

Women at War and War on the Home Front

Women During the War

Just as they had done during World War I, women played a vital and essential role both at home and overseas during World War II. Women were once again needed to work in war factories and on the farms. Propaganda once again encouraged women to do “the right thing” and contribute to the war effort. “_____!” was one popular slogan. Posters showed women with goggles, dressed in overalls, and wearing kerchiefs or turbans over their hair to keep it from getting caught in factory machinery. One picture called the “Bren Gun Girl” was designed to encourage women to seek untraditional jobs making munitions, tanks, ships, and other weapons of war. By 1943 there were over _____ women working in munitions factories – and this with only about _____ million females of all ages living in Canada.

In the aircraft industry alone there were over _____ women working alongside men building planes that would be used to win the war. _____, who was the first women to ever graduate from mechanical engineering in Canada, was in charge of Canadian production of two types of fighter planes used in the war.

Altogether over _____ **women worked outside of the home during the war** – about 17% of the total female population and about 33% of the total number of women working age (20-59) in Canada at the time. This was a huge increase in the number of women who went to work, and all because of the war. It became a common sight to see women driving trucks, buses, taxis, and streetcars in Canadian cities – over 4000 women even went into the construction industry.

Women were expected to “_____” (meaning to bring men up and back from war). Even though women were doing traditional male jobs and working the same hours and in the same conditions, they were often paid much _____ counterparts.



Even though over a million women went out to work to support both the home and the men at war, many people were uncomfortable with seeing women work like this. They were seen as doing “_____” jobs and wanted women to return to their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and housekeepers. Those who felt _____ with women at work felt uneasy about the changing world around them; the war was challenging Canadians to think about new roles for women and forcing many of them to re-examine their _____ images.

Women who took male jobs were often resented – even by other women. They could face gossip, which labelled them as _____, _____, and _____ – which were some of the traits that would mean they would never find a husband. Despite these [painful backlashes, most women carried on in their new roles and duties.



Slogans like “_____” in government advertising encouraged thousands of homemakers to join the war effort to achieve victory. They rolled bandages for the _____, saved bones and fat to be made into glue, collected tin cans and other metal scraps for recycling, and even grew fruit and vegetables in “_____.” Clothes were made and sent overseas to troops, and many women worked as hospitals and blood banks.

Canadian women made a vital contribution to Canada’s war effort and in doing so they changed the way they saw themselves. They became much more confident in their new roles and no longer wanted to be confined to the traditional roles of the female. They did face hardship, however: just as with what happened after World War I, many women would lose their jobs to the men returning home from war. A 1944 opinion poll showed that _____ of men and _____ of women believed that men should be given their jobs back when they got home. It seemed that women were only given new opportunities when they were needed to do something. While they did make a big difference at home, they also helped out overseas.

Women in War

During WWII, _____ **Canadian women volunteered for military duty.** Every other woman in the country fought for “_____” in her own way. Canadian women enlisted in the Women's Division of the Royal Canadian Air Force, as well as the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service and the Canadian Women's Army Corp.

In July, 1941, the Women's Division of the RCAF (Royal Canadian Air Force) was authorized by the government. Thousands of young women flocked to the recruiting offices to enlist. **By _____, _____ Women were in the Canadian Armed Forces.**

In August 1945, the Canadian Women's Army Corp was established. Training bases were established in Kitchener, Ontario; St Anne de Bellevue, Quebec; and Vermilion, Alberta. _____ served in the Canadian Women's Army Corp (CWACs.) The Women's Royal Canadian Naval Services (WRENS) began recruiting in 1942. This division grew more slowly, but all women who served wanted to be part of the "real" war.

Only _____ of the _____ women who signed up were selected for duty overseas. It seemed Armed Forces needed women to do the _____. Women's roles in the war were too far exceed what was expected of them.



Canadian Women's Army Corp.

Servicewomen were required to take three months basic training. They had to pass a medical and had to be at least _____ years old. They had to be of good character, neat in appearance and intelligent. One army senior official said, "It's senseless to tie up 150 men on the washing of clothes when women could do the job just as well."

As the war progressed, women began to be assigned to clerical and other duties in the combat zone. **In 1945, when the war ended, there were _____ CWAC's overseas.** That was _____ of those in the combat zone.

Women wanted to be shipped overseas. Just like the men, they had a yearning for adventure. Once they arrived, the reality of the dangers

became evident.

The Canadian Women's Auxiliary Corp.

On _____, the Canadian Women's Auxiliary Corp. was established. Women in the Corp. took over jobs as clerks, vehicle drivers, messengers and canteen workers. **Their pay was only _____ of the men's wages.**

Royal Canadian Air Force - Women's Division

The women's division of the RCAF was established in _____. Ground crews were desperately needed and the women's division was born.

The WREN's

On _____, the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service was established. This division got the cream of the crop. The navy wouldn't look at a woman who didn't have excellent references.



Nurses

The active role of women in war was not a new concept. Many women had answered the call to "duty between 1914 and 1918, because of major manpower shortages. Many men didn't feel that women were suited for military life. What would we have done without them? The work of Canadian women, though mainly non-military, prepared the world for the role they would play in WWII.

Canadian nurses became the first in the world to achieve officer status in _____. The nurses of the _____ (RCAMC) had close contact with Canadian military operations overseas.

Canada on the Home Front During World War II

In 1939, Canada's economy was not nearly ready for war. There over _____ people unemployed – which was about _____ Canadians of working age – and there were few factories that could actually build _____ and the materials that were required for war. Remember, Canada, just like the rest of the world, was still in the midst of the Great Depression, although things were slowly starting to get better. All of this would dramatically change over a period of just a few years. Factories that had once produced cars, appliances and other consumer goods were retooled to be placed on a war-production footing. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians were hired for these new industries and soon thousands of trucks, armoured vehicles, fighting planes, ships, and weapons were being produced right here in Canada and shipped overseas.

While 1939 had seen depression, but 1942 over \$ _____ billion dollars was being spent on Canada's war industry alone – which is almost \$ _____ billion in today's dollar. Between 1940

and 1942, Canada's total industrial output increased by 47%. By 1945, Canadian war factories had produced over _____ military vehicles, including tanks, and trucks.



To help raise the billions of dollars necessary to finance the war effort, the government introduced _____, also called victory loans. In exchange for lending the _____ money, individuals and corporations were given the government's written promise to repay the money with interest at a specified time. For \$4 Canadians could purchase a bond that they could redeem for \$5 at a later date – meaning they made a profit of \$1 in interest. Canadians showed massive patriotism by buying bonds. They felt good about themselves and their contribution to the war effort. **Altogether Canadians loaned the government over \$___ billion** to help pay for the war through Victory Bonds – which is equivalent to about \$___ billion dollars in today's money.

Canadians also contributed to the war effort by _____. This limited what people could buy at the store in an effort to make sure that as much food and supply went overseas as possible. The government introduced rationing to ensure that no one person could get more than anybody else in the country. Canadians received ration books that had coupons for essential goods such as _____, sugar, butter, _____, and _____. When customers went to purchase these goods, they had to present their coupons to get what they wanted. Canadians were expected to "tighten their belt" to ensure that there was enough food for those fighting overseas.



The government also introduced _____ in 1941 to help ensure that labourers could not take advantage of the shortage of labour and demand higher wages. A cost of living allowance was introduced, which stated that wages would _____ only when the price of goods _____. This was in an effort to make sure that businesses did not see their costs rise, which in turn would mean that prices would rise in the market as well. The government also controlled the prices, called _____, of many essential goods that Canadians would need, making sure that these goods did not become too expensive for people to purchase.

Canadian Culture During the War Years

While the War was still raging in Europe, life for many Canadians went on. Rations were introduced and people bought Victory Bonds, but people still wanted to be entertained.



Newspapers, radio broadcasts and newsreels reported on the latest efforts overseas and at home. Propaganda was everywhere, intensifying the hatred for the enemy and reinforcing the need to enlist and make every effort to win the war. In 1939 the government created the _____ (_____) to produce films that reflected Canadian culture. The NFB produced a number of propaganda films that were designed to bring people together and unify against the _____.

Paintings by the _____ were sent overseas to remind troops of Canada’s beauty; comic books featuring the popular “_____” were produced where he fought Hitler all by himself and destroying Hitler’s factories.

Questions



1. What were some of the ways that the role of women changed during WWII?
2. Why did people resent women going into the work place during WWII? What were some of the criticisms offered?
3. What was the importance of women going overseas to fight?
4. How did the efforts of Canadians on the Home Front helps the troops overseas?
5. Looking at the poster to the left: what is meant by the heading “We’re in the army now”? What is the purpose of this poster? Do you think that it is propaganda?