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## Colour of War: Works on Paper from the Canadian War Museum, 1914 to 1945

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*Canadian War Museum*

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# Colours of War

## Works on Paper from the Canadian War Museum, 1914 to 1945

### Introduction

Eighty percent of the Canadian War Museum's 13,000 works of art are on paper, in the form of drawings, prints and watercolours. They date from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day, recording 250 years of Canadian military history.

The paintings presented in the exhibition *Colours of War* demonstrate the quality of work completed in watercolour during the First and Second World Wars, as well as the variety of subjects. Artists from Canada, Britain, and Belgium approached war in many different ways, often finding a tragic beauty in the human and material destruction they witnessed. Many were officially commissioned war artists or painted with specific military units as service artists. Others sketched in their spare time because they had been painters in civilian life.

Some of the paintings are relatively rapid sketches done in the field; others are preliminary studies for finished canvasses. All are imbued with personal emotion. They speak democratically, silently, to all Canadians, not of any nationalist mythology or maudlin sentiment, but simply of the experience of generations, now passing, whose sacrifices formed the foundation of modern Canada.

Curated by Laura Brandon, Curator of War Art at the Canadian War Museum, the exhibition consists of 50 works from the First and Second World Wars. It appeared at the Wellington County Museum and Archives Fergus, Ontario, from January to March 2001, and at the Museum of the Regiments in Calgary from April to September 2001. It is on view in the 3rd floor gallery of the Canadian War

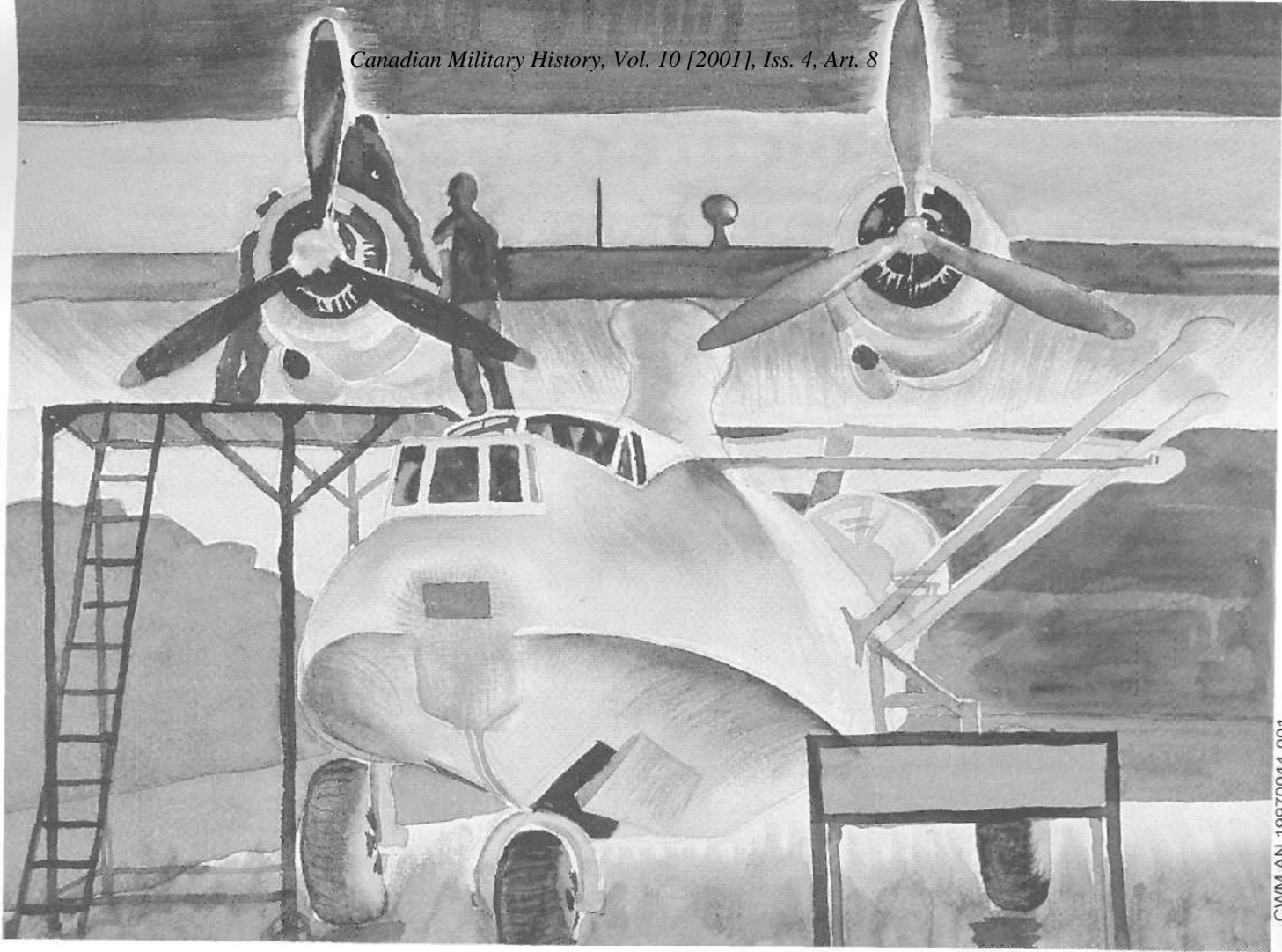


Museum from November 2001 to May 2002. The Canadian War Museum frequently has art shows on exhibit and on tour that, unfortunately, probably few readers of *Canadian Military History* ever get to see. The following selection of works from the *Colours of War* is meant to convey something of the flavour of one of these exhibits. At the same time, it is intended to bring to the readers' attention some of the images from the rich store of works on paper in the war art collection.

### The War Art Programs

Wealthy Canadian newspaper owner Lord Beaverbrook founded the Canadian War Memorials Fund in November 1916. The Fund hired more than 116 artists in Canada and Great Britain to paint over 900 scenes of Canada at war. Some artists were sent to the front lines in France and Belgium to sketch Canadians in battle. Back in their studios in London, England, they completed larger paintings in oils. Other artists painted scenes of the home front in Canada.

Inspired by the success of the First World War art program, Vincent Massey, Canada's High Commissioner in Great Britain, initiated Canada's Second World War art program. The Canadian government hired 32 official war artists to paint the activities of the armed forces at home and overseas. They served in specific army units, air force squadrons or ships, were issued instructions regarding the choice of subject matter, and were given the necessary materials. Additional commissions went to a number of female artists who ensured that the role of women in wartime was adequately depicted. Nearly 5,000 works of art were completed before the program ended in 1946.



Tom Hodgson (1924-) - **Canso Being Repaired, 1944**

The Canso was the Canadian version of the American Catalina patrol-reconnaissance aircraft. Used extensively for anti-submarine warfare during the Second World War, Cansos were responsible for the sinking of several German U-boats.

Moe Reinblatt (1917-1979) - **Guiding Liberator Down the Runway for Parking, 1944**

An RCAF repair depot in Scoudouc, New Brunswick. The Liberator, or B-24, was a four-engine bomber designed and manufactured in the United States, and used in the North Atlantic on long-range anti-submarine patrols.

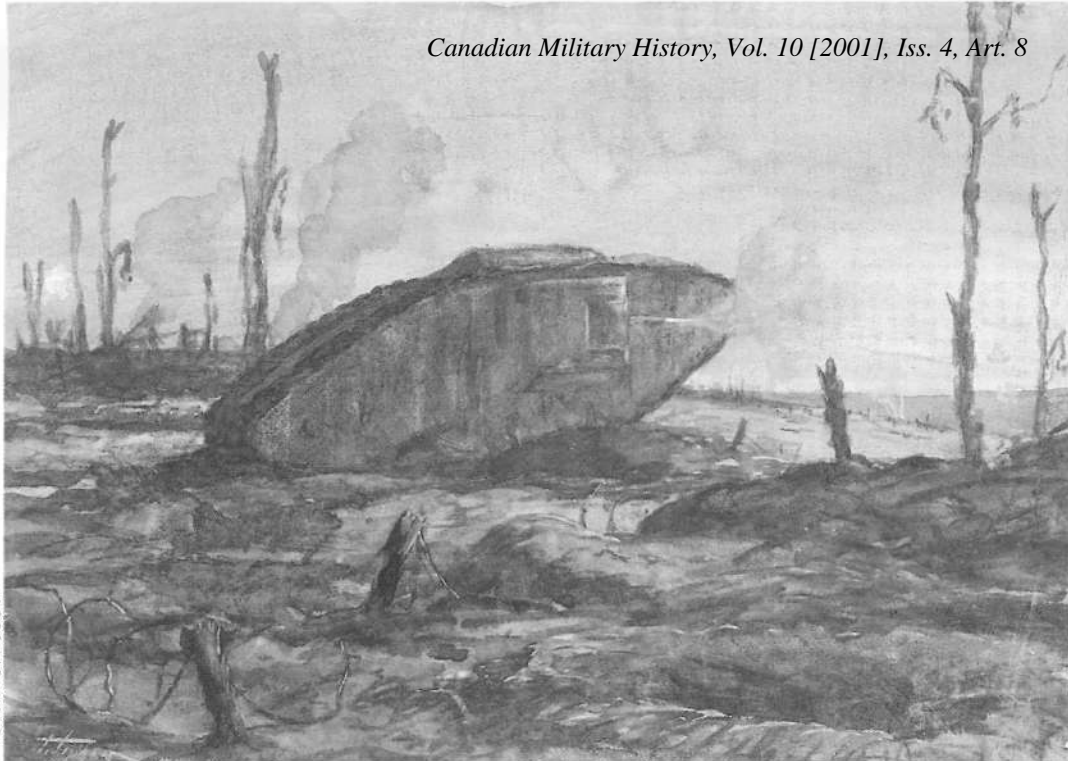




Pegi Nicol MacLeod (1904-1949) - **Cwacerouses, 1944**

The unusual title refers to the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC) and to the somewhat low-key "carousing" of the young women in their bunkroom housing.

CWM CN 8891



**Thurstan Topham (1888-1966) - A Tank at Montauban, 1916**

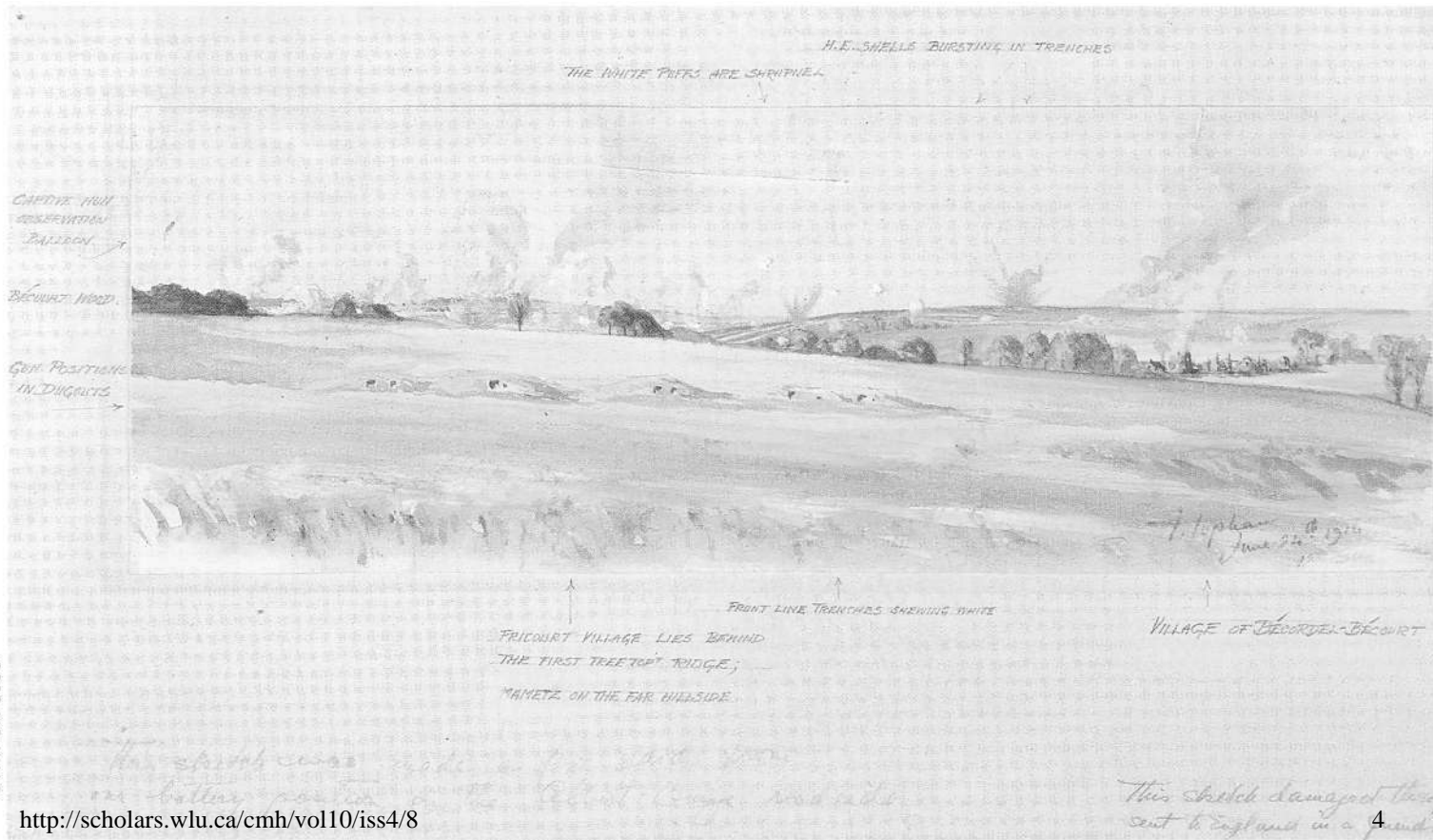
Thurstan Topham's studies of tanks are among the earliest painted records of this weapon in action. As he later wrote, his often-moonlit renditions of the front were "unofficial personal sketches done under considerable handicap." Montauban is east of Amiens, in the valley of the river Somme, France.



**Thurstan Topham (1888-1966)**

**Opening of the Somme Bombardment, 1916**

Thurstan Topham's assignment with the 1st Canadian Siege Battery was to make panoramic observation sketches for military intelligence and gun-ranging purposes. This one is dated 24 June 1916, a week before the beginning of the Battle of the Somme in France. More than 24,000 Canadians were killed or wounded before the battle ended in November.



CWM CN 8869



CWM CN 12866

CWM CN 11249



Charles Goldhamer (1903-1985)

**Face Burns, Sgt. James F. Gourlay, RAF, c. 1945**

Over 50 per cent of the RCAF's overseas aircrew served in RAF squadrons. At one point during the war, the chance of a Canadian flier like Sgt. Gourlay surviving his thirty-mission tour was one in ten. By war's end, 17,101 RCAF personnel had died.

**E. J. Hughes (1913-) - Gunfire, 1943**

Initially a service artist with the Canadian Army, E. J. Hughes was appointed one of the first official war artists in February 1942. After a period with the First Special Service Force in the Aleutian Islands in 1943, he spent most of his service in southern England with the Royal Canadian Dragoons. This gently humorous painting shows how the inhabitants of a typical English farm responded to the gunfire in their midst.

**Bobs Coghill Haworth (1904-1988)  
Patricia Bay, Ventura in Dispersal, 1943**

The Lockheed Ventura in the foreground was an American-built bomber supplied to the RAF. Depicted in the background are a Bristol Beaufort torpedo bomber (left) and a Hawker Hurricane fighter aircraft (far right). Aircraft such as these were parked in dispersal areas between flights.



CWM CN 14108



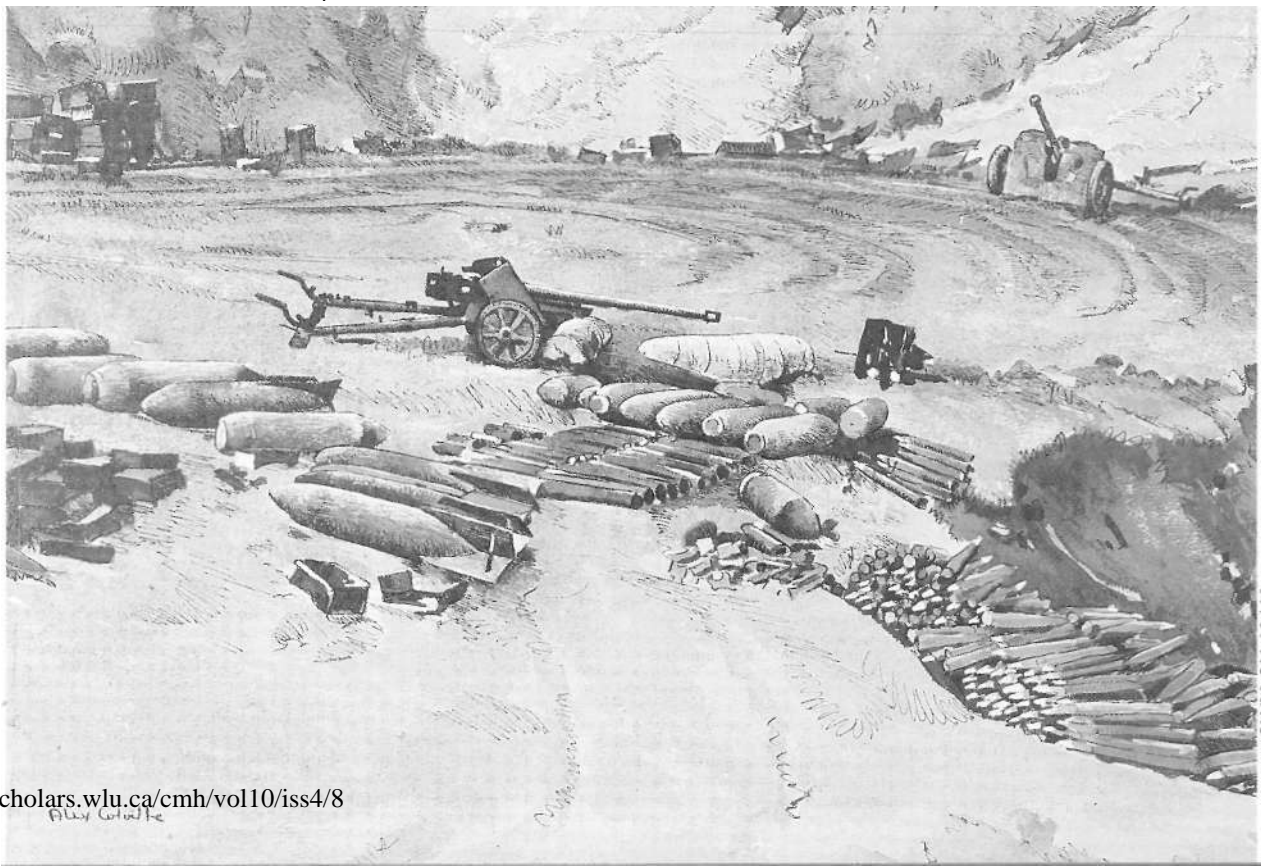
CWM CN 10467

**Rowley Murphy (1891-1975) - Study of HMCS *Prince Robert* Alongside, 1943**

Originally a Canadian National Steamships liner, HMCS *Prince Robert* escorted the convoys that took Canadian troops to Hong Kong in 1941 and brought them home as released prisoners of war after the surrender of Japan in 1945. It is depicted here at Esquimau, British Columbia, before beginning convoy escort between Britain and the Mediterranean in 1944 and 1945.

**Alex Colville (1920-) - Abandoned Munitions, 1945**

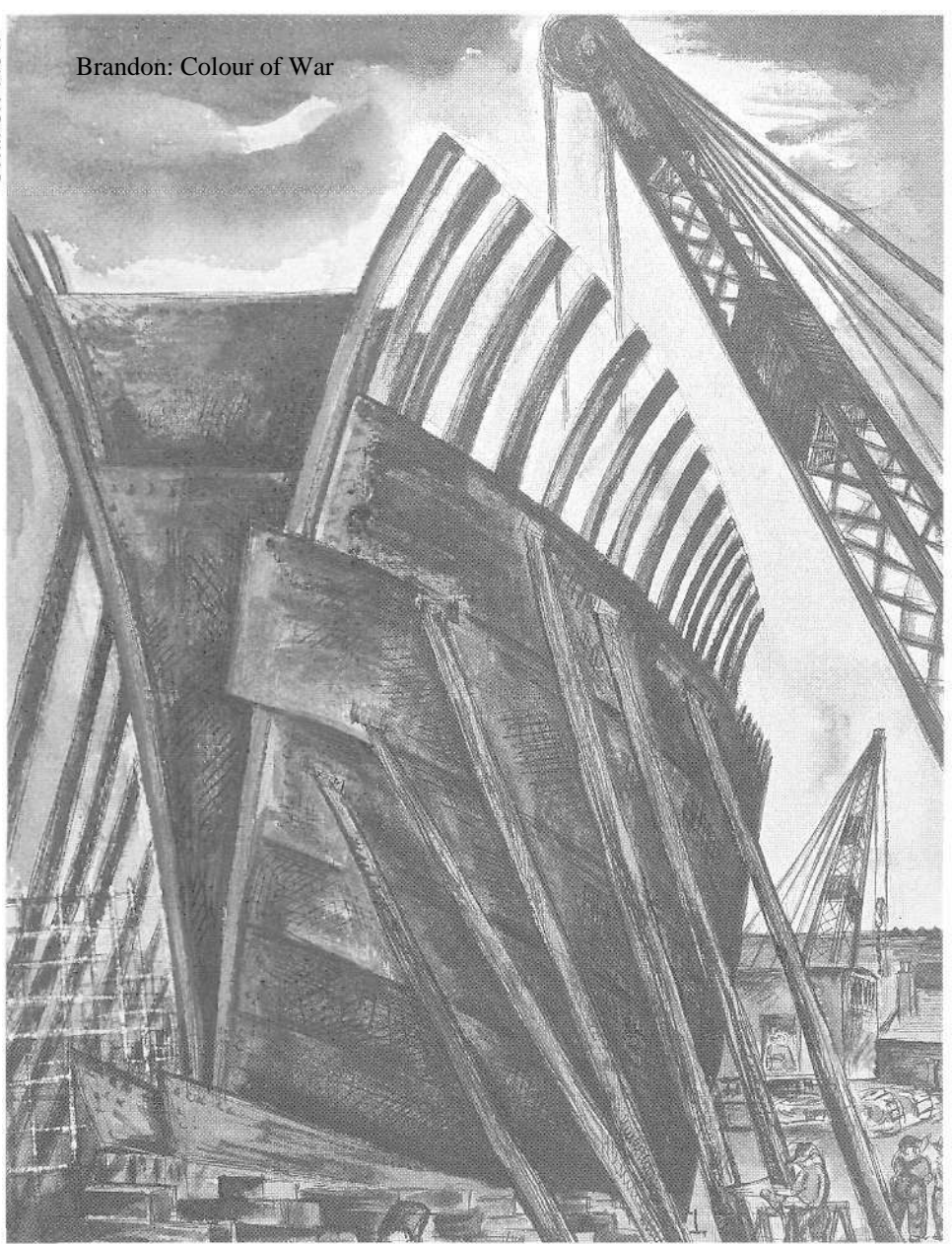
German 75 mm guns, shells, and bombs in a sandpit near Nijmegen. Canada's contribution to the Liberation of the Netherlands was of critical importance.



CWM CN 12112

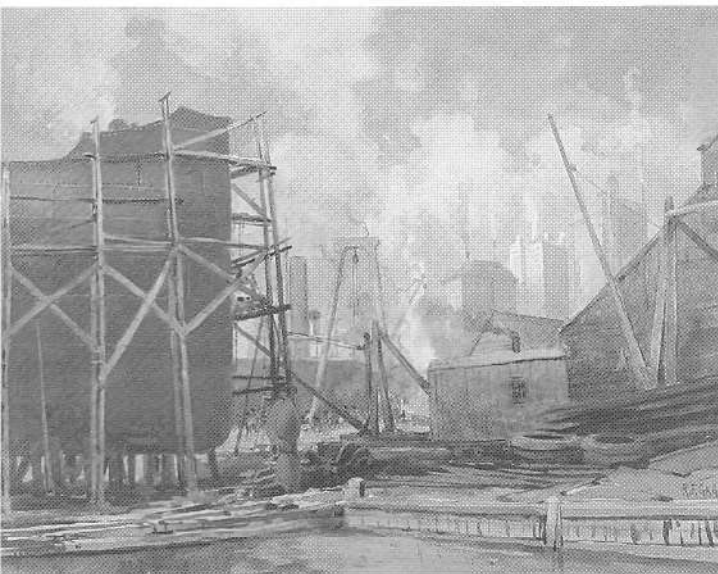
CWM CN 14047

Brandon: Colour of War



**Caven Atkins (1907-2000)**  
**Hull 32V for Victory, 1942**

In his title, Caven Atkins has made a visual pun out of the V-shaped bow formed by the vessel's partially constructed hull at the Toronto Shipbuilding Company. Atkins was one of a number of artists who received permission to paint military subjects such as this prior to the establishment of Canada's official war art program.



CWM CN 8170

**Robert Gagen (1848-1926)**  
**Toronto Shipbuilding, 1918**

One of the founding figures of the Canadian art establishment, Robert Gagen painted a number of somewhat romantic watercolours of Toronto shipbuilding yards at the end of the First World War. Here, in a study of Poison Yard on Lake Ontario, he includes the partially constructed SS *Nardja* in the foreground.



CWM CN 12254

**Charles Comfort (1900-1994)**  
**Carrier Maintenance in a Cork Forest, 1943**

The 4th Princess Louise Dragoon Guards in Philippeville, Algeria. Official war artist Charles Comfort attributed the bleached appearance of this painting to the pervasive North African dust and sand.





Sai Wan Bay, Hong Kong. The mountainous nature of Hong Kong is clearly evident in the aerial photograph taken in June 1947. The Commonwealth War Cemetery at Sai Wan is visible as a light-coloured slash on the side of the hill directly above the end of the peninsula.