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A familiar moment of silence, then a trumpet sounds to honour the lives of fallen soldiers — each Remembrance Day these rituals remind us of and stories of war, loss and sacrifice. While the history of the Second World War has been documented in great detail, many personal stories are left untold, and countless others have vanished with the dead.

"You know, over the years, these stories have been missed and [veterans have] been reticent for *so* long without about saying them," says Winston Churchill Parker, 100-year-old rancher, SAIT alumnus and Second World War veteran. "So over the last few years the [Royal Canadian] Legion has been telling us, 'If you don't tell your stories now, they're gone forever.'"

Saddles and service

Despite his age, Parker carries a physical strength and accounts his life in vivid detail, both in person and in his biography *Saddles and Service*, written by close friend and fellow SAIT grad, Elaine Taylor Thomas (Journalism '74).

"Elaine said she'd like to write my life story and I hummed and hawed, but finally we decided to do it," Parker explains.

"I couldn't get my heart into it. I didn't treat her very good in the first few months because I just couldn't get to work on it.

"I didn't think my stories were worth telling. Too many people have better stories than me."

Parker was 94-years-old when the book was published in 2011. It traces his childhood, his service in the Second World War and his life as a rancher afterwards. Parker and Thomas also set up an endowment fund at SAIT. Financed by the proceeds of the book, the fund supports the Saddles and Service student award. Their endowment reached \$30,000 this year.

Parker says the decision was made to support SAIT students because of their shared history with the Institute.



Saddles and Service author Elaine Taylor Thomas (Journalism '74) with Winston Parker (Tractor '39) at a book signing in 2011. Photo courtesy Winston Parker.



Winston Parker enlisted in the Royal Canadian Airforce (RCAF) in 1939. He graduated as aircrew and was sent overseas in 1941. Photo courtesy Winston Parker, as published in his biography, *"Saddles and Service."*

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From Tech to war

As a teen, Parker studied in the Tractor program at SAIT, then called the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (PITA) and referred to by many as Tech.

"I was born and raised at a time when everybody was sharp on horses and suddenly they started switching to tractors," Parker says. "Most of our fathers couldn't tell you how to adjust anything on a tractor. I knew nothing about internal combustion engines, so I went to SAIT and that was a great help. I met some fellas and we became friends and now I'm the last one left."

Winston Parker in the Tech-Art Record yearbook, 1938-39



Image 1 of 3

Winston Churchill Parker graduated from the Tractor program at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (PITA), now SAIT, in 1939.

Parker graduated from PITA in 1939, the same year Britain and France declared war on Germany. He and his childhood friend Bill Wallace enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), hoping to follow in the footsteps of their idol Wilfrid Reid "Wop" May, the legendary Canadian aviator who flew in the First World War.



Winston Parker's best friend, Bill Wallace. Bill died the day before he and Winston were scheduled to reunite. In his biography, Parker says it was one of the saddest days of his life. *Photo courtesy Winston Parker, as published in "Saddles and Service."*

"Wop was a friend of ours. I had known him since I was a kid and he's one of the great heroes of Canada, so I was quite intrigued by this great ace. A kid is really influenced by that," Parker says.

As part of his training for war, Parker spent three months at the No. 2 Wireless School, housed on PITA campus, before he attended bombing and gunnery school. The No. 2 Wireless School was one of four schools set up by the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Canada.

Missing in action

Parker was sent overseas in June 1941. On his 13th bombing mission, he was declared missing in action after his plane was hit by German fighters.

He spent the next three years as a prisoner of war (POW) in Stalag VIIIIB, one of the harshest prison camps of the war. In January 1945, Parker and his fellow prisoners were forced to walk nearly 1,000 kilometres at

gunpoint in a march that is documented in his biography as one of the longest and cruelest in the history of the Second World War.

"We were down to desperate and we were dying every day," he says. "I'm one of the lucky ones. I made it."

Sergeant Winston Parker missing in action



Image 1 of 3

After being liberated by the American army, Parker returned home and bought a ranch. He later took a photography course at SAIT, a hobby he continues to enjoy and talk about with great enthusiasm.

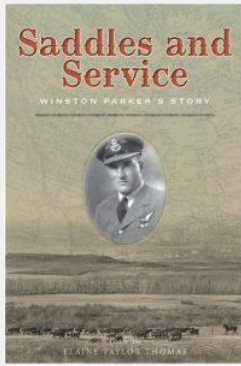
It seems Parker's pursuit of a generous and passionate life is why he thrives in spite of challenging memories and great loss.

"I haven't lived the war over and over again like so many people. I came home and became a rancher and that's what I liked and loved doing. The war was put in the background as much as I could. But I thought of the fellas.



Official photos taken by RCAF photographers to use for recruitment. From left to right: Sergeant – Air Gunner Lloyd Willigar, Sergeant – Wireless Operator Jimmy Paton, Pilot Officer Richard Lang,

Sergeant – Pilot C. Stanley, Pilot Officer T. E. Pilkington, Sergeant – Air Gunner Winston Parker.
Photo courtesy Winston Parker.



Saddles and Service: Winston Parker's Story by Elaine Taylor Thomas was first published in 2011. Proceeds from the book support the Saddles and Service Student Award in support of SAIT students.

"There's so many of our friends who didn't make it, and they paid for their lives, so that we have the freedom we've got," Parker says.

"I used to talk at the schools and one day [the students] asked me, 'What do you think of when it's Remembrance Day?' I said, 'One thing I remember is when prisoners died out there in Germany in the prison camp — they'd have a funeral on a cold miserable evening, you'd be out there in the woods, the Last Post [was played and it] sounded so lonely — I think of that.

"And the other thing I think of is my friends— two crew members who got killed — and I can't help but think, 'Why am I here, but they're not.'"

This Remembrance Day, Parker will lay a wreath at a memorial service in Okotoks, where he lives, in honour of those who fought with him.

Saddles and Service can be [purchased online](#), with proceeds supporting SAIT students.

TEXT, PHOTOS AND VIDEO BY ASHLEY NAUD, WITH FILES FROM *SADDLES AND SER*



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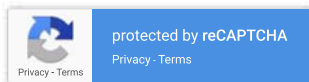
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