

Canadian Women of Valour Challenge:

KAREN HERMISTON, Canadian Women's Army Corps

On June 19, 1941, the Canadian Army created a special unit to document Canada's role in the Second World War. The seventy-six still and motion photographers who made up the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit ensured that the war would be told from a Canadian perspective. The unit was tasked with "provid[ing] informational and inspirational material for the maintenance of public morale and the stimulation of recruiting" and keeping "Canada's war efforts before...the world."

The seventy-six photographers were recruited from all over Canada and covered every aspect of the war. However, one member of the unit deserves special attention.

Sgt. Karen Hermiston, nicknamed 'Hermie', was the only female army photographer to serve overseas. After enlisting in the Canadian Women's Army Corps (C.W.A.C.) in 1941, Hermie was "frequently told that there were some things a girl can't do." That would not stop her; she did them anyway.



Sergeant Karen M. Hermiston of the Canadian Women's Army Corps holding an Anniversary Speed Graphic camera, London, England, 15 November 1945.

(Credit: Lieut. A.L. Cole, LAC M# 3210381).



During her time serving overseas, Hermie photographed casualties flown back to Swindon, England, went inside operating rooms, photographed graves for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and flew all over Europe to document the activities of others in the C.W.A.C. The petite 5'2" photographer earned the respect of her male comrades and defied strongly held gender stereotypes.

Sgt Hermiston at Piccadilly Circus in London on VJ-Day (Victory Japan Day), 10 August 1945.

(Credit: LAC M# 3211847)



Sergeant Hermiston with a Speed Graphic Camera.

(Credit: LAC M# 4233211)

For more information about the ground-breaking Sergeant, see "[Meet Sgt. Karen Hermiston](#)".

To delve into an academic account (advanced level) of the "Canadian Army Film Unit in the Second World War", visit "[Shooting the War](#)" (PDF) (Canadian Military History 2005:14:3 pp.21-38).

Key Vocabulary:

Morale: the emotional condition of a person (or group of people)

Stimulate: to spur on, invigorate, encourage action, etc.

Recruited: to enlist for service, to seek to enroll, to try to get a person to sign up, etc.

Casualties: people who are sick, injured, or dead; those unable to fight because they've been injured or have died

Stereotype: a commonly held idea, conception, or mental image