

Fall Term, 2017 – Room A100
Friday, Sept 15 – Friday, Nov. 17
Afternoon, 12:50-2:50

Course F Canada and the Second World War

Co-chairs: Mike Antoniadis and Tiiu Ambus

Course Director: **Eric McGeer**, Teacher, Historian, Author

From her declaration of war on September 10, 1939, until the final victory over Germany and Japan in 1945, Canada made a contribution to the Allied war effort out of all proportion to her population and place in the world. This course will review the many roles Canadians played in the Second World War, both in battle and on the domestic front, and the ways in which the experience of a second and greater conflict than that of 1914-1918 brought Canadians to a new understanding of themselves and their country.

Week 1: Sept. 15 The no man's land between the wars / The war takes shape

Hard hit by the Depression and dismayed by the rise of militant dictators, Canadians contemplated the approach of a second war with dread; but when it came, Canada stood firm by Britain's side. In looking at Canada's road to war, we will review the background of the interwar period, the major political figures, and the international situation as it developed through the 1930s. How prepared Canada was in 1939, and what kind of war she expected to fight, will stand in stark contrast to the country's reaction to the shocking events of 1940 and the full mobilisation of arms and industry that followed.

Week 2: Sept. 22 Hong Kong / Dieppe

What began as a European war in 1939 grew into a world war by 1941. As a junior ally, Canada played no part in the strategic direction of the war, but her forces were committed to operations serving larger strategic ends. The despatch of two battalions to Hong Kong in 1941, and the Dieppe raid in 1942, remain the two most tragic and controversial episodes of Canada's war. We will consider the decisions that led to both tragedies, the course of the fighting, and the historical debates about Hong Kong and Dieppe that have continued to the present day.

[CLASS CANCELLED ON SEPT. 29 FOR GLENDON EVENT IN A100]

Week 3: Oct. 6 The war at sea / The war in the air

To protect the vital lines of supply between North America and Britain, the Royal Canadian Navy expanded enormously in size and role, eventually becoming the fourth largest surface fleet in the world. The story of the Battle of the Atlantic, the one the Allies could not lose, will complement the story of the Royal Canadian Air Force which, along with the other Commonwealth air forces, made up half of Bomber Command. For nearly four years, it was the Canadians serving at sea and in the air who braved the terrible risks and carried the fight to the enemy.

Week 4: Oct. 13 The Italian Campaign: Sicily to Ortona

Not until mid 1943 did Canada's army come to grips directly with the enemy. The longest Canadian land campaign of the war began on the southeastern tip of Sicily and carried on for another twenty-two months. Nearly 100,000 Canadians served in Italy, where in more than forty war cemeteries 6,000 remain in silent testimony to their comrades' efforts and sacrifice from Sicily to the Po Valley. Enhancing our discussion of this oft forgotten chapter of Canadian history will be the remarkably vivid record of paintings, photographs, and memoirs of the Italian Campaign.

Week 5: Oct. 20 The D-Day Dodgers: Cassino to Ravenna

The story of the Italian Campaign continues as we review the two great feats of arms achieved by I Canadian Corps — the breaking of the Hitler Line in May of 1944, and the breaking of the Gothic Line four months later. Overshadowed then as now by the more famous Normandy landings in June 1944, the battles won by the Canadians in northern Italy brought the Allies as close to a decisive victory as they would ever come in this long and frustrating campaign, of which the strategic worth is still debated.

Week 6: Oct. 27 The Home Front / The University of Toronto at war

Schooled by the experience of the First World War, Canada took a much more systematic approach in mobilising the country's population and resources. In this class we will look at the home front and the effects of the war effort on Canadian society and politics, as well as the controversies arising from the internment of the Japanese and the conscription crisis of 1944. The University of Toronto is in many regards a microcosm of the country at war, so that a discussion of its policies and contributions will give a closer focus to the many ways in which Canadians supported the national effort from 1939 to 1945.

Week 7: Nov. 3 D-Day and the Normandy summer

June 6, 1944, stands as one of the most famous days in history, a day on which the 3rd Canadian Division played a significant part in assuring the success of the Allied landings and beginning the liberation of Europe. The D-Day assaults, the drive inland, and the brutal fighting on the road to Falaise involved Canadians in the most momentous campaign waged by the Western Allies. The outcome of the campaign sealed the result of the Second World War.

Week 8: Nov. 10 From Normandy to the Liberation of the Netherlands

The triumph in Normandy was followed by some of the most bitter battles ever fought by Canadian soldiers, from the virtual sieges of the Channel ports to the waterlogged fighting to secure the Scheldt estuary. As hopes of victory in 1944 faded, the Canadians found themselves facing the prospect of a final drive into Germany and the destruction of the enemy forces in the eastern Netherlands, where the reception of a population liberated from a cruel occupier offered the most meaningful recompense for the toils of the victory campaign.

Week 9: Nov. 17 The clouded dawn

Canadians were under no illusions about wars to end all wars in 1945 as the first stirrings of the Cold War became evident in the Gouzenko affair. The readjustment to the postwar world and other realities had occupied Canadians well before 1945, and it is no exaggeration to say that the years immediately after the Second World War form a watershed in Canadian history, with important changes to the social, political, and cultural fabric of the country. This final class will thus be an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of the war and the profound changes it wrought upon Canada and Canadians.