

THE FLAGS OF OUR VETERANS

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THE VETERAN AND THE FLAG

Only a veteran really knows the special personal, almost religious attachment to flags during war and peace support operations. It is rightly said we fight for queen and country, both being represented by the sacred and patriotic symbols which are our national ensigns and battle flags. Here follows the story of the Flags of our Veterans. *Lest we forget*



THE NATIONAL FLAG OF CANADA

Also called the “Red Maple Leaf Flag”, the National Flag of Canada became our first truly official Canadian flag by parliamentary approval in 1965 and as such first flew in combat operations during the 1991 Gulf War. It was also proudly carried into battle by our veterans during the Somalia conflict. Our national flag is flown and worn on our uniforms during peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations the world over. Recognized as a beacon of peace around the world, it has also become the Canadian battle flag. Today, we are witnessing the rise of a new generation of combat veterans returning from service under our flag in Afghanistan. There were no fatalities during the Gulf War but one UN peacekeeper was lost in Somalia. To date, there have been over 100 mortal casualties in the Afghanistan Conflict. Hundreds of our Afghanistan Veterans have been injured, many permanently, serving under the Red Maple Leaf Battle Flag. *Lest we forget*



THE ROYAL UNION FLAG

Commonly known as the “Union Jack”, and called the “Union Flag” outside Canada, thousands of Canadians who served under this famous symbol of the British Empire and Commonwealth first became war veterans during the Northwest Rebellion and in the Sudan in 1885. Many more served during the Boer War of 1899-1902 in Southern Africa and in the Great War of 1914-1918 in Europe. There followed the Second World War of 1939-1945 where over a million Canadians saw service on land, at sea and in the air. Today, many of the Second World War veterans are still with us. A good many of these served with British and other Commonwealth Forces. The Union Jack was by default, the official flag of the Dominion of Canada from 1904 to 1965 even though it was displaced as the national flag by the Red Ensign in 1945. It was also the flag of Newfoundland until very recently. An estimated 106,460 Canadian sailors, soldiers, airmen and merchant seamen lost their lives fighting under the Union Jack. *Lest we forget*



THE CANADIAN RED ENSIGN

Never an official Canadian flag by parliamentary approval, all three official versions of the Canadian Red Ensign nevertheless deserve high national honours. These versions were produced in 1868, then in 1924 and finally in 1957. Although the 1868 version saw service as a battle flag at the end of the First World War, notably at Vimy Ridge, it was only flown outside Canada from January 1944. The Merchant Navy had flown it at sea from 1924 onwards. In 1945 it was officially flown on land and thereby became the battle flag of our Korean War Veterans. The 1957 version may also said to be the flag of our Cold War Veterans. Canada lost 44,893 souls in the Second World War, 496 during the Korean War and over 100 during the Cold War. *Lest we forget*

THE FLAGS OF OUR VETERANS



THE FLAG OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations (UN) Flag came into being in 1947 and it is the flag of the Peacekeeping Veterans world-wide, the renowned **Blue Berets**. Peacekeeping missions did not exclude conflict, they were fraught with them. The UN Flag was also carried by our veterans during the Korean War. Those who served under the sky-blue flag of peace often came under fire in places such as Cyprus, Congo, Lebanon, Yugoslavia, Somalia, Rwanda, and other zones of conflict. Included under this flag are the veterans of five multinational peacekeeping missions. The largest single loss of Canadian lives occurred on a UN peacekeeping mission, on the 9th of August 1974, when a Canadian UN aircraft was shot out of the sky over Lebanon. Canada has suffered 114 fatalities during UN Peacekeeping operations to date. For their extraordinary sacrifice and courage in the service of peace, the **Blue Berets** were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1988. *Lest we forget*



THE NATO FLAG

The flag of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and is both a Peacekeeping Veterans' and a War Veterans' flag. It is also the flag of the Cold War Veteran. The NATO flag came to be an international symbol after the formation of the western alliance of the democratic nations of Western Europe and North America to face the threat from the Communist Bloc under the Warsaw Pact. It is flown as a common Battle Flag at sea and on land by all the NATO nations. Today, long a guarantor of peace, NATO is at war. Formerly a Cold War symbol, today the NATO flag has been involved in peace support operations in the former Yugoslavia and in Afghanistan. Canada has lost 12 NATO Peacekeepers and over 100 war-fighters in Afghanistan so far. *Lest we forget*



THE EUROPEAN UNION FLAG

It is less known that Canadians have served on peacekeeping missions in the former Yugoslavia under the European Union (EU) flag. Peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations in the former Yugoslav republics of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia were recently handed over to the EU or the OSCE by the United Nations and NATO. Although Canada has so far suffered no casualties under the EU Flag, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina remain dangerous assignments for our military and police peacekeepers who serve there. *Lest we forget*

THE SYMBOLISM OF OUR FLAGS

The soldier's passionate commitment to the flag is not understood by the civilian who harbours a more comfortable patriotism for the national symbols. For veterans, flags are more than patriotic and rallying symbols. The flag is home, the beacon of salvation, the signal that all is not lost. This symbolism of the flags we served under have a sacred, deep-rooted significance which is not experienced by civilians. We, the veterans, unlike our fellow citizens, are willing to lay down our lives for the flag, and over 107,250 of our comrades in arms have done so since the country was founded in 1867. This is why a flag must be carried with honour and never be dipped or permitted to touch the ground. It is the veteran who salutes the flag because it is the veteran who serves under the flag. It should therefore be the veterans' right to carry the flag first on parade with pride and honour! *Lest we forget*

THE FLAGS OF OUR VETERANS

“Have not I myself known five-hundred living soldiers sabered into crows’ meat for a piece of glazed cotton, which they call their flag; which, had you sold it at any market-cross, would not have brought above three groschen?”

(Thomas Carlyle, c1828)

THE BATTLE FLAGS OF OUR NAVY VETERANS

The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) came into being in 1910 and flew the British Imperial Naval (White) Ensign from that time including the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War. Canada was authorized to fly the Red Ensign on merchant ships from 1892 and the Blue Ensign on government vassals, including warships from 1924. Before 1949, Newfoundland flew the standard British Red Ensign on her ships. During the Second World War, the Imperial White Ensign was again in service on RCN ships up until the unification of the Canadian armed forces in 1968 even though the Blue Ensign was still official. Our Merchant Navy continued to fly the Red Ensign. From the beginning of the war in 1940 until 1965 our navy again flew the White Ensign. After 1965 the Red Maple Leaf Flag flew from our warships. In 1968, the Navy received its own distinctive White Ensign to fly at sea. Since 1965, Canadian merchant vassals fly the Red Maple Leaf Flag.



**IMPERIAL NAVAL
WHITE ENSIGN
1910-1965**



**RCN
NAVAL ENSIGN
1924-1940**



**MERCHANT NAVY
RED ENSIGN
1924-1965**



**NATIONAL
FLAG OF CANADA
1965**



**CF
NAVAL ENSIGN
1968**

THE BATTLE FLAGS OF OUR ARMY VETERANS

Up until the Great War of 1914-1918 the regiments of the Canadian Militia flew the Royal Union Flag and a myriad of regimental colours and guidons. For a brief time during the Great War, notably at Vimy Ridge, the 1868 version of the Red Ensign was flown by our military. Otherwise, the Canadian Army flew the Imperial Union Jack until January 1944. It should be noted that when serving overseas, our soldiers wore a green or a red maple leaf to distinguish themselves from other British and Commonwealth forces. A special battle flag was designed for the military during the war but was unpopular and fell into obscurity. From the reconstitution of the Canadian Army in Northwest Europe in 1942, the 1924 and 1957 versions of the Red Ensign became the battle flags of our army until 1965. From 1965 the National Flag of Canada (Red Maple Leaf Flag) replaced the Red Ensign. With unification in 1968, the Canadian Forces (CF) Ensign came into use alongside the National Flag. A distinctive CF Army Ensign came into being about 1975 but it is the Red Maple Leaf Flag of Canada which our troops wear on their uniforms and now carry into battle.



**CANADIAN
RED ENSIGN
1868-1904**



**ROYAL UNION
(JACK) FLAG
1904-1944**



**CANADIAN
RED ENSIGN
1944-1965**



**NATIONAL
FLAG OF CANADA
1965**



**CF
ARMY ENSIGN
1975**

Be a proud Veteran – Carry our flags with honour!

THE FLAGS OF OUR VETERANS

THE BATTLE FLAGS OF OUR AIR FORCE VETERANS

With the creation of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) in 1924, the various air components in Canada were united under the Royal Air Force (RAF) Blue Ensign. Many of our pilots and aircrew in Europe and elsewhere fought under the RAF Ensign during the Second World War as members of the British Imperial and Commonwealth forces. In 1940, a distinctly Canadian Blue Ensign was finally adopted for the RCAF. A red maple leaf replaced the red dot in the roundel. After the unification of the Canadian armed forces in 1968 the Blue Ensign disappeared but again came into service in 1984. Between 1965 and 1984 the Canadian Air Force flew the National Red Maple Leaf Flag or the Canadian Forces (CF) Ensign after 1968. Canadian military aircraft wore the Red Ensign prior to 1965 and now wear the Red Maple Leaf Flag recognized the world over. Today, the Air Force proudly flies the redesigned traditional Light Blue Air Ensign.



**RAF
BLUE ENSIGN
1924-1940**



**RCAF
BLUE ENSIGN
1940-1965**



**NATIONAL
FLAG OF CANADA
1965**



**CF
WHITE ENSIGN
1968**



**CF
AIR ENSIGN
1984**

THE ORDER OF PRECEDENCE OF OUR FLAGS

For most of us veterans as well as the public, the order of precedence of our flags is confusing. It does not help that Canadian flag protocol is not complete. One must be cautioned that the flag precedence established by some private associations leads us in error. The Canadian Forces has its own order of precedence on land and sea but this does not include the flags of our veterans. Official Canadian flag precedence only applies to current, not former, flags. The United Nations Flag Code applies internationally to national flags and for the UN flag only. The proper manner for flying the flags of our veterans may be found by combining the recognized international flag protocol with former flags by seniority. Note that it is highly improper to fly active CF ensigns and battle flags in a veteran's parade unless carried by the active military forces. The following order of flags is recommended as the most appropriate in Canada. Permission to fly the former military ensigns of the Canadian Forces must be obtained by the designated military commands.

Flag

Precedence Description



The 1965 Red Maple Leaf Flag is the National Flag of Canada and our Battle Flag
It represents all national service, peacekeeping and war veterans from 1965



The 1801 Royal Union Flag is a former flag of Canada and is still an Official Flag
It represents our British, Commonwealth and Canadian veterans before 1944



The 1924 Canadian Red Ensign is a former flag of Canada altered in 1957
It represents our Merchant Navy, Second World War and Korean War veterans



The 1801 Imperial White Ensign of the RN is a former flag of the RCN
It represents our Canadian, British and Commonwealth naval veterans



The 1940 Canadian Blue Ensign is a former flag of the RCAF
It represents our Canadian air force veterans



The 1947 United Nations Flag is an international flag with national status
It represents our United Nations and multinational peacekeeping veterans



The 1953 North Atlantic Treaty Flag is an international flag with national status
It represents our Cold War and NATO peacekeeping & peace enforcement veterans

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