

4-26-2012

Canada's Coming of Age: A New Resource for Schools

Recommended Citation

(1996) "Canada's Coming of Age: A New Resource for Schools," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 16.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol5/iss2/16>

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Canada's Coming of Age 1939-1945

A New Resource for Schools

Canada In 1939 was only 72 years old, a society of small cities and limited industry emerging from an agrarian economy, with little influence on the world stage, our colonial past a recent memory.

Within six short years this description would no longer apply. Canada was transformed into a progressive, productive middle power, respected throughout the world. During the period 1939-1945, our industries and farms produced far beyond expectations and became a life-line to the economy of Britain. Our growing cities bustled with industrious workers, many of whom were fresh arrivals from rural areas and other regions of the country. A vast network of training facilities and war era housing sprang up almost overnight. Children did their part by saving money for war bond drives and collecting scrap materials for recycling, long before our age of environmental awareness. Canadians of all ages possessed a great sense of mission and a spirit of self-sacrifice that was necessary to help overcome the great challenges that faced this country and its allies. By war's end, 45,000 Canadians had given their lives to the struggle to defeat the menace to civilization presented by militarism and fascism. In the end, our world outlook was changed forever.

How many Canadians today, under the age of 35 are cognisant of all this?

During the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War there was considerable public debate over the need for increased visibility of the Canadian war

experience in schools. Many have compared the exposure of Canadian youth to Second World War history with that of the Dutch and found ours lacking. Others have expressed a concern that the knowledge and appreciation of our veterans will increasingly fade with the generation of men and women who lived through those times and bore the burden for our continuing benefit. The discussion has continued to the time of writing, in the summer of 1996. As of September, a new educational resource has become available that

we hope will encourage young people to appreciate what this young country and its citizens, both overseas and at home, accomplished from 1939-1945.



In 1994-1995, Veterans Affairs Canada oversaw the Canada Remembers program, a federal initiative that commemorated the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. One of the objectives of the program was to reach out to youth to make them more aware of the sacrifices of the war generation. Throughout the duration of the Canada Remembers program, a considerable amount of material, both written and audio-visual, was produced and distributed. Much of this material came into the hands of teachers and was positively received. As a consequence, Veterans Affairs Canada was encouraged to continue beyond the limitations of an event driven program and to produce a more permanent Canadian resource for teachers on the war years, using some of the material produced under the Canada Remembers program. The result is the resource kit, "Canada's Coming of Age, 1939-1945."

The elements of the resource kit are as follows:

- A three-hour video series, entitled "Canada Remembers." This series was co-produced by the Canada Remembers Committee and the National Film Board and broadcast nationally by CBC/Radio Canada in April 1995. The independently-produced French version is entitled "Le Temps d'une Guerre." The series, now re-mastered into six half-hour segments suitable for classroom time schedules, is a collection of frank and compelling interviews with men and women who lived through the Second World War and served as soldiers, sailors, airmen, nursing sisters, as workers in industry, all interspersed with much original archival footage. Suitable for high school levels and above.
- A set of four posters, designed to appeal to the rich imagination of a child, tell the story in pictures of a family caught up in the events of the war years: the farewell at the train station, the father going overseas, the mother in an aircraft production plant, and the family reunion after six years of separation. The posters were designed for elementary and intermediate school levels.
- A glossy magazine including nine articles, with subjects ranging from service and training overseas, industrial production, life on the home front, to Canada's war artists, as well as a chronology of the war from a Canadian perspective. For high school levels.
- A music video for senior elementary/intermediate levels, which features the song, "We Will Remember." A young man explores an old trunk in the attic and discovers his grandparents' commitment to the war effort. The actors are an actual family of three generations.
- Five short vignettes highlight themes of remembrance, the role of women in industry, friendship with the Dutch and pride in the accomplishments of Canadians, who met the huge challenge the war years presented to a nation still young. The

vignettes were originally produced as public service announcements for the Canada Remembers program. Some continue to receive air play on various networks and stations.

- "Canada Remembers Holland" video: This half-hour video features ten Canadian teenagers who travelled to the Netherlands with a veterans pilgrimage, where they learned a new respect for what Canadian veterans endured in order to liberate the Dutch from Nazi occupation.
- All of the above elements have a corresponding section in the teachers' guide, which was produced in consultation with, and with the input of, educators across Canada at all levels.

The objective is to encourage young Canadians to learn about what this country went through, how it met the challenge through perseverance, commitment and working together to help put an end to the militarism taking root in Europe and Asia. The hope is that our youth will see reason to take pride in Canada, in what is considered by many to be the best place on the planet in which to live, and to learn that, with these values in hand, there is nothing we cannot accomplish.

After all, we've done it before.

Further inquiries may be made and order brochures obtained at:

Canada Remembers Education Program
Veterans Affairs Canada
1208-66 Slater St
Ottawa, K1A0P4

Orders also accepted through the Canada Post fulfilment centre at 1-800-565-4362. The cost of the kit is \$49.95 (includes postage and handling), plus applicable taxes.