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## Service Flag

Canadians used service flags to show that members of a household were in the military. The number of maple leaves on the flags indicated the number of people serving. Leaves were changed to another colour – often red – if the people they represented were killed.

Reproduction



Service Flag © Canadian War Museum

### Recognizing Service

Service flags were part of a larger tradition of recognizing military service. Some households with family members in the military displayed flags such as this. The flags would often be placed in a window so that people passing by would see them.

Service flags allowed people to demonstrate their involvement in the war effort, while allowing them to express worry about family and friends in the military. Sometimes they indicated a death during military service. When a person was killed, the colour of their maple leaf might be changed – often to red.

## Canadians and Service Flags

Canadians began using this type of service flag during the First World War. They used them again during the Second World War. The service flag was a way for many Canadian households to demonstrate their patriotism at a time when people were expected to be loyal and devoted to their country.

Some businesses and other organizations also had service flags. In this case, the flags indicated the number of employees or organization members who were in military service.

## Different Kinds of Service Flags

Service flags could be purchased, but were sometimes homemade. They were produced in different fabrics, including cotton and silk. The maple leaves could be printed, embroidered, or sewn on. Sometimes, the flags hung from a wooden pole or cross-bar.

Since they were made by different people and manufacturers, their designs were not always the same. The reproduction in this Discovery Box is made from cotton. It is a design based on many different wartime examples.

The flag in the box also does not represent a specific family or location. It has two maple leaves. One is blue, representing a family member in the air force. The other is red, indicating that a family member had been killed.

## Did You Know?

Similar service flags, with stars instead of maple leaves, were used in the United States, starting in 1917. They are still used today. American service flags use blue stars for family members in military service, and gold stars for those who have died in service.