



The Faces of Peace – Canadian peacekeepers



The mandate of the Canadian Armed Forces is to protect our country, its values and its interests, while also supporting international peace and security. Our military has served in many capacities at home and around the world as it carries on Canada's proud tradition of standing up for what we think is right. Over the years, many of our service members have deployed overseas to take part in a variety of United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and other multinational peace support operations.

ORIGINS OF PEACEKEEPING

In total, more than 1.7 million Canadians fought in the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War during the first half of the 20th century. The toll taken globally by these huge conflicts was horrific, with tens of millions of people losing their lives—including over 118,000 Canadian service members. In the aftermath of such suffering, our country and many others in the international community felt that it was far better to try to prevent future wars, when possible, than fight them. This perspective would help give rise to the modern concept of peacekeeping.

Canada would play a leading role in peacekeeping from the beginning. In fact, Lester B. Pearson (Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs and a future prime minister) won the Nobel Peace Prize for his pioneering vision in helping establish the United Nations Emergency Force in Egypt in 1956 to prevent the Suez Crisis from escalating into a global confrontation. Canadian troops would also be among the UN peacekeepers who took part in this trailblazing mission.

PEACEKEEPING 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 chances of a peaceful outcome. But taking on these duties is demanding work. Put yourself in the boots of a Canadian Armed Forces member leaving on an international peace mission. You could be called upon to monitor ceasefires, patrol buffer zones, act as an intermediary between clashing groups, investigate violations, clear landmines, look into war crimes, seize weapons, protect refugees and provide humanitarian assistance.

The roles our service members play on these kinds of missions can involve all aspects of supporting peace, including peace-making and peace-building. The abilities and training required include combat skills as well as interpersonal skills. Their lives and the lives of others often depend on their strengths in both areas and their knowledge of when to use which ones at the right time. It has been said about this challenging balancing act that “peacekeeping is no job for a soldier, but only a soldier can do it.”

Each peacekeeping mission is unique. Indeed, some Veterans of these efforts have remarked that there was often little “peace” to “keep” in the places they served—a reference to the fact that Canadian Armed Forces members are often asked to intervene in situations where violence is still common and the environment is far from peaceful.

AN ONGOING TRADITION

Canada's early peacekeeping efforts in the Middle East were only the beginning of a proud tradition of service that has continued since then. The regions where Canadian peacekeepers have served truly span the world, including such diverse places as Cyprus, Congo, the Golan Heights, India and Pakistan, the Balkans, Cambodia, Haiti, Rwanda, East Timor, Sudan and Mali.

While danger is always present in these kinds of missions, Canada's peace efforts in the Balkans in the 1990s was an eye opening situation. Our troops deployed to a place where armed clashes and ethnic violence were still widespread. Indeed, Canadian soldiers would take part in the heaviest firefight our troops had experienced since the Korean War during a battle at the Medak Pocket in Croatia in September 1993.

The nature of peacekeeping has also evolved in other ways since the 1990s. Peace operations are now often more multidimensional. In addition to helping maintain peace and security, peacekeepers are also frequently called on to help protect human rights, restore the rule of law and organize elections. While the level of Canada's participation in these operations has ebbed and flowed over the years, our service members' reputation for expertise in this specialized field is well known. Indeed, Canada's long tradition of peacekeeping remains an important part of our international identity—and an ongoing point of national pride.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- More than 125,000 Canadian Armed Forces members have served in international peacekeeping missions to dozens of countries over the past seven decades. Troops who serve in UN operations typically wear blue helmets or berets—iconic headwear that

has come to symbolize peacekeeping for many people.

- As a leading contributor to peacekeeping missions from the 1960s to the 1990s, Canada had an average of some 1,500 military personnel deployed on these efforts at any one time. However, at the peak of our country's peacekeeping participation in the early 1990s, nearly 4,000 Canadians were serving under the UN flag.
- Members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, as well as other provincial and municipal police officers, have also taken part in many peacekeeping missions. Since 1989, more than 4,000 of them have travelled far from home to help establish effective police services in places in turmoil.

HEROES AND BRAVERY

- In 1988, the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize was collectively awarded to the world's peacekeepers—including many Canadian personnel—who had served in UN missions. This honour inspired our country to create the Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal. Tens of thousands of Veterans and still serving Canadian Armed Forces members proudly wear this decoration.
- Peacekeepers' on-the-ground efforts are often characterized by perseverance and compassion. For example, during the peace efforts in Somalia in the early 1990s, Lieutenant (Navy) Heather MacKinnon operated a medical clinic, worked in hospitals and orphanages, and provided humanitarian assistance to the victims of war and famine in the capital city of Mogadishu. The risks were very real, but she helped many people during this time of great upheaval and laid the groundwork for further relief efforts.



SACRIFICE

Peacekeeping missions often have positive effects, but the difficulties they present are not easy to handle. Being separated from friends and family for months at a time, witnessing extreme violence, facing the possibility of having to use force, and living with the realization that you could be killed or badly wounded are some of the challenges that peacekeeping Veterans know well. Approximately 130 Canadian Armed Forces members have died during peace support operations and many more have suffered physical and psychological wounds that can last a lifetime.

Many Canadians have served on several international missions during the course of their military careers, repeatedly fulfilling their special duties against a backdrop of danger. One example of this dedication was Master Corporal Mark Isfeld of British Columbia. He was a combat engineer who served in three peacekeeping missions before losing his life in a landmine explosion in the Balkans in 1994. This soldier was known for giving children in war-torn regions handmade dolls that his mother had made to try to bring them a bit of happiness. After Master Corporal Isfeld's death, the story spread of how he had touched children's lives. Thousands of dolls began to flood in from people all across Canada who decided to make some for other Canadian peacekeepers to distribute overseas and keep this heartfelt tradition alive. These gifts of love came to be known as "Izzy Dolls" in his honour.

Canadian peacekeepers have made great contributions, but their sacrifices have been heavy. These brave individuals take their honoured place in our country's proud military history beside the service members of past generations who took part in the world wars. Canada honours these heroes in many ways. *Reconciliation – the Peacekeeping*

Monument is a powerful memorial in downtown Ottawa that was dedicated in 1992. The names of Canadians who gave their lives in these efforts are written in the seventh Book of Remembrance, called *In the Service of Canada*. National Peacekeepers' Day is also observed each year on August 9—a special time to remember all those who have done so much for peace, security and human rights.

CANADA REMEMBERS PROGRAM

The Canada Remembers Program of Veterans Affairs Canada encourages all Canadians to learn about the sacrifices and achievements of those who have served—and continue to serve—during times of war, military conflict 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 website at veterans.gc.ca or call **1-866-522-2122** toll free.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Veterans Affairs Canada: veterans.gc.ca
- Canadian War Museum: warmuseum.ca
- Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association: cpva.ca
- Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping: cavunp-hq.ca
- The Royal Canadian Legion: legion.ca

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