

# Women's contributions to ww2

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



Women's contributions to WW2 are usually glossed over by people, especially history channels on YouTube (unless it's International Women's Day). But why? Were their jobs not as exciting as the men's? Well, saying that women during WW2 didn't have exciting jobs is an understatement. Although they couldn't fight on the front lines as soldiers because of sexist rules in place back in the 1940s, women served as nurses on the battlefield and formed their own battalions to assist the navy, airforce and infantry. As for the women stuck in Canada, they worked hard and did all the jobs that men used to do-from waking up early everyday to single handedly run a farm to pounding and assembling large ships for the navy.

One of the most well known services were nurses, under the " Nursing Sisters" program. Women who graduated from nursing school, were a registered nurse, unmarried, and had no children could apply. The Nursing Sisters program was split into three different branches, each branch assisting with the navy, airforce and infantry respectively. Uniforms differed from branch to branch, however the most common one was a blue dress, white apron and white veil (ironically many nurses ended up marrying soldiers), which gave them the nickname ' bluebird' (Nancy Miller Chenier, " Nursing Sisters.", "' Angels of Mercy': Canada's Nursing Sisters in World War I and II." McMaster University).

Nurses provided assistance with everything medical related and had the same status as commanding officers because they were so crucial to the war. Nurses constantly had their stamina and patience stretched thin by the overwhelming amount of patients that needed to be treated. During the Assault in Italy, records stated that nurses treated 2000 patients on average

each day. During D-Day, nurses were placed in hospitals along the English shore, however after D-Day, they were transferred closer to the front lines to treat wounded soldiers (“ Overview of the Depression and Military Era (1930 – 1945) | CARNA” College & Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, “ The Nursing Sisters of Canada.” Veterans Affairs Canada).

Nurses in WW2 worked close to the front line and faced just as much danger as soldiers did; whether it was the continuous shelling and bombing of hospitals or torpedoed boats and endless enemy fire, death always seemed to be looming over these undaunted nurses (“ Nursing Sisters”, Chenier, Nancy Miller). In order to help nurses find their way through the battlefield, nurses had frequent lessons on things like map reading, and avoiding casualties, but nurses were still caught in the line of fire which claimed their life. 12 nurses were injured when a shell fell on a hospital, and a nurse lost her life when a hospital ship was torpedoed by a German submarine. 2 nurses named Kathleen G. Christie and Anna May Waters were even captured and sent to Japanese war camps during the Japanese assault on Hong Kong. Although these nurses were often caught in danger, they did their best to ensure that injuries and amputations were kept at a minimum (“ The Nursing Sisters of Canada.” Veterans Affairs Canada).

In addition, nurses helped create different methods to treat bodily injuries such as burns and shattered bones. As a result of the frequent bombings and attacks from enemies, nurses demanded medication to prevent infections and diseases that were being transmitted quickly through the tough conditions the military faced, and ultimately lead to the re-discovery and

mass production of penicillin (“ Nursing History: The History of WWII Medicine for Schools” NurseGroups). Without the hardwork and dedication of these nurses, the number of lives claimed by this deadly war would have increased dramatically.

Next, women served in and formed their own battalions, which assisted the Canadian Navy, Air Force and Infantry. The battalions started by these bold women were the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC), the Royal Canadian Air Force- Women's Division (RCAF-WD), and the Women's Royal Navy Service (WRNS aka ' Wrens' ) . The CWACS assisted the infantry, and at first the jobs weren't very exciting. It was mainly ' feminine' chores such as cooking, laundry and office work. Eventually, as more men were required to fight in the front lines, women were assigned to ' masculine' jobs like driving trucks and ambulances, mechanics and radar operators (“ Canadian Women's Army Corps” James Wood and “ CANADA IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR” Juno Beach Centre). Since these women took on these crucial roles, the men who originally held them were able to fight in the war, which gave the Allied troops a larger man power and would ultimately contribute to the victory of WW2. The RCAF-WD was consisted of women who finished at least 1 year of high school, who had a good sense of leadership and responsibility.

This was crucial for these women because as the RCAF-WD assisted the Royal Canadian Air Force, which was much more difficult and dangerous than helping the infantry. In addition, as war went on, the women would go from working in the office, admin or supporting jobs into jobs like electrical and mechanical occupations, aircraft maintenance and control, and

communication networks (“ RCAF (Women's Division)” William March and “ Canada Remembers Women in the Canadian Military” Veterans Affairs Canada). These occupations all required keen sense of leadership and responsibility to ensure that the planes and pilots were in tip top shape, and that no major accidents would occur with the planes as they would be fatal.

Lastly, the WRCNs or ‘ Wrens’ assisted the navy. The WRCN's jobs were divided into different sections. For example, women who enjoyed housework and had experience in domestic services were employed in the Stewards. The Stewards would cook and clean for the soldiers, in order to feed and provide comfort for the them. Women who attended at least 1 year of secondary school, could choose to become a Plotter. They had a clear and fast mind, were able to work well with mathematics, were independent and confident. Plotters kept track of the friendly or unfriendly vessels in the channel, and were vital to officers who were planning attacks. Finally, Sick Berth Attendants were women who attended least 2 years of high school, and had a strong stomach as they usually came into contact with wounded soldiers. They served as multiple medical professionals at once, to help treat and comfort the wounded or dying. The Wrens all faced the constant dangers of being torpedoed by U-Boats. (“ WRCNS – The ‘ Wrens’” CFB Esquimalt Naval & Military Museum and “ Serving Their Country: the Story of the Wrens, 1942-1946.” Plows, Emilie Anne).

These battalions were all created because of the social pressure on the government from women who were eager to fight, and because the government was concerned that there wouldn't be enough men to fight the

battles. These battalions allowed women to take on the jobs of these men and make them available to fight. Although battalion women were not always respected, these valiant and grand women pushed through and sold their blood, sweat and tears for victory. (“ Canada Remembers Women in the Canadian Military” Veterans Affairs Canada, “ Canadian Women and War” Nancy Miller Chenier, “ Canadian Women’s Army Corps.” Wood, James).

Finally, women on the homefront took on jobs to assist in providing for the military and for their community. Since the men who originally held these positions had gone off to war, companies and the government turned to women, who were already eager to work in the first place, to take on the new jobs. Some jobs included factory work like manufacturing ammunition. At the beginning of WW2, around 600 000 women worked in factory jobs, however as the war continued and escalated, more men were needed to fight, and the number of women working in factories doubled to 1 200 000 women. According to Veterans Affairs Canada, Canada built and shipped at least 800 000 military vehicles to Britain during WW2. All of these vehicles were manufactured by women, and without them our military wouldn’t have had the manpower (hah) or equipment to overpower the Axis. Women also worked on farms with children and teens, to grow food to provide for their families and for the soldiers overseas. Women also worked as ‘ lumberjills’ and loggers, they built the ships for the navy and worked in the railway . Some women even managed to graduate from universities.

Elsie Gregory MacGill was the first woman in the world to graduate as an aeronautical engineer, and designed and produced the Hurricane Combat

Aircraft, which would be vital to the Allied forces overseas. For women who couldn't find work or were not up to the industries's standards, they volunteered in recycling drives to encourage other people to recycle metals for military equipment. They helped their communities with rationing food, raising money to fund hospitals, preparing and packing items for the military, growing community gardens to feed locals and even advertised, and bought Victory Bonds to support the government (" Life on the Home Front: Women and the War on the Home Front" Canadian War Museum, " Women's Work | Legion Magazine" Knowles, Valerie and " CANADA REMEMBERS WOMEN AT WAR" Veterans Affairs Canada). If these women had not taken the initiative to work, there would have been no one to build the ships, planes and guns that were required to win the war.

In conclusion, women contributed to the victory of WW2 by serving as nurses on the battlefield, taking initiative to create their own battalions to assist the navy, airforce and infantry, and by working hard to fill in the empty job positions in Canada to meet the demands of war. So although the effort of these women are not always shown in history videos, it easy to see that without these women, WW2 would have been a war lost to the Allies; and if that is true, what kind of world would we be living in today?