

A Hero's Words

Mary Dover



I blinked awake, finding myself seated in the front row of a theatre. Around me, swarms of women stared, entranced, at the stage. They wore vintage calf-length dresses with belted waists and utilitarian collars in hues and prints of emerald, cherry, and sunflower. Luckily, the muted theatre lighting obscured my sleek, futuristic clothes, preventing suspicion. Following the gazes of the women around me, I glanced up at the stage.

There she stood, mere metres in front of me. I recognized those solemn, intelligent eyes, the proud and graceful alertness of the posture. Resplendent in a crisp, freshly-ironed uniform, was Mary Dover. A banner behind her read: *Canadian Women's Army Corps Recruitment Tour 1944*.

1944. I heaved a sigh of relief. Time travel technology was still relatively new and risky, but I'd rewinded hundreds of years, and managed to get here in one piece. Perilous as the technology was, I had no choice but to employ it. It was all my social studies teacher's fault; he'd instructed us to write research essays on important figures from Alberta's history.

I silently recited the beginning of my essay. *Mary Julia Cross was born on June 8, 1905, in Calgary, Alberta. She led a childhood of leisure, becoming a skilled horsewoman. In 1930, Mary married Melville Dover, and together, they travelled all over Southeast Asia. At the start of WWII, Melville joined the European war effort, while Mary and their son returned to Calgary. In 1941, Mary Dover enlisted in the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC), rising through the ranks to become Lieutenant-Colonel and Chief Recruiting Officer. Mary served as Commandant of the CWAC training centre in Kitchener, Ontario, then joined a CWAC contingent located in England to receive senior officers' training. In 1944, she ran a tour across Canada, giving recruitment speeches to encourage women to enlist.*

The basic information was in place, but *something* was missing, the last piece in the puzzle. That was why I'd needed to go back to 1944. What better way was there to do research than to orchestrate a real-life encounter with the subject of my essay? To record the experience, I had embedded a miniscule camera in my shirt collar.

When I diverted my attention back to Mary, she appeared to be in the middle of a speech. She talked about how the cipher clerks, switchboard operators, radar operators- all manner of important personnel- were dominantly women. In her words about training and duty, there were teachings of discipline and respect. Most of all, she emphasized the significance of the Canadian Women's Army Corps to the war effort.

“As men are needed to take their place in the field of battle, so women are needed in theirs behind the lines of supply and communication,” Mary said, “Our soldiers need us, our country needs us, and the people of occupied Europe need us. Those in the service work willingly and well, regardless of the hours, until the job is done. Know that we are the driving force and the great inspiration behind Canadian army. Know that we help bring liberation and relief to our suffering brethren.

“The war is not over. We have not fired the last shot, nor have the bells rung out an anthem of victory. Great change is coming, but we must be the deliverers of it. Women are needed. Let us bring them into the CWAC.”

After a second of awe-inspired silence, thunderous applause flooded the theatre, everyone rising in a standing ovation. I could see why Mary had been hired to give recruitment speeches. With her enthusiasm and charisma, she would influence hundreds of women to join the CWAC. As women chattered excitedly amongst themselves, many were discussing plans to enlist. The atmosphere was alight with energy, and newly-found passion for the war effort sparked like electricity in the air.

Reverently, I turned off my camera. I had seen everything I needed.

The glare of my holographic screen stings my eyes, a harsh contrast to the dim lighting of the theatre. Safe and sound in the present, I scan over my essay’s second paragraph, which outlines Mary’s life post-WWII.

After the war ended, Lieutenant-Colonel Mary Dover returned to Calgary. She became an active part of the community, volunteering tirelessly for many causes and committees. She was elected to Calgary City Council, becoming the first female alderman in the city’s history, and worked to preserve historic buildings and green spaces. For her wartime service, she received awards such as the Order of the British Empire and the Order of Canada. Mary Dover is remembered as a war hero, an alderman, and a preservationist.

The rest of the page is void of text, but it isn’t going to be empty for long. A reservoir of ideas hangs fat and heavy from my fingertips, just begging to be typed out. As soon as I latch onto the perfect train of thought, I pounce on the keyboard.

Despite the prejudice of the times, Mary had been a respected military figure and a successful politician. Without Mary, many of the historical buildings and green spaces in Calgary

would not exist today. Thanks to women like her, the CWAC was able to play a key role in the war. Through both advocacy and example, Mary proved that women could significantly contribute to the world they lived in. Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by individuals like Mary Dover.

My flying fingers halt abruptly as an unpleasant realization comes to me. Today, countless years later, sexism and gender roles and barriers *still* persist. Discrimination and oppression remain prominent issues in present-day society. Who will come up with the solutions to these problems? Who will carry on Mary Dover's legacy? Just then, Mary's words come to mind: *Great change is coming, but we must be the deliverers of it.*

The change is coming, and it can start with me.

It's easy to forget that history is composed of events that actually happened, of real people who fought to build a better future. Although we know Mary as a national icon, she hadn't originally intended to create such a lasting influence, or become a hero fundamental to the shaping of Canada. She had joined the military with the sole purpose of saving lives of war victims and contributing to the cause. Her altruism inspires me to lend a hand to the less fortunate, by volunteering and donating to humanitarian foundations. Mary's independent spirit and determination allowed her to forge her own path through hard times and bring empowerment to other women. In recent years, women have become vital members of the military, government, and society. Feminism remains an important movement to this day, and I promise to raise awareness and spread positive messages. Incorporating Mary's values of dedication and hard work, I will give my best effort to pursue academic excellence and to give back to the community. Finally, I resolve to believe in my own power as an individual. If I want to create a positive impact in the world, I will have to be brave enough to speak out. Mary Dover was unafraid to make her voice heard- and it made all the difference.

Bibliography:

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