The Liberation of the Netherlands during the Second World War was one of the best-known chapters in our country’s long military history. In late 1944 and early 1945, the Canadians battled to push the Germans from the country they had occupied since the spring of 1940. With its challenging terrain, the Netherlands was a tough place to fight.

After opening battles in the fall of 1944, bad weather brought the offensive to a halt. That winter was a terrible time for the Dutch—food and fuel supplies were gone, people ate tulip bulbs and scavenged through garbage to survive. Thousands starved or froze to death.

Early in the new year, the push began anew to liberate the entire country and finally end the war in Europe. The Canadian troops were cheered as one town after another was freed. Veteran Robert Greene recalled of the liberation of the town of Emmelo:

“And in the town square, we moved our tanks in and within minutes, there were probably a couple of thousand people... And I got up in the turret and started the people singing the Dutch national anthem. And there wasn’t a dry eye to the place, 2,000 people. They hadn’t been able to sing for five years.”

The Liberation of the Netherlands was a proud achievement for our country but one that came at a great cost with more than 7,600 Canadians losing their lives. This spring marked the 75th anniversary of this important milestone. The Dutch people have never forgotten the help we offered in their time of need and a strong international friendship between our two countries continues today.

Winning the war on the high seas

The Battle of the Atlantic was the longest campaign of the Second World War. It began in September 1939 and the fighting in Europe would rage until May 1945. It was a showdown between the Allies, who needed to transport supplies and troops from North America to Europe, and the Germans, who wanted to cut that vital supply line. With courage and the adoption of new technology and tactics, however, the tide turned and the Allies would eventually triumph in the war at sea.

Members of the Royal Canadian Navy, Canadian Merchant Navy and Royal Canadian Air Force played leading roles in this battle. Indeed, more than 25,000 Allied merchant ships safely made it to their destination under Canadian escort, delivering some 165 million tons of supplies to Europe. The cost of helping the convoys get through was high—some 2,000 of our sailors died during the conflict, 750 Canadian airmen lost their lives over the Atlantic and more than 1,600 of our merchant seamen were killed. But without victory in the Battle of the Atlantic, the Allies could not have triumphed in the Second World War.

Peacemaking in the Congo

The political situation in the Congo has remained volatile and a small Canadian Armed Forces contingent has again been serving in the country in recent years.

Canadian service members have taken part in many peace support efforts in Africa over the years. One of the first was in the Congo in 1960. Hundreds of Canadians served in the troubled country as part of a large-scale United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission that ran for four years.

It was an eye-opening experience for our military personnel tasked with peacemaking in a place with so little peace to keep. Weapons and violence were widespread in a society that had been torn apart in the aftermath of its colonial period as a Belgian possession. Despite some successes, in the end the UN troops were unable to stop the greater forces of upheaval roiling the Congo and they departed in 1964. Sadly, two Canadian soldiers lost their lives there.

“The immediately were engaged and the Canadians fought extremely well in a hopeless situation. There wasn’t anybody there that did not know that we were in a terrible spot…”

Thousands of Royal Canadian Air Force members also served in Africa during the conflict. Most of them would take part in the Burma Campaign, working as radar operators and members of bomber, transport, reconnaissance and fighter squadrons.

Japenese surrender on 15 August 1945, after atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Victory over Japan (V-J) Day marked the end of almost six years of fighting in the Second World War. The Canadian prisoners of war were finally liberated and could return home.
Fighting for breath

It is hard for us today to imagine the horrors of fighting in the First World War. Heavy machine gun, rifle and artillery fire took a deadly toll on the soldiers in the trenches of the Western Front. But a terrible new weapon arrived on the battlefield on 22 April 1915 when the Germans released poison gas during the 2nd Battle of Ypres in Belgium.

The Allied troops beside the Canadian positions took the worst of the choking clouds of yellow-green chlorine and were forced to retreat. The Canadians quickly changed forward and the Canadian Women’s Army Corps, serving as a courier force established a special educational program to boost morale and give our soldiers the tools they needed to figure out what they wanted to do with their education once they returned to Canada. More than 50,000 students looking to further their formal education, the certificates they earned. Khaki uniforms). A variety of instructional courses were offered—primarily at military camps in Britain—on subjects like agriculture, business, mechanics, law, health and teaching. Thousands of illiterate men also learned to read and write. For more advanced students looking to further their formal education, the certificates they earned there were also accepted by universities back in Canada. More than 30,000 Canadians would attend Khaki University before it closed in 1919 after the First World War had come to an end. This dedication to helping Veterans with their education has endured. Khaki University agriculture club existing the Royal Farms at Windsor Castle in England.

Some Canadian military milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22 April 1915</td>
<td>Canadians see first major action at Ypres</td>
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<td>9 April 1917</td>
<td>Start of the Battle of Vimy Ridge</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 11, 1918</td>
<td>End of the First World War</td>
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<td>25 December 1941</td>
<td>Canadians in Hong Kong forced to surrender</td>
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<td>8 April 1944</td>
<td>Canadians fight in D-Day and the Battle of Normandy</td>
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<td>15 August 1944</td>
<td>Canadians liberate the Netherlands</td>
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<td>5 May 1945</td>
<td>Canadians liberate the Netherlands</td>
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<td>8 May 1945</td>
<td>Victory in Europe (V-E) Day</td>
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Studying at “Khaki University”

Imagine being a young Canadian serving overseas during the First World War. Surviving the conflict and getting back home would likely be on your mind a lot. Hundreds of thousands of Canadian service members had enlisted as teenagers, so returning home meant figuring out what they wanted to do with the rest of their lives. As the war neared its end, the Canadian Expeditionary Force established a special educational program to boost morale and give our soldiers skills that they could use in their civilian lives.

The happy couple celebrating their 70th wedding anniversary in 2010.

A Major accomplishment

They were promoted and came under fire. Arsenault was killed and an angry German commander. Major explained that if their troops did not retreat, the Canadians would shell the historic town, killing many people. To convince the enemy, the clever Major then ran around Zwolle firing his weapons and throwing grenades, making it seem like the attack was underway. The Germans were fooled and pulled out, allowing the Canadians to enter Zwolle on April 14, without a fight. Thanks to Major’s outstanding bravery, the town and many lives had been saved.

Years have passed but Léo Major is still a legend in the Netherlands. He was made an honorary citizen of Zwolle in 2005 and recently, the local soccer club even put his name on their game jerseys to mark the 75th anniversary of the country’s liberation.

A Second World War Love Story

Vicky Goosyard and Bill Luscobome were both born in July 1925 in St. John’s, Newfoundland, and were cared for in the same hospital nursery.

They turned 18 during the Second World War and both joined the Canadian Army. Vicky was drafted right after through both the night and into the next day to close the large gap that had developed in the defensive lines. Our soldiers’ heroic actions gave the Allies time to recover and prevent a massive enemy breakthrough. On April 24, however, the Germans launched another gas attack—and this time the Canadians were the primary targets. In a nightmare of fighting that saw the Canadians gasping for air through sneak and muddled tunnels, they held on against all odds until Allied reinforcements arrived.

In their first major action of the war, our soldiers had begun building a remarkable reputation for skill and valor on the battlefield. It came as a steep cost, however, as more than 2,000 Canadians were killed and 4,000 wounded.

It had been years since the two were cared for in the same nursery, but love quickly blossomed. They married soon after and raised a family of five children. Years have passed but Léo Major is still a legend in the Netherlands. He was made an honorary citizen of Zwolle in 2005 and recently, the local soccer club even put his name on their game jerseys to mark the 75th anniversary of the country’s liberation.

Our country has a long and proud tradition of serving in international peace support efforts. Twenty years ago, Canadian Armed Forces members deployed to Ethiopia and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa to take part in a large United Nations (UN) mission.

Ethiopia and Eritrea had once been one country but Eritrea gained its independence in 1993 after a bloody civil war. However, border disputes again flared into open fighting in the late 1990s before a cease-fire was declared in 2000 and UN peacekeepers moved in. Some 400 Canadian Armed Forces members—including armoured reconnaissance, mechanized infantry, engineer and support elements—were part of the initial UN force. Canadian soldiers established checkpoints and patrolled bases to help enforce the terms of the peace treaty before their six-month deployment came to an end.

Some Canadian soldiers also worked as UN Military Observers in the hot and dusty region until mid-2003, monitoring the security zone and helping arrange humanitarian aid for the local civilians. The Canadians who served in Ethiopia and Eritrea also often volunteered their personal time and resources to help the people there by rebuilding a damaged school and distributing clothes, school supplies, sports equipment and toys to children.

The Second Battle of Ypres, 22 April to 25 May 1915 painting by Richard Jack.

A Major accomplishment

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Young Canadians remember

Salma Khattab moved from Egypt to Canada with her family at a young age. In 2019 she travelled with a government delegation to Italy to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Italian Campaign. As a new Canadian, she had often found it hard to connect with her new country’s efforts in the Second World War. However, her experience as a youth delegate gave her a whole new perspective:

"Firstly, lessons learned from war are to be learned universally—no matter where you are from. Secondly, I learned I need to reflect on my own privilege with no relatives who served in the military. His great-grandfather, Douglas Moore, was a sailor on HMCS Canadair F-86 Sabres were the best jet fighters of their day.

The desire to honour Canadians who helped liberate their country during the Second World War runs deep in the people of the Netherlands. Remembrance is almost a part of the Dutch DNA—sometimes they even name their children after Canadian Veterans!

One Canadian who served in the Netherlands campaign, William G. Ludlow of Montreal, returned to the country for a visit 70 years later and stayed with a local couple in Apeldoorn named Henk and Olga. They became close with Mr. Ludlow and when they had their first child, Tijl, in the fall of 2017, they decided to give him the middle name Ludlow in honour of their friend and hero.

Kayden MacPhee does have a family member who had served in the Canadian military. His great-grandfather, Douglas Moore, was a sailor on HMCS Anson in 1951 and was 19 years old, serving in the Royal Canadian Navy. Kayden received the uniform but was shocked by how tiny it was. Really wanting to honour his great-grandfather, he managed to squeeze into the uniform and cap—and proudly wore it to school.

What’s in a name?

The new parents said they will explain the significance of his name when their child is old enough to understand that he “will be able to live in peace because of the sacrifice of the Canadian soldiers.”

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"Attending a remembrance ceremony with Veterans of the campaign, listening to their stories, is something I will always remember. Witnessing the Veterans’ pride as we promised to remember their contributions and the ultimate sacrifice that many of their comrades made, was a remarkable experience that I am thankful for every day. As for myself, I will always be grateful for their sacrifice and will forever remember what they did to protect the country that I now call home.”

Hannah Yang worked in France as a student guide at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial and the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial in 2009. Being of South Korean descent, with no relatives who served in the First World War, she initially felt less qualified to represent Canada there. But over time, she realized she could not be more wrong.

PROTECTING THE SKIES OVER EUROPE

Canada was an important part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces that served in Western Europe during the Cold War. This military alliance helped protect the democratic countries of the west from the communist forces massed on the other side of the “Iron Curtain” in Eastern Europe from the early 1940s to the early 1990s. Canadian forces flew Sabres were the “top guns” of their day.

When the First World War erupted in 1914, more than 10,000 former British Home Children would volunteer for military service. Often motivated by the chance to get back to the United Kingdom on their way to the front lines of Europe they could hunt for lost family connections, while also helping out with other chores. Some children ended up in war-torn and supportive homes, but sadly many were not treated well.

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Down 1. Battle in Belgium where poison gas was first used on 22 April 1915. 2. First name of Canadian Women's Army Corps driver from Newfoundland. 3. Agreement signed on 27 July 1953 to end the Fighting in the Korean War. 4. An African country where Canadian Armed Forces members deployed to in 2000. 5. Contention that Allied ships delivered supplies to during the Second World War. 7. Dutch city where William Ludlow met local couple Henk and Olga. 8. Canadian Armed Forces Nursing Officer helping a child in Iraq in 2013. 9. Commander of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). 10. Bag of bones. 11. City freed by Léo Major in April 1945. 12. Canadian Armed Forces members, at home and abroad. When serving in peace support missions overseas, Nursing Officers often face the same hazards and conditions as many other troops. Their long tradition of professionalism and care is still going strong. Thank you for all you do, Nursing Officers!

Honouring Corporal Karine Blais

Karine Blais grew up in Les Méchins, Quebec. She joined the military at age 18 and was deployed to Afghanistan with the 2nd Battalion 33rd Canadian Infantry Regiment. The dangers of serving in a war zone are constant. Only two weeks after her arrival, the vehicle she was travelling in hit a roadside bomb near Kandahar on April 15, killing the 24-year-old woman and wounding four more soldiers. Her death was a huge loss to her family, comrades and friends, and a brutal reminder that life is fragile.

The community supported by her former regiment, decided to pay tribute to Corporal Blais. They erected a statue of her along the picturesque St. Lawrence River. The statue is in a small roadside park and includes flags, two benches and a memorial plaque. More than 20 years have passed since her tragic death, but her memory lives on.

The next time you are buying a snack, have a close look at the money you may be using. The Royal Canadian Mint has created a number of special 2020 coins that commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Some of them are collector editions that must be ordered but an eye-catching $2 coin was widely released in September. Its design features “V for Victory”—a famous slogan and symbol that helped keep hope alive in Britain, Canada and other Allied countries during the dark days of the Second World War. So keep your eyes open for some cool history in your pocket—don’t forget to share this with others so we can all remember the sacrifices of our fallen soldiers like Brigadier Angle.

Angelo continued his impressive military career after the war. Tragically, he died in a plane crash on 17 July 1953, while serving as Chief Military Observer in Kashmir with the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan. He was the first Canadian to lose his life while serving in a United Nations mission. He was laid to rest in the York Road Cemetery in New Delhi, India—the only Canadian serviceman buried there.

Explore our “Remembrance dog tags — Canadians buried abroad” activity on the Veterans Affairs Canada website to learn more about fallen soldiers like Brigadier Angle.

The dangers of peacekeeping

Being a member of the military often means putting your life on the line, even if it’s not in the middle of a war zone. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians have served since the Korean War and, sadly, more than 1,800 have died in the course of duty. Brigadier Harry Herbert Angle was one of them.

Angle was born in 1906 in England and moved to Canada at 16 to work on fruit farms in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. He enlisted in the Canadian Army in 1939, shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War. He rose through the ranks to command the Canadian Dragons by the end of the conflict, fighting in Italy and North Europe. His bravery was recognized in April 1945, when he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

The year 2020 has been designated the Year of the Homefront Hero — the Inuk elder was honored in 2020 by Parks Canada as a hometown hero. He participated in the bone collection effort.

Louis Cuppens was born in 1943 in Nijmegen, Netherlands, during the harsh German occupation in the Second World War. His family, like so many others, suffered from persecution and starvation. Over 125,000 Canadians took part in the Liberation of the Netherlands. The efforts of our troops were greatly appreciated by the Dutch people and the Cuppens family was moved to immigrate to Canada and build a new life.

Settling in New Brunswick in 1970, the family never forgot the sacrifices of Canadian soldiers. Louis’ father, Frans, joined the Royal Canadian Legion because he wanted to support Veterans. Louis decided to join the Canadian military in 1990 in his own way to show his appreciation. He had a long and distinguished career in uniform, retiring in 1998 as Deputy-Commander-in-Chief of the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD). His service to Canada did not end, however, as Lieutenant-General Cuppens (Retired) went on to be the President of the National Post Fund and serve on the board of the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, among other commitments.

Appreciating living in “the land of the free,” he remains a strong advocate for Veterans—his way of supporting a new generation of service members.