England at Dibgate Camp. We marched, drilled, conducted firing range practice and readied ourselves for trench warfare. I did get paid \$1.10 per day for my soldiering, and like all other Canadian soldiers, half of my pay was sent home to my father in Canada.

In April 1917, our unit was shipped across the English Channel to France where we just missed the battle of Vimy Ridge by one week.

Over the next few months, I found out just how terrible trench conditions were. Shelling during bombardments, midnight raids into the German trenches, large rats, rain and the intense summer heat which made everything smell horrible.

In August 1917 our unit was to attack the German trenches in the battle of Hill 70, not far from Vimy Ridge. In the evening of August 15th, during a mad dash across No-Man's-Land, a German shell landed nearby, exploded and killed me instantly. I was 26 years old.

Narrator:

Wellington's family is very concerned about him in Europe, his mother Annie can share a parent's point of view.

Mother of WWI Infantry Soldier:

When I married my husband Joel in 1886, we were the second couple wed at the Brant-Argyle Presbyterian Church. We began our lives nearby, raising five children to help us with the chores and workings of our growing farm. I am proud of all children, but I simply must tell you about my son. Where do I begin...?

Well...two years after the war began, those of us in Canada would read the newspapers and see the death tolls grow and grow. It seemed that every week there was another local family affected with news of their uncle, father or son becoming wounded or killed. To make things worse, young Canadian boys were not signing up as eagerly as they had when the Great War began in 1914.

I remember the day my oldest boy Wellington came into the farm house with news that he had voluntarily joined the Army. He walked right into the kitchen and said "Mother, father – I feel it is my duty to serve in the Canadian Army." Obviously his father and I were very concerned, but what could we do, he was a grown man now. This was the first time our son was away from home, it was also the first harvest that he ever missed – boy were we short-handed that autumn.

The day finally came when Wellington boarded the train at the Argyle Railway Station. It seemed the whole district was there to see him off. With tears in my eyes, I saw my first born son disappear into a railway coach as the train carried him away into the horizon.

I hung this banner in the window of our front room, a proud symbol of our son's patriotic duties overseas.

We did hear from him as he trained with the Army. He sent many letters home, and we replied to his letters with knitted socks, photos of his family and small gifts for Christmas. It was in the summer of 1917 that his letters suddenly stopped. In September of that year, I received a letter from a certain Reverend Tweedle. He was writing to tell me that my son was killed in an attack. My boy, Wellington, would never again return home.

Narrator:

The second young man from my district who volunteered, went from the stable Manitoba Prairies to protect Canada's coast upon the unpredictable waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

WWI Navy Sailor:

Good Day! I am Able Seaman Edward Proctor.

I joined the Canadian Army when I was 19 years old. It was a cold February day in 1916 when I traveled into Winnipeg on the train to sign up with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles.

You might be wondering why I am wearing a navy uniform. Well, during basic training with my battalion in the winter months of 1916, I caught pneumonia and was so weak that I was discharged from the Canadian Army.

I was determined to be a part of the armed forces, so I decided to join the Royal Canadian Navy. I was accepted into the training program and traveled all the way by train from Argyle, Manitoba to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Once I received my training, my service with the navy began aboard one of only six Canadian naval ships during the First World War. With such a small navy, it was no wonder it was dubbed the “Tin Pot Navy”!

My ship was called the HMCS Rainbow. The HMCS stands for “His Majesty’s Canadian Ship” The Canadian Navy was learning to operate her ships, and had the duty of patrolling the east and west coasts of Canada. Our biggest threat was German ships, but my biggest fear was the German’s secret weapon, a boat which could dive under water. They called them U-Boats and we were always on the lookout for them.

The navy life is exciting, but I am looking forward to returning home when the war ends. As much as I love the salt air of the Atlantic Ocean, I miss the sights and sounds of my family’s farm back in Manitoba.

Narrator:

Of the thousands of men who enlisted, we must not forget about the women who traveled across the world to help those that are wounded in the battlefield.

WWI Nurse:

When the war broke out in 1914 I saw my two brothers volunteer for the Canadian Army. One day, a year later, they both were killed during two separate battles in France. After a week’s grieving, I decided to volunteer myself for service in the war. I wanted to help wounded soldiers so that other Canadians would not get the same grim news that our family received.

My name is Mary. Before the war I attended nurse training in Winnipeg and worked in various hospitals and with local doctors. In the second year of the Great War, I volunteered with the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps and was sent overseas to France. The Canadian Army only accepted professionally trained nurses between ages of 21 and 38. In all, over 2,500 of us saw duty overseas.

Some girls worked in Canadian military hospitals across Europe, other nursing sisters served aboard floating hospital ships. I myself was stationed at hospital tents near the front line trenches!

These tents were called Casually Clearing Stations. The horse drawn ambulances deliver the wounded everyday; we nurses assess and treat the soldiers as best we can. Some of the more serious cases are evacuated to the permanent hospitals by long train journeys, many miles behind the front lines. With our hospital units so close to the front, we comfort the wounded and with our new medical techniques we are saving more lives than during any war in the past.

However, life at these clearing stations was quite dangerous. We were often under attack from German shells, air raids and even shell fire. The ground shook with nearby explosions, and could hear constant thunder of the distant artillery. The tents were hot in the summer, freezing in the winter and often crawling with rats, fleas and lice.

Narrator:

On November 11th, 1918, the Great War came to an end. All in all, over 650,000 Canadians served in the military. Sadly, more than 66,000 would never return home to Canada. They now lie close to where they fell, in graves covered in beautiful red poppies.

Bagpipe (playing *Bonnie Dundee*)

- Mother/War Bride flip banner
- Cadet & Farmer, remove flags and switch locations
- Soldier, Sailor, Nurse & Airman follow bagpiper around set
- Everyone gets into their positions, bagpiper stops playing

Part Two – World War Two
Setting: Argyle, 1939

Narrator:

It has only been 21 years since the Great War ended, and now in 1939, Canada has declared war again. Once more, our country is at war with Germany.

It seems that patriotism is on the rise. Just this morning, I saw scores of young men running up the old wooden stairs of our local school to the principal's office. They are all eager to sign up with the Canadian Air Force, Army and Navy.

Yesterday, my older brother Adrian volunteered with the Royal Canadian Air Force. He always wanted excitement; I believe the RCAF is just what he is looking for.

WWII RCAF Air Bomber:

In 1910 I was born at my family home in the Rockwood Municipality. My mother named me Adrian and I attended school up until grade 12. After school I moved to Ontario to work in a gold mine, and later as a lathe operator.

In 1939, when Canada declared war on Germany, I was seeking excitement and I joined the Royal Canadian Air Force. Training in large aircraft, I was part of a crew of seven men, working as the plane's bomb aimer. It was my job to locate bombing targets and essentially launch the weapons when the time was right. Our crew flew many missions over the English Channel and deep into German airspace. It was very dangerous work, and we often flew at night, in our Halifax Bomber so as not to be detected. There were a few close scrapes, but I will always remember one particular flight:

In February 1945 we were flying near the city of Chemnitz, Germany, well over enemy territory when anti-aircraft guns fatally damaged our plane, causing it to fall from the sky. Our crew evacuated, parachuting to relative safety. When I landed, a young Germany woman found me lying injured on the ground and took me into her home before the Germany army could capture me. I remained hidden in her home for several weeks, tending to my injuries and hesitantly consuming what little food she had. Truth be told, we Canadians ate better at our Air Force Base than she ever did as a civilian in wartime Germany. She was brave, but I knew what would happen to her if the Germany Army found that she was harboring an enemy. I decided to save her that danger and turn myself in.

After my capture, I became a Prisoner of War for almost 3 months in a German War Camp. During my time there, my captors fed me very little and I was not allowed much exercise or movement. When the Allied Army reached our camp at the end of the war, I was released and sent home to Manitoba to rejoin my family.

Upon my return to the farm, my family presented a wonderful meal to mark the occasion. They had mashed potatoes, turkey, gravy, puddings, fresh bread and wonderful deserts. The one thing I remembered from that day are the strange looks they all gave me when I barely ate the food that was set before me. It seems that after becoming captured in the German POW camp, my stomach shrunk. For the rest of my life, my physical health and strength has never been the same.

Narrator:

I never thought that our local boys would get married while they were overseas, but it seems more and more common nowadays. This young lady comes all the way from England.

WWII English War Bride:

My name is Connie. I was born in a small town in England called Burwash. After attending school, at the age of 14, I began work in various homes as a domestic servant. I even managed to become a kitchen maid at a very grand and beautiful home belonging to a wealthy paper merchant. Living in the servant's quarters when the Second World War began, I vividly remember hearing German air planes flying overhead at night, on their way to bomb the city of London.

When I was older, during the Second World War, I was working as a telephone operator. One particular time I took another girl's shift at work, and it ended up saving my life! It was during that night shift, a German V2 rocket destined for London hit the row houses where my family home was located. We were all lucky to have not been home that night; the entire row house was reduced to a pile of rubble.

A few of the girls from work and I would take the bus into the nearby village to go dancing on Saturday nights. There were many Canadian servicemen stationed around my village and when a good friend asked me to join her at a dance I replied "I don't have a partner". She said she had just the man for me, and set me up with a young man from the nearby Canadian Air Force Station. His name was Andy, and we began to spend more time together, once a week to be exact, whenever he was given leave from his base.

In March 1944, we were married. I was suddenly a War Bride – this was a term given to a woman who marries someone from the armed forces. It was soon after that Andy was deployed overseas, to France, Belgium and Germany. We kept in touch with letters about once a month, although the letters were heavily censored by the Air Force.

When Andy returned from action in Europe, we saw each other again, but soon he was sent back to Canada aboard a troop ship. I was not allowed to go with him, I had to wait a full year before I was sent to Canada aboard a ship with many other war brides. A 4 day train ride took me across the country to Winnipeg where Andy met me at the train station. After a few days in the city, we travelled out to my new home in Argyle. I was amazed at the wide open spaces and how large Canada really was. Although I left behind everything I knew in England, it didn't take me too long to get used to my new surroundings. I look forward to working on our farm and raising a family in my newly adopted Canada.

Narrator:

When we talk about the war, we shouldn't forget about those of us still working hard for the war effort here at home. One of the most important components of war production are the Canadian farmers,

WWII era Canadian Farmer's Wife:

My name is Gertie. I am a farmer's wife. I spent many harvests working alongside my family, watching them grow stronger and smarter each year. Our family ran a large farm and as the Great Depression of the 1930s turned into World War Two, our farming operation grew, and we prospered.

In 1944, due to a shortage of volunteer soldiers, the Canadian Government evoked Conscription; the forced military duty of all adult Canadian men. Five young men from my extended family, being over the age of 18, were conscripted and sent overseas. Those left behind in Manitoba found a way to help the war effort in our very own way.

Men, women and children in Canada worked hard at what was called the "Home Front". This was the term given to all the people who supported the war effort here from our homes.

Our farm grew grains that fed hungry allied soldiers in Europe. Eggs were converted to egg powder, milk was condensed and vegetables were dehydrated for the long ship journey overseas.

The women of our community would regularly gather to knit socks, mitts, scarves, sweaters and toques. Large boxes of wool would arrive at our home, and the wool was always navy, grey or Khaki, the official colours of the Navy, Army and Air Force. We women sewed large quilts and families would make Christmas care packages for their sons and fathers serving overseas.

My family bought several Victory Bonds over the years. This was money we invested with the Canadian Government to help pay the huge expenses of war. I remember there were big bright posters everywhere convincing people they should contribute in every way to the war effort.

Even though we were living here in Canada, the government rationed many basic supplies. Our family was issued our first ration book in 1942. The book was full of coupons that allowed us to purchase certain amounts of sugar, meat, tea, & coffee, but we could only buy these items if we had the ration coupons too. Eventually even gasoline and rubber tires were rationed.

Those of us here in Canada played a very important role in the war effort, doing everything we could on the "Home Front" to support our allies fighting overseas.

Narrator:

As an adult, it's easy to become involved in almost every component of the Second World War. However, Canadian children have contributed to the war effort in their own ways.

WWII era Student Cadet:

Hello! I'm Roy, a grade 7 student at the Brant-Argyle School. I'm not really fond of school. I don't like arithmetic and I have a hard time spelling, but there is one part of school I really do enjoy.

Each Friday afternoon, we change into our cadet uniforms and go out to the school yard to practice our drills. The principal, Mr. Bartlett, is a veteran of WWI and he arranged for a cadet corps to be formed at our school. A real army sergeant from Winnipeg drives out to meet us on Fridays in his Jeep or army truck. Once, he even drove a tank out to see us! The sergeant brings military training equipment with him; boxing gloves, cross country skis, hurdles and padded mats. We have even been issued .22 rifles! They don't really fire of course, but they are used in our marching and drill practicing none the less.

We learned how to march so well, that our cadet corps competes against other schools, and we've even won some trophies for it too.

Besides military training, we cadets go on scrap metal and bottle collections around the district. Mr. Mernett has a large truck, and we ride along with him to gather scrap from all the local farms. The military uses this metal to make planes, tanks and ships. The bottles we find are sold and the money helps the Red Cross. We even donate our gently used clothing for civilians in Europe who lost their homes because of the war.

Our cadet corps is only boys, but the girls have a group too. It is called the Wavy Navy. Their uniforms are blue skirts, white blouses and a sailor's cap. Sometimes we compete at school fairs alongside them. The girls do their part for the war effort too. They collect bobby pins, help knit warm clothing and make quilts for the Red Cross. Both boys and girls write weekly letters to local soldiers serving in the war.

Our school holds Remembrance Day services each year in the auditorium room. Principal Bartlett will take the opportunity to tell us about life in the trenches during WWI. When we see his hands shaking, we understand how much he has been affected by his time in the war.

All the students at our school bring in pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters for Victory Bonds. The Boys & Girls Club here has even held a Red Cross Tea to support for our brothers, uncles and fathers who bravely fight overseas.

Narrator:

World War Two ended in Europe in May of 1945, and in Japan in August of the same year. Over 1 million Canadians served with the military. In all, 45,000 Canadian men and women gave their lives for the freedom of future generations. We must always remember those who sacrificed their lives for us.

Bagpipe (plays a lament *The Dark Island*)

- Slowly...Mother/War Bride collect banner, Cadet & Farmer collect flags, everyone walks off stage.

Return to stage for:

- Curtain Call (Everyone introduces themselves and character they played)
- Question period (15 minutes)