

World War II Patriotics ...Canadian, that is!

by
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Say "patriotics" to a trader, and he or she will undoubtedly assume that you are referring to World War II



covers—from the United States. That’s understandable. The bulk of these covers *are* U.S. issues, and they’re the ones that are most well known and most often seen in various auctions, displays, etc. Other countries have similar offerings, though, but we tend to overlook the latter, either from lack of knowledge or from ethnocentric disdain.

Canada, as it turns out, not only has covers in this category, but has a respectable variety and number, as well. More than one million Canadians and Newfoundlanders served in the Second World War. Of these, more than 45,000 gave their lives, and another 55,000 were wounded. Countless others shared the suffering and hardship of war...including those at home, and, in a very real way, that’s what these Canadian World War II Patriotic covers reflect.

Canada's economic effort in the war was impressive and her financial contribution generous. A whole new series of industries was created to meet the demands for war supplies, from munitions to motor vehicles, aircraft and ships. In the field of diplomacy, Canada played a particularly important liaison role between Great Britain and the United States.

Although it would be a mistake to over estimate Canada's contribution to the defeat of the Axis powers, still, for a country of only 11 million people at the time, it was remarkable, and was significant enough to win the respect of other nations. With the third largest navy, the fourth largest air force and an army of six divisions, World War II saw Canada become a significant military power. Canada as a nation matured through the ordeal of war and by 1945 was ready to assume new responsibilities as a member of the world community.

Perusing these World War II covers, collectors will be able to identify a number of prevailing themes, many of which, understandably, are similar to those seen from the United States during this period, but other are more unique to Canada. With Canada’s strong historic ties to England, for example, first as a colony and then as a dominion, Canada’s main war aim was “Support Britain!” This is evident right from the beginning of the war, in September, 1939, and this can be seen in a number of the covers, such as the “Britons Never Shall Be Slaves” sample pictured on the previous page. Others include “Wings for Britain,” “There Will Always Be an England,” and the like.

Themes similar to the ones at home, here, include about what you would expect if you have any experience with US World War II Patriotics at all: “Buy More War Savings Certificates,” Buy War Savings Stamps,” “Friday is War Savings Stamp Day,” etc. Others are more specifically nationalistic: “Carry On Canada,” “V for Victory,” “Canada Marches On,” and so forth.

After May 1940, with the fall of France, another objective appeared - cooperate with the United States in continental defence. This, of course, became even more pronounced with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, which signaled a very real threat to the other side of the country. Although I don’t have any, myself, I would also be very surprised if there weren’t also a number of covers covering various conservation themes and material shortages: save aluminum, victory gardens, make your telephone calls short, etc.

All of the above themes can be seen on the 20-strike covers in this category. The 30-strikes seem to noticeably differ. Here, judging from the few that I currently have, the heavy theme seems to be a ‘defeat the enemy’ thrust: “The Jig Is Up!”, various satirical cartoons of Axis leaders, and so on. I don’t remember ever seeing any 40-strikes in this category, and I don’t have any in my collection.

An additional feature which makes all of these covers even more desirable is the fact that they are all tax stamped (1/5 for the 20-strikes; 3/10 for the 30-strikes), and Canadian tax-stamped covers are collected in and of themselves.

I don't have any stats on how many covers there are here; my own collection certainly isn't numerically representative. I'd love to hear from some knowledgeable Canadian collectors on this subject.