

CANADA'S INVOLVEMENT IN WORLD WAR II



World War II was Canada's first independent declaration of war. Although Canada was a sovereign state at this point, Britain's decisions were still influential. At first, Britain and France chose to appease the conflicts that were occurring globally, which the Canadian government respected. However, the growing Nazi aggression and oppression on Europe (Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia) swayed Britain and France to declare war on Germany. A week after, on September 10, 1939, Canada also declared war on Germany. Canada had a small population of only 11 million people, however, over a million Canadians served in armed forces. Men, women, Aboriginal peoples, Black, Chinese-Canadians, etc. were all involved. Over 42,000 perished and another 55,000 were injured.

Towards the beginning of the war, Canada agreed to conscription in a national plebiscite, a poll where citizens voted in allowing conscription. Two years later, in 1944, Ottawa imposed limited conscription for military service overseas. Tens of thousands of conscripts proceeded to military action, although not all entered combat. Regardless, Canada's war overseas was virtually voluntary. Canada was a significant aid in defeating the dictatorship in Italy and liberating Northwest Europe from the Nazi Party. Canada was involved in numerous brutal battles, raids, and operations. For example, Canadians engaged in the Dieppe Raid (France, 1942), the Italian Campaign (Sicily, fighting over 4 weeks before defeating Italians), D-Day (Allied landings in Normandy, invading Western Europe), and the Battle of Rhineland (forcing Germans back to Rhine, 1945). The war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945.

In Japan and the Pacific coast, Canada positioned Pacific coastal defences and naval operations. Canada also removed Japanese-Canadians living in British Columbia from the Pacific Coast, in order to prevent a feared Japanese rebellion. In 1942, 22,000 Japanese-Canadians were relocated inland to rudimentary settlements, road camps, and prairie sugar beet farms, separating many from their families. Those who resisted were sent to military internment camps in Angler and Petawawa, Ontario. They were only allowed to carry few possessions, while their properties were sold, against their consent. In 1945, the government forced Japanese-Canadians into either: dispersal to areas east of the Rocky Mountains or being deported back to Japan. 10,000 had consented to repatriation. However, the war in the Pacific ended on August 15, 1945, after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. 4,000 had already returned to Japan and 6,000 recanted their consent. Many Japanese-Canadians that were repatriated perished in the bombings. In 1988, the Canadian government officially apologized for the actions taken against Japanese-Canadians in World War II.

The Royal Canadian Navy ended the war as the third largest Allied navy, as opposed to their meagre troops in the beginning of the war. The Royal Canadian Air Force also became powerful, training many Allied troops, and serving in many locations overseas.

Besides military action, millions of Canadians contributed to the war effort by volunteering for organizations, (Red Cross), participating in salvage campaigns, gathering materials (scrap metal and newsprint, etc.) Evidently, Canada played a major role in the outcome of World War II.

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