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Bringing Servicewomen into Focus

Exploring Methods for Indexing Second World War Archival Photographs at Library and Archives Canada

REBECCA MURRAY

Abstract: The Second World War saw women officially serving in the Canadian military in capacities other than nursing, breaking into roles historically held by men. The service of over fifty thousand Canadian women is documented in photographs held at Library and Archives Canada; photographs that allow historians to widen the lens on the traditional narrative, but only if they can find them. This article presents two methods for indexing archival photographs and highlights the particular challenges of identifying servicewomen in the archival record and bringing our aunties and grandmas into focus.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR saw women officially serving in the Canadian military in capacities other than nursing, breaking into roles historically held by men. For a country of twelve million in 1945,¹ the service of over fifty thousand Canadian women in the conflict was an extraordinary commitment that would pave the way for future generations of women who have served.² Yet, we are only beginning to see Canadian servicewomen and their stories presented alongside the traditional narrative. With fewer and fewer Second World War veterans alive to tell us themselves, we must increasingly

¹ Statistics Canada “Population of Canada and the provinces.” <https://doi.org/10.25318/3610028001-eng>

² Veterans Affairs Canada “Women at War.” <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/classroom/fact-sheets/women>

rely upon archival records to learn about these women's service. Archival research requires reading between lines and even more so when looking for a less traditionally privileged narrative like that of servicewomen. This is even more true when examining photographs as it requires a willingness to roll up one's sleeves and look beyond the focus of a photographer's gaze, all in pursuit of reframing history.

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) holds over thirty million photographs.³ Approximately half a million of these photographs are organised within accession 1967-052 of the Department of National Defence (DND) fonds (RG24/R112), which constitutes the bulk of the photographic record of the Second World War and post-war period. The accession was reviewed for photographs of servicewomen with the objective of creating a tool that would allow veterans' descendants to easily identify their female ancestors in the archival record. The accession was chosen for this project due to its extent and scope, two aspects that make it especially ominous for researchers. The project has since evolved, seeking now to create a tool that balances the needs and wants of different types of researchers—those looking for their ancestors, for individuals and those looking to widen the historical lens on the period and reframe the traditional narrative.

But why photographs? What can we learn from the hundreds of thousands of photographs taken from Bella Bella to Bayeux? What *can't* we learn from them might be a better question—one that this research and article can only begin to answer.⁴ Matthew Barrett suggests that “pictures inform public perceptions of war by evoking emotion and by offering new ways to visualise the past.”⁵ Arguing that archivists share a responsibility with historians to offer “contextualized interpretations”⁶ of historical photographs, Jeffrey Miffin stipulates that “the aim of photographic research should be

³ In this article the word ‘photographs’ is used loosely and interchangeably with ‘images’ or ‘photos’ to refer to graphic material in various formats such as prints and negatives. As appropriate and applicable, these specific terms will be used.

⁴ This article will focus on the research project described above. The comprehensive exploration of additional questions such as the role and intentions of photographers and the creation of associated captions and other metadata are noted for future exploration.

⁵ Matthew Barrett, “Historical Thinking and Visual Literacy: Exploring the Canadian War Museum with Graphic History,” *Canadian Military History* 30, 1 (2021): 2.

⁶ Jeffrey Miffin, “Visual Archives in Perspective: Enlarging on Historical medical Photographs” *The American Archivist* 70, 1 (2007): 65.

to challenge existing interpretations and raise new questions.”⁷ If we really want to reframe the past, then we must be willing to do so through the photographer’s gaze rather than solely through the scribe’s pen. To do that though, we must first understand and appreciate how the photographs in question are organised and described.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS

Within accession 1967-052, there are three sub-series⁸ of photographs organised by the branches of the Canadian military. Each sub-series of photographs includes numerous sub-sub-series, within which the individual photographs⁹ are arranged. Alphanumeric prefixes group photographs most often by location (such as military base, city or region) or by ship (in the case of naval photographs).¹⁰

Scope and content notes vary in terms of detail provided, but at the sub-sub-series level they typically define the geographical area or military operations or activities documented in the graphic material. Here are three examples:

“NP prefix - RCN Halifax - Images documenting RCN activities in Halifax, Nova Scotia during the Second World War.”¹¹

PC Prefix - RCAF [Pacific Command] - Sub-sub-series consists of records created and/or maintained by the Royal Canadian Air Force depicting the general activities of Western Air Command (WAC), RCAF, from approximately 1941-1945. This includes routine activities and air operations of flying establishments and squadrons attached to the Command.¹²

⁷ Mifflin, “Visual Archives in Perspective,” 65.

⁸ See figure 1.

⁹ Individual photographs are classified as items within archival hierarchical terminology. See figure 1.

¹⁰ Other groupings include those by specific photographers (ex. GM [Gilbert Milne] prefix), types of images (ex. P prefix (Portraits Royal Canadian Air Force), and in the case of the SF (Special Force) prefix, the Army’s contribution to the United Nation force in the Korean War.

¹¹ “NP Prefix – RCN Halifax,” accessed February 23, 2024, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=4814877&lang=eng>, Library and Archives Canada [hereafter LAC].

¹² “PC Prefix – RCAF [Pacific Command],” accessed February 23, 2024, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=5271614&lang=eng>, LAC.

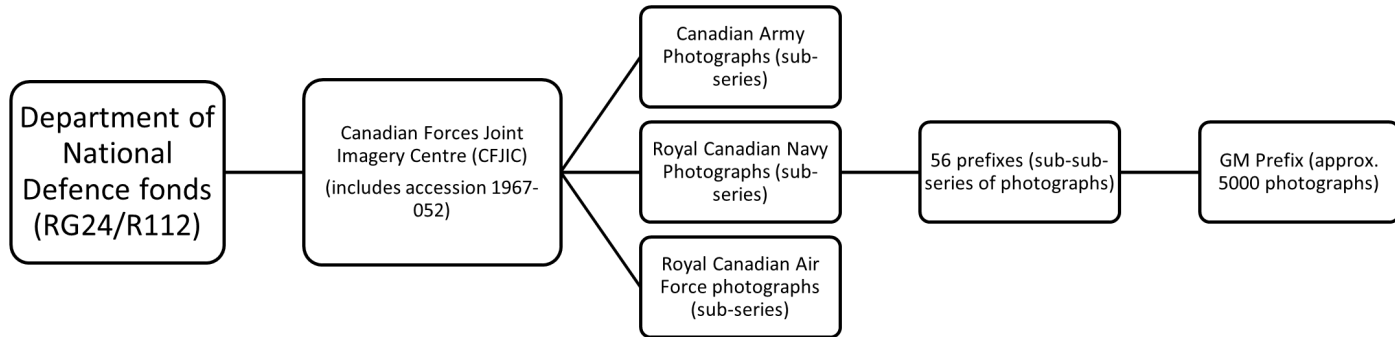


Figure 1. Chart demonstrating the archival arrangement of photographs in accession 1967-052, specifically the GM (Gilbert Milne) prefix.

Z prefix – CA - Photographs with the Z prefix document the Canadian Army's activities, centred in Ottawa. Images include: Atomic Test Site in Nevada (1957); Royal visit of 1957; Eisenhower's visit to Ottawa in 1958; Royal visit of 1959; President of Mexico visits in 1959; Army Boxing Championships (1960); visit of UK Minister of Defence to Canada; President of Iceland (Ásgeir Ásgeirsson) visits in 1961; other VIP visits; funeral of Major-General Turner; Harkness greeting UNEF Commander; funeral of HDG Crerar; RCR in South Africa; National Dominion Day celebrations.¹³

The photographs (items) in each prefix are described in a type of finding aid¹⁴ commonly used for graphic material called a caption list.¹⁵ Although finding aids can vary by creator and by type of record they describe, most if not all the caption lists relied upon for this project were provided by DND to LAC upon transfer of the photographs. At the outset of the research in 2018, the finding aids available were a mix of handwritten and typed (circa 1967) caption lists. These documents have been the main access point to the holdings for researchers and have recently been digitised and linked to the catalogue descriptions. Although they vary considerably even within the accession, the caption lists generally include the following information:¹⁶

1. Prefix (ex. GM)
2. Negative or print number (ex. 0001)
3. Caption (descriptive information that varies considerably in terms of detail and length)¹⁷
4. Date photo was taken (ex. 5-43)
5. Name of photographer (often available but not always included)
6. Location of photograph (sometimes included in the caption or in other descriptive information)

¹³ "Z prefix - CA," accessed February 23, 2024 <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=4532478&lang=eng>, LAC.

¹⁴ Finding aids describe archival material.

¹⁵ See figure 2.

¹⁶ These finding aids do not include container particulars, but this information is available, like many of the caption lists, via the collection catalogue. Associating individual images with container information directly in the finding aid would further enhance access to original records.

¹⁷ See examples in figure 2.

NEGATIVE NO.	CAPTION	DATE
✓ GM-0001 to GM-0018	H.M.C.S. <u>REGINA</u> AT HALIFAX	5-43
✓ GM-0019 to GM-0053	Wren Series AT HALIFAX	5-43
GM-0054		
✓ GM-0055 to GM-0071	Wren Series AT HALIFAX	5-43
GM-0072		
✓ GM-0073 to GM-0075	Wren Series AT HALIFAX	5-43
✓ GM-0076 to GM-0087	Fairmile Feature	5-43
GM-0088		
✓ GM-0089 to GM-0091	Fairmile Feature	5-43
GM-0092		
✓ GM-0093 to GM-0122	Fairmile Feature 104 R 110 R	5-43
✓ GM-0123 to GM-0125	H.M.C.S. <u>CAMROSE</u>	5-43
GM-0126		
✓ GM-0127 to GM-0130	H.M.C.S. <u>CAMROSE</u>	5-43
✓ GM-0131 to GM-0134	Reconstruction Story	5-43
✓ GM-0135 to GM-0137	H.M.C.S. <u>CAMROSE</u>	5-43
✓ GM-0138 to GM-0146	Apple Blossom Festival	6-43
GM-0147		
✓ GM-0148 to GM-0149	Apple Blossom Festival	6-43

Figure 2. Extract from GM (Gilbert Milne) prefix finding aid. [LAC Finding aid 24-513P-GM]

The caption lists do not always describe the photographs in ways that allow researchers to identify or find marginalised subjects like women or members of other minority groups, with the same ease as those searching for traditionally privileged themes or aspects of military history, such as photographs of servicemen. Although the captions for images GM-0019 through GM-0053¹⁸ indicate that Wrens¹⁹ are included in the images, we cannot know from this listing alone that

¹⁸ See figure 2.

¹⁹ Those serving with the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS) were commonly called "Wrens," the nickname used by their British counterparts of the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS).

the photographs of the “Apple Blossom Festival” (GM-0138 – GM-0146 and beyond)²⁰ also prominently feature servicewomen.

This and numerous other examples, demonstrate the need for subject-based indexing. Collection subject indices, finding aid-like material that has been acquired, described and stored as part of the collection rather than a self-serve reference tool, exist for these photographs.²¹ Although detailed and seemingly extensive, the indexed photographs tend to represent only a subset of the holdings. This does not mean that the index is not helpful, nor that the photographs are any less valuable for reframing or illustrating the historical narrative. That said, without further information about how the indices were compiled, most researchers would be remiss to rely solely on them for a diligent review. For example, photograph PC-543 captioned as “Two airwomen working on plotting board” has been indexed under keywords ‘Trades’ and ‘Fighter Control Operations.’ Even in this example where the caption clearly indicates the presence of servicewomen, if the subject-index is relied upon entirely to identify this photograph of servicewomen, it can easily be missed.

It is relatively straightforward to organise a series of portraits or group photographs by subject and refer to servicewomen as *included* or *identified*. It is another thing entirely to look at every image and find all the unidentified women, including those not mentioned in the caption, such as the nursing sisters pictured at No. 1 General Hospital Horsham during the Second World War.²²

Some may argue that the indexing of this photographic collection was already complete, as the finding aids *do* provide researchers with photo captions for most images. After all, the finding aid material is relatively robust in comparison with other government and private photograph collections held at LAC. Yet, as is often regrettably true of women’s representation more generally across archival collections, the servicewomen are much more difficult to *find* or *see* relative to their male counterparts and other more privileged subjects. Recent feminist reframings of Canadian military history are beginning to

²⁰ See figure 2.

²¹ Various relevant subject indices exist, such as those with titles like “Servicewomen I,” “Wrenettes,” and “WRCNS Miscellaneous Activities.” See R112 volumes 30416, 30361 and 30363.

²² See figure 4.

DATE TAKEN 7 Dec 54 NEGATIVE NUMBER PC-543

SCANNED TO CD POSITIVE

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION _____

SHIP UNIT OR ESTABLISHMENT _____

LOCATION _____

PHOTOGRAPHER _____ ORDER OR REQUISITION NO. _____

DEPARTMENT ORDERING _____

P. R. PRINT DISTRIBUTION _____

SUBJECT _____

LOCATION Faymount

CAPTION MATERIAL (Two airwomen working on plotting board)

Trades Flight Control Operator

PC-543

INDEXED

7530-21-102-1259
DND 330 (REV. 59)

Figure 3. Original envelope for image PC-543 “Two airwomen working on plotting board.” [LAC R112, volume 36368. Author’s photo]

bring these stories to the forefront, usually with a focus on individuals and their service,²³ but we can widen the lens even further.

²³ See for example: Stacey Barker, Krista Cooke and Molly McCullough, *Material Traces of War* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2020); Ariane Gauthier, “Long and Strenuous Duties in France,” *Canadian Military History*, 31, 1 (2022): 1; and Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw, eds. *Making the Best of It: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the Second World War* (Toronto & Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2020).



Figure 4. Army Numerical image 5372 “No. 1 General Hospital Horsham,” n.d. [LAC R112, volume 37607 Army Numerical 5350-5684 - United Kingdom - Album 11 of 110]

Although this project began with a goal to identify individuals, the themes and trends that emerged, necessarily, with the review of the photographs, show that there is so much to learn beyond the names of these women who served. This will be expanded upon in the Results & Methods Analysis section of this article. And so, what has come from the past six years of work is a methodological approach to indexing these photographs in a way that speaks to both the general public’s desire to find photographs of a specific person and the archivist’s interest in illustrating trends and themes in Canadian military history. I must mention briefly my personal inspiration for this work: my Nana (my late maternal grandmother Kathleen “Kay” Victoria Reed from Barrie, Ontario) who served in the Royal Canadian Air Force’s Women’s Division (RCAF-WD) in Newfoundland during the Second World War. For six years I read caption lists and looked at negatives until my eyes hurt hoping to find her, and instead found countless others. Disappointed, yet inspired, the further I delved into the caption lists, the easier it became to pursue this work as if every servicewoman was *my* grandmother. I let this inspiration drive my

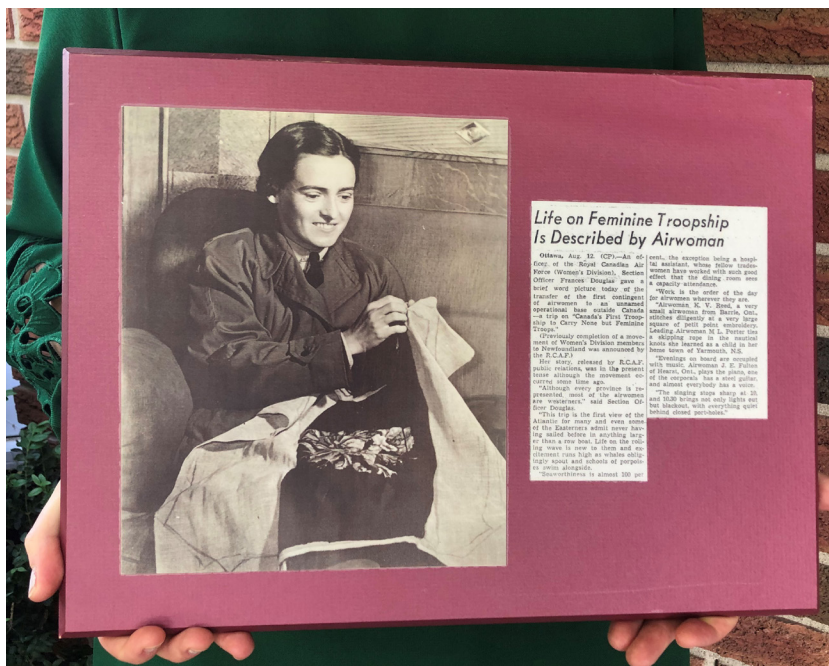


Figure 5. Rebecca Murray holds a mounted photograph of her maternal grandmother Kathleen (Kay) Victoria Reed. Kay is pictured working on her embroidery, on a troopship on her way to Newfoundland as part of the RCAF Women's Division during the Second World War. The original image, shown here cropped and reproduced in a newspaper, is held at LAC and can be cited as PL-9687 [Author's photo]

methodology, increasingly choosing to include *more* rather than *fewer* photographs, which meant *more* women, just in case it was the one place where someone else's nana was framed as part of this important historical period.

INDEXING

As the work neared completion, I found myself reflecting on how the project developed and how the process impacted the findings. An exploration of the literature for guidance illustrated the relative absence of instruction as to how to index archival photographs, so it was necessary to explore methods from varied fields such as library science and health methods.

The role of the indexer is generally ascribed with importance. Digital librarianship scholar K.K. Matusiak suggests that “[concept-

based] indexing requires human indexers to interpret the meaning of the picture, assign subject headings, and transcribe image captions and textual annotations. The process of translating the content of an image into verbal expressions poses significant challenges to concept-based indexing.”²⁴ Although Matusiak suggests going beyond what was done for this particular indexing project, I agree that the indexer cannot help but be drawn in by the images, subconsciously noting the trends (the concepts) as they appear throughout the photo review.

Through the organisation of the photographs by branch of service and within that by general location of service, the archival arrangement provides researchers with a relatively straightforward access point—but some of these groupings still number in the thousands which is not a reasonable expectation for lay or expert users. In providing heightened access to images based on their attributes, which in this case, refers to the inclusion of servicewomen, a more specific grouping within the pre-determined arrangement is established, thus allowing for an enhanced user experience.

Justin Court suggests that “[to] separate a photograph from its context, as illustrated histories often do, is to separate it from its terms of legibility.”²⁵ In the case of these DND photographs, they are already largely arranged by location and date. As such, a stronger and arguably better representation of the diverse history of the forces, even within the period, can be called upon when the provenance and structure is maintained within a subject-based index such as the one produced over the course of this project.²⁶

In this age of artificial intelligence (AI), some might dismiss the need for an archivist to read every caption or look at every image, simply to create an additional layer of indexing for an already privileged photograph collection. Klenczon and Rygiel argue that “[although] the automatic recognition of images seems to be very promising, there are layers of meaning that can be indexed only with human

²⁴ K.K. Matusiak, “Towards user-centered indexing in digital image collections,” *OCLC Systems & Services: International digital library perspectives* 22, 4 (2006): 285.

²⁵ Justin Court, “Picturing History, Remembering Soldiers: World War I Photography between the Public and the Private,” *History and Memory* 29, 1 (2017): 96.

²⁶ See figure 12, image 57814 for an example of how considering images in context can tell us more and contribute to the project’s goals in a way not possible when considering images outside of their original context.



Figure 6. O-5056, “Coronation Day – After the Coronation Day parade, a dance was held at HMCS *Carleton*. Here a group of boys and girls pose for their photograph,” 2 June 1953. [LAC RG24, accession 1967-052, O-5056]



Figure 7. CA-559, “The Hob Nob sisters - Lts. Davies, Shergold & Martin,” n.d. [LAC RG24, accession 1967-052, CA-559]

knowledge, experience, and intuition.”²⁷ For example, a photograph of curiously capless sailors²⁸ alongside non-uniformed women, apart from those missing caps, might be read by AI as a photograph of servicewomen. Further checks were necessary to confirm this, but the gut instinct of this archivist was that the women pictured were not servicewomen. As the caption identifies them only as “girls” this cannot be truly confirmed—although it should be noted that the image has not been included in the indexing results. There are also numerous photographs of servicemen dressing in women’s clothing²⁹ throughout the accession, adding a layer of complexity if identifying servicewomen primarily by the presence of skirts or long locks.

After almost a decade as a reference archivist, I see the immediate benefit in what Mifflin suggests about “uncovering (or recovering) layers of meaning and [in turn being able to provide] better services.”³⁰ For example, knowing that one or multiple images within a prefix or album have been identified as including servicewomen should be a strong indicator for a researcher to look even more closely at every other image in the set. Might we be able to recognise servicewomen pictured out of uniform? Might we find them on the fringes or in blurred movement where original description has ignored them? Might we, for example, find them celebrating the Annapolis Valley’s annual Apple Blossom Festival as Gilbert Milne³¹ did in 1943?

As mentioned above, this project was focused on the transcription of captions rather than the creation of new information or data associated with the images. However, what about those images where the captions do not reference or name the servicewomen pictured? Should an indexer suggest or create additional metadata to reflect the presence of servicewomen or is the inclusion of the negative number and caption, however general or specific, in the listing enough?³² An argument could be made that, such as in the case of reparative description efforts with regard to Indigenous peoples, that there is a

²⁷ Wanda Klenczon and Paweł Rygiel, “Librarian Cornered by Images, or How to Index Visual Resources,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 52, 1 (2014): 43.

²⁸ See figure 6.

²⁹ See figure 7 for an example.

³⁰ Mifflin, “Visual Archives in Perspective,” 68.

³¹ Gilbert Milne (1914–1991) was an official Navy photographer during the Second World War.

³² S. Kumpulainen and H. Ruotsalainen, “Searching Wartime Photograph Archive for Serious Leisure Purposes,” in *Linking Theory and Practice of Digital Libraries*, Silvello, G., et al. (Springer International Publishing, 2002), 83.

strong precedent to add information to the archival catalogue entries. These additions enhance the discoverability of the photographs and the stories they tell, while also including the original caption information to maintain the creator's original description and respect provenance.

Art historian Erwin Panofsky suggests that:

[a] work of art can be described on the pre-iconographic level, which consists of general aspects—the primary or natural subject matter; the iconographic level, which encompasses concrete aspects—the secondary or conventional subject matter; and the iconological level, which includes symbolic, abstract aspects—the intrinsic meaning or content. These three strata of interpretation (pre-iconographic description, iconographic analysis, and iconological interpretation) require specific skills from the interpreter, namely practical experience, the knowledge of resources, themes, and concepts as well as synthetic intuition.³³

This project engages at the pre-iconographic level and to an extent, depending on the photograph, the iconological level. The renaming of “Panofsky’s strata as generic, specific, and abstract and [subdividing] each of these areas into four aspects, each of which forms an answer to one of the following questions: Who?, What?, Where?, When?”³⁴ coincides with the terminology and structure to which students of military history are accustomed. Similarly, it coincides with the information that researchers, lay or expert, often have in hand when starting their forays into the archives. Unsurprisingly then, it also reflects the way that the photographs are currently organised and the type of information included in, and alongside, the captions. If we agree with Matusiak, who states that “[the] primary purpose of indexing is to identify images and provide access to them[.]”³⁵ then we must allow user experience to inform the method. Raya Fidel also makes a case for user-centered indexing but only when “searching behavior is understood better.”³⁶ What this archivist took

³³ Klenczon and Rygiel, “Librarian Cornered by Images, or How to Index Visual Resources,” 44.

³⁴ Klenczon and Rygiel, “Librarian Cornered by Images, or How to Index Visual Resources,” 44.

³⁵ Matusiak, “Towards user-centered indexing in digital image collections,” 284.

³⁶ Raya Fidel, “User-Centered Indexing,” *Journal for the American Society for Information Science* 45, 8 (1994): 572.

from this guidance is that the more information that can be collected about a photograph, the better, as the multiple entry points for researchers will likely only enhance the eventual user experience. As the fields of user experience and archival methods intersect more and more, we will only see continued improvements on this front.

METHODOLOGY

My first complex experience working with primary sources at LAC was as a clerk preparing Second World War killed-in-action files, largely textual in nature, for digitisation. I sat in the basement of LAC's main public building at 395 Wellington St. in Ottawa with a small team and reviewed hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of files—sifting through administrative paperwork and picking out the gems that would form what is known as a gene-pack.³⁷ We were asked to focus on the basics: enrollment and attestation papers, statements of service, dental charts (adding flags for x-rays), estate paperwork and contextual information about the serviceperson's death. If we were very lucky, sometimes our fingers stumbled across something relatively unique like a wallet sized photo (or two) tucked into an RCAF members' flying book or a handwritten letter to or from the family about the burial or death of that serviceperson.

I recall with fondness (and a slight crick in my back) the intensive time spent manipulating the primary source documents, following the course of the war and the lives of countless Canadians who served. This was primarily through very administrative and rote documents, template forms filled in either in handwritten scrawl or neatly printed on a typewriter. Every morning the carts of boxes filled to the brim with service files exemplified the enormity of the task at hand: the review of one file per serviceperson who died during and in the aftermath of this conflict. This experience has stayed with me: serving as a touchstone moment in my work with primary sources and constituting a major part of my learning about the Second World War and shaping me into the archivist that I am today. Something

³⁷ Short for genealogy package, a gene-pack is a selection of the most relevant documents from an individual's service file highlighting their service including but not limited to enlistment, units, ships, or squadrons with which they served, medal entitlements, cause of death, burial details and estate records.

I have thought about in retrospect is that I do not recall ever touching the file of a servicewoman. As per Veterans Affairs Canada, 107 servicewomen died between 1939 and 1947.³⁸ This constitutes approximately 0.2 per cent of the total files.

In reference work we necessarily and happily collide with the world of the user and we simply would not be doing our job well if we ignored their needs. Canadian archival photography legend Joan Schwartz argues:

Archivists, too, must be learners and borrowers - from other forms of representation, from other disciplines, and from other professions. If we are prepared not simply to adopt, but to study, evaluate, and adapt - ideas, methods, strategies, and models from outside the world of archives, we have much to gain and nothing to lose from such cross-border intellectual shopping.³⁹

The world where these documents are used, known beyond their rote reference information and metadata, is one full of possibility. No matter where we start in our learning or professional journey, there are so many established and new paths to take in this twenty-first century world. Cleland and MacLeod suggest that “[looking] forward, we encourage researchers to consider the use of photographs as a source of data, as a way of accessing data that might otherwise have been obscured or overlooked if we had relied solely on language-based data.”⁴⁰ If we as archivists want to do this, we need to make sure that we have the tools to do so. If we want to see new images in future generations’ history textbooks, new narratives emerging alongside pre-existing ones, then we need to work with users to respond to their needs. New tools must be created or made accessible to allow archivists to do this important work.

The creation of such a tool has been my self-assigned task over the past six years. Where a servicewoman was identified or thought to be present in a photograph, the negative or print numbers assigned to each image were recorded. When indexing from caption lists, the

³⁸ Veterans Affairs Canada “Lest We Forget Her.” veterans.gc.ca/pdf/remembrance/those-who-served/women-veterans/fallen/fallen-women-eng.pdf

³⁹ Joan M. Schwartz, “Review of *Negotiating the Visual Turn: New Perspectives on Images and Archives*, by Gillian Rose, Peter Burke, J. B. Harley and Elizabeth Edwards,” *The American Archivist* 67, 1 (2004): 122.

⁴⁰ Cleland and MacLeod, “The visual vernacular,” 235.

Z-2261-1	OTTAWA 15/11/43	PASSPORT - CAPT. J.E. O'BRIEN
Z-2262-12	OTTAWA 15/11/43	C.W.A.C. XMAS VIEWS.
Z-2263-4	OTTAWA 15/11/43	COPIES FOR D.S.D.(W) OF TANKS
Z-2264-3	OTTAWA 15/11/43	VIEWS OF WALLS FOR. MR. LAVERGNE
Z-2265-5	OTTAWA 15/11/43	OFFICERS CANTEN - 133 SPARKS ST.
Z-2266-1	OTTAWA 15/11/43	COPY PORTRAIT - CAPT. JOHN
Z-2267-10	OTTAWA 15/11/43	C.W.A.C. AT GLEBE COLLEGIATE
Z-2268-4	OTTAWA 15/11/43	PORTRAIT - LT-COL. W.S. LAWSON
Z-2269-2	OTTAWA 15/11/43	LIEUT. STRATHY SMITH WITH CAMERA
Z-2270-1	OTTAWA 15/11/43	COPY OF JEEP
Z-2271-14	OTTAWA 15/11/43	COPIES OF DRAWINGS. - PRISONERS OF WAR
Z-2272-13	OTTAWA 15/11/43	THREE SERVICES AT UNION STATIONS
Z-2273-12	OTTAWA 15/11/43	WEDDING PIX OF CPL/SCOTT.
Z-2274-7	OTTAWA 19/11/43	C.W.A.C. PORTRAITS - FOR ARMY PROMOTION.
Z-2275-4	OTTAWA 19/11/43	PORTRAIT - LIEUT. P. SLATTERY
Z-2276-3	OTTAWA 19/11/43	PORTRAIT - MR. FLAHERTY - CAN. PRESS.
Z-2277-1	OTTAWA 19/11/43	D.S. Soldier + wife
Z-2278	OTTAWA 20/11/43	A.T.S. Sergeant. Visiting Aigyle. Barracks
Z-2279-18	OTTAWA 20/11/43	C.W.A.C. at R.C. CHURCH
Z-2280-3	OTTAWA 23/11/43	PORTRAIT - C.S.M. J.H.H. ROEHE

Negative Number	Caption	Date
Z-2262-12	C.W.A.C. Xmas Views - Ottawa	15/11/1943
Z-2267-10	C.W.A.C. at Glebe Collegiate - Ottawa	15/11/1943
Z-2274-7	C.W.A.C. Portraits for Army Promotion - Ottawa	19/11/1943
Z-2279-18	C.W.A.C. at R.C. Church - Ottawa	20/11/1943

Figure 8. Example of caption list entries (top) and corresponding tracking sheet entries (bottom) from work with the Canadian Army Photographs (prefix).

caption was copied out alongside other available information such as the date, location and photographer's name.⁴¹ The decision to record this specific information was informed through years of working with researchers who were most often armed with names, locations and dates associated with an individual's service (as explained above). This is further confirmed by Chassanoff who notes that "given a set of images with accompanying metadata, [users] ranked 'date,' 'title'

⁴¹ See figure 8.

22809
 22810 An informal group of N/SS: N/S T.M.Hunter, Winnipeg;
 N/S C.M.Compston, Winnipeg; Matron A.J.McLeod, Edmonton;
 N/S E. Honey Binscarth, Man; N/S D.Quehl, Fort William;
 N/S A. Clarke, Roland, Man; N/S B.M.Hampton, Gananoque, Ont
 N/S H.E.Campbell, Francis, Sask; N/S I. Forrest, Toronto;
 N/S F.M.MacDonald, Alepidre, Ont.

22811 N/S K.McDole, Winnipeg; N/S J.Coleridge, London, Ont;
 22812 N/S D. Lowe, Winnipeg; N/S H. Dyck, Winnipeg, having lunch
 in their mess.

22813 N/S~~g~~ Constance Browne, Fort William, in a jeep.



Army Numerical 22542-23813 - Sicily - Album 62 of 110			
Negative Number	Caption	Date	Photographer
22681	Canadians in Sicily	August 3, 1943	Dolan
22682	Canadians in Sicily	August 3, 1943	Dolan
22807	Canadians in Sicily	August 7, 1943	Royal
22808	Canadians in Sicily	August 7, 1943	Royal
22809	Canadians in Sicily	August 7, 1943	Royal
22810	Canadians in Sicily	August 7, 1943	Royal
22811	Canadians in Sicily	August 7, 1943	Royal
22812	Canadians in Sicily	August 7, 1943	Royal
22813	Canadians in Sicily	August 7, 1943	Royal

Figure 9. Excerpt from workbook showing initial caption and photo number entries (top left) alongside original images (bottom left) and typed captions (right) from work with Canadian Army Photographs (numerical). [Photographs from LAC R112, volume 42827]

and ‘subject descriptors’ as the most relevant attributes—a noted difference from textual retrieval environments.”⁴² When indexing from images, the negative or print number assigned to the image was noted and caption information added at a later time to collect the same metadata.⁴³ In the cases where I was working with army photographs in albums, I noted the overarching caption or story title, along with metadata such as date, location and photographer’s name.⁴⁴ More detailed caption information is recorded separately.

Throughout the project, a consistent tracking method was followed. The original work with the Royal Canadian Navy Photographs was based on the available caption lists that form part of Finding Aid 019, the catch all number assigned to cover accession 1967-052 imagery. Further work was done in 2023 and 2024 to ensure the project work and findings were aligned with the current archival arrangement.

For the Canadian Army Photographs (prefix and numerical) and Royal Canadian Air Force Photographs the work began with the exporting of the catalogue descriptions from the database to spreadsheet software (Excel) workbooks and letting the existing archival arrangement inform the project plan, ensuring that findings could be easily reassociated with their archival context. Four workbooks were created over the course of the project to track the findings and are as follows:

1. Royal Canadian Navy Photographs
2. Canadian Army Photographs (prefix)
3. Canadian Army Photographs (numerical)⁴⁵
4. Royal Canadian Air Force Photographs

Each workbook includes a sheet for each prefix grouping (a sub-sub-series) or album (a file) of photographs. The first few sheets in each workbook serve to track the time spent on the project and as an ongoing status check to show images reviewed and indexed per

⁴² Alexandra M. Chassanoff, “Historians’ Experiences Using Digitized Archival Photographs as Evidence,” *The American Archivist* 81, 1 (2018): 138.

⁴³ See figure 9.

⁴⁴ See figure 9.

⁴⁵ It is worth noting that not all photographs within this sub-sub-series are organised into albums; a small percentage of images within this sub-sub-series are available only in negative format rather than printed and organised in bound albums.

prefix or album as well as notes regarding, for example, the need for quality assurance checks.

When reviewing the Royal Canadian Navy Photographs sub-series, I relied primarily on the physical caption lists from the grey finding aid boxes in the Reference Room at LAC. Later, when working with the Canadian Army Photographs (prefix), I relied primarily on electronic caption lists located on an internal shared drive or via the catalogue where most, if not all, are now linked to prefix (sub-sub-series) descriptions. The main reason for the switch from paper to electronic caption lists was the timing of the project; the work with the Canadian Army photographs was conducted primarily in 2021 during a period of remote work.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Throughout the project the documents were reviewed carefully for mentions of servicewomen, usually relying on given names,⁴⁶ service branch nicknames or abbreviations (ex. WRENS, WRCNS) to make this determination. All relevant captions were copied out into the assigned sheet. Typically, captions that did not include these mentions were not included. Some quality assurance was performed, usually a visual check of the images, when it was not clear from the caption if a woman, usually identified only by her given name, was a servicewoman and not a civilian. This was determined through visual review of the image and usually based on her appearance in or out of uniform. In rare cases, she was identified as a servicewoman in another contextually close image (or corresponding caption) and as such, I made the decision to include the image based on this information. Examples from the Royal Canadian Navy Photographs sub-series follow to demonstrate three levels of difficulty (easy, medium and hard) with regard to the evaluation of caption information in deciding which ones to include in the workbook.

⁴⁶ This represented an additional learning for me as it increased my familiarity with given names typically associated with both men and women during this period. Decisions to index based on given name alone would present a challenge for many contemporary researchers. The names should be read alongside the context in which they are presented and clues such as rank are helpful in determining if the named individuals were servicewoman.

Easy: GM-2837 “Naval Nursing sister attending first RCN Matrons Conference held in Ottawa,” 03-1945.

Medium: COR-321 “Canadian girls on their way to Hyde park,” 01-06-1953.

Hard: A-1120 “Lt. Cmdr. Alvey & Lt. Cmdr. MacDonald,” 11-1944.

The caption for image GM-2837 is classified as ‘easy’ or ‘most obvious’ because it identifies the subject of the photograph by their rank and service branch. The caption for COR-321 is classified as ‘medium’ because it identifies the individuals in the image as Canadian women, or more specifically girls, but not as servicewomen. A close read of the caption list as a whole and confirmation through visuals can confirm the “girls” as servicewomen based on their uniforms. The caption for image A-1120 refers to two named lieutenants, a rank conferred to both servicemen and women. Although perhaps trickiest of the three upon reading the caption, consulting the image quickly confirms that A-1120 is an image of one serviceman and one servicewoman. All three photographs have been included in the indexing project.

Photos taken at parties or dances prove especially difficult when indexing from either captions or images as the captions are often generalised and servicewomen are not always in uniform. Understandably, when indexing from caption lists, I likely missed many photographs that I would have included if I had been doing a windshield survey style review—a systematic observation made from either a moving vehicle or on foot. Ideally the accompanying caption list checks following the windshield survey would help to determine the identity of the women at dances or dinner tables.

Here are some photographs that didn’t make it into my first round of results (based on captions alone) for the Royal Canadian Navy Photographs despite including servicewomen.⁴⁷ Both images have since been incorporated into the project results. There is no caption information available for image O-8245, while the caption information for O-8295 doesn’t name any individuals nor allude to the presence of the two servicewomen pictured.

⁴⁷ See figures 10 and 11.



Figure 10. O-8245, no caption or date available. [LAC RG24, accession 1967-052, O-8245]



Figure 11. O-8295 “Personnel Selection Officer training,” 25 August 1953. [LAC RG24, accession 1967-052, O-8295]

The availability of digitised images provided me with a timely opportunity to work primarily from visual records rather than from textual caption lists. This was true for most photos in the Canadian Army Photographs (numerical) sub-sub-series and images available on microfiche (across the service branches). This approach was more akin to a windshield or visual survey than the detailed reading that the caption list method necessitated. Over the course of this phase of the project, I developed an adeptness at scrolling through images and looking for women, then slowing down to look for distinguishing markers of servicewomen, the most obvious and common of which was their uniform. The mere presence of bare knees beyond a hem line was not the clue this archivist thought it might be, the number of servicemen pictured in kilts or shorts was a surprising find.

For those images that were less obviously of servicewomen at the time of the image review, this was indicated in the tracking sheet. As demonstrated above with the captions from the naval photographs, when taken together, the image and the caption can tell us a lot about who is in the photograph (both generally and specifically). At times though, it may not provide enough information to determine if the women pictured are servicewomen. We may need to turn to other captions and photographs within the same album or prefix to make that final determination.

For example, here is an excerpt from Army Numerical album 54.⁴⁸ The first image, 57814, shows a man in a service uniform and a woman in a bridal gown. The story information on the album page identifies them only by their family names, therefore no rank or military unit clues are available to us during the visual survey. The second image, 57815, shows the same bridal couple alongside what appears to another ‘just married’ duo as well as several uniformed servicewomen.

During the visual survey the indexer should include image 57815 without hesitation (easy) and should use the clues in that image to also register image 57814 (medium). The indexer should then identify this first image as requiring further investigation before including it among the final list of images. The complete caption for image 57815 identifies a Canadian servicewoman by name, Private Cynthea Sheehan, whereas the caption for image 57814 confirms Sheehan’s service affiliation with the Canadian Women’s Army Corps (CWAC).

⁴⁸ See figure 12.



Figure 12. An excerpt from album showing images 57814 and 57815. [LAC R112 volume 42819 "Army Numerical 56766-57891 - United Kingdom - Album 54 of 110"]

57814: The bride and groom – SGT. L.R. EVANS, St. John, N.B. and PTE Cynthea SHEEHAN, CWAC, of Toronto.

57815: Best man and brother of the groom, CPL JIM EVANS, St. John; Bridesmaid PTE SQUIBBS, Ann of the ATS,⁴⁹ from Salisbury, Eng.; groom SGT L.R. EVANS, St. John, NB, who was GEN MONTAGUE's driver, and PTE. CYNTHEA SHEEHAN, bride, of Toronto.⁵⁰

Although easier in many regards, the drawback of this approach is that once the survey is done, the caption lists must then be reviewed and associated with each of the indexed images. That said, the

⁴⁹ The ATS = Auxiliary Territorial Service, the women's branch of the British Army during the Second World War.

⁵⁰ There are additional unnamed, unidentified servicewomen in image 57815. Further work with the photographs could tell us more about the servicewomen pictured for a more fulsome analysis.

reading is much more precise and allows us to identify trends and images that include servicewomen that would not have been included solely from a review of captions.⁵¹

Servicewomen *are* found within the photographer's gaze, but not always as their main subject. Although not exclusively, servicewomen often appear to be included by virtue of their seemingly accidental or coincidental presence rather than their intentional placement or inclusion within the photograph and now, the archival record. Further research and work with textual records may help us to better understand the photographer's intentions and instructions regarding the photographing of servicewomen. For example, there are numerous photographs of weddings (or 'just married' couples) where the groom is almost always a Canadian serviceman (in uniform) marrying either a British or Canadian servicewoman or British civilian. What we do not typically see in the photographic record are Canadian servicewomen marrying British servicemen or civilians. This is an area for further review and research.

Shatford would have us go a step further and make a "distinction between OF (what a picture consists of) and ABOUT (what a picture is about)."⁵² Other authors also make the distinction between 'concept-based' and 'content-based' indexing.⁵³ Although perhaps confusing at first glance, this project falls decidedly in the 'concept-based' indexing camp as the focus is on the attributes or visual content of the image as opposed to features-based indexing (remarking on colour, shape, etc.). The literature also suggests that concept-based indexing "can also contain information about image authorship and provenance"⁵⁴ which is also part of the current project.

The switch from the caption list method to the image or windshield survey method influenced many aspects of the project including but not limited to the time and effort expended and results. I stand by the two methods used and am supported by Hyuda's assessment that "[since] the literature and courses on Canadian photographic history

⁵¹ Refer to figures 10 and 11 for examples of this.

⁵² Klenczon and Rygiel, "Librarian Cornered by Images, or How to Index Visual Resources," 45.

⁵³ See Heting Chu "Research in image indexing and retrieval as reflected in the literature," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 52, 12 (2001): 1011-18; and Matusiak, "Towards user-centered indexing in digital image collections."

⁵⁴ Matusiak, "Towards user-centered indexing in digital image collections," 285.

are scarce, photograph archivists must rely on work experience, trial and error, and the modification of more traditional archival approaches to master their collections.”⁵⁵

METHODS ANALYSIS & RESULTS⁵⁶

For those searching for the indexing method that would be the most compliant with the Rules for Archival Description (RAD), this archivist suggests a review of the original negatives as the preferred method as the RAD compliant description is one based on the most original format of a document. In the case of a photograph, where available, the most original format is the original negative, as opposed to a print or a digitised version.⁵⁷ When the negative itself is not readily or easily available for use in such a long-term project, microfiche or digitised versions could be relied upon, especially for a project focusing on the subject rather than the physical attributes of the image. It should be noted that working with negatives is not always perfect either as over or under exposed images can be almost impossible to review properly.

For further RAD-compliance, the work should be completed in line with the archival arrangement, as done in this case. This ensures the maintenance of the context and provenance of the photographs while providing that heightened access as “archival value in photographs resides in the interrelationships between photographs and the creating structures, animating functions, programmes, and information technology that created them. It is for this very reason that we must preserve the functional context which transforms photographic images into photographic documents.”⁵⁸ The respect for the provenance and original order of the images has actually

⁵⁵ Richard J. Huyda, “Photographs and Archives in Canada,” *Archivaria* 5 (1977): 10.

⁵⁶ As this is primarily a methods article, the results presented here are high-level to demonstrate the design justification proposed above. Basic quantitative analysis of the results was done on an ongoing basis throughout the project and has been presented in various forums including blog posts and conference presentations.

⁵⁷ Joan M. Schwartz, “We Make Our Tools and Our Tools Make Us: Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats,” *Archivaria* 40 (1995): 46.

⁵⁸ Schwartz, “We Make Our Tools and Our Tools Make Us,” 50.

	No. of Images	No. of Images Indexed	% of Images Indexed
Royal Canadian Navy photographs	214,948	3,121	1.45 %
Canadian Army photographs (prefix)	103,333	1,424	1.38 %
Canadian Army photographs (numerical)	75,372	2,723	3.61 %
Royal Canadian Air Force photographs	176,577	1,946	1.10 %
<i>Totals</i>	<i>570,230</i>	<i>9,214</i>	<i>1.62 %</i>

Figure 13. A high-level presentation of the quantitative results of the indexing project.

enhanced the qualitative and quantitative findings of this project and more practically served as an effective project management tool.

Spreadsheet software was used to track the number of images indexed per prefix, album or negative range, always in comparison with the predetermined extent to demonstrate proportion. I relied upon existing catalogue entries rather than re-counting the images as part of the project which is a potential flaw of the methodological design if focusing or relying on quantitative results. This analysis showed where (i.e. in which prefixes) servicewomen are represented, but neither their male counterparts nor civilians were counted for a more nuanced result. Nor can it be assumed that if two photos out of ten are of or include depictions of servicewomen that the remaining eight are of servicemen. Many images across the photo collection depict machinery, landscape or civilians. Therefore, a nuanced quantitative analysis was not done and would not have been a prudent use of time at this point in the project. There is also missing extent (number of images) information and as such the percentage of images indexed is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the findings. These numbers must be taken critically because there are some pre-determined extents which do not match the number of negatives available, and in some cases, there is no listed extent. For the Canadian Army Photographs (numerical) the extent was calculated from the range presented in the album title. In others where feasible, I counted the images.

All of that said, we can make a few conclusions based on these numbers. In looking at the overall percentage of photographs that include servicewomen, 1.62 per cent, they are underrepresented in the imagery. Even basic calculations that estimate the percentage of servicewomen within the three branches at approximately 5 per cent of the total serving force, surpasses the percentage of images indexed for individual sub or sub-sub series and the overall findings.

The windshield or visual survey method, most consistently employed for the Canadian Army Photographs (numerical), has yielded a higher percentage of indexed photos, arguably better results, than the caption list method. In both cases, further research about the instructions given to photographers about what or who to photograph would be interesting to pursue to find out if the apparent heightened inclusion of servicewomen was intentional.

The Canadian Army photographs were reviewed and categorised into five main groupings: portraits or portrait-style and formal group photos; stories/series; other on duty images; off duty; and background/extras. These categorisations allow for a more nuanced reflection on how servicewomen are portrayed throughout the sub-series. Further analysis is required to see if these categorisations hold across the service branches, which this archivist suspects that they will, and to evaluate how these categorisations might help or hinder different types of researchers. Similarly, work to evaluate our ability to rely on the photographic record to demonstrate the agency of military nurses during the conflict is ongoing.

When choosing a method for indexing archival photos, it is key to start by establishing what already exists and in what formats. Are there existing captions or other descriptive material for most or all items? If so, are those descriptions, and even better, the images, already available and easily accessible in electronic format? Will one or multiple indexers be working on the project? Will external users be contributing to the work? Will this affect what, when or how they can contribute? The answers to these questions should inform how the work will proceed and help formulate the project plan.

Working exclusively with caption lists is not sufficient to fully interrogate and explore the photographic record because captions do not always describe or identify all individuals in an image, nor do caption lists always include a unique caption for each image. In the case of accession 1967-052, over half of the sub-sub-series descriptions include a note specifying that “captions were not provided for all

photographs.”⁵⁹ As suggested above and based on the results, it is advisable to work from photos first and caption lists second due to the relative visibility and identification of servicewomen in both the graphic and textual records.

As noted by Huyda, “[the] identification of photographs presents numerous fundamental difficulties. Existing captions are often incomplete, inaccurate, deliberately distorted, or irrelevant. For photographs with no captions, the task of identification is even more difficult. Recognition by memory or through comparison with other visual evidence is often inadequate and unreliable.”⁶⁰ This feels especially true when working with such relatively dated photographs and a dispersed community whose historical significance and contributions have not always been recognised and thus the knowledge not transferred or shared as it has been for majority narratives.

Work remains to pair identified images with caption information to confirm servicewomen’s presence in the imagery and enhance discoverability and access, main tenets of the original purpose of this project. Ideally, item level descriptions will heighten access to these photographs, allowing researchers to search the collection database by name, as well as by subject keywords to identify for example, units, branches or places.

CONCLUSION

This project has brought together relatively scattered and unknown images that represent a marginalised narrative from an oft cited and privileged photo collection. This project has tested two methods and made substantial inroads towards this objective within a very specific, well organised photo set. Through a combination of a decade of reference work and the methodological challenges described above in trying to pursue understudied narratives from this era, this archivist came to better understand why the same types of images and the stories that accompany them, or vice versa, serve as the dominant, repetitive,

⁵⁹ See an example of this in the finding aid note for the Army Central Command prefix photographs: <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=4814077&lang=eng>.

⁶⁰ Huyda, “Photographs and Archives in Canada,” 10.

narrative. Practically speaking, the primary source material that is most easily identifiable and usable will be the obvious choice for those seeking to illustrate or provide evidence for the narrative. So, how do we give those less easily identifiable people and topics their due?

Thinking especially about the aunts and grandmas who, like my own, are no longer with us to tell their stories, it makes the extra effort that is required for projects and work like this, worthwhile, even if it means more paper cuts and time with stinky negatives. For this archivist, and those like her, looking to tell the story of Canada's Second World War servicewomen, these are the types of resources we can use to illustrate their accounts. Or maybe it comes down to one servicewoman, that special aunty or grandma in our family tree, she's there too, and together, we can bring her into focus.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Murray has a Master of Arts in Canadian Studies from Carleton University (2012) and has worked at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in Ottawa for over ten years as a Reference Archivist and Program Advisor. Her research interests include the representation of servicewomen in visual records and the related and various intersections of art and military history, feminism and user experience.

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