



CANADA REMEMBERS

The Canadian Armed Forces in Cambodia



INTRODUCTION

More than a thousand Canadians served in Cambodia to help stabilize and rebuild the country during four peace support missions spread over the years 1954 to 2000.

CAMBODIA

Cambodia is a tropical country in Southeast Asia. It has an area of approximately 180,000 km² (about three times the size of Nova Scotia) and a population of more than 14 million people. It is a hot and humid country, but also very poor. Bordering Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, Cambodia was formerly a part of French Indochina, a colony of France that was founded in the 1800s but was dissolved in the years following the Second World War.

Cambodia became an independent country after the end of colonial rule, but the ensuing power struggle, the Vietnam War (which spilled over into Cambodia at times) and a military coup resulted in constant internal strife. The Khmer Rouge faction gained power in 1975 (renaming the country Kampuchea) and its Communist regime saw the deaths of an estimated two million Cambodians to famine, sickness, forced labour and execution. After four years of terror, the government was overthrown following an invasion by neighbouring Vietnam which then occupied much of the country. Resistance groups fought for control and the violence continued. When Vietnam announced it would finally withdraw from the country in the late 1980s, a new chapter in Cambodia's history began—one which

Canada and the international community would help bring about.

CANADA AND THE WORLD RESPONDS

Our country's first efforts in Cambodia began in 1954 when approximately 30 Canadians went there as part of the International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC). This military mission had been set up by the international community to help French Indochina make the rocky transition to becoming the countries of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The Canadians serving in Cambodia helped maintain order and supervised the withdrawal of French colonial forces, as well as those from neighbouring countries. International personnel also watched for border violations in the volatile region, and monitored the first elections in the new country. The ICSC mission was soon reduced in size and, after a few years, only a token number of Canadians would serve there until the mission finally ended in 1969.

Canadian Armed Forces members would again travel to Cambodia in late 1991 as part of the international efforts to help the war-torn country following the horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime and the ensuing Vietnamese occupation and civil war. The United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC) was tasked with helping implement a peace agreement that had finally been reached and pave the way for a larger UN mission to come. Canadians were part of this initial mission, helping monitor the delicate cease-fire and

working in landmine awareness and removal. Indeed, Canadian military engineers would go on to play an important role in the landmine clearance efforts in a country that, after decades of conflict, was riddled with millions of them.

In early 1992, the massive United Nations Transitional Authority Cambodia (UNTAC) mission began. Its more than 20,000 peacekeepers monitored the cease-fire, disarmed the warring sides and oversaw the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Cambodian refugees in time for a national election. A total of about 700 Canadian Armed Forces members served with UNTAC between February 1992 and September 1993. While they made up only a small portion of the UN force, the extensive peacekeeping knowledge shared by the experienced Canadians was a great asset. The approximately 240 Canadian Armed Forces members who served there at any given time performed several roles. A primary task was the challenging job of transporting supplies and the thousands of UN personnel around a country that still saw guerrilla activity and wide-spread banditry in some regions. The No. 92 Transport Company delivered food, fuel, natural gas, election supplies and other goods required by the UN. The Canadians offered other logistical support as well, such as finding accommodations for the huge UN force from many different countries speaking many different languages. Thirty Canadian sailors also served with UN naval detachments patrolling the Gulf of Thailand and Mekong River monitoring refugee movements and watching for cease-fire violations, smugglers and bandits. As well, approximately 40 Canadian officers served with the UN command in the country.

The UNTAC mission was over by the end of 1993, however some Canadian Armed Forces members would soon return to the country to work with the Cambodia Mine Action Centre. Between 1994 and 2000, more than 60 Canadian Armed Forces members served to find and remove deadly land mines—a UN task that continues there to this day.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- UNTAC was one of the largest peace support operations ever undertaken by the UN with more than 20,000 military and police personnel drawn from more than 40 countries.

- Many of the Canadians serving with UNTAC were bilingual—a great asset as English and French were spoken in many of the countries contributing UN troops; French was also still spoken by some Cambodians as a result of decades of colonial rule.

- Cambodia has one of the heaviest concentrations of land mines in the world. An estimated four to six million land mines have killed some 15,000 people and injured 120,000 more.

HEROES AND BRAVERY

Canadian Armed Forces members endure many hardships while performing peace support duties. While Canadian Armed Forces members did not experience any major incidents of violence in Cambodia, guerrilla forces and bandits did threaten and attack UN forces there at times. Witnessing the poverty, violence and destruction in Cambodia was hard, while the extreme temperatures and humidity, poisonous snakes and spiders, banditry, contaminated drinking water, dysentery and malaria were also very challenging. Doing one's job under such conditions during a rotation lasting six months or more required great endurance and courage. But Canadians who participate in these efforts



often go beyond the call of duty to help those in need. In Cambodia, they also volunteered their resources and skills to work with the local people, such as reaching out to young people by distributing toys and working in the “Canada House” Children’s Centre.

SACRIFICE

Canadian Armed Forces members know well the sacrifices that go along with the rewards of participating in international peace support efforts. Hostile fire and land mines are perhaps the most obvious dangers in a conflict zone, but they are not the only ones. Vehicle accidents, mysterious illnesses, and psychological effects resulting from the arduous conditions they are exposed to take a serious toll as well – a toll that can last a lifetime. One Canadian Armed Forces member died in Cambodia. About 130 Canadian peacekeepers have died in peace support operations over the years.

CANADA REMEMBERS PROGRAM

The Canada Remembers Program of Veterans Affairs Canada encourages all Canadians to learn about the sacrifices and achievements made by those who have served—and continue to serve—during times of war and peace. As well, it invites Canadians to become involved in remembrance activities that will help preserve their legacy for future generations.

To learn more about Canada’s role in peace support efforts over the years, please visit the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site at veterans.gc.ca or call **1-866-522-2122** toll free.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Veterans Affairs Canada: veterans.gc.ca
- Canadian Military History Gateway: www.cmhg.gc.ca
- Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association: www.cpva.ca
- Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping: www.cavunp.org
- The Royal Canadian Legion: www.legion.ca

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