



History of Women in the Canadian Military

Barbara Dundas

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Courage, loyalty and devotion to duty in time of war, strife and emergency are qualities that Canadians have demonstrated throughout their history. The participation of women during such times extends back to the French and British colonial eras when, as civilians, they played an active role in the struggles leading up to Canadian nationhood. While there has been many contributions of bravery by women that are part of Canada's rich heritage, it is the story of women in uniform that is the focus of attention.

During Canada's early military history, it was in the nursing work that women exerted their greatest influence. The nursing tradition formed the basis for the first six decades of women's service with the armed forces of Canada. In 1901, the Canadian Nursing Service was created and responded Canada's involvement in the First World War, serving in hospitals in Britain, on the Western Front and elsewhere. The advent of the Second World War saw the role of women expanded beyond the traditional one of nursing and by 1942, all three armed services had established organizations for women. Though disbanded afterwards, the Korean War and the dawn of the Cold War era brought Canadian women into uniform once again. This time their organizations would endure.

The succeeding decades witness an increase in the number of military occupations open to women and the move towards full gender integration within the Canadian Armed Forces.

The year 2004 marks the 119th anniversary of the first response by Canadian women to their nation's call to service. The intervening years have seen triumph and tragedy, heroism and quiet duty, and the development of the tradition of service that is presented in this lavishly illustrated book.

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