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Women in wartime

Roll up your sleeves for victory!

During the war, many women took a wide variety of civilian jobs that had once been filled by men. Canada had its own version of "Rosie the Riveter," the symbolic working woman who laboured in factories to help the war effort. Women worked shoulder-

to-shoulder with men in factories, on airfields, and on farms. They built parts for ships and aircraft and manufactured ammunition. They drove buses, taxis, and streetcars. This level of female participation in the workplace was a first for Canada - thousands of Canadian women proving they had the skills, strength, and ability to do the work that men did.

• Out of a total Canadian population of 11 million people, only about 600,000 Canadian women held permanent jobs when the war started. During the war, their numbers doubled to 1.2 million.

• At the peak of wartime employment in 1943-44, 439,000 women worked in the service sector, 373,000 in manufacturing and 4,000 in construction.

• Women's smaller physical size and manual dexterity helped them develop a great reputation for fine precision work in electronics, optics, and instrument assembly.

• With their sons overseas, many farm women had to take on extra work. One Alberta mother of nine sons - all of them either in the army or away working in factories - drove the tractor, plowed the fields, put up hay, and hauled grain to elevators, along with tending her garden, raising chickens, pigs and turkeys, and canning hundreds of jars of fruits and vegetables.

• Women who worked with lumberjacks and loggers during the war were called "lumberjills."



Members of the first contingent of C.W.A.C. personnel to enter Germany, 12 June 1945

Photos and info. courtesy of Veterans Affairs Canada, www.veterans.gc.ca

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