

MEDALS AND MEMORIES: The Inuit

The True North Strong and Free?

Character Education

- Explore different concept of service across cultures
- Appreciate diversity in the development of an individual's sense of social responsibility
- Think critically about loyalty to Canada and divided loyalties

Facts

- 1/3 of Canada's land mass is in its northern territories
- A northwest naval passage over North America would shorten the Panama Canal trip from Tokyo to London by 4,000 nautical miles or 7,800 km
- Canada considers the Arctic waters of the Northwest Passage internal waters which fall under Canadian control; this claim is disputed by the U.S.A. and the European Union
- 4,200 Canadian Rangers, mostly Inuit, under the Canadian Land Force Command provide a military presence in sparsely settled northern, coastal and isolated areas of Canada. "Vigilans/The Watchers" became active during WWII

Before the Reading

- Name Canada's three territories and their capitals. Compare the population of their capital with the population of the capital of Ontario. If the need arose, which capitals would be the easiest to defend? Why?
- Who are Canada's closest neighbours to the NORTH? Is there any reason why we should be 'on guard' with these neighbours?
- When you watch out for your friends, what does that mean? Explain what you might do to watch out for them? What would it mean to watch out for your country?

Reading: "They also serve who only stand and wait." John Milton



North of the tree line in Canada Inuit Watchers provide a military presence in support of Canadian sovereignty, including reporting unusual activities, collecting local data of significance to support military operations and providing local expertise, assistance and advice as guides and advisors in search and rescue operations.



Ranger Master Corporal Lilly Kerr

February 14, 2000, 17 of these Watchers from all over Canada came to Ottawa to receive the Canadian Ranger Bar to accompany their Special Service Medal. The recipients ranged in age from 34 to 78 and spoke seven different languages. Master Corporal Lilly Kerr of Telegraph Creek, B.C. stated, "My friends and family are very proud of me—after all I'm a grandmother twice over and should be home knitting and doing these types of things, but instead I'm out there with the Canadian Rangers doing search and rescue, and rappelling down cliffs....I love being a Canadian Ranger."

The 2009 Ranger sovereignty operation named Nunavut ended in Eureka, Ellesmere Island after a 14 day patrol that traversed approximately 1,050 km over arctic tundra and sea ice; it was one of three sovereignty patrols now conducted annually.

The 2007 expedition of 17 red-suited Rangers with seven regular Canadian Forces soldiers and one Mountie patrolled 8,000 km from Resolute Bay to Alert covering a barren stretch of white hell in temperatures as cold as minus 50C; their snowmobiles pushed into chilling winds of up to 115 km an hour. Arctic explorer Robert Peary last covered that remote western coast of Ellesmere Island in 1906.

The 2006 patrols gathered information on equipment and airfields that would be helpful to Canada in emergencies such as major air disasters. Five teams set out from Mould Bay in the Northwest Territories and from Isachsen, Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay in Nunavut; the teams covered 5,000 km. As well as reconnaissance, the patrols trained soldiers to put up camps in extreme conditions and to communicate with the air force from ground to air by radio.

In Ontario, as many as one in three Rangers is a woman. Fifty year old Liza Ningluk of Grise Fiord accompanied the 2007 patrol; as a community elder she was held in high regard by her fellow soldiers. Two Inuit in their 80s serve a function similar to military chaplains, passing on their wisdom. Since there is no compulsory retirement age, they have been Rangers since 1947.



Pacific Coast Militia Rangers

The Canadian Rangers were preceded by the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers (PCMR) formed in 1942. During the heightened fears of Japanese invasion after Pearl Harbour, the PCMR numbered 15,000 volunteers in 138 communities and included the gumboots navy—a fishing fleet that provided surveillance along the coast line of British Columbia and the Yukon.

When shells, supposedly from a Japanese submarine, hit near the light house at Port Estevan on the remote western shores of Vancouver Island on June 20, 1942, Canadians went on high alert. A little know fact even today is that a total of 102 Japanese balloon or bomb fragments were documented on Canadian soil during WWII. The PMCR was stood down in 1945 but the Rangers assumed their watch over Canada's remote, isolated, coastal communities in 1947.

Now after 60 years of vigilance, by those who have served not only by standing and waiting, but also by patrolling and advising, there are new roles for the Canadian

MEDALS AND MEMORIES MINUTES



Lance Corporal John Shiwak who received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal, died at the Battle of Cambrai in northern France Nov 20, 1917. Shiwak, a hunter and trapper of Inuit descent from the remote Rigolet community in Labrador, was a sniper and a scout with the "F" Company of the 1st

Newfoundland Regiment. Shiwak distinguished himself as an expert sniper while serving on the front lines. An unidentified officer reportedly called him the best sniper in the British Army. Captain R.H. Tait of the Newfoundland Regiment called the 28 year old Lance Corporal, "a great favourite with all ranks, an excellent scout and observer, and a thoroughly good and reliable fellow in every way." Shiwak attributed his sniping prowess to his experience "swatching" seals—a Newfoundland and Labrador term for watching the water to shoot seals as they resurface to breathe. When he died on the battlefield of shell wounds, he was 28 years old. Fellow "F" brigade member **Private Frederick Freida**, from the remote Hopedale community of Labrador was more fortunate. He returned home. When he was 55 years old in 1951, Private Freida decided to serve his country as a Canadian Arctic Ranger.



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Avalanche at Kangiqsualujuaq



Disaster struck the 1999 New Year's celebration in a remote village on Ungava Bay in Quebec when a three metre high wall of snow tore out the wall of the gym and buried many of the more than 400 partiers. Ignoring 100 km winds and -20 degree C weather, survivors used shovels, frying pans and even bare hands to free those trapped. The avalanche killed nine and injured many more. Fortunately the remote Inuit community, surrounded by heavily scoured rolling glacial highlands, had a 28 member patrol of Canadian Rangers. These Canadian Forces volunteers helped dig out those trapped, built coffins and dug graves. The Rangers monitored the cliff face to assess further avalanche risk, patrolled the avalanche area to protect the young and curious from harm and helped at every stage of need as the community dealt with the disaster and grief. Forty additional Rangers from 11 different patrols flew in or assisted the community in some way. For example, the Coral Harbour Patrol, NWT, harvested and shipped fresh caribou to the disaster area. For their extraordinary leadership and co-operation the 2nd Canadian Rangers Patrol Group was awarded the Canadian Armed Forces Unit Commendation.

Rangers. Global warming threatens to turn the Northwest Passage into an international shipping route in as few as 15 years. The historic Inuit presence in the "true north strong and free" has served to counter International claims on Canadian underwater resources and on unchecked passage through what Canada considers its historic coastal waters.

Remembrance Day serves as a great reminder to discover Inuit service in Canada's past and their role in Canada's present and future. A new northern frontier for all Canadians is on the horizon.

After the Reading

- What did you notice about the Inuit attitude towards the elderly and women?
- How do the three annual sovereignty patrols provide

for an exchange of knowledge between the regular Canadian Forces and the Canadian Rangers? (i.e. Who knows what?)

- Why do you think the Canadian government is expanding the Canadian Rangers program?
- How did this reading change your opinions about Canada's northern territories?

Extensions

- The attack on Pearl Harbour led to the internment of Canadians of Japanese heritage who lived along the British Columbia coast. Research the stories of some of the affected families.
- Compare Canadian novels by Joy Kogawa (*Obasan*) and David Guterson (*Snow Falling on Cedars*) with *Picture Bride*, by the American Yoshiko Uchida. All deal with the Japanese experience during WWII.
- When Canadian Rangers gathered to receive their Special Service Medals, they spoke seven different languages. Research the different Inuit groups that have lived and continue to live in Canada's north.

Select one of the following to prepare a report for your class:

- The May 2009 National Geographic article "Arctic Landgrab"
- The university of Guelph website Canada's Polar Environments
- The 1942 Chapter of Chuck Davis' *The History of Metropolitan Vancouver*

Sources

- www.heritage.nf.ca "Aboriginals in WWI: Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage"
- www.vancouverhistory.ca "1942: Expulsion of the Japanese"
- www.armee.forces.gc.ca "Special Services Medal Investiture Ceremony" and "Backgrounder: The Canadian Ranger"
- www.arctic.uoguelph.ca "Canada's Polar Environments"
- www.carleton.ca "Stopping Canadian sovereignty from melting away"
- www.journal.forces.gc.ca "The Canadian Rangers: A "Postmodern" Militia that Works"

Image Sources: Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation; Veterans Affairs Canada; Esquimalt Naval & Military Museum