

The Royal Canadian

Legion History

Prior to World War I, the armed services in Canada are represented by regimental associations, scattered units of various types and one common organization: The Army and Navy Veterans of Canada. Membership to these groups was limited and mostly restricted to large urban centres. Their activities were largely devoted to discussion of service, national functions and assisting needy comrades in distress.

Canada was totally unprepared for the holocaust of the Great War; it was also unprepared for rehabilitation problems which arose when peace finally came. Some idea of the immensity of the problem is indicated by the fact that more than 600,000 men had seen service; nearly 60,000 were killed in action; 138,000 were wounded, and some 130,000 men were discharged medically unfit as a result of their service. What the government suffered from most was lack of experience when dealing with these problems. Veterans, on whose advice it depended, lacked organization.

The obvious result was confusion and a lack of facilities to handle the multitude of problems. The government had to start from scratch with regard to war pension administration. The world economic dilemma made matters worse.

An unemployed veteran, returning to his homeland, noticed wealth and prosperity around him which had arisen during the war as a result of increased industrialization and specialization, drastically stepped up to meet the demands of the war machine. The veteran returned to Canada, his heart full of glory, but his belly empty. Little was being accomplished on his behalf and he was bitter.

Under such complicated conditions some fourteen or fifteen national veterans' groups sprang up between 1917 and 1925. They had no united voice, no united effort. Attempts were made to cooperate their activities but each group's objectives seemed different from the next and thus they appeared to work at cross purposes.

Unity was the only hope that the veterans had in order that their needs be fulfilled.

In 1925, the Dominion Veterans Alliance came into existence, spurred by the plea of one man in particular - Field Marshal Earl Haig of Bemerseyde, Commander in Chief of the British Armies. Having had experience with the growing pains of the British Legion, he was invited as guest speaker at a convention of all veterans' organizations in Ottawa. In November 1925, all organizations met in Winnipeg for a "Unity Conference".

The inspiration and dedication of men such as Earl Haig and General Sir Richard Turner bore fruit. The Legion was born and by July 1926 it was self-supporting.

Considerable time had been spent on the preparation of a Constitution and it is interesting to note that it was so well prepared that few changes have been found necessary to this day.

Purposes and objects of the Royal Canadian Legion

The purposes and objects of the Legion shall be:

(a) to constitute an association of those who have served or are serving in Her Majesty's armed forces or any auxiliary force and of others who support the purposes and objects of the Legion, which association shall be democratic and non-sectarian, and shall not be affiliated to or connected directly or indirectly with any political party or organization;

(b) to bring about the unity of all who have so served;

(c) to further among them the spirit of comradeship and mutual help and the close and kindly ties of active service;

(d) to pass on to their families and descendants the traditions for which they stand;

(e) to perpetuate the memory and deeds of the fallen and of those who die in the future;

(f) to promote and care for memorials to their valour and sacrifice, to provide suitable burial, to keep an annual memorial day, to preserve the records and memories of their service and to see that such services shall not be forgotten by the nation;

(g) to ensure that proper attention shall be paid to the welfare of all who have served and the welfare of their dependents and to see to the maintenance and comfort of those who require special treatment, particularly the disabled, sick, aged and needy, and to promote the welfare of their dependents;

(h) to educate public opinion regarding national duties to the dead, the disabled and others who have served, and their dependents;

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(i) to foster loyalty among the public and education in the principles of patriotism, duty and unstinted public service;

(j) to strive for peace, goodwill and friendship among all nations, at the same time advocating the maintenance by Canada of adequate and sufficient forces on land, sea and in the air for the defence of our country and for the discharge of those obligations which rest upon us by virtue of our partnership in the Commonwealth;

(k) to support suitable undertakings for the training, employment and settlement of ex-servicemen and women, and the education of their children;

(l) to preserve their statutory, acquired and legitimate rights, and those of their dependents and, in so doing, to offer the Legion's co-operation to those officially charged with the responsibility of administering such rights by federal or other governments;

(m) to assist comrades now serving, especially in connection with their return to civil life, and to safeguard the interests of those dependents whilst they are in service;

(n) to assist ex-servicemen to secure not less than the recognized standard rates of wages;

(o) to secure adequate pensions, allowances, grants and war gratuities for ex-servicemen and women, their dependents, and the widows, children and dependents of those who are dead, and to labour for honourable provision being made for those who, in declining years, are unable to support themselves;

(p) to co-operate with the Commonwealth and Allied associations of similar aims and objects;

(q) to establish, organize and regulate provincial, district and local bodies, or commands and branches in convenient centres throughout Canada and elsewhere;

(r) to establish, organize and regulate provincial, district and local bodies of women for the purpose of assisting the Legion in seeing to the maintenance and comfort of disabled, sick, aged and needy ex-servicemen and women and their dependents, and to co-operate with the Legion in the promotion and carrying out of all aims and objects of the Legion, such a group to be known as a ladies' auxiliary of The Royal Canadian Legion;

(s) to acquire, hold, sell or lease real and immovable, personal and movable property;

(t) to raise and co-ordinate funds for assisting those mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, to provide for the administration of the Legion and its authorized provincial and district commands, branches and ladies' auxiliaries, and to see that these and other funds raised for such purposes are applied to those purposes and none other;

(u) to act generally on behalf of all those who have served in Her Majesty's forces;

(v) to encourage, promote, engage in or support all forms of national, provincial, municipal or community service, or any charitable or philanthropic purpose.

Ordinary Membership

In general terms, Ordinary membership in The Royal Canadian Legion is open to any person of good character who served in Her Majesty's forces and whose services terminated under conditions other than dishonourable. This includes those who have two years' service in the RCMP or Reserve Forces.

Associate-Voting Membership

Includes any person who is a son, daughter, spouse, widow or widower of an Ordinary member in good standing or of an ex-service person who is or was eligible to be such a member and who has attained the age of majority under the law of the province where he resides.

Honourary Members

Persons recommended at various levels of the Legion who accept and support the purposes and objects of the Legion and who are associated in the advancement of these purposes and objects in the past by giving time and work.

Fraternal Affiliates

Open to persons who support the purposes and objects of the Legion, particularly in the field of community service.

Ladies' Auxiliaries

The formation and operation of Ladies' Auxiliaries to commands and branches is encouraged. This is a most important segment of Legion membership.

Legion Progress and Growth

From its inception, the Legion quite naturally concerned itself primarily with the battle for adequate pensions and other benefits for war veterans and the dependents of those who had lost their lives as the result of war. Beneficial changes were effected but the Depression of the 1930s created a whole host of new problems. The Legion was continuously involved both in local endeavours and national undertakings in efforts to improve the desperate conditions of veterans in most of Canada. A significant development in this period was the introduction of the War Veterans Allowance Act in 1930. This benefitted those prematurely aged by their war experiences but who were not, in most instances, eligible for war disability pensions.

With the advent of World War II, the Legion was revitalized by the demands made

upon it and the influx of new members. The effort during and immediately after the war was prodigious. Canadian Legion War Services provided amenities such as entertainment, canteens, etc., for the serving men, both home and abroad, including the battlefronts. Canadian Legion Educational Services provided correspondence courses and tutors to prepare the serving men for their return to civilian life.

Concurrently with these programs, the Legion was involved in a substantial way in the promoting of the most comprehensive rehabilitation program offered by any government to its men returning from war - the Veterans Charter.

The many Acts that made up this Charter covered practically every aspect of the ex-service person's life - education, medical treatment, employment, land settlement, vocational training, as well as the more conventional benefits such as disability pensions (compensation). The University Training Program provided an opportunity for thousands of returning veterans to gain professional status, and we believe had a marked impact on all aspects of Canadian life in the ensuing years.

With the adoption of the Veterans Charter, the Legion's task was far from complete, however. In the succeeding years improved benefits were sought, especially in regard to disability and death pensions, and war Veterans Allowances. During the 1960s an investigating committee - the Woods Committee - studied in great depth the Pension Act and the Operations of the Pension Commission. The Royal Canadian Legion, together with other veterans' organizations, made many comprehensive presentations to this Committee, seeking a whole variety of improvements in the legislation. In March 1971 a completely new Pension Act came into force.

Through a further study undertaken jointly by the veterans' organizations and the government, a satisfactory new basis for upgrading pension rates was introduced in July 1973. This took into account the relationship of war pensions to public service salaries, as well as the previously adopted indexing using the Consumer Price Index.

Following the efforts made by the Legion after the war, it sought new themes and new objectives. It did not forget its responsibilities to the veterans; it simply expanded its endeavours to encompass community leadership. In particular, the involvement with the development in youth leadership has and will continue to reap rich rewards in Canada's future.

Of significance is their development of senior citizen housing in Canada for which the Legion has sponsored over one hundred housing projects.

For many years, with the assistance of the federal government, the Legion organized The Royal Canadian Legion Sports Training Plan which included national clinics for track and field coaches as well as young athletes. More than 1,300 coaches and thousands of young athletes received the benefit of these programs under the direction of world renowned Geoffrey Dyson, former British National Coach.

The Legion recognized the need for Canadian technical periodicals on track and field and published the Coaching Review and Track and Field Annual. These publications are no longer available.

During this period, upgrading of Canadian track and field records increased from 40 a year to well over 600. Almost one-half of the Canadian track and field athletes who attended the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles has passed through the Legion's program.

Today, the Legion organizes and conducts an annual national athletic camp for minor athletes and is involved in community programs as diverse as Canada's geography and climate as they are geared to individual communities and reflect the character of that community.

The structure of the Legion

In consideration of what the Legion can achieve, some understanding of how it works may prove helpful. In brief, the Act of Incorporation (Chapter 84 of the Statutes of Canada, 1948, as amended), is the authority for The Royal Canadian Legion. From this Act is drawn the General By-laws and from the by-laws is drawn the provincial command by-law and from the provincial command by-laws, the branch by-laws. The primary unit is the branch. A number of branches form a zone, a number of zones a district, and a number of districts usually within a province but not necessarily so, form a provincial command.

Branches and provincial commands exercise autonomy with regard to their own

affairs, but within the General By-laws and in the area under their jurisdiction. Provincial conventions are held annually or biennially. Branch delegates to these conventions elect a slate of officers. From these provincial command officers, either by election or nomination, is formed the Dominion Executive Council, the governing body of the Legion between Dominion Conventions.

Dominion Convention is the ultimate governing body of the Legion. During this convention, branch delegates decide by majority vote the policy of the Legion and elect a slate of officers at Dominion level. This group becomes the Sub-Executive Committee of Council and consists of the Dominion President, First Vice-President, four Vice-Presidents, Treasurer, Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Immediate Past President. It is charged with the responsibility for the day-to-day administration of the Legion.

Dominion Command headquarters is in Legion house in Ottawa. It has a professional staff of some 60 employees.

The building also houses the staff of Legion Magazine.

Standing committees are normally authorized by the Dominion Executive Council to which they report annually. These committees also report to the Sub-Executive Committee of Council on an as required basis. This may sound confusing, but in fact it works well and ensures the maintenance of the democratic principles on which the Legion was built.

The Legion is a non-profit, dues-supported organization. It receives no financial support from outside agencies.

A per capita tax on dues paid by the members supports the operation of provincial and Dominion Commands. Payment of dues also entitles members to receive monthly issues of Legion Magazine.

Revenue from poppy campaigns supports the Service Bureau and the Legion's welfare programs. Financial assistance from poppy funds is available to ex-service people and their dependents, whether or not they are Legion members.

Our total membership today is about 600,000.

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POPPIES AND WREATHS

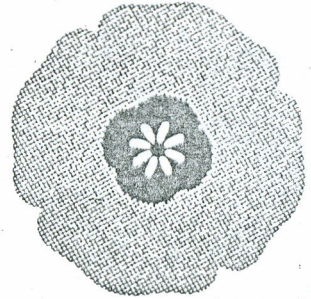
In 1986, 13 million poppies and 68,500 wreaths and crosses were distributed in Canada. For every donation received, a poppy, wreath or other acknowledgement is given. These items are financed out of the receipts of the Poppy Campaign.

All poppies and wreaths are made in sheltered workshops, or in homes by ex-servicemen and women or their dependents. Thus the Poppy Campaign helps to support ex-service personnel and their dependents in all phases of its operation.

FACTS ABOUT THE

POPPY CAMPAIGN

The Royal Canadian Legion conducts a poppy campaign to collect funds each year prior to Remembrance Day. All proceeds are placed in trust accounts and after expenses (including the cost of poppies and wreaths) are paid, the



funds are used to assist needy Canadian ex-service personnel and their dependents, ex-service personnel of Commonwealth countries and of allied countries resident in Canada.

Some authorized uses of these funds are:

- Community medical equipment and medical research.
- Day-care centres, meals-on-wheels, transportation and related services for ex-service personnel, their dependents and the aged.

Although the Poppy Campaign is national in scope, each Legion branch is responsible for running its own campaign and collecting and disbursing funds in its area. Money is not deposited in a central fund.

In 1985/86 \$3,455,329 was spent for the benefit of ex-service personnel and their dependents.

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION

Number of branches: Canada - 1750, U.S.A. - 41, West Germany - 2.

Number of Legion members and fraternal affiliates: 600,000.

Number of Ladies' Auxiliary members: 90,000 approximately.