

BACK TO "CIVVY" STREET: POST-WAR VETERAN RE-ESTABLISHMENT

INTRODUCTION

More than a million Canadians served in the armed forces during the Second World War. The Department of Veterans Affairs was created in 1944 to handle the important matter of helping the large number of veterans who had to make the transition from fighting a war to becoming productive members of a country finally at peace. To aid these brave men and women who had done so much for their country and the world with their service during the war, many benefits were created to help veterans re-adjust to civilian life.

BRINGING THE SOLDIERS HOME

With transport space in short supply after the surrender of Germany and the end of the war in Europe, the military could not bring all the armed forces members home at once. Just getting these people back home to Canada was the first hurdle in helping them return to civilian life.

- There was a complicated point system to determine a soldier's priority for going home.
- Soldiers received two points for each month of service in Canada, three for each month of service overseas and a 20% bonus if they were married. The higher the score, the better the chance for a quick return home.
- Soldiers who volunteered for duty in the Pacific War were given top priority for going home.
- Once back home in Canada, each soldier received 30 days' leave, followed by discharge from the military.

A FINANCIAL HEAD-START

Veterans received immediate benefits after discharge. These benefits were designed to help give returning soldiers and their families a stable financial basis on which to build their lives.

- Veterans received \$100 to buy civilian clothing.
- Veterans were paid a war service gratuity of \$7.50 for each 30 days' service, an additional 25 cents for each day overseas, and one week's pay for each six months service outside Canada.
- Approximately one million men and women received war service gratuities, with each veteran receiving an average of \$488 (about \$5,000 in today's dollars).
- Spouses of those who had died in the service received pensions, set at 75% of what a disabled veteran would have received, and the children received additional benefits.
- The children of Canadians killed in service received financial support to pursue higher education.

GOING BACK TO WORK

By law, no one was to lose his or her job as a result of having served in the armed forces. However, many veterans did not have jobs before the war or found that the jobs they were returning to were no longer suitable. The government put many programs in place to help veterans find work.



- The *Veterans' Land Act* helped veterans buy land for their homes or businesses. Approximately 33,000 veterans obtained land for farming through this program.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs provided vocational training for approximately 80,000 veterans and helped rehabilitate those who had been wounded.
- With financial aid from the Veterans Rehabilitation Act, 54,000 veterans went to university, crowding many educational institutions which were not prepared for so many students. The University of British Columbia moved 370 army huts onto the campus for extra housing and classrooms.
- Many returning soldiers were in a hurry to finish their educations, so universities accelerated their academic programs to help them graduate faster.
- Those who did not want land or training could obtain a "re-establishment credit" to renovate their homes, buy furniture or start a business.
- Under the *Veterans Business and Professional Loans Act*, the government granted 6,902 veteran loans totalling \$11 million dollars.
- For those who had trouble finding work, the government provided financial assistance through the War Veterans Allowance Program. Initial benefits were \$13 a week for married veterans and \$9 for unmarried veterans. The total cost for the program from 1941 to 1951 was approximately \$51 million.

THE LEGACY

Remembering and reflecting on the significance of the contributions that veterans made during the war strengthens the commitment to preserve the values that they sacrificed so much to defend: truth, justice, peace, freedom and knowledge - values that help to define Canada and Canadians. To learn more about the Veterans who returned home to Canada and the role our country played in the Second World War, please visit the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site at www.vac-acc.gc.ca or call 1-877-604-8469 toll free.

