

# Socialite to Soldier- The Inspiring Story of Mary Dover

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Imagine being born into what could best be described as, Albertan royalty. What would you do? Would you save this money? Would you abuse this privilege? Would you never be afraid of falling, because you know there will always be the safety net of your father's wealth to catch you? Mary Dover could have easily strolled down that path. She could have pushed all her dreams and aspirations aside and basked in her family's riches, but she didn't. She didn't, because of her unfailing drive and determination, and her selfless spirit. Putting her country before herself, she not only helped lead an army to victory, but also a province to a flourishing future full of respect, acceptance, and equality.

Perhaps it was a sign of some sort, that Mary Julia Dover was born on the day Alberta officially joined the confederation. She was originally Mary Cross, born to historical rancher, A.E. Cross, and Helen Macleod. Her father was an entrepreneur, oilman, real estate developer, brewer and was the co-founder of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede. Her grandfather, Colonel James Farquharson Macleod, was one of Calgary's founders. Mary was sent to remarkably privileged schools in Calgary, Victoria, and Montreal. She studied materials such as art, literature, and history- subjects that were expected of girls at the time. Young Mary came to think of herself as rather unskilled when it came to academics, but she excelled when she was on the saddle.

A very fine horsewoman she turned out to be and even starred in, "*His Destiny*", one of Hollywood's very first movies ever filmed in Calgary. In the movie, she can be seen riding free amongst a herd of wild horses, almost as if she had a spiritual connection with the animals. She was also a very passionate and talented stunt rider, and to say she enjoyed what she did would be an understatement.

One of the many twists and turns in Mary's life carried her overseas when she met her husband, Melville Dover, an automobile executive. She lived in Colombo, Ceylon, where she gave birth to her first son, David. Everything was perfect, once more for Mary Dover, until whisperings of World War II struck her and her family. She took her son and moved back to Canada, but her husband stayed in Ceylon. It tore her life apart and, devastating though it was, she persevered through the hardships by facing them head-on in Canada and in Europe.

At first, she devoted her time to volunteering at the Red Triangle, providing temporary homes for soldiers who were staying in Canada. She then enlisted in the women's army, where she was placed in charge of recruiting new members in Southern Alberta. As it turned out, it was the ideal situation for a person like her, judging by the eloquent and persuasive speeches she delivered. By speaking up about the overlooked fact that women *could* indeed make an impact and support their community, she inspired many young women. She informed her audience that defending a country should be a responsibility concerning everyone- not just men. Not long after, she was promoted to Major in the Canadian Women's Army Corps and posted to Britain.

Eventually, she caught wind of a smear campaign implying that women who joined the army would be unloving wives and mothers and "masculinized" once they returned home. Dover countered these beliefs by stating that nearly every woman she knew in the military was eagerly anticipating the day she would return home to her family.

Fortunately, she survived the Blitz in London, eliminated misogynistic remarks (for the time being) and returned to Canada, where she was promoted to Lt.-Col- Canada's second-highest ranking female officer. As if fighting in the war and valiantly serving her country weren't enough, she decided to run for the Alberta Legislative Assembly as a Liberal candidate. Despite all her best efforts on two attempts, she was unsuccessful.

Being the resilient woman she was, instead of watching the door to political leadership shut, she pulled it back open by becoming a Calgary alderman for two terms. On the battlefields and at City Hall, she was a compassionate and persuasive leader. These are two qualities in a person that can make an effective leader because a good leader must be able to understand the people and be able to make his or her views agreeable to everyone.

I believe that, despite all the advances women have made in society since Dover's time in the military, her struggles are still relatable today. One example is NDP MLA, Sandra Janson, who raised her voice in the legislature, urging all politicians to take a stand towards hateful remarks towards women. This issue is similar to the challenges Dover faced with the smear campaign. If Mary Dover were alive today, she would be quite proud of how far women have come, but she would also continue to challenge views that put down women.

Before I knew about Mary Dover, I always had a fear of failure. I had a fixed mindset that somehow, I would slip through the cracks and into the icy depths of despair and darkness. I thought that once I was there, there would be no coming back. Mary Dover taught me that if I do indeed fall, drive and determination will always help me back up.

Not only has Mary Dover taught me to overcome my fear of failure, but she has inspired me to become a better person in my community as well. Reading her story opened up a place in my heart that I intend to fill with volunteer work and involvement in my community. Her story caused me to look back on my own life, and think, "*what have I done to contribute to my community?*". Up until now, my volunteering has only gone as far as the occasional shoveling of a senior's sidewalk. I think a small, but meaningful first step on the path to becoming an active citizen would be to volunteer at a local senior's home. I have already begun raising my voice about issues at my school that concern me. I am amazed at her desire to serve her country and her community through her work as a volunteer, officer, and politician. She was able to make a positive impact- something I hope to accomplish.

From socialite to soldier, Mary Dover was a trailblazer, leader, and an inspiration. Beginning in a position near aristocracy she chose a path less traveled and paved it for others to follow. She stood strong against the showers of bullets and against the thunderstorms of gender-based pessimistic comments. She helped liberate women and girls from suppressive chains of misogyny. I truly believe that if everyone aspired to be like her, the world would be a better place. I like to think of it as a relay race- champions like Mary Dover have already gotten us this far, but now, the baton is in our hands. It's up to us, the youth, to lead our country to a brighter future. We will take initiative and bring matters into our own hands. I will strive to be a champion, just like my hero, Mary Dover.

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