

Many Milestones Mark Part Played by Canada In Victory Over Huns

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When Prime Minister Chamberlain told the world Sept. 3, 1939, that Britain would stand by her word to invade Poland, Canadian participation in the war thus declared started at once.

Already serving in the RAF was a group of Canadian airmen trained in Britain, and they went into their fighting roles immediately, though Canada's formal declaration of war followed the Mother Country's by a week.

In the months that followed, the Dominion set about the groundwork of war organization that gradually converted her into one of the important arsenals of fighting democracy. During that slow process these airmen became pioneers in the recreation of Canada's distinguished tradition of war service.

While at home men stepped into their first battle-dress and the Government concluded negotiations for air training of Empire fliers on a vast scale, Canadians in the RAF flew on early bombing raids, of mere token significance by present-day standards of air strength.

Canada's hand in the war likewise was a mere token then, but as the early months went by there appeared the first signs of what was to be an important contribution by the Dominion.

First Contingent Leaves

A week before Christmas, 1939, the first contingent of Canadian troops was revealed to have reached Britain, and five days after Christmas a second contingent was safely in the British Isles.

By the standards of fitness and competency of the troops who later struck at Sicily and up through Italy and then in the invasion of France, the new arrivals were raw recruits. However, they started to train to be good soldiers and as they did the first awards for gallantry were made to the men with the RAF.

In February the personnel of the first RCAF squadron reached Britain and fresh troops arrived. Norway was invaded in early April and the Canadians were ordered to prepare for their first action of the war, but the orders were cancelled.

Canadian names appeared in RAF casualty lists and further groups of Canadians in battle-dress reached the country. Then Germany thrust through the Low Countries.

Orders Cancelled

The German invasion westward became the Battle of France and the Canadian 1st Division got ready to embark. The defense of France was a debacle and again sailing orders were cancelled. A few Canadian officers and men who had gone to France earlier were withdrawn.

The eyes of the German High Command turned to Britain and the Luftwaffe carried blows of increasing weight across the Channel.

Invasion talk was in the air and the Canadian troops in England went through defense exercises. Plans for the formation of a Canadian Corps were mentioned.

Troops of the 2nd Canadian Division arrived in August as the Battle of Britain speeded up, with Canadians in RAF squadrons helping defend the skies.

While the battle was at its

height awards to Canadians in the Royal Navy told of the service men of the Dominion were giving at sea. Canada took over a half-dozen over-age United States destroyers and put her own personnel aboard.

Line Invasion Coast

Canadian airmen fighting in the Battle of Britain helped build up the count of 1,000 attacking enemy planes destroyed in three weeks.

Canadian troops moved into defensive positions on the invasion coast as the RAF broke the back of daylight attacks, but Canada lost her finest liner, the Empress of Britain, to German bombers.

As the year ended, the first graduates of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan arrived in Britain from Canada.

Through the winter months, Britain took the blitz and survived it. The 1st Canadian Corps was formed and Canadian tunnellers went to Gibraltar to help improve the defences of the fortress. There were formal announcements that the Royal Canadian Navy was growing in size, though numbers of particular types of ships could not be revealed because of the interested enemy.

The first RCAF fighter squadron was formed and Canadian troops kept coming across the Atlantic, while those in training in Britain polished up their soldiering by manoeuvres.

In September, 1941, as the Germans marched east in their Russian campaign, Canadian troops made their first headlines with a raid on Arctic Spitsbergen. Canadians in an RAF fighter wing went to the Russian front and the RCAF became active with Coastal Command.

Pacific War

In November, on the other side of the world, Canadian infantrymen sailed to Hong Kong to strengthen that garrison as Far Eastern affairs reached a crisis. The first Canadian tank troops arrived in England.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war, and an immediate invasion attempt on Hong Kong was launched. Hong Kong surrendered to the Japanese on Canada's gloomiest Christmas Day of the war.

Malta was put to trial by the German and Italian air forces in the New Year and Canadians flew in the island's seemingly-hopeless defense. Canadians now served in several theatres, numbered some 200,000 in battle-dress and 100,000 in the uniform of the air force.

The name of the RCAF was well-known to the enemy by now. Canadians in Ceylon helped beat down a Japanese air attack, and an RCAF Coastal Command unit earned the nickname "Demon Squadron" for its kills.

Returning from Canada after a visit for consultation purposes, Gen. McNaughton carried out plans for the formation of the 1st Canadian Army.

May 30, 1942, RCAF crews flew in what then was the greatest bombing operation of all time. The force of 1,000 bombers that roared out from the British Isles hit Cologne. As Malta kept up its gallant defence, a Canadian in the RAF, George Beurling, piled up a score as a fighter pilot that made him one of the war's greatest flying aces.

Dieppe Raid

In the early summer a special Canadian force undertook elaborate combined operations exercises and

struck Aug. 19 at Dieppe. The big raid was fierce and costly, but the Luftwaffe was lured into one of its greatest defeats of the war, while the Allies achieved an effective formula for combined operations and learned lessons for the further use of men, planes and ships together.

At Fort Benning, Ga., Canadians went into training as paratroops and a specialized Canadian-United States shock force was formed.

The RCAF's share in more and more weighty bombing raids on Germany grew bigger and plans were made for an RCAF bomber group. A bomber squadron manned by French-speaking Canadians became operational.

In October a Canadian naval force in the North Pacific worked with United States forces in the occupation of the Andreanof Islands. As the year 1942 ended, RCAF bombers flew over the Alps to Italian targets with the RAF. Canadians flying RAF bombers as well as their own were estimated to make up more than 25 per cent of the aircrew personnel of the parent force. RCAF squadrons overseas numbered more than 30.

Early in 1943, Canadian troops were promised action and a detachment representing units of the 1st Canadian Army joined the British 1st Army fighting in North Africa after the joint United States-British landings in which the Royal Canadian Navy helped.

Canadian corvettes operated in the Mediterranean, while the British 1st and 8th Armies and United States forces strangled the Axis there.

July 10, combined British and United States forces invaded Sicily, with the 1st Canadian division forming part of Gen. Montgomery's army.

Invasions Multiply

The Canadians fought with distinction in an important campaign role, and then on the fourth anniversary of the start of the war landed on the toe of Italy with a British division.

In the meantime a joint Canadian-United States force occupied Kiska Island in the Aleutians without opposition.

While the Canadians in Italy were increased to the size of a corps and helped in the liberation of Rome and the ensuing drive into Northern Italy, preparations went forward for Canadian participation in the main invasion of Europe.

Months of intensive organization were climaxed when the Canadian 3rd Division on June 6, 1944, struck the Normandy beachheads as part of Gen. Montgomery's powerful initial assault force. The 3rd was

followed into battle by the 2nd and 4th (armored) divisions with which it made up part of the 1st Canadian Army.

British, American, Polish, Belgian and Netherlands troops also served under Gen. Crerar, who had succeeded Gen. McNaughton.

The Canadians took Caen, July 9, broke through to Falaise in August and then co-operated with Americans to rout the 7th German Army at Falaise and Trun. The 1st Canadian Army then drove the enemy from the Channel ports, taking Rouen, Dieppe and Le Havre. In Belgium troops under Gen. Crerar's command captured Dixmude, Ostende, Zeebrugge and Brugge, and by the end of September fought in the Antwerp area. Two other ports held out for some weeks, Boulogne being captured Sept. 20 and Calais Oct. 1.

Canadians cleared the Antwerp port area early in October and the long and costly battle for domination of the Schelde Estuary followed.

A period of static warfare ensued and this ended Feb. 8 when the 1st Canadian Army launched an offensive southeast of Nijmegen in Holland that carried the fighting men well into Germany.

Canadian members of the joint Canadian-United States special service force, veterans of Kiska and Italy, took part in commando-like blows Aug. 15 which knocked out German defenses in the Southern France invasion before the main American-French forces landed. Canadian naval units shared in the initial operations.

149
WAR
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