

Canadian Women of Valour Challenge:
Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force (C.W.A.A.F)

While women serving bravely in the Canadian Military is common practice today, it was not always the case. Before the Second World War Canadian women hoping to serve their country had only one option: to work as a nurse. This forced many women to find other ways to support the war effort. As a result, organizations such as the Red Cross would see an **influx** of newly enlisted women during times of war.



Members of the RCAF's Women's Division.

(Credit: [The Secrets of Radar Museum](#)).

Minimal formal military involvement by women would continue until 1941, even as the male recruitment began to **dwindle** and war demands continued to increase. Finally, on April 2nd, the three major components of the Canadian Military would sit down to discuss the possibility of women taking up non-**combative**, non-medical roles. Their discussions would ultimately lead nowhere.

Months later female members of the Royal Air Force arrived in Canada for training and the idea was revisited. On July 2nd, 1941, the Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force (CWAAF) was born. This announcement sparked mass enrollment into the unit. Of the 2,000 women that applied, only 150 would be selected. Women by the hundreds flocked to sign up as the war continued.

Two members of the RCAF Women's Division (aka C.W.A.A.F.) doing exercises while stationed in England, 1943.

(Credit: RCAF Women's Division/ The Canadian Encyclopedia)



The C.W.A.A.F. would later be renamed as the RCAF Women's Division or WD. Initially, jobs in the WD mimicked the work done by civilian women of the time. It wasn't until 1943 that it was proposed to allow some qualified WD members to take on "light" flying duties, but in reality, no changes were made.



In total 17,038 women served in the RCAF Women's Division during the Second World War and although their role was non-combative, 30 women would lose their lives. The motto "We Serve that Men May Fly" was later adopted by the division.

To learn more about the roles played by women in the Air Force, check out the [Juno Beach Centre](#).

For more information about the changing occupations of Canadian women in the military over the course of the past 120 years, visit [Veterans Affairs Canada](#).

Recruiting poster: "She serves so that men may fly", for the RCAF Women's Division.

(Credit: McGill University Ref no. WP2.R28.F5 via [Wikipedia](#)).

Key Vocabulary:

Influx: the act of flowing in

Dwindle: decrease in quantity or to become smaller and smaller

Combative: ready to fight