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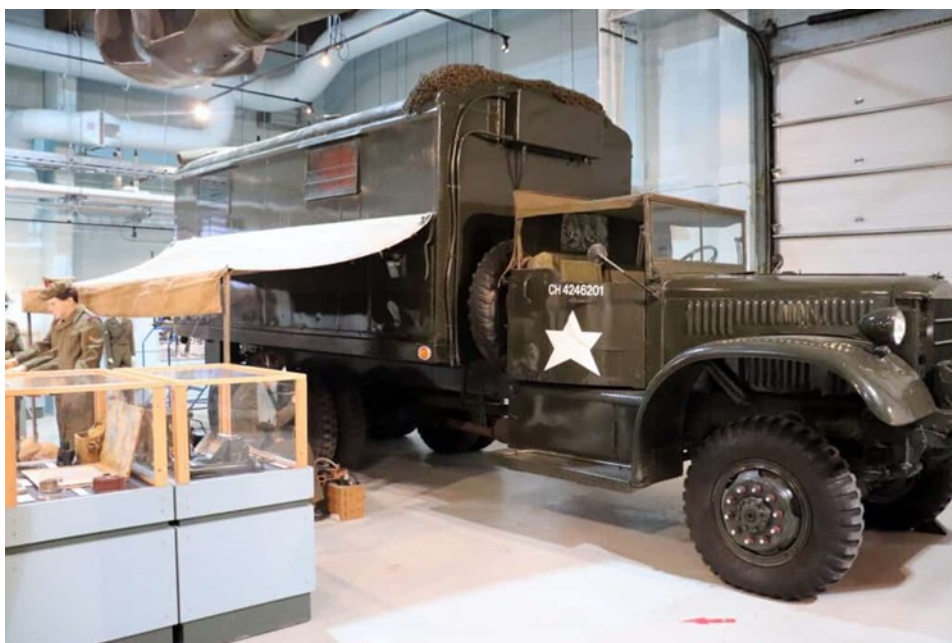
The RCA Museum News

THE RCA MUSEUM
CANADA'S NATIONAL ARTILLERY MUSEUM



October 2025

WWII Command Posts – Temporary Exhibit at the RCA Museum



The RCA Museum presents *WWII Command Posts*, a new exhibit on how Canadian command vehicles coordinated artillery and communications during the Second World War.

At the centre are three vehicles: the Crerar Caravan, the C15A Wireless Truck, and the 3-Ton Command Low Power. A Willys Jeep, a BSA motorcycle, and reconstructed Observation Post and Command Post scenes add context. Each truck is open at the rear, allowing visitors to view interior layouts and equipment.

The C15A Wireless Truck linked artillery units with headquarters. The 3-Ton Command Low Power transmitted orders across the front. Operated by the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, these vehicles maintained vital communication networks. The Crerar Caravan, used by General Harry Crerar during the North-West Europe Campaign, served as a mobile headquarters in France.

The exhibit builds on the museum's permanent WWII gallery to show how mobile command units supported artillery in North-West Europe. It demonstrates how design, coordination, and decision-making shaped operations. Highlights include the Crerar Caravan interior from its 1980s restoration and reconstructed OP and CP settings that show how soldiers operated in the field. A direct visitor route leads to the caravan, creating a clear flow through the space.

We invite visitors to explore *WWII Command Posts* and experience how Canada's command vehicles shaped the battlefield.

Anderson's UNPROFOR Shirt

Museums usually prefer to display military uniforms in good condition, with little wear. In some cases, however, a uniform's wear and story are the very things that make it worth displaying. This is the case with the torn shirt worn by Captain Ian Anderson during his time as a UN peacekeeper in the former Yugoslavia.

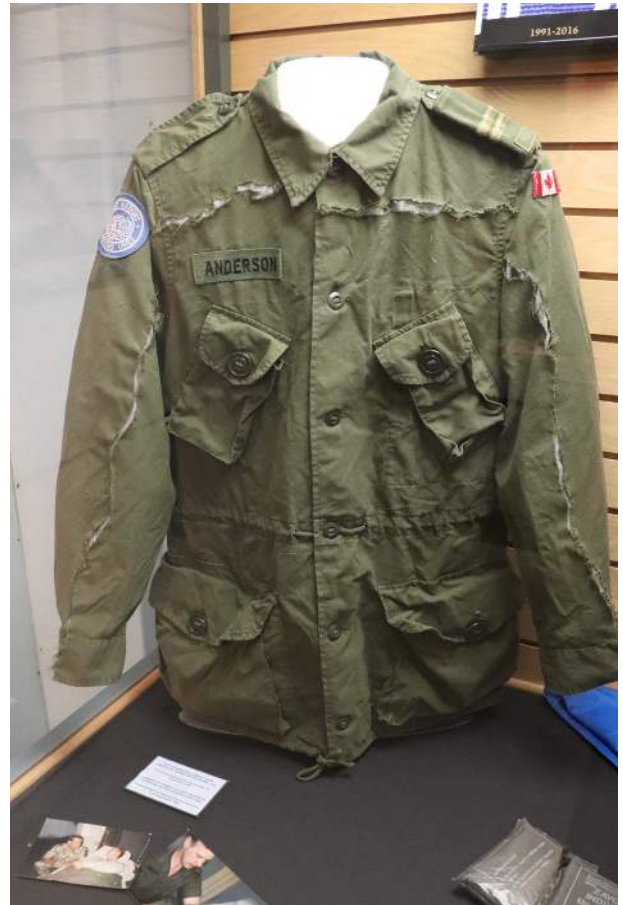
Ian Wentworth Anderson was born in the town of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, and joined the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA) in 1980, after attending the University of King's College in Halifax. During his time with the RCA, Anderson served in Gagetown, St. John's, Valcartier, and Ottawa.

In the early 1990s, following the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, its six former republics—Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina—emerged as independent states. This process was marked by ethnic violence and **civil** conflict, which necessitated the deployment of peacekeeping forces. Anderson served with the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, becoming one of nearly 40,000 members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) who served as peacekeepers in the Balkans—the single largest deployment of Canadian peacekeepers up to that point.

In the city of Sarajevo, where UNPROFOR was responsible for securing the Sarajevo airport and ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid throughout the city, Captain Anderson served as a liaison officer with the Serbian Army Corps Headquarters. Despite their role as peacekeepers, it wasn't uncommon for UNPROFOR members to find themselves engaged in combat. On August 25, 1992, in the first of two incidents for which he would later be recognized, Anderson organized the treatment of wounded individuals while under artillery fire in the neighborhood of Lukavica.

One month later, on September 24, 1992, Anderson again came under fire. While travelling with a group of Egyptian peacekeepers en route to a body exchange between Muslim and Serbian forces at Ažići, the armoured personnel carrier they were travelling in struck an anti-tank mine. As a result, Anderson sustained injuries to his left arm that required medical attention. Despite these injuries, Captain Anderson successfully led his party to safety while under fire. The shirt was later cut from his body by medical staff. For his actions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Anderson was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal on December 27, 1993.

Following his release from the Canadian Armed Forces, Anderson accepted an appointment as Chief Gunnery Officer with the Royal New Zealand Artillery. He died on July 5, 1996, following an accident during a training exercise. Anderson's UNPROFOR shirt, along with photographs of him receiving medical treatment following his injury, is now on display at the RCA Museum in a collection about Canadian involvement in UN peacekeeping efforts. Anderson's shirt serves as a reminder of the Canadian Armed Forces' contributions to peacekeeping over the past eighty years.



McNaughton Troop 8809(F): A Turning Point in Artillery History

While reviewing our photo archives, I discovered a worn black binder, four inches thick, containing approximately 140 images of recruits training at the RCA Battle School at CFB Shilo in the fall of 1988. At first glance, it appeared to be a typical record of field exercises and weapons training, but one detail immediately stood out. These photographs captured the arrival of the first female Gunners in the Canadian Artillery.

Images illustrate the story of McNaughton Troop 8809(F), highlighting their training at CFB Shilo from August 15 to November 4, 1988. Over twelve weeks, 32 French-speaking recruits completed the demanding Field Artilleryman QL3 course. They mastered small arms like the C7 rifle and C9 light machine gun, advanced through grenade ranges and anti-tank weapons, and finally stood on the gun line of the C1 105mm howitzer.

What makes this collection significant is not only the record of training but the presence of five women among the recruits. For the first time, female candidates completed a combat arms qualification course alongside their male peers in the Canadian Artillery. The photos show them marching, digging, and firing, always part of the troop. They carried the same loads, faced the same risks, and proved beyond doubt that they belonged in combat arms.



Gunner L. C. Migneault



Gunner M. M. Belisle



Gunner M. M. Belisle

The binder also preserves moments of history. On 19 October 1988, during the troop's first live fire exercise with the C1 105mm howitzer, LCol Hoyland presented the first female graduates with their RCA cap badges. The images depict both ceremony and celebration with men and women united, no longer recruits, but Gunners.

The course did not become easier as it progressed. The photos show ammunition handling, combat simulations, live-fire exercises, and long ruck marches under cold prairie skies. By graduation on 4 November 1988, 32 candidates - 27 men and five women - marched off the parade square as Gunners. The military posted the entire troop to 5e RALC at Valcartier.

Rediscovering these photographs reminds us that history often hides in plain sight. In 1989, the Canadian Armed Forces officially opened all combat arms trades to women. Yet the photographs in the old binder show that Troop 8809(F) had already set the precedent. Their success proved that integration was both practical and effective. These women were not bystanders or symbols—they were soldiers: trained, tested, and full members of the gun line.



Gunner M. F. Beaulieu

By Andrew Oakden

Private Sydney Gath and the Legacy of the Devil's Brigade

Private Sydney Gath of Winnipeg, Manitoba, stands as a powerful example of courage, quiet determination, and ultimate sacrifice during the Second World War. Born on June 22, 1915, Gath enlisted in the Canadian Active Service Force on September 3, 1939, as Canada mobilized for war. He began his service with the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (RCASC), quickly proving himself reliable, hardworking, and disciplined.

In 1942, Gath volunteered for one of the most demanding and dangerous military units ever assembled, the First Special Service Force (FSSF), a combined Canadian-American commando unit formed to undertake high-risk operations behind enemy lines. Before his acceptance, Gath underwent screening and evaluation. On his formal assessment form, the interviewing officer described him as having “fair education,” “good morals,” and “a pleasing manner,” but concluded that Gath was “not aggressive enough for paratroops” and recommended him for service elsewhere.



Gath wearing his US Jump Wings



FSSF troops jumping in Montana - From Gath's photo collection

Despite this, Gath persisted. He was accepted into the Force and went on to complete its famously grueling training in Helena, Montana. The FSSF trained intensively in mountaineering, parachuting, close-combat, amphibious assault, and winter warfare. The unit, later dubbed the “Devil’s Brigade,” operated with complete secrecy and rapidly became one of the most elite Allied forces in the war.

The Force’s first major engagement came in December 1943, at Monte La Difensa—a nearly 1,000-metre-high stronghold in Italy’s Apennine Mountains, fiercely defended by German paratroopers and panzergrenadiers.

Previous assaults by Allied divisions had failed with heavy casualties. On December 1, Gath and the Force began an 11-hour march through rain and mud to reach the base of the mountain. From there, they completed a two-day climb up the treacherous north face in silence, hauling weapons, gear, and supplies in preparation for a surprise attack at dawn.



Gath's PT sweatshirt and mountain wool socks

On December 3, the battle began. Gath advanced with his company commander, Captain Bill Rothlin, and Sergeant Joe Glass. Taking cover behind a rock, Glass warned them not to expose themselves—an enemy machine gunner had their position locked in. Tragically, both Gath and Rothlin looked over the rock simultaneously. A single burst struck them both fatally in the head. Sergeant Donald MacKinnon, nearby, initially believed Gath had stumbled into him, MacKinnon scolded him. “As I said that,” MacKinnon later recalled, “he rolled over and I saw the gaping wound to his head. He had died instantly. It really stunned me. Syd had been a good friend from the beginning—a very likeable guy.”



Gath's Military ID issued in Helena, Montana



Gath's FSSF Should Patch

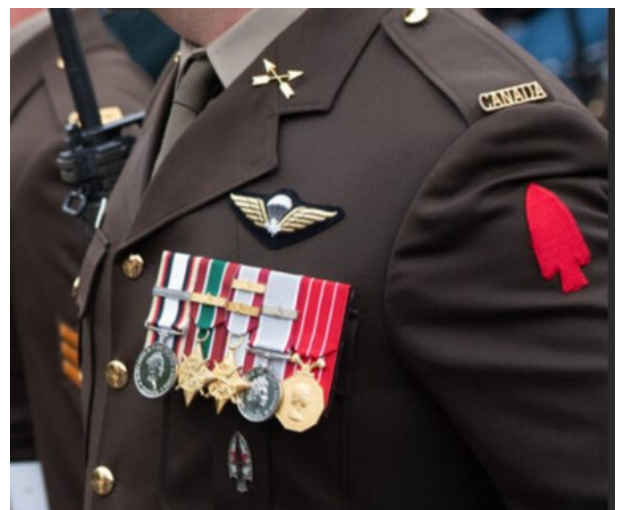
Though he died in the opening hours of the attack, Gath helped secure one of the most critical objectives in the Italian campaign. The FSSF's victory at La Difensa cracked the German Winter Line and opened the road to Rome. In just two hours, the Force accomplished what two full Allied divisions could not. Yet the cost was high: 20 commandos were killed, including Private Gath, and 160 were wounded.

Today, we honour Private Sydney Gath and his sacrifice by displaying his original First Special Service Force shoulder patch at the RCA Museum. The red arrowhead recalls the unit's first unofficial name, the 'Braves.' Inside, the words 'USA' and 'CANADA' highlight the unprecedented partnership that defined this remarkable force. Alongside the patch, visitors can see Gath's crossed arrows collar insignia, first worn by U.S. Indigenous scouts in the 1890s. His U.S. Parachutist Wings, and his Fort Harrison PT sweatshirt are also on display with other personal items owned by Gath.

What makes Sydney Gath's story especially moving is the contrast between the official judgment that he lacked aggression, and the reality of his death in the front ranks of one of the toughest and most dangerous operations of the war.

He proved that quiet resolve can be as vital as bravado, and that courage often reveals itself in action, not paperwork.

The legacy of the Devil's Brigade lives on. Canada's Joint Task Force 2 (JTF2), the Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR), and the U.S. Army Special Forces (Green Berets) all trace their origins to the FSSF. Its doctrine, combat training, and special operations ethos became the blueprint for modern elite forces. The arrowhead patch and crossed arrows insignia are still used today, in both official and unofficial capacities. This speaks to the impact and influence this short-lived unit had on both Canadian and American special operations, which continue to this day.



CANSOFCOM soldier on parade with modern Arrowhead patch

By Will Brandon

Creaking Metal Giant - Grizzly Tank #160244

When I think of Second World War tanks, I imagine them rumbling down a lonely dirt road, their rusty metal tracks clattering rhythmically through the smoke-choked air. That image comes to life every time I walk past Grizzly #160244 at the RCA Museum archives. I'm proud to say we're fortunate to house dozens of Second World War vehicles, including tanks and self-propelled artillery. But none carry quite the same presence as the Grizzly I tank, a 30-tonne steel giant that rolled off the Canadian assembly line in November 1943.



Grizzly tank #160244 loaded for transport to the RCA Museum in 1986.

It was the fall of 1943 when Montreal Locomotive Works answered Canada's urgent call for armoured vehicles and began rolling out the first Grizzly I tanks. Designed as our homegrown counterpart to the M4A1 Sherman, each Grizzly stretched over 19 feet and stood nearly 10 feet tall, bristling with a 75 mm M3 L/40 gun and two 30-06 Browning machine guns. A crew of five: commander, gunner, loader, driver, and co-driver, hunkered inside its 75 mm of armour. The Continental R-975 radial engine produced up to 400 horsepower as it rumbled at speeds up to 24 mph.

Between August and December 1943, MLW completed 188 tanks, including Grizzly #160244. The Canadian-built Grizzly I tanks never went overseas during the Second World War; instead, the Canadian Army used most of them to train troops at Camp Borden and Camp Meaford, teaching essential skills in gunnery, tactics, and diesel maintenance. After the war, Canada retained many Grizzlies for reserve training.

By the mid-1950s, the Grizzly tanks had become obsolete, outpaced by newer, more advanced armoured vehicles. In 1956, Canada transferred over fifty surplus Grizzlies to Portugal under NATO's Mutual Aid Program. Depots in Lisbon received most Grizzly I tanks, where crews stripped them of their barrels and left them to decay.

Decades later, Welsh farmer Ian McGregor stumbled upon that cache of mothballed tanks in Portugal, which were for sale, and purchased them. Seizing the opportunity, he arranged their transport back to North Wales using "Ro-Ro vessels," sparking a wave of renewed interest in restoring World War II armour. McGregor even earned a quirky reputation for selling tanks as Christmas presents.

In 1983, Dr. Bill Gregg of Rockwood, Ontario, acquired two of these Grizzlies - serial numbers 160243 and 160244. The Canadian federal government agreed to cover the cost of bringing them home. Gregg gave one to the Canadian federal government and, in 1986, donated the other - Grizzly #160244 - to the Royal Canadian Artillery Museum in Shilo, Manitoba, ensuring its preservation as a piece of Canadian military history.

We're delighted to preserve this creaking metal giant, a powerful reminder of Canada's wartime manufacturing legacy. I often imagine the roar of its Continental R-975 engine as it rolled off the Montreal assembly line, trained crews at Camp Borden, crossed the Atlantic to sit in Portuguese depots, and then, thanks to a determined collector, made its way back home. History is shaped not only on distant battlefields but also in local workshops, training grounds, and through the dedication of those who never forget.

By Andrew Oakden

Arthur Catt's Album: The Story of the 3-Inch Anti-Aircraft Gun

In 2001, the RCA Museum received a 36-page album full of military and family pictures from WO2 Arthur Edward Catt, covering the 1920s to 1980s. Rich in personal anecdotes and historical context, it shows Arthur at various stages of his military career in multiple settings across Canada, Great Britain, and Europe. The photo album vividly highlights Canada's need for new guns in the 1930s.

Arthur was born in Sussex, England, in 1911. His father died in the First World War, and his mother passed away a few years later. He and his two siblings were left orphaned: two boys and a girl. A close family took in the daughter while authorities sent the boys to the colonies. The oldest brother, Ernest, was sent to Australia, and Arthur came to Canada in 1922 at age eleven. Arthur initially worked on a farm doing manual labour with horses and hauling logs. In 1926, at 15, he joined the Canadian militia and served in various units across Ontario.

Arthur Catt's album uniquely focuses on the limited rearmament of the Canadian Artillery in the 1930s. In 1937, he joined the 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery, part of the Permanent Force, the first Canadian unit rearmed with semi-modern artillery. About half of the album highlights this Battery during the late 1930s, often overshadowed by the war years from 1939 to 1945. The photo to the right shows Arthur Catt during a summer training exercise. He appears to be in his mid-20s, from the mid-1930s.



In August 1935, the Canadian militia ordered four 3-inch, 20-cwt, Mark I Anti-Aircraft Guns on a Mark II Travelling Platform. The four Canadian guns were mounted on a four-wheeled trailer and used one-piece ammunition. Each gun could fire up to 18 rounds per minute, reaching a maximum ceiling of 37,200 feet (11,300 meters) and an effective range of 20,000 feet (6,100 meters). The ammunition types included high explosives, shrapnel, target shells, smoke shells, and practice shells with a minor bursting charge. The photo to the right shows the 3-inch, 20-cwt, Mark I AA gun.



In terms of AA guns, there was not a single semi-modern gun in Canada in 1935. Canada had eight WWI-vintage 13-pounder, 9-cwt AA guns that had become obsolete by the end of the First World War. In 1937, the Canadian militia raised the 4th AA Battery in Kingston, Ontario. The 3-inch, 20-cwt AA guns arrived with much fanfare in the summer of 1938. The four 3-inch Anti-Aircraft guns went to the only Permanent Force anti-aircraft battery raised for the purpose—the 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery, RCA. The British developed the 3-inch, 20-cwt AA gun in 1913–14 and used it extensively during the First World War. However, the gun became essentially obsolete due to rapid increases in aircraft performance. The photo shows the 4th AA Battery, RCA, logo taken at Camp Petawawa.



Additionally, the existing field artillery guns were unsuited for mechanical tractor vehicles—these weapons, such as the 18-pounder, were outranged by 3 to 6 thousand yards by modern guns. Canada had no tanks, armoured cars, or tractors for heavy and field equipment. Government policy was slow to rearm before WW2.

Since the 1920s, the British War Office had recommended improvements for anti-aircraft guns, including high-explosive aerodynamic shells and mechanical time fuses. Enhancements involved increased firing rates through automation, long-range optical range-finders, and centralized fire control factoring in weather and equipment wear. By 1935, Canada ordered outdated, semi-modern 3-inch AA guns, which were ineffective against modern 1930s aircraft. By the late 1930s, manufacturers began transitioning to the more effective 3.7-inch AA gun.



Gunners from the 4th AA Battery completed drills on the mobile 3-inch, 20-cwt guns during summer training in 1938 at Camp Petawawa.



Gunners completing drill with the 3-inch AA gun during summer exercises at Camp Petawawa in 1938.

In anticipation of the new guns, in May 1938, the 4th AA Battery moved from Tête-du-Pont Barracks, Kingston, to Petawawa for the first summer training with the guns. In July 1938, they received the new 3-inch AA guns. In August 1938, the 4th AA Battery trained in Permanent Force exercises at Camp Borden. They also used new Leyland trucks to haul the guns 270 miles between Camp Petawawa and Camp Borden.

In September 1938, the 4th AA Battery went to Point Petre in Picton, Ontario, to fire their 3-inch guns for the first time at targets over Lake Ontario. The guns used a single Vickers Predictor for accuracy. The photo below shows WO2 Catt on the right in white overalls with fellow Gunners and the Vickers No. 1 Predictor.



Canadians used the Vickers No. 1 Predictor with a right-sight telescope. Developed in the 1920s, it communicated corrections to gun dials through an electrical induction system, making it an early automated fire-control system for large-calibre guns targeting high-altitude bombers.

The 4th AA Battery spent the winter in Kingston, Ontario, and returned to Point Petre to train reservist (NPAM) batteries on the 3-inch AA guns in 1939. As the threat of war became critical in August 1939, Headquarters in Ottawa recalled the Battery to Kingston, Ontario. By August 25th, Ottawa issued a "Precautionary Stage" warning against Germany. Then, on 26/27 August, the 4th AA battery left Kingston for Halifax with Canada's only four semi-effective and semi-modern AA guns, a prelude to WW2.

Peace did not last through the appeasement at Munich in September 1938, Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, and Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1st, 1939. England declared war on Germany on September 3rd, and Canada declared war on September 9th. On September 3rd, the Permanent Force artillery RCHA mobilized, including A and B Batteries out of Kingston, the 3rd Medium Battery, RCA, out of Kingston, and the 4th AA Battery in Halifax, and C Battery, RCHA, out of Winnipeg.

Headquarters in Ottawa recalled the 4th AA Battery to Halifax on August 26th, 1939, which served there until August 15th, 1940. The urgent task of forming AA batteries for Britain led to establishing the 2nd Canadian LAA Regiment in August 1940, supporting the 1st Canadian Division. It included the 1st (Yorkton) LAA Battery, the 4th (Kingston) LAA Battery, and the 5th (Montreal) LAA Battery, along with the 54th Battery from the 1st RCHA in February 1941. The newly renamed 4th Light Anti-Aircraft (LAA) Battery, RCA, arrived in England on January 1st, 1941.



On the left: soldiers loading 3-Inch shells during summer training in 1938. On the right: the 4th AA Battery transporting 3-inch AA guns with Leyland trucks in 1938.

The four 3-inch, 20-cwt AA guns stayed in Canada and never reached Europe. In June 1941, they were relocated to Arvida, Quebec, to protect an aluminum plant and hydroelectric facilities. By June 1943, with new 3.7-inch AA guns arriving, the Canadian Army placed the four 3-inch 20-cwt guns in storage and disposed of them afterward.

Arthur Catts served in the Canadian Artillery during the war, mainly stationed in England and later in France and Northwest Europe in 1944. He sustained a permanent leg injury in Holland late that year. After returning to Canada, Arthur joined the 129 Anti-Aircraft Battery in Victoria, B.C., and rose to WO2 (Master Warrant Officer) by the early 1950s. He re-



Soldiers from the 129th AA Battery in the early 1950s. WO2 Catt is a front center smiling.

tired from the Canadian Army in March 1952 at 41. Post-war photos show that he aged significantly during and after his service.

After retiring from the military, Arthur met Jessie at a party, and they married in 1953. They spent 37 years together on Southern Vancouver Island, where Arthur was known for his sense of humour and storytelling, including his war experiences. After Jessie passed away in 1990, Arthur lived in their home until he died in 2001. He had a rewarding military career, and his legacy highlights the story of the 3-inch Anti-Aircraft gun in Canadian service.

By Andrew Oakden



Arthur and Jessie in 1980.

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