



**SUPPLY
LINE**

Minnie Eleanor Gray

Canadian Women's Army Corps

Despite a difficult start in life, Minnie – who joined the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC) when she was 31 – ended up with a dream job as nursing orderly and chaperone for the CWAC Pipe Band.



Minnie Gray relaxing in her uniform, around 1944
George Metcalf Archival Collection
Canadian War Museum 20110057-022_5

Early Years

Minnie was born in Nova Scotia in 1913. Little is known about her parents, who may have died shortly after she was born.

Minnie's father was a Black Nova Scotian, and her mother was White. Minnie spent her early childhood living with family members.

By the age of 8, however, she was living at a home for orphaned or disabled children.

She later found a permanent home with John and Velma MacPherson of Wolfville, Nova Scotia, with whom she enjoyed a close and lasting bond.

A Dream Assignment

When the Second World War began, Minnie was working in domestic service. She joined the Wolfville Women's Volunteer Corps and, when the military started enlisting women, she went to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to join up.

Minnie was rejected. She was told it was because she had flat feet. However, given official and unofficial discrimination against racial minorities, her race likely played a role.

She tried again the following year. This time she was accepted.

In early 1944, Minnie reported to a Canadian Women's Army Corps Training Centre in Kitchener, Ontario, for basic training. She learned the fundamentals of army life. She documented her training in a photo album filled with images of her and other recruits cleaning, cooking and clearing snow.

Once she finished basic training, Minnie took specialized training as a Nursing Orderly. After graduating, Minnie worked in a hospital in Kitchener, Ontario, and in 1945 was sent overseas with 250 other women in her corps.

Minnie was ecstatic to learn that she had been assigned to the Canadian Women's Army Corps Pipe Band as a nursing orderly and chaperone. She wrote in her diary, "I [am] going to the continent as M.O. to the Pipe Band. What a day! – and what a break. I certainly never expected anything as perfect as that."

Minnie toured England, France, the Netherlands and Belgium with the CWAC Pipe Band. They visited 83 cities during a seven-month period.

Her scrapbooks (now in the collection of the Canadian War Museum) are filled with photographs and souvenirs from that journey.

Life After the War

Minnie was discharged from the army in March 1946. After her wartime experiences, she had no wish to return to domestic service.

She took the medical skills she had acquired as a Nursing Orderly and enrolled in the Parker School for Trained Attendants, in Montréal, Quebec. After graduating in 1947, she remained in the city, working in the healthcare field until her retirement. She passed away in 2005.