

# Joining Up Underage

Shirley Ann (Sherry) Constable was orphaned at the age of 11, but by the age of 16 she wanted to be on her own. She tried to be a waitress but broke too many dishes. So she lied about her age and joined the Canadian Forces in 1942. Her dream? To be an army driver. She got into the driver course in Kitchener, Ontario, but within a few months, she was caught out by the very intimidating Colonel Dover.

Here is the story of her dressing down in her own words.

"What did you think you would accomplish by lying about your age and driving experience?" "... My mouth was dry and my brain had ceased working when I crossed the office threshold.

"Come, come. You must have something to say for yourself." "Yes, Ma'am," I finally managed. Once my mouth opened, it went on of its own accord. "I really wanted to join the army and I really wanted to be a driver — an army driver. I knew I could be a good driver and I knew I would love the army. I just needed a chance to prove it, but how could I get a chance if I waited until I was 18? The war might be over before then. So I lied. I'm sorry I lied, Ma'am, but I'm not sorry to be in the army or to be a driver."

She looked at me silently for a few moments, while my heart pounded. "I have been in touch with your grandmother, and she was upset to know that you had taken such a step without consulting her, but she thinks the army may be the making of you. I happen to think so too. I have been hearing good reports about you from Sgt. Menzies. You have shown initiative and courage. You will report back to the garage tomorrow and finish your course. By the way, you may be interested to know that you were on the first CWAC draft to

## Explorations

1. What did the army offer that Sherry wanted? What did Sherry offer that the army wanted?
2. Although Sherry's incentives were personal, her actions were part of a major change in Canadian society. How did Sherry break barriers? Would she make a good role model for young women today? Why or why not?



**Figure 10-12** Shirley Ann Constable — known to her friends as Sherry — eventually became the driver for Colonel Dover. On the job, she drove a jeep. But in her off hours, she had the use of a motorcycle. When she went to visit Nana, her grandmother, she had to park it around the corner because Nana said that nice girls did not ride motorcycles, never mind drive them.

be posted overseas. You were to go as soon as your course was finished. This, of course, will not be possible now, due to your age. Consider yourself lucky to have gotten off so lightly. Dismissed." I left her office in a daze with my thoughts turning cartwheels in my brain. . . I could stay in the army!