

## CANADIAN PRODUCTION OF WAR MATERIALS

## INTRODUCTION

The great national effort put forth by Canadians during the Second World War took many different forms. The brave Canadians engaged in combatting the enemy needed a great deal of support from many areas of Canadian society to be successful in their vital struggle. The Second World War was a highly mechanized war, with a great deal of mass-production of weapons, ammunition, vehicles, and other war material necessary to defeat the enemies who had great industrial powers of their own.

With the onset of the war, Canada was faced with the challenge of creating - practically from scratch - a strong industrial base to produce weapons and war materials for the war effort. Canadian industry and the workforce of our country stepped up with an amazing response to this situation and helped contribute to the Allied victory in the war.

## TRUCKS, TANKS AND GUNS

- Britain had entered the war with 80,000 military vehicles of all types; however, 75,000 of these British vehicles were left behind in the evacuation at Dunkirk in 1940. Virtually defenceless on the ground, Britain turned to Canada - and particularly the Canadian auto industry - to replace what had been lost. Canada not only replaced these losses, it did much more.
- Canadian industry produced over 800,000 military transport vehicles, 50,000 tanks, 40,000 field, naval, and anti-aircraft guns, and 1,700,000 small arms.

- Of the 800,000 military vehicles of all types built in Canada, 168,000 were issued to Canadian forces. Thirty-eight percent of the total Canadian production went to the British. The remainder of the vehicles went to the other Allies. This meant that the Canadian Army 'in the field' had a ratio of one vehicle for every three soldiers, making it the most mechanized field force in the war.
- The Bombardier company of Valcourt, Quebec, built over 150 military snowmobiles. General Motors developed a frame for another snowmobile, of which 300 were built.
- Canadian Pacific Railway constructed 788 Valentine tanks in its Angus shop in Montreal; its engine was built by General Motors. 5,200 tanks had been built at C.P. Angus and Montreal Locomotive Company shops by the end of the war.
- 2,150 twenty-five pounder "Sexton" self-propelled guns were built by Montreal Locomotive Works.
- A heavy utility vehicle body was developed in Canada. 4,000 such vehicles were manufactured by General Motors in Oshawa. This vehicle body could be mounted on a 4x4 chassis and could, with slight modifications, be used as a personnel carrier, ambulance, light wireless truck or machinery truck.

## ALL THE SHIPS AT SEA

There were 348 ten thousand-ton merchant ships built in Canada during the war. Large and relatively

Photo: Airplane assembly line inside the plant, Canadian Car and Foundry Co., Fort William (ca. 1940). Archives of Ontario C190-5-0-0-21



slow, but reliable and easily adapted to a variety of cargoes, these ships and those who sailed on them ensured the delivery of much of Canada's war production.

- During 1941, the first of the large 10,000 ton merchant ships were taking an average of 307 days to build (and up to 426 days in one case). One year later, average production time had dropped to 163 days (with one ship being produced in a record 112 days).
- Some 57,000 individuals were employed in merchant shipbuilding and a further 27,000 worked in naval shipbuilding, which included building vessels like destroyers, frigates, corvettes and minesweepers.

## **WASPS, MOSQUITOS, AND HAWKER HURRICANES**

Canadian aviation industries manufactured engines and other parts for various aircraft, as well as complete bomber and fighter aircraft such as the Lancaster, the Mosquito (whose laminated fuselages were made of wood harvested from the forests of British Columbia), and the Hawker Hurricane, to mention a few.

- Production in the aircraft industry went from extremely low levels before the war to 4,000 military aircraft a year by the end of the war. At its peak, the industry employed 120,000 men and women.
- Canada assembled a total of 16,000 military aircraft, 10,000 of which were shipped directly

to Britain, and the remainder going either to the United States or remaining in Canada for use in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

- Canadian factory space for the production of aircraft increased from 500,000 square feet before the war to a high of 14,000,000 square feet at its peak during the war.
- Canadian industry pulled together to a great degree in many different ways and cooperated a great deal to produce vitally-needed war materials. For example, the contract to produce 1,100 Mosquito fighter-bombers was awarded to De Havilland, but they only did the final assembly. General Motors made the fuselages, Massey Ferguson made the wings, Boeing made the tailplanes, the flaps were made by Canadian Power Boat Company, and the undercarriages were built by Otaco. Numerous other smaller companies were also involved in producing other parts for this aircraft as well.

## **THE LEGACY**

The sacrifices and achievements made by Canadians during the Second World War were many and spanned a broad range of efforts. The contributions of the Canadians who worked in industry on the home front and helped produce material for the war effort were essential in helping triumph in the war. To learn more about the Canadian war effort during the Second World War, please visit the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site at [www.veterans.gc.ca](http://www.veterans.gc.ca) or call 1-877-604-8469 toll-free.

