



**SUPPLY  
LINE**

## Alta Wilkinson

Silver Cross Women Remembrance Association

Alta not only lost a brother during the First World War, but when she was 46, she lost her son Arthur during the Second. She later founded the Silver Cross Women Remembrance Association for women who had lost a spouse or child to war.

Alta Wilkinson and her son Arthur before he left for overseas.  
George Metcalf Archival Collection  
Canadian War Museum 19830600-002\_p2



### Touched by the First World War

Born in 1898, Alta grew up in Quebec's Gaspé region, in the town of New Richmond. Two of her brothers fought during the First World War, but only one returned home. In October 1918, her brother Arthur Campbell had died of wounds suffered in battle.

Alta became a teacher, working in Montréal and Québec City before meeting Curt Lorne Wilkinson, who had also fought in the First World War. They married and moved to Ottawa, Ontario, where they had five children, including Arthur, named after his late uncle.

## A Mother's Worry

At the start of the Second World War, Alta's son Arthur was working as a postal clerk. After he enlisted, he was assigned to the Canadian Postal Corps, and was sent to England.

Arthur's war, like that of many Canadian troops, was slow to start. He left Canada in December 1939 and spent the next four years in England – training, working as a postal clerk and waiting.

After Arthur had enlisted in the army, another son, Richard, decided to join the Royal Canadian Navy. With two sons in service, Alta's worries doubled.

In 1944, Arthur decided to join the **infantry**, transferring to the Royal Highland Regiment of Canada (the Black Watch). He took a reduction in rank from Sergeant to Private, and began the training that would lead him to Normandy, France.

D-Day came on 6 June 1944, but Arthur was not in the first few waves of troops. He would not wait long, however. In early July, he landed in France.

Although Alta did not know exactly where Arthur was, she did know that he was involved in the campaign. On July 19, she wrote, "We listen & read every scrap of news about the Canadians & think of you and pray that God will keep you safe & that it will be over soon. Good night my darling boy. XXXX Mother."

The letter was returned. The day before Alta had written those words, Arthur had been killed in fighting to liberate the city of Caen from the Germans.

Alta found out about Arthur's death 10 days later, via telegram. In a sad twist, another arrival at the Wilkinson house that day was a bouquet of roses from Arthur, who had arranged through friends to have them delivered before he landed in France.

Alta preserved one of the roses in a scrapbook where it remains, more than 75 years later, in the collection of the Canadian War Museum.

## Remembrance and Recognition

Alta's scrapbooks are filled with clippings, photographs and documents related to Arthur's wartime service. Among the items is a small canvas packet taped to a page and labelled, "Earth from Arthur's Grave."

The packet was sent to her after the war by Mrs. J.E. Raoult, one of the residents of Normandy who had volunteered to tend the graves of **Allied** soldiers. It would be years before the Wilkinsons travelled to Normandy to visit Arthur's gravesite.

Alta also helped found the Silver Cross Women Remembrance Association. Silver Cross women were those who had lost either a husband or a child in war, making them recipients of the Memorial (or Silver) Cross. Alta served as President of the Ottawa Chapter and, in 1975, was Canada's National Silver Cross Mother.

Arthur Campbell Wilkinson is buried in the Bretteville-sur-Laize Canadian War Cemetery near Caen, France. Alta Wilkinson died in 1990, and is buried in Ottawa.

## Vocabulary

### Allied

The countries, including Canada, that joined together in opposing the Axis powers during the Second World War. The largest Allied nations were the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union and China.

### Infantry

Soldiers who engage in combat while on foot, instead of in other ways, such as in tanks or on horseback, although they often use vehicles for transportation. On some occasions (such as D-Day) infantry were sent into combat using landing craft which put them ashore on a beach, or as airborne infantry, who parachuted or rode gliders into landing areas.