



Significant Canadian Military Contributions in the Second World War:

- Simultaneous with their attack on Pearl Harbour, Japan attacked the British territory of Hong Kong, which was garrisoned by Canadian troops. The Canadian garrison eventually surrendered – hundreds were killed and those taken prisoner spent the remainder of the war in prisoner of war camps, experiencing terrible conditions that included forced starvation, forced labour, and torture.
- A few months later, Canadian troops launched a disastrous raid on the French port town of **Dieppe**. Nearly a thousand were killed and nearly two-thousand were taken prisoner. The historical debate regarding its purpose and necessity will likely never cease. These two events were not a good start for Canada in the war.
- Canada played significant roles in the **Battle of the Atlantic** and the **Battle of Britain**. Tens of thousands of Canadian pilots perished in the airwar, and the threat of German U-boats was perilous throughout the war. Canadians contributed significantly to the **British Commonwealth Air Training Plan**, and Canadian pilots flew with distinction in the **RCAF** and **Bomber Command**. In the Atlantic, Canadian **Corvettes** were crucial to guarding convoys from U-boats.
- In 1943, the Allies invaded Sicily and then Italy in an attempt to strike at the “soft underbelly” of Europe. Fighting in Italy was slow and brutal. The Allies were denied their quick success and the campaign in Italy lasted until the end of the war. Many German troops were diverted from France to fight here though, which helped make the Invasion of Normandy possible. Canadians fought with distinction at **Ortona** – a bloody, house-to-house battle that historians dub “the Little Stalingrad”

- On June 6th, 1944, the Allies launched the **Invasion of Normandy**. Paratroopers dropped behind enemy lines the night before to secure critical crossroads and destroy German artillery, while at 6:00AM thousands of troops landed on five different beaches. Canadians landed at **Juno** beach, and although it was one of the most heavily defended beaches they made it further and accomplished more objectives than the Americans or British on the other beaches. This was the largest amphibious invasion in human history and the beginning of the end for Hitler and the Nazis.
- After the landings at Normandy, Canadians fought against battle-hardened SS troops to close the “**Falaise gap**” – a pocket of German troops that was being encircled by the allies. While the Canadians sustained heavy casualties and pioneered new uses of their armoured vehicles to launch the attack, some Allied generals criticized the slow progress of the Canadians which ultimately allowed a significant number of Germans to escape encirclement.
- As the Allies fought east towards Germany, an unsuccessful attempt was made to liberate Holland (Operation Market Garden). In September 1944, Canadians defeated German forces at the Battle of the **Sheldt** Estuary and went on to **liberate Holland** in 1945. The allies destroyed the Dutch dyke system, flooding the farmland with ocean water. While this was a cunning way of trapping the Germans and cutting off their supplies, The fighting in the Sheldt was a muddy quagmire that made movement difficult. Canadians took heavy casualties, but the Dutch are thankful to this very day.