



WOMEN ON ALL FRONTS

Sixty years ago, the Second World War came to an end. Freedom triumphed over oppression, and the whole world was filled with a sense of hope. To commemorate that victory, the Government of Canada wanted to recognize the immeasurable contribution and sacrifices of the thousands of people who defended democracy, here and beyond our borders. As a result, 2005 has been proclaimed the Year of the Veteran – a tribute to all our veterans.

When we think of our veterans, the image that comes to mind is most often that of a man who was a soldier in the trenches. But did you know that women have also played an essential role in all the armed conflicts in which Canada has taken part? Women have served as nurses, stenographers, camp cooks, drivers, mechanics and airplane pilots. It was only at the end of the 1980s that women were able to take their place in positions directly

linked to combat, such as fighter squadrons or artillery and armoured units.

Imagine what life was like for the nurses who accompanied the troops into countries as far away as South Africa or Korea. Imagine the experience of the first women to integrate into the Canadian Forces. Until 1929, women were not even considered to be "persons" under Canadian law. Women only won the right to vote in the 1910s. In Quebec, that right was only recognized in 1940. For young women whose aspirations went beyond marriage and a family, war service meant new horizons, opportunities and growth.

During Women's History Month 2005, Canadians of all ages are invited to discover the contribution that women have made to our war efforts and to maintaining peace, as well as the consequences that conflicts have had on their status and the recognition of their rights.

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY: FROM THE KITCHEN TO THE BATTLEFIELD

1885: The Northwest Rebellion

Women served as members of the military force, but only in caring for the wounded.

1899-1902: The Boer War

Four military nurses accompanied the first contingent to South Africa.

1914-1918: First World War

The outbreak of the First World War changed the role of women in the labour market. Faced with a shortage of workers in factories, women, especially single women, were called on to take up the slack. More than 2,800 women also served in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps.

1939-1945: Second World War

The enrolment of more and more men in the Army once again makes women's work necessary to maintain production in factories, naval shipyards and munitions plants.

In an appeal to women for help in making men available for combat, the Army urges women to volunteer for support and nursing services.

In 1941, the Government of Canada decides to enroll more than 45,000 women in military services other than nursing. The Army, Navy and Air Force create women's divisions, including the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC).

1950-1953: The Korean War

More than 5,000 women were enrolled during this war.

1965: A ceiling of 1,500

The government decides to continue to recruit women to the Canadian Forces but sets a limit of 1,500, which represents 1.5 per cent of the military establishment at that time.

1970: Royal Commission on the Status of Women

The Commission recommends changes to the military to create equal conditions for all, especially for women serving in Canada's Armed Forces.

1989: Decision of Canadian Human Rights Commission tribunal

The Commission appoints a tribunal to investigate the complaints of four women and one man, all members of the military. On February 20, 1989, the tribunal rules that all obstacles to women's access to any military job must be removed, with two exceptions: service aboard submarines and Catholic chaplains.

1991: The Gulf War

The Gulf War is the first conflict in which Canadian women take part in combat.

2005: Women in the Armed Forces

The number of women in the Canadian Forces has grown from 1,500 in 1971 to 7,100 today (10.6 per cent of total strength). There are 15,544 women in the reserve forces (18 per cent of the total). Canada allows women to fill roles directly linked to combat, which is not the case, for example, in the United States.

WOMEN OF COURAGE AND ACTION

Throughout our history, without necessarily being in the military, women have made a contribution to the conflicts in which Canada has been involved. The names of some of those women are certainly well known. Here are some examples:

In 1640, nothing could hold **Françoise Marie de Saint-Étienne de La Tour** back from coming to the defence of her husband in his struggle against Charles de Menou d'Aulnay, a rival for the governorship of Acadia. She went as far afield as France and Massachusetts to find help and funding for her husband's troops. For three days, she held off an attack from Aulnay against her husband's fort at the mouth of the Saint John River in New Brunswick.

At the age of 14, **Marie-Madeleine de Verchères** (1678-1747) defended the place where she lived near

Montréal against the Iroquois. After taking refuge behind the barricades, she armed women and children with muskets, and fired the fort's only cannon, warning neighbours of a possible attack.

During the War of 1812 between Great Britain and the United States, **Laura Secord** travelled a long distance on foot through enemy lines to warn Canadian troops of a planned American invasion.

Why do we now associate the name of this war heroine with chocolate? The Laura Secord Company was founded in 1913, the anniversary year of the long march this courageous, determined woman made 100 years earlier to protect her loved ones. The chocolate maker who founded the company chose her name because he wanted its products to reflect images of health, purity, the family, home and cleanliness.

The Canadian Women's Army Corps, commonly known as the CWAC, was officially created August 13, 1941. Its mission was for women to serve so that men could be sent to the front. During the Second World War, more than 21,000 women wore the uniform of the CWAC.

The American wartime role model was "Rosie the Riveter". In Canada, **Elsie MacGill** was a war heroine who became known as the "Queen of the Hurricanes" – the symbol of Canada's wartime transformation. In 1938, the 35-year old woman became chief aeronautical engineer at Canadian Car & Foundry.

The Royal Air Force and the Royal Canadian Army (RCA) ordered Hawker Hurricane fighters from the company and inspired a production line directed by **Elsie MacGill**. The RCA used a fleet of Hurricanes in Canada to defend our shores. In 1942, a comic book called *Queen of the Hurricanes* told Elsie's story.

Molly Lamb Bobak joined the Army at the age of 20 as a Canadian war artist. In 1945, armed with her paint brushes and a stock of canvasses, she landed in Europe. Her mission: to paint the daily life of Canada's women soldiers. Some of her paintings can be seen in the new Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

Nurse **Hallie Sloan**, a naval lieutenant, cared for thousands of wounded during a 33-day attack on the Rhine region in the 1945 Netherlands campaign. In one month, the hospital where she worked received 18,000 wounded; doctors performed 1,600 operations. In 2005, Princess Margriet of the Netherlands presented Ms. Sloan with a Dutch medal in recognition of her contribution.

“We, the women of Canada, have demanded and won the right to participate in public affairs with our votes. Today, we ask our fathers, our husbands and our brothers for the honour of standing by their sides to defend our country and our liberty.”

- La Presse, January 17, 1942 -

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

While wars have contributed to a movement of emancipation, they have also produced brutal consequences for large numbers of women. Countless women and girls have lost a loved one. Many have been left alone to raise families and provide for the needs of others. Some women have had to leave school at an early age to work in factories.

In our time, as the distinction between military and civil targets is less respected, women and children are the most frequent victims of current conflicts.

Nevertheless, women are also militants, participants and leaders; they can be seen as negotiators, making peace and working toward that goal. They care for survivors, help with reconstruction and create a new culture of peace.

SOME SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS

Of some 40 million people who have had to flee their homes because of armed conflicts and human rights violations, it is estimated that 80 per cent of them are women and children.

Of the 17 nations with more than 100,000 AIDS orphans, 13 countries are locked in conflict.

In Bosnia, to name just one example, between 20,000 and 50,000 women were victims of rape during five months of conflict in 1992. It is estimated that 60 per cent of women victims of human trafficking in Sarajevo are between 19 and 24 years of age.

This year, the Nobel Peace Prize (2005) seeks to recognize the contributions of women who strive daily to promote peace. Of a total of 1000 women nominees, 9 are Canadian. Only 12 women have received this prestigious prize since it was first awarded in 1901.

“Women, who know the price of conflict so well, are also often better equipped than men to prevent or resolve it.”

Kofi Annan,
Secretary General of the United Nations,
October 24, 2000

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"Les Pénélopes" Web site -
www.penelopes.org

To find out more about Women's History Month, please consult the Status of Women Canada Web site at the following address: www.swc-cfc.gc.ca