

THE LIFE of CWAC BILLY (MELLAFONT) PICKARD



Born and raised in small town Saskatchewan in the early twenties—a little place called Radville, just southwest of Weyburn, Billy grew up in the depression when there was little work except for farming and no one had any money to pay the farmers.

Her father was a builder, who often worked for farmers who paid him using the barter system, food for work. Her mother died when Billy was fourteen and her father was left with three girls to raise and no money.

“Times were difficult.” Billy recalls.

“I completed my high school education in Radville and because there was no work, I moved to Wells, British Columbia to live with my older sister....she had arranged work for

me there....At the time, Wells was a thriving gold mining town with about 3,000 inhabitants, mostly men....I landed a job in the Post office.”

The war was on and in 1943, an Army recruiting officer came to town and most of the men were joining up. *“I joined with them on February 3rd, 1943. My unit was the Canadian Women’s Army Corps, commonly called the CWAC’s”*

Immediately posted to Vermillion, Alberta for basic training, then transferred to Esquimalt, B.C. where Billy was placed in the Signal Corps drafting office. *“..I worked there for nearly a year, and one morning in Jan. ‘44 I was summoned to the C.O.’s office and asked about my previous Post Office experience....moments later I was asked what I thought about going overseas, as there was a need for experienced Post Office personnel....I said I hadn’t thought about it, but was willing to go wherever I was needed.....They told me to go back to barracks and pack because I only had about 2 hours to catch the next ferry to Vancouver....the next thing I knew, I was on a train heading for Kitchener, Ontario for overseas training....I did get 4 days leave to stop en route in Radville to visit my father.”*

The training course in Kitchener was very rigorous. *“It lasted 6 weeks and consisted of long route marches with full packs, combat training and my least favourite, how to cope with tear gas....it was exhausting but I managed to pass t*

the course, along with 40 other girls...we then went by train to Halifax where we