

Women and the War

The Great War was not just a man's endeavour: Canadian women also played a vital role. Between 1914 and 1918 more than six hundred thousand men set aside their normal trades to serve as Canadian soldiers. In many cases it was women who

took over the tasks soldiers left behind. Women worked in myriad roles previously considered men-only. In some cases these roles were directly related to war production: women helped manufacture munitions and military equipment.



Beatrice McNair
Courtesy of Wendy Billingsley

Beatrice McNair

Some 2,800 nurses volunteered for war service; many worked in military hospitals close to the battlefields. Their work was demanding and dangerous. Courage was frequently demanded—and delivered. **Beatrice McNair** of Vancouver was one of nine nurses awarded the Military Medal for gallantry. Sixty-four nurses earned the Royal Red Cross First Class for exceptional devotion to duty.

Amelia Earhart WW1.
Courtesy of
Schlesinger Library,
Raddcliffe Institute,
Harvard University



Amelia Earhart

It wasn't just registered nurses who were keen to do their part for the war effort. Some two thousand Canadian women served in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) as nursing assistants, cooks, ward aides and the like.

One member of the Canadian VAD went on to world-wide fame: **Amelia Earhart** joined in Toronto and served until the end of the war.

Fifty-eight nurses—including two who served in the VAD—died in service during the war, twenty as a direct result of enemy action.



Voluntary Aid Detachment (V.A.D.) Recruitment Poster.
Courtesy of the Canadian War Museum
CWM 19920143-009

Women Making Shells, Mabel May.
Courtesy of the Canadian War Museum CWM 19710261-0389

Grace MacPherson

Most VAD women did their duty on the home front but some were determined to take a part closer to the front lines. Vancouver's **Grace MacPherson** succeeded in doing just that. She drove an ambulance, transported wounded soldiers and was as talented a mechanic as she was a driver.



Grace MacPherson. Courtesy of Library and Archives
Canada Mikan 3395835



Nurses on Government Street, Victoria BC.
Courtesy of Barbara Randall

