

THE ADMIRAL'S VIEW

**The Legacy of
"Service Before Self" –
Lest We Forget**



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More than fifty years before Confederation, the inhabitants of what would later become Canada stood together to preserve their way of life during the War of 1812. Since that war, and over the course of 200 years, Canada was born and has evolved amidst the turmoil of a shrinking globe. Notwithstanding the staggering changes that have occurred since 1812, there is a tradition of "service before self" which has its roots in that pre-Confederation conflict. There were, and continue to be, Canadian men and women who place the ideals of freedom and justice ahead of their own well-being. These Canadians, who stood on guard for this nation, are our veterans.

When we think of veterans, we cannot help but remember the men and women who served in the wars of the first half of the last century. World War I conjures up horrific images of trench warfare, mud, barbed wire, poisonous gas and an overwhelming death toll from artillery and machine gun fire. The scale of the sacrifice made by Canadians during this conflict was staggering. Over 66,000 service personnel from the fledgling nation of Canada were killed during World War I. Despite the horrors faced by Canadian service personnel during this global conflict, the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) prevailed. The seizing of Vimy Ridge by Canadian troops in April of 1917 is considered by many historians to be a defining moment for Canada. Following the heroic victory at Vimy Ridge, the CEF was at the fore of the Allied war effort until the end of hostilities. This was only made possible by the sacrifice of the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who entered the war in support of a common goal - to fight the war to end all wars.

Following the sacrifice of Canadians during the First World War, another global conflict erupted two decades later with the declaration of World War II in 1939. Canadians again answered the call to fight for freedom, and all three branches, Army, Navy and Air Force, grew exponentially as Canada transformed into a nation at war. As an illustration of this point, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) grew from a pre-war strength of under 2000 Regular Force members to a peak war strength of over 96,000 Reserve and Regular Force members. This phenomenal growth in



the RCN was necessary to sustain the war's longest continuous battle, the Battle of the Atlantic, which lasted from 1939 until Germany's defeat in 1945. This struggle to control the seaways was essential to maintaining the flow of resources from North America to Europe in support of the war effort. Germany's submarine fleets prowled the Atlantic Ocean, torpedoing Allied transport ships in an effort to stop the shipment of resources. This brutal struggle raged throughout the Atlantic and many ships were sunk within sight of the Canadian coastline. The veterans of the Battle of the Atlantic faced a determined and highly capable foe. In addition to the threat of being torpedoed, our naval veterans endured terrible living conditions in small primitive ships which operated in the worst weather the North Atlantic had to offer. The Allied victory in Europe would not have been possible without this victory at sea, achieved by the combined efforts of the RCN, the Merchant Navy, and the RCAF. These sailors and airmen willingly placed service to Canada before self and, as a result, the Battle of Atlantic was won.

Fortunately, Canada has not had to fight a global war since the end of World War II. Although the scale of conflicts in which Canada has been engaged since the global wars of the last century is significantly less, the sacrifices made by our Canadian Forces men and women on behalf of the people of Canada are no less important. Successive generations of veterans have served Canada in war-torn parts of the globe in support of those same Canadian ideals of freedom, justice and respect for all persons which were cherished by the veterans of the global wars. The expression of "service before self" is epitomized by the sacrifices made by our veterans in such conflicts as Korea, Rwanda, the former Republic of Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Libya. As we pause this Remembrance Day to remember the selfless service of our Canadian veterans of days gone by, let us not forget the sacrifices that our modern veterans are making today.