



**SUPPLY
LINE**

Women and the War Effort

The Second World War created new opportunities for women. They filled vacant wartime positions and served in all branches of the military. Women also faced pressure to volunteer, support the war and maintain households alone.

Paid Labour

The growing wartime economy needed more workers. Men were joining the military, so women were encouraged to replace them. At its wartime peak, Canada's paid workforce included more than one million women. Some took clerical and administrative jobs, including

work for the federal government, which was hiring more women. Others worked on assembly lines or in shipyards. News reports and propaganda often featured women in industrial jobs that had previously been seen as men's work.

Household Pressures

Many women also continued to work in the home or on farms, performing essential work that was often unpaid. They remained responsible for many household duties. The war only added to their workload. With family members away on military service, there was more work for those at home. For women, this often included dealing with rationing and price controls. Some wartime propaganda targeted

women. It urged them to save money while choosing food and clothing carefully.

Women also had to juggle child care and work outside the home. Day care was sometimes available, but women usually had to make arrangements with family or neighbours. Older children were often expected to take care of themselves after school.

Volunteer Efforts

Many women combined their daily tasks with volunteering in support of the war effort. Some sold Victory Bonds, War Savings Certificates and War Savings Stamps. Others knitted woolen items for military

personnel or raised funds to buy them treats. Women also joined organizations that helped people affected by the war, often acquiring first aid and medical training.

Women in Uniform

Many Canadians, including women, served in uniform. At the start of the Second World War, traditional ideas about women's roles kept them out of military service. Nurses were the only exception, having served in the Canadian military since 1885. Some women formed their own groups to learn military skills and lobbied the government to let them enlist.

As the need for Canadian military personnel grew, things changed. Women were now seen as suitable for non-combatant roles. The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) was the first branch of the armed forces to accept female recruits. It created the Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force (later the RCAF Women's Division)

in July 1941. The army soon followed with the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC) in August 1941. In July 1942, the Royal Canadian Navy created the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS).

By the end of the war, more than 50,000 Canadian women had served in uniform. About 25,000 had joined the CWAC, 17,000 served in the RCAF and 7,000 in the WRCNS. Approximately 5,000 women were military nurses. At the end of the war, most women were demobilized. They had blazed an important trail. By the early 1950s, women were again being recruited for military service.

Timeline

JULY 1941

Creation of Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Becomes Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division in February 1942.

AUGUST 1941

Creation of Canadian Women's Army Corps.

JULY 1942

Federal government introduces subsidized daycare for women in essential war industries; only Ontario and Quebec participate. Program ends in 1946.

JULY 1942

Introduction of coupon rationing.

JULY 1942

Introduction of Canada's Official Food Rules, forerunner of Canada's Food Guide.

JULY 1942

Creation of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service.

SEPTEMBER 1942

More women are needed to work in war industries. Under National Selective Service, women between the ages of 20 and 24 are registered by the government, to help locate women available for war work.

OCTOBER 1943

About 261,000 women are involved in producing war goods.

JULY 1945

The first family allowance cheques go out, via a government program created to help with the cost of raising children.