

The Gratitude owed our Canadian Veterans

Pete Aarssen - November 2020

As Remembrance day approaches, I find it hard to adequately express how much Canadians owe our veterans for their service and sacrifices. No seriously balanced person wants a war or an armed conflict to occur; still, most every nation on earth has experienced the consequences of having to do so, and Canada is no exception. Our men and women have always been ready, willing and able to respond in times of crisis. The thing is, do we as a nation still appreciate all that they have done? When just a fledgling nation, Canada contributed to her parent Country's war effort; the Boer War of South Africa from 1899-1902. Here, more than 7,000 Canadians served, and it cost 267 of them their lives. Now, 1902 is a long time ago with few of us aware of or even interested in why our involvement then matters today. I'd like to crystalize the scale of our military's contribution in support of Canada's own peace and security ever since. Most of the conflicts we have participated in have occurred far from our shores and as a partner to a group of nations efforts to restore law and order; good but many Canadians are oblivious to the historic scale of Canada's contribution to global peace and security. Let's start with WW1. When a nation of just 8 million souls, Canada and Newfoundland contributed 650,000 men and women to the war effort. More than 66,000 died with 172,000 more being wounded. While the last remaining WW1 veteran died in 2010, it is arguably in this war where Canada became a nation in the eyes of the world; recognized for the resolve, the bravery and the resourcefulness of her people; a reputation that remains to this day. Many of the children of our WW1 veterans, now seniors themselves, helped shape the values and standards that define Canadians today. Just 25 years after WW1, the 'war to end all wars', WW2 erupted and Canada was there from the outset! In this 6 year- long conflict, when a nation of 11 million souls, an even greater percentage of Canadians and Newfoundlanders served; more than 1 million. (Newfoundland became a Canadian Province in 1949). Here, more than 45,000 Canadians died and a further 55,000 were wounded. This year's Remembrance day services, shrouded as they will be with Covid-19 measures, most of the 33,000 remaining WW2 veterans will be out of public sight. There are still many veterans alive today able to inform our understanding of what it took to earn the freedoms and the liberties we enjoy today, if we but ask. Let's take a closer look at Canada's contributions to the other major conflicts of the past century. Following WW2, Canada contributed greatly to the Korean war of 1950-1953. More than 26,000 Canadian served in Korea with 516 giving their lives; the third deadliest conflict in Canadian history. While a fairly long period of time elapsed with Canada not committing her forces to any large scale world conflicts, we did commit our forces in the 60's, 70's and 80's to many peacekeeping missions in much lesser known battlefields throughout the world. In total, more than 125,000 Canadian military persons have served in 122 designated peacekeeping missions worldwide with it costing 130 Canadians their lives to do so. These commitments, coming to the aid of lesser known nations, further distinguished Canadians as a caring and generous people, committed to the restoration of peace and justice throughout the world. It wasn't that long ago that Canada also fought as a member of a coalition of nations in the first war in Iraq of 1990-1991. Here, more than 4,000 Canadians served. Thankfully, while naval, air and land forces were committed, no Canadian deaths were recorded. Just a year or so later, Canada became one of the lead nations working to restore peace and security in Bosnia-Herzegovina, engaged during the actual war of 1992-1995, with added peacekeeping responsibilities lasting to 2010! More than 40,000 Canadian military personnel served in the region resulting in 23 deaths. Canada's longest war was also her most recent, the war in Afghanistan between 2001-2014. More than 40,000 Canadians military personnel also served here resulting in 158 deaths and 1,800 wounded. Do you recall the steady stream of military funerals as soldier's remains returned home? I do. During the war in Afghanistan, 1 in 10 of Canada's entire military personnel took part. Canada's contributions to so many military conflicts illustrates the scale of Canada's long and profound support for world peace and security. On November 11th, lets recognize the profound contribution made by our nation's past soldiers, sailors and aircrew. We should also acknowledge our military personnel still serving abroad and those on active duty with NORAD, NATO or tasked to train for the potential defence of our home and native land. We will remember them!

