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The contributions of women form a rich and vibrant part of Canada's military history and heritage. Women have been involved in Canada's military service for more than 100 years and women have played an essential role in all of the armed conflicts in which Canada has taken part for more than a century, initially serving in traditional support roles as nurses, clerks and communicators but now fully integrated across all military occupations and in key leadership positions across the spectrum of operations and the organization.

The First and Second World Wars allowed women to slowly gain recognition and build esteem both inside and outside the military as they assumed roles left vacant by the men who served on the front lines. Our nation saw women proudly wearing uniforms and serving their country in greater numbers and in new roles and although these women did not set out to challenge society's perceptions of the roles

of women, they blazed the trail for those who serve in Canada's military today.

The number of Canadian women in uniform has fluctuated over the years, with the largest number serving during the Second World War when many women were enrolled on a temporary basis. Following the large reduction in personnel after the Second World War, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), the Canadian Army (CA), and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) again allowed women to enroll in the early 1950s, though their employment was restricted to traditional roles in medicine, communication, logistics, and administration. Until the 1980s women's military service in Canada was still limited.

In recent decades various legal and political milestones have been particularly critical in ensuring increased equal employment opportunities for women including the right to serve in the military. These key milestones include: the 1969 Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, the proclamation of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* in 1978, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and most recently the *Employment Equity Act*.

By 1985, after Parliament passed the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, policies were changed to permit women to start to train and serve in operational occupations and units and the process of integration into operations and combat began.

All military occupations were open to women in 1989, with the exception of submarine service, which opened in 2000.

In Canada, we can be justifiably proud of the leadership role we have played in equality and human rights. In fact, to younger Canadians, the benefits and rightfulness of integration and equality seem so obvious, to the point of being a non-issue. After all, equal opportunities for men and women is only fair. Not only is it a fundamental right, but all realms of society—from politics, to industry, to academics—benefit from having access to double the workforce, double the talent, double the ideas...and the unique perspectives that women may hold and men may not.

Today, over 10 000 women are serving in the Regular Component of the Canadian Forces (CF), and an additional 13 000 serve in the Reserves on full and part time commitments. Overall representation of women in the Canadian Forces is currently at 14.6 percent and 20.4 percent in the Regular and Reserve Forces, respectively. Distribution across occupation ranges from approximately 25 percent in health services, > 15 percent - Aerospace Engineering, < 15 percent - Air Ops, Naval Ops, and Engineering, and < 6 percent - Pilots and Combat Arms. Women make up approximately 18.6 percent of the RCN, 17.8 percent of the RCAF and 13 percent of the Canadian Army officers and 13 percent of the RCN, 18 percent of the RCAF and 11 percent of the Canadian Army non commissioned members.

Canada has a relatively small Armed Forces: an all volunteer force of 68 000 Permanent Force (Regular Force) members and 27 000 Primary Reservists, and our members reflect and represent the broader Canadian society. The fact the Canadian Forces have welcomed women across all environments and all occupations is a tribute to Canadian society's values; essentially embracing diversity, equity, and freedom of choice for all. The Canadian Forces embody the values for which it fights.

To promote diversity and inclusiveness, the CF establishes representation goals for women and monitors progress towards achieving those goals. It is recognized that achieving the current goal of 25.5 percent is a long-term objective that will require work on recruiting, training, programs and policies as well as making military service a career of choice for Canadian women.

Unlike other civilian career fields where women were also being integrated in greater numbers, military service had some unique challenges to overcome including not only the long established culture and traditions of a male dominated organization and male only units, but uniforms, equipment, training, accommodations and the hierarchical organization that would require a long and slow process to qualify women and give them both experience and legitimacy with their peers before they could assume leadership positions and progress through the ranks. The brave and

courageous women who were the first to integrate into new careers were faced with many obstacles as they entered what was traditionally a man's arena. Not only did they have to do the job and excel at it, but first they had to prove that, given the opportunity, they would not fail. This was not simply a case of opening opportunities and injecting women into the organization at all levels; the very nature of military work would require some major changes for the organization and its members, both male and female.

Convincing women to join the military is only one of the challenges of creating and growing a gender-integrated force. Getting women to stay in the CAF long enough to become a senior rank or appointment is another. Servicewomen of all ranks still tend to leave at higher rates than their male counterparts. The reason for this attrition varies but the conflicts of balancing family life with a military career seem to affect women more than men, especially those serving in the field or at sea.

Despite these challenges, the CAF has made progress in integration of women into non-traditional roles and continues to do so. Canada allows women to fill roles directly linked to combat, and 10 percent of our deployed forces around the world are women. The Gulf War (August 1990 to February 1991) was the first conflict in which Canadian women played a direct role in combat and they have continued to serve on combat related missions around the world. Sadly, Canada was forced to deal with our first female combat casualties

in the past decade as Canadian women have trained, fought and been killed in action serving alongside their male counterparts. We continue to work hard to be a leader in the field of equality and women's rights and have broken the glass ceiling for women serving in leadership positions including command of warships at sea, on operations around the world, flying fighter jets and going into space. Our military training standards and qualifications, roles, responsibilities, pay, benefits, career progression, employment and leadership opportunities are the same across the genders —something that can't be said about all civilian occupations.

Canada has a role to play on the international stage in the promotion of gender integration and women's rights. Our men and women in uniform are important ambassadors for Canada. When deployed on operations, they are sometimes the only Canadians that the local populations will ever meet. Think of how inspiring it was for Afghan girls to see Canadian women in uniform leading a combat infantry company, conducting patrols, flying aircraft, driving and maintaining vehicles or providing medical care.

Be they male or female, regardless of race, religion, or culture, Canadian Forces members share a common goal —protecting the country, its interests, and values while also contributing to international peace and security.