

# **“Our Boys”**

## **The Second World War**



# Introduction

The Second World War was transformational for Canada, and Canadians played a vital role in the Allied cause. Canadians contributed soldiers, support personnel, equipment, and medical staff to the campaigns of Western Europe, the Mediterranean, and beyond. In 1939, Canada's population of 11 million people was still reeling from the Great Depression. Between 1939 and 1945 more than one million Canadian men and women served with the Canadian Army, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). There were 42,042 Canadian casualties. Of the 2,926 Peel residents that enlisted during the war, 89 from historic Mississauga did not return home.

We will remember them.

## Canada Goes to War

The First World War had a lasting legacy on the Canadian mindset: the enormous loss of life, large debt, burden of wartime production, and strain of conscription all weighed heavily. Initially, Canadians had little appetite for another major conflict, and Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King supported the British policy of appeasement toward Germany. The Munich Crisis and increasing German aggression in Europe gradually turned public opinion, and the Prime Minister understood that if another war erupted, Canada could not stand idly by.

Nazi Germany attacked Poland on 1 September 1939, leading Great Britain and France to declare war on Germany, and on 10 September 1939, Canada followed suit.

Front Cover: 8 Squadron, 4th Troop, Fort Garry Horse (Lt. V.H. Brown of Clarkson at back left), 1943, [www](http://www)

Right: Canadian Armoured Assault, Ortona, 1943, [www](http://www)

# The Military Response & Italian Campaign

Canada had originally hoped for limited involvement and a quick end to the war, and initially sent just one army division overseas. However, the fall of Belgium and France in 1940 brought a sense of heightened urgency to the Allied war effort.

Conscription was introduced in June 1940 under the National Resources Mobilization Act and the Canadian armed forces rapidly expanded. In April 1940 the First Canadian Army was organized in England under Lieutenant-General A.G.L. McNughton. With the exception of the ill-fated defence of Hong Kong from Japanese invasion in December 1941, and the disastrous Dieppe Raid on 19 August 1942, Canadian soldiers were not on the front lines. By late 1942 Canada fielded five divisions overseas. Under pressure to increase Canadian involvement, the Federal government organized for the 1st Canadian Infantry Division to join in the attack on Sicily in July 1943. Sicily fell quickly, and the invasion of the Italian Mainland launched on 3 September 1943. The Italian Campaign, which lasted until May 1945, involved significant Allied advances at Elba, Monte Cassino, Mount Ortigara and Rimini, amongst other locations. During the campaign, Canadians played a central role in battles such as Ortona and the Liri Valley, and in the breaking of the Hitler and Gothic lines, which were points of significant resistance. All told, 92,757 Canadian soldiers served in Italy, and 5,764 lost their lives.







## Normandy Invasion

The Allied invasion of mainland Europe – codenamed Operation Overlord – took place on 6 June 1944. Canadian soldiers – who were assigned the heavily defended coastal area known as Juno Beach – played a significant, albeit costly, role in the amphibious landings. Despite tremendous casualties, Canadians achieved many of their initial objectives and began moving inland in the face of bitter resistance. The Canadian Army continued to play a leading part in the Normandy invasion, including the capture of Falaise and the closing of the “Falaise Gap” by August 1944. The Canadian Army continued to push inland, capturing Le Havre, Boulogne, Calais and the Scheldt River by December 1944.

Between 8 February and 10 March 1945, the Canadians were engaged in the Battle of the Rhineland, which pushed the German army back onto German soil. The Canadians, along with British and American forces, crossed the Rhine River on 23 March, liberating the Netherlands and advancing into Germany. The combined Russian army in the east and Allied forces in the west began liberating Nazi concentration camps in early 1945, bringing to light the horrors of the Holocaust. In total, the Normandy campaign involved some 237,000 Canadian men and women, with 11,336 casualties.



## On The Home Front

Canada's industrial contribution was considerable, though it began slowly. After Europe fell to German forces in 1940, Britain was forced to rely on North America for equipment production. To meet this vast new demand, the Department of Munitions and Supply established several Crown Corporations, which built new factories and adapted existing ones for war production.

Innumerable ships, aircraft, and other military vehicles were produced. Much of the work in wartime factories was carried out by women, who were newly recruited into the wartime labour force to fulfill roles vacated by enlisted men overseas. Women on the home front played a vital role in the war effort.

Several companies in historic Mississauga – such as the St. Lawrence Starch Company in Port Credit – converted production to support the war effort. Additionally, the Dominion Small Arms munitions factory operated in Lakeview and was a major contributor to the war effort overseas.

Women's aid societies, such as local church groups, women's institutes, and Port Credit's chapter of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, organized supplies and aid for soldiers overseas and their families at home.

## Naval War

The RCN was tiny in 1939 but underwent a remarkable expansion during the war: it enlisted 99,688 men and some 6,500 women and fielded 471 fighting vessels of various types. The RCN was primarily tasked with the protection of convoys crossing the Atlantic Ocean.

Canadian naval units took part in other campaigns during the war, including supporting the Allied landings in North Africa in November 1942, and the Normandy operations of June 1944.

Top Left: Reserve troops of the Canadian 3rd Division coming ashore at Bernières, Juno Beach, on D-Day, June 6, 1944, Juno Beach Centre

Bottom Left: Assembly Line, Dominion Small Arms Ltd. munitions factory, Lakeview, c1943, HM

# British Commonwealth Air Training Plan

During the course of the Second World War, Canada was involved with the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, a joint military aircrew training program carried out by Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The program trained aviators who served with the Royal Air Force (RAF), Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm (FAA) and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF).

Through the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, Canada trained 131,533 Allied pilots and aircrew, 72,835 of which were Canadian citizens. There were 107 schools and 184 supporting facilities at 231 locations across Canada. The No. 1 Elementary Flying Training School and No. 1 Air Observer School operated in Malton, within modern Mississauga.

## Victory Aircraft & the Lancaster Bomber

Victory Aircraft – established in Malton on 4 November 1942 – was a major wartime employer with a culturally diverse workforce, which expanded from 3,300 in 1942 to 9,521 in 1944. About half of the workers were women. Building the Lancaster bomber was a daunting task that required some 55,000 separate components.

The first Canadian-built Lancaster – KB-700 “the Ruhr Express” – rolled off the assembly line in Malton on 1 August 1943. By war’s end, Victory Aircraft was producing one aircraft per day. In total, 422 Lancaster bombers, 8 modified X-PP mail planes and 1 York transport were built in Malton between 1943 and 1945.

Nearly one quarter of the Lancasters built in Malton were lost during service. On average, 45% of Bomber Command airmen were killed, and only 41% escaped capture or serious injury over the course of their service. While the bombers were important to the Allied war effort, bombing campaigns extracted a terrible toll – both in terms of servicemen lost and the vast number of civilian casualties.

Back Cover: Roll-out of Lancaster Bomber KB-100, the “Ruhr Express”, Malton, 1 August 1943, HM

## The Air War

48 RCAF squadrons were deployed overseas, almost entirely staffed by Canadians. This included No. 6 Bomber Group of the RAF Bomber Command, which grew to include 14 bomber squadrons. Bomber Command was tasked with the night bombing of German targets, during which almost 10,000 Canadians lost their lives. Canadian airmen served in every theatre, from bases in Britain, North Africa, Italy, Northwest Europe and Southeast Asia. Squadrons in North America worked in antisubmarine operations off the Atlantic coast. During the war 232,632 men and 17,030 women served in the RCAF, and 17,101 lost their lives. 27 airmen from historic Mississauga did not return home.



British Commonwealth Air Training School, Malton, 1944, HM

## Peace

There is not a single date that marks the end of the Second World War. 2 May 1945 marked the end of the war in Italy and the Mediterranean. 8 May 1945 is known as Victory in Europe (or V-E) day, and marks the signing of the German Instrument of Surrender and the end of the war in Europe. Following the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945, Japan announced its unconditional surrender on 14 August 1945, ending the Battle of the Pacific. The announcement of Japan's surrender was made public on 15 August 1945 – known as Victory Over Japan Day (V-J Day) – thus ending hostilities. The Japanese Instrument of Surrender was signed on 2 September 1945, officially ending the Second World War. After the war many allied veterans came to Canada, and to Mississauga, and made it their home.





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