

The Faces of Peace

Veterans of the Canadian Forces

The mission of the Canadian Forces members is to defend our country, its interests and its values, while contributing to international peace and security. They serve in many capacities at home and throughout the world carrying on Canada's proud military tradition.

Over the years many Canadian Forces veterans have served overseas in a variety of United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and other multinational task forces.

International peace missions often have positive effects but strife, conflict and death that can surround these efforts is not always easy to handle. Being separated from friends and family for months at a time, the possibility of witnessing extreme violence and cruelty, of having to use force or have force used against you, and the realization that you could be killed or wounded while carrying out your duties are some of the experiences that many Canadian Forces veterans know well.

International Efforts

During the first half of the 20th century, some 1.5 million Canadians were called upon to defend peace and freedom around the world during the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War.

Following these terrible conflicts, in which more than 110,000 Canadians died, Canada and other countries felt that it was better to try to prevent wars when possible than fight them. Our country played a leading role in the peacekeeping movement from the outset. In fact, a Canadian, Lester B. Pearson, won the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize for his pioneering vision in helping establish a UN force to prevent the Suez Crisis of the 1950s from escalating into a global confrontation.

Peace Mission Challenges

"Peacekeeping" is based on the idea that having a force of impartial troops present in a regional conflict can help reduce tensions and improve the chance of peaceful settlement to a violent conflict. But filling this role is demanding work. Put yourself in the boots of a person leaving on an international peace mission.

You could be called upon to monitor ceasefires, patrol buffer zones, act as an intermediary between clashing groups, clear landmines, investigate war crimes, protect refugees and provide humanitarian assistance.

The role of the Canadian Forces now involves all aspects of peace support, including peace-making and peace-building. The skills and training needed for peace support includes “combat skills” as well as “contact skills”. Their lives and the lives of others often depend on their skills in both areas and their ability to use both at the same time.

Each situation encountered by Canadian Forces when they enter into a new peace mission is unique. Canadian Forces members returning from peace missions often remark that “there was very little peace to keep”, a reference to the fact that our military is often asked to intervene in situations of full fledged war where the environment is not at all peaceful.

Facts and Figures

- The number of Canadians who have served has varied greatly over the years according to the needs of our country and the world. Over one million Canadians served during the Second World War. Our present day military numbers are approximately 60,000 regular force members and 20,000 reservists.
- More than 125,000 Canadian Forces members have served in dozens of international peace missions to more than 35 countries over the past six decades. Approximately 125 Canadians have died in these efforts and many more have suffered physical and mental injury.
- The Canadian Forces perform many other important functions. Search and Rescue operations, patrolling our air space and territorial waters, supporting anti-drug operations and helping out in the aftermath of natural disasters, such as the Manitoba flood of 1997 or the Great Ice Storm of 1998, are just a sample of some of these vital duties.

Heroes and Bravery

In 1988, the prestigious Nobel Peace prize was collectively awarded to the world's peacekeepers, including thousands of Canadians, who served in UN missions during that year. This honour inspired Canada to create the Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal. Tens of thousands of serving Canadian Forces members and veterans proudly wear this medal.

International peace missions have a large element of “reaching out.” While there is always a political element to peace missions, the on-the-ground efforts are often characterized by human emotion and compassion.

For example, during the UN peace efforts in Somalia in the early 1990's, Naval Lieutenant Heather MacKinnon operated and provided humanitarian assistance to the

victims of war and famine in the embattled city of Mogadishu. It was a tense and dangerous time, and the risks of working there were very real. Lt. MacKinnon helped many people in this time of great upheaval and laid the groundwork for further relief efforts in the battered country.

Sacrifice

Many Canadians have served on several international missions in the course of their careers repeatedly fulfilling their duties against the constant background of danger. One example of this special effort comes from Master Corporal Mark Isfeld. He was a combat engineer who served in three peace missions before losing his life in a landmine explosion in Croatia in 1994. This Canadian soldier was known for giving children in war-torn regions handmade dolls that his mother and others in Canada had made. He passed out these dolls to try to bring a little happiness and hope to the children. After his tragic death, the story began to spread of how he touched children's lives with those handmade dolls from Canada. Thousands of these dolls then began to flood in from people all across Canada who decided to make dolls for other Canadian soldiers to give away overseas and keep M.Cpl. Isfeld's tradition alive. The dolls have since become known as "Izzy dolls."

Canadian Forces veterans have made many personal and global achievements, and have made personal sacrifices to defend Canada's interests and its values, while contributing to international peace and security. These men and women take their honoured place in our country's military history beside their fellow veterans and fallen comrades of Canada's earlier war efforts. Their commitment has earned Canada a worldwide reputation as a country that supports and protects peace.

Canada Remembers Program

As the years have passed, the focus of commemorative events like Remembrance Day has expanded. Where once they centered on the achievements and sacrifices of the veterans of the World Wars and Korea, they now include the veterans of "peacetime" Canadian Forces activities.

The Canada Remembers Program of Veterans Affairs Canada encourages all Canadians to learn about the sacrifices and achievements made by Canada's veterans during times of war, military conflict and peace, and to become involved in remembrance activities that will help to preserve their legacy for future generations.

For More Information

- Veterans Affairs Canada – Canada Remembers -- www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers
- Canadian Military History Gateway -- www.cmhg.gc.ca

- Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association - www.cpva.ca/home_e.html
- Gulf War Veterans Association of Canada – www.jetnet.ab.ca/gulfwarva
- Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping – www.peacekeeper.ca/cavunp.html
- The Royal Canadian Legion – www.legion.ca