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Flags of Canada and Japan.

A Short History of Canada–Japan Military Relations

by Hugues Canuel

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The spread of COVID-19 around the world could have put a dramatic end to the flurry of Canada–Japan military initiatives that emerged in the 2010s, from Operation NEON—supporting the implementation of UN sanctions against North Korea—to participation in friendly events such as the International Cadets’ Conference at the National Defense Academy outside Tokyo.¹ Although there was a lull in the spring and summer of 2020 with the suspension of both personnel exchanges and the deployment of Canadian units to the region, it lasted only a few months. The frigate *Winnipeg* and a

CP-140 long-range aircraft were back by the fall to patrol the East China Sea from bases in Japan.² That episode, which went largely unnoticed by the international media, is a reminder of the complicated but little-known history of interaction between the Canadian and Japanese armed forces over more than a century of mistrust, hostility and cooperation. The purpose of this article is to fill in this gap in the narrative of Canada–Japan relations from the early 20th century to the present.

Feats of arms and great battles will find little place here as the periods of combat between the armed forces of the two countries have already been the subject of detailed study.³ Instead, the emphasis will be on how the two nations’ military relationship has evolved over time against the backdrop of an ever-changing geostrategic context. An attempt will also be made to illuminate largely ignored military interactions between the two nations, both in the past and in recent times. This approach will give the reader a glimpse of a unique dynamic as the two nations evolved from distant enemies in the interwar period to partners with common interests in the 21st century. But first, we need to return to the beginning, when British diplomacy made them reluctant allies across the vastness of the Pacific.



Commodore Matthew Perry meeting Imperial Commissioners at Yokohama, Japan, 1854.

In the meantime, enjoying the benevolent neutrality of Great Britain, Japan decided to counter Russian advances in Korea and Manchuria, launching an attack in February 1904.¹⁰ A precursor to the horrors of the First World War, the Russo-Japanese conflict attracted much interest overseas, and both sides accepted the presence of foreign observers in their ranks.¹¹

Exploiting the friendly spirit of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Great Britain man-

Reluctant Allies

Following nearly two hundred years of seclusion and the first intrusion of the American Matthew Perry in 1854, Japan voluntarily opened to the world at the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868.⁴ Just a few years later, Canada gained a gateway to the Pacific when British Columbia joined the dominion in 1871.⁵ Exchanges soon followed with the visit of Canadian missionaries to Japan in 1873 and the arrival of the first Japanese immigrant to Canada in 1877.⁶ Before the turn of the century, eight thousand Japanese compatriots would follow, settling for the most part in the Vancouver area despite [translation] “anti-Asian sentiment that had been developing for several years in British Columbia among members of the Anglo-Saxon population.”⁷ Paradoxically, it was as these “yellow peril” denunciations in North America were increasing—reflecting concerns shared on both sides of the 49th parallel⁸—that Great Britain decided to tie its fortunes to those of the Empire of the Rising Sun by establishing the first Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902.

London—and the rest of the British Empire—thus recognized the primacy of Japanese interests in Korea in return for Tokyo’s support in countering Russian expansionism in the Far East.⁹ Ominously for those Canadians concerned about the security of the Pacific coast, the agreement with Japan also meant the gradual withdrawal of the Royal Navy, which had to concentrate its forces in European waters in the face of the German Kaiser’s ambitions.

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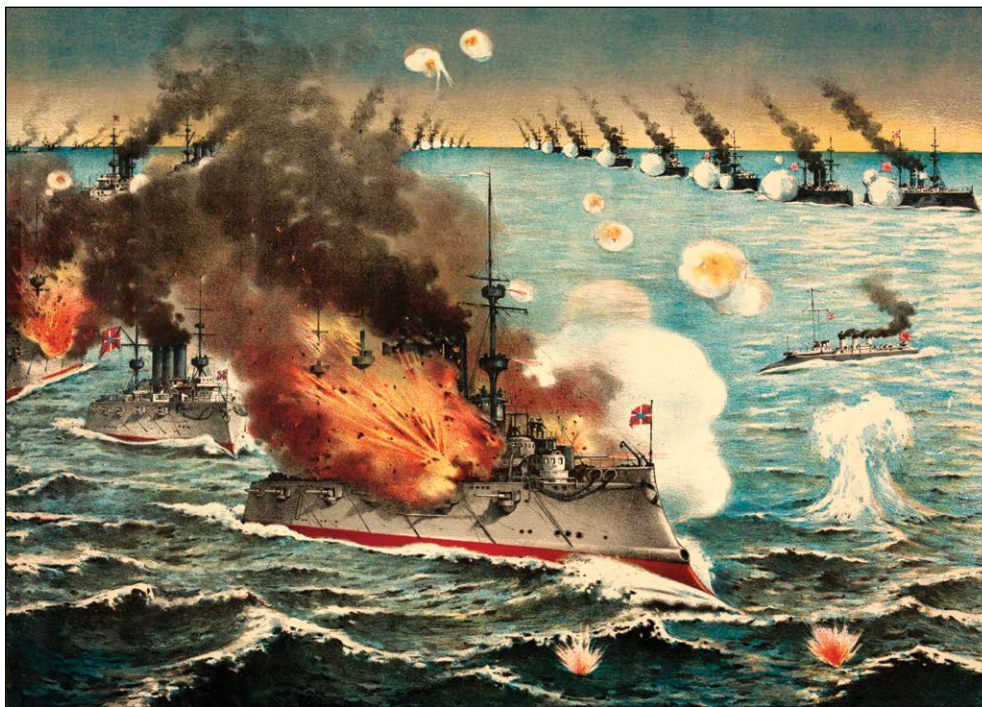
aged not only to send several British observers but also to add representatives from the dominions, including Canada. Artillery Captain Herbert C. Thacker was ordered to set out for Japan a few weeks after hostilities broke out.¹² He was breveted as a major

and arrived in Tokyo on 27 March 1904 to join Lieutenant-General William Nicholson of the British Army.¹³ Nicholson was leading a motley crew of British, Australian, French, German, Spanish and American officers who were to join the Japanese 2nd Army, which had already landed on the Liaodong Peninsula with the intention of marching into the heart of Manchuria. However, the attachés had to wait until they could observe the first major battle at Liaoyang on 26 August as the 2nd Army moved up the peninsula to combine forces with the 1st Army that was coming from Korea.¹⁴ Thacker was also present at the Battle of the Shaho River in October, but his campaign was already coming to an end—he was evacuated

to Japan a few weeks later for medical reasons and returned to Canada in late November.

This first assignment of a Canadian attaché with the Japanese armed forces was not immediately followed by others. Major Thacker, who was confirmed in his rank in May 1905, wrote a few reports relating his experience, but his shortened trip caused him to miss the two most storied battles, the Siege of Port Arthur and the Battle of Mukden.¹⁵ Perhaps a more tangible benefit of the Russo-Japanese War was the spirit of affiliation with the British Crown that was apparent among members of Canada’s Japanese community. Twenty-four veterans of the conflict, after

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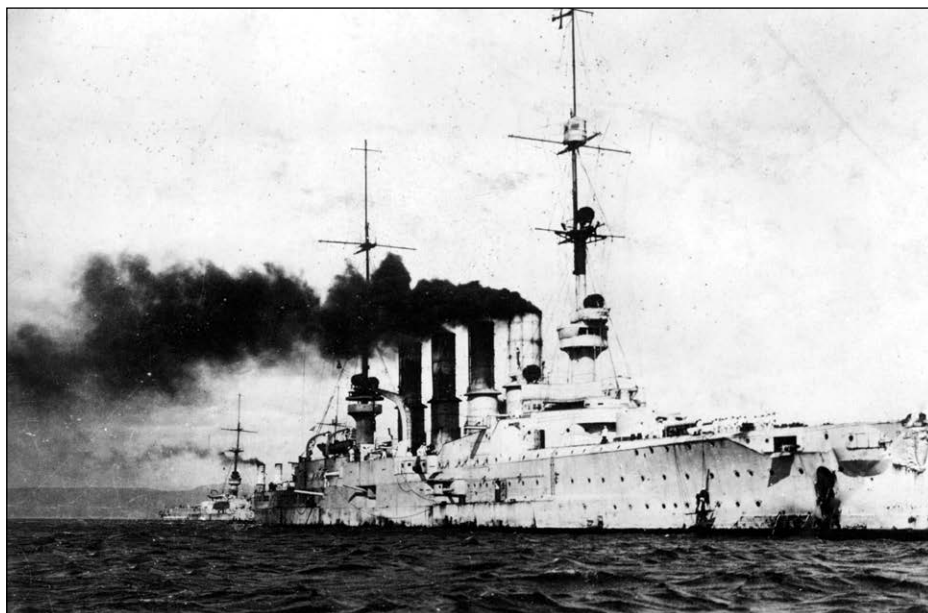
Japanese attack on Port Arthur, Russo-Japanese War, 1904.

emigrating to British Columbia, were able to put their experience to good use when they served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War.¹⁶ Joining them were two hundred other Japanese immigrants who fought with distinction on the Western Front, with fifty-five of them losing their lives and fifteen of them receiving decorations for bravery.¹⁷ It was at sea, however, that the new agreement took on the greatest importance during the conflict.

The terms of the Alliance (which was renewed in 1905 and 1911) did not force Japan to join Britain in the event of a war in Europe.¹⁸ In fact, some even expected Tokyo to ally with Berlin given the influence of the Prussian model in Japan, as it had shaped the country's political and legal frameworks and the structure of its army.¹⁹ There was great anxiety in Canada about this, as London had agreed to entrust the security of its North Pacific interests to the Imperial Japanese Navy. By 1905 the Royal Navy had abolished its Pacific station, leaving residual forces in China and Australia while the Esquimalt Dockyard on Vancouver Island was transferred to the Canadian government even though the Dominion did not yet have its own navy.²⁰ It was not until 1910 that the Canadian Naval Service came into being. It was renamed the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) the following year, but by 1914 it had gathered together only meagre resources on the Pacific coast: the light cruiser *Rainbow*,

and Japanese Admiralties, these forces had sailed in July and their position was unknown when Great Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August.²³ After some hesitation, Japan followed suit on 23 August.²⁴ The Imperial Japanese Navy and British (and Dominion) naval forces were given the urgent task of finding the scattered units of the German squadron and neutralizing the threat.

London and Tokyo believed that the light cruisers *Nürnberg* and *Leipzig* were off the coast of North America, ready to wage a merciless *guerre de course* against their merchant traffic. For a few weeks, therefore, there was some cooperation between the Canadian and Japanese navies (through the British Admiralty) as the *Rainbow* headed south and the armoured cruiser *Izumo*,



SMS Scharnhorst and SMS Gneisenau, 1914.

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based in Esquimalt, and two companies of Reservists—one in Victoria and the other in Vancouver.²¹

Yet Berlin had significant forces in Asia. An expanding colonial power since the 1880s, Germany had acquired a considerable aggregate of territory in the central Pacific—the Mariana, Marshall, and Caroline Islands, in addition to German New Guinea, Palau, Bougainville Island, and German Samoa—and had taken control of a large concession on China's Shandong Peninsula.²² The territory included a naval base supporting the East Asia Squadron, which in 1914 consisted of the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, as well as three light cruisers (*Nürnberg*, *Leipzig* and *Emden*). A cause for concern for the British



The German light cruiser SMS *Emden* attacked by HMAS *Sydney*, 9 November 1914, at the Battle of Cocos.

off Mexico, headed north, a pincer movement that could have culminated in a battle off the coast of California. Failing to detect the Germans, the two ships eventually headed for Esquimalt to resupply.²⁵ The presence of the Japanese naval flag in Canadian waters was short-lived, as the German threat never materialized off the coast of British Columbia.

In fact, the cruisers *Nürnberg* and *Leipzig* had been recalled to join the German squadron that was then heading for South America, inflicting a bloody setback on the Royal Navy off the coast of Chile (on 1 November at Coronel, where four Canadian naval midshipmen perished on board the battleship *Good Hope*). The Kaiser's ships later escaped into the South Atlantic, but most were wiped out in the Battle of the Falkland Islands on 8 December 1914.²⁶ By this time, the flag of the German Empire had been swept from the rest of the Pacific. The only other ship of the *Kaiserliche Marine*, the light cruiser *Emden*, had sailed to the Indian Ocean where she caused much damage before being sunk on 9 November during the Battle of Cocos. As for the German colonies, those further south fell to British, Australian and New Zealand forces, while Japan seized the Shandong Peninsula as well as the Mariana, Marshall and Caroline Islands between September and November 1914.²⁷

Thereafter, the Japanese navy continued to cooperate with the British fleet in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, while Canada focused its military effort on the Western Front and the Atlantic.²⁸ Apart from a few visits to Esquimalt by Japanese ships seeking to resupply and take advantage of the only dry dock available to them in North America before the United States joined the hostilities in 1917, Canadian and Japanese forces did not really find themselves together for the remainder of the conflict; they

and moved rapidly inland, reaching as far as Lake Baikal and developing a considerable area of occupation before being joined by other foreign contingents.³⁰

More than 4,000 Canadians gained a foothold in Siberia, with the first detachment arriving in October 1918 and the remainder the following January, but this brigade played only a limited supporting role in the Allied operation.³¹ Most of the Canadian force remained in the Vladivostok area, while a contingent of fifty-five soldiers went to Omsk to serve as staff troops with a British formation.³² However, with hostilities already over in Europe, there was little support in Canada for that intervention.³³ The troops began their withdrawal to Canada in April 1919, and the bulk of the brigade was evacuated in June, leaving sixteen dead in Siberia, the victims of disease and one suicide.³⁴ This reluctant effort showed a certain parallel with that of the other Western partners, all of whom were tired of the war, but contrasted with that of Japan, which had invested considerable forces in the operation just as the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was coming to an end.

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Distant Enemies

The scale of the Japanese effort in Siberia was of concern to both London and Washington. Seventy thousand Imperial troops had deployed to the region, while the Entente countries and the United States had been able to send merely a little over 20,000 men to join a legion of Czechoslovakians who were already in Russia at the beginning of the intervention. Equally worrisome from a Western perspective was the fact that Japanese troops remained in Siberia after the other forces gradually abandoned the operation in 1919 and 1920.³⁵ Tokyo seemed determined to control an extensive area on the

did, however, cross paths again during the Siberian expedition. Even before the defeat of the Central Powers in Europe was complete, the Entente Powers, the United States and Japan had decided in 1918 to intervene in the Russian civil war in support of the last remaining White Army forces fighting against the Red Army.²⁹ Japan took the initiative in the Far East while other contingents headed for northern Russia, the Crimea and the Caucasus. By August, the first Japanese troops had landed in Vladivostok

continent from which the Japanese government could exercise political and military dominance, not only in Siberia but also in neighbouring Manchuria. The situation could only fuel the suspicions of those who accused Japan of pursuing a “rapacious” policy since its entry into the war on the side of the Entente, having already consolidated its hold on the German colonies in the central Pacific as well as the Shandong Peninsula. Tokyo had also sent a list of twenty-one imperious demands to Peking in 1915, causing considerable outrage in the United States, where the move was seen as a direct infringement of China’s sovereignty and a threat to Western interests.³⁶

Relations between the Entente Powers and the United States on the one hand and Japan on the other only worsened in the immediate post-war period. Japanese representatives were allowed to sit alongside the victors at Versailles, and Japan was invited to join the League of Nations and granted an “administrative” mandate over the central Pacific islands.³⁷ However, the consolidation of the Japanese presence on the Shandong Peninsula could not be resolved because of opposition from China and the United States (in the face of the agreement in principle of England and France), while Western leaders agreed to decline Tokyo’s proposal to include the principle of racial equality in the League of Nations pact.³⁸ These tensions were accompanied by a ruinous naval arms race between the three great post-war powers.³⁹ Particularly troubled by this last issue, but also seeking to put an end to the whole range of problems left unresolved at Versailles with regard to the Far East, President Warren Harding invited all countries with an interest in these matters to a large meeting in the United States.

The Washington Conference of 1921–22 kicked off an unprecedented arms control effort while addressing a series of diplomatic disputes and resulted in the signature of several agreements.⁴⁰ The most famous of those was the Five-Power Treaty (or Washington Naval Treaty), which limited the war fleets of the signatories for the first time in history. The Nine-Power Treaty affirmed the respect of these countries for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China. Japan renounced its occupation of the Shandong Peninsula but managed to keep its railway and economic interests there (as in Manchuria). And, by signing the Four-Power Treaty, Washington, London, Paris and Tokyo committed themselves to respecting the territorial demarcations already in place in the Pacific. Without specifically mentioning it, this agreement endorsed the mandate granted by the League of Nations to Japan but put an end to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which was formally abandoned in 1923.⁴¹

The repeal of the pact was welcomed in Canada.⁴² The establishment of a regime of neutrality in the Pacific instead of an alliance reviled by the Americans was a real gain for the Canadian government. Another step forward for Canada was the Balfour Declaration of 1926, which gave the dominions control over their foreign policy.⁴³ Canada quickly increased its international presence, including the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan in 1928. The opening of a Japanese legation in Ottawa that same year and a Canadian mission in Tokyo in

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1929 seemed to bode well for future relations.⁴⁴ The evacuation of Japanese troops from Siberia (1922), the Shandong Peninsula (1923) and northern Sakhalin Island (1925) signaled a curbing of expansionist tendencies within the Imperial Army, which had to contend with a more moderate political class.⁴⁵ And yet, Japanese militarists regained the upper hand over the following decade. Japan acquired a growing sphere of influence in China, gave up its seat in the League of Nations, and withdrew from the naval arms control system, all while democratic rule gradually faded in Tokyo.⁴⁶ Simultaneously, the issue of Japanese immigration and the treatment of these newcomers in the climate of racial animosity that still prevailed in British Columbia continued to undermine diplomatic exchanges between the two countries.⁴⁷

The Imperial Army sent its first attaché to Ottawa in 1931 (Major Tadamichi Kuribayashi, who later commanded the desperate defence of Iwo Jima in 1945), and the Navy followed suit the next year, but Canada did not reciprocate.⁴⁸ Any potential for military collaboration between the two countries was dead in the water as Tokyo pursued an expansionist policy in Asia.⁴⁹ Japan established a puppet government in Manchuria in 1932 and advanced south of the Great Wall of China in 1937 while aligning itself with Germany and Italy.⁵⁰ Ottawa, for its part, followed the American example by imposing economic sanctions against Japan beginning in the summer of 1940. Imperious voices were raised condemning the presence of a “fifth column” within the Japanese community in British Columbia, while hostile mobs attacked Canadian missionary establishments and businesses in Japan. Others in China were damaged in the fighting between Japanese and Chinese troops.⁵¹

Canada had been concentrating its military forces in the Atlantic and in Europe since 1939, yet it was in Asia that the Canadian Army would first engage in battle. Even before entering the war against Japan in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, Canada had agreed to reinforce the British garrison in Hong Kong with two infantry battalions and a brigade staff. These troops landed just three weeks before the Imperial Army launched its assault on 8 December. In the fighting that ended on Christmas Day, nearly three hundred Canadians were killed and five hundred were wounded, and all of the survivors were taken captive.⁵² Although they could count themselves lucky to have survived the battle, their ordeal had only just begun. The prison conditions were appalling and the weakened prisoners were forced to work, both in Hong Kong as well as in Japan, where 1,183 Canadians were transported, most of them to toil in coal mines and shipyards.⁵³ Of the 1,975 Canadian servicemen who landed in Hong Kong (including two nurses), 556 never returned home: 290 died in battle, 264 died in detention (136 of them in Japan), and two more died after their release—one in Japan and one en route to Canada.⁵⁴

Some 40 other Canadian servicemen serving with Allied units across Asia fell to the Japanese in 1942 and suffered similar deprivations.⁵⁵ Among them was pilot Leonard Birchall, “the saviour of Ceylon” (now Sri Lanka), who was shot down off the coast of that British colony by Japanese fighters on 4 April 1942 after send-



Leonard Birchall.

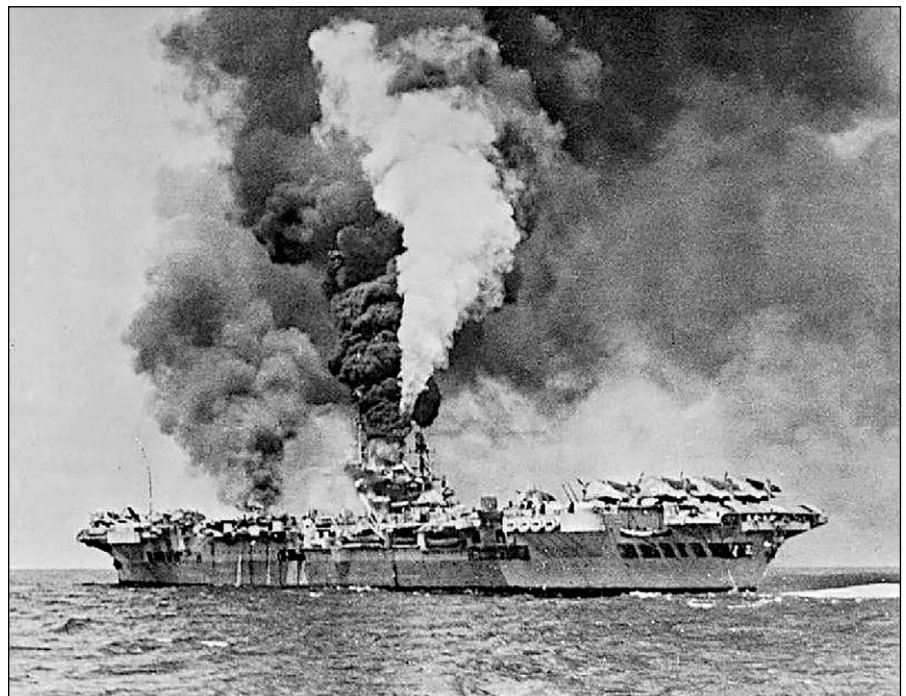
ing a radio message reporting the approach of an Imperial Navy fleet.⁵⁶ He and his crew belonged to 413 Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), as Canada had accepted a request for help to reinforce the Allied posture in the Indian Ocean after the fall of Singapore.⁵⁷ The RCAF also sent two fighter squadrons and a light bomber squadron to assist in the defence of Alaska in the days following the Battle of Midway in June 1942, when the Japanese had taken advantage of the opportunity to occupy the small islands of Attu and Kiska in the Aleutians.⁵⁸ In September, Squadron Leader K. A. Boomer shot down a Japanese fighter in a raid on Kiska, earning the only victory claimed by a Canadian airman based in North America during the conflict.⁵⁹

This episode constituted the only instance of combat involving Canadian military personnel deployed in the western part of the continent, as the Japanese threat was otherwise limited to a few submarine patrols.⁶⁰ On 20 June 1942, submarine I-26 attempted to destroy the Estevan Point lighthouse on Vancouver Island with cannon fire but failed to inflict any damage.⁶¹ Another type of threat came in the form of explosive-laden balloons in the winter of 1944–45. Thousands of the balloons were released from Japan to drift towards North America using high altitude air currents, but only eighty made it to Canada, causing little damage and no loss of life (although there were six casualties in the United States).⁶² Despite this lack of real threat in British Columbia, the Canadian government began evacuating the 22,000 Japanese nationals then living on the West Coast to internment camps inland as soon as hostilities in the Pacific began. Most of them were held in these camps until the end of the war, often under harsh conditions.⁶³

These measures limited the participation of Japanese immigrants in the Canadian Forces. About 30 of them, all from outside British Columbia, enlisted at the beginning of the war and several served in Europe, one of them falling in combat on 20 February 1945.⁶⁴ After Pearl Harbor, the “Nisei,” although born in Canada, were excluded from military service. It was not until early 1945 that Ottawa began a recruitment campaign among the Japanese community, under pressure from the Allies to meet the growing need for translation in the Far East. About 100 Japanese immigrants served with the Allied forces in Southeast Asia and Japan, but they could only work as interpreters.⁶⁵ Many other Canadians were also scattered among the British units that drove back Japanese troops. Among them were Lieutenants William Asbridge and Robert Hampton Gray, both of whom were aboard the British aircraft carrier *Formidable*. The former was killed in a raid in the Tokyo area on 18 July 1945, and the latter in Onogawa Bay on 9 August when he sank an enemy destroyer and was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.⁶⁶

These two pilots were the only Canadians to die in action in the Japanese archipelago, and Gray remains to this day the last Canadian (and only member of the RCN) to earn this illustrious award.

In addition to those individual contributions, few Canadian units participated in the defeat of Japan. After recapturing Attu Island in the spring of 1943, the Americans asked the Canadians to help liberate Kiska. The 13th Infantry Brigade (and the well-known “Devil’s Brigade,” a mixed force of American and Canadian commandos) joined the landing on 15 August, but the Japanese had already evacuated the island, leaving behind explosives and

The aircraft carrier HMS *Formidable* (R67) on fire after being struck by a Kamikaze off Sakishima Gunto, 4 May 1945.

booby traps that cost the lives of four Canadian soldiers in the weeks that followed.⁶⁷ The RCAF sent two transport squadrons to India to support the Allied advance in Burma in October 1944, while 413 Squadron returned to England in January 1945.⁶⁸ As for the RCN, the cruiser *Uganda* joined the British Pacific Fleet in the spring of 1945 and participated in the Okinawa campaign. However, the following month, the majority of her crew chose to return to Canada when offered the choice under a new policy dictating that only volunteers could fight in the Pacific after the end of hostilities in Europe. Having thus “voted” to withdraw from combat, the cruiser headed for Canada—to the great shame of the Canadian admirals—and arrived at the base in Esquimalt as the atomic bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, leading to the surrender of the Empire of the Rising Sun.⁶⁹ Soon Canada and Japan would no longer be enemies, but would they become allies?

Partners with Common Interests

The Canadian government had reluctantly approved the deployment of a large military contingent to participate in the invasion of Japan. Of the forces designated for that purpose, only *Prince Robert*—a liner converted into an anti-aircraft cruiser—had time to get underway before the end of hostilities, arriving in Australia as the *Uganda* set sail for Canada.⁷⁰ At the same time, the Canadian military attaché in Canberra, Colonel Lawrence Cosgrave, was dispatched to sign the Japanese Instrument of Surrender on Canada’s behalf at a ceremony on 2 September aboard the battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay.⁷¹ Ottawa, however, declined the suggestion that it join the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, preferring to speed up the demobilization of its armed forces.⁷² The priority in the fall of 1945 was the repatriation of the remaining prisoners of war in Japan and Hong Kong, many of them aboard the *Prince Robert*.⁷³ That was going on while Canadian officials continued to discourage Japanese Canadians from returning to the Pacific coast. When given the chance to leave the internment camps, many had no choice but to head east to start a new life in the Prairies and Ontario or face deportation to a devastated Japan.⁷⁴

Ottawa also had to determine the form of its representation in the Allied-occupied country. Colonel Cosgrave remained in Tokyo as a delegate to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), American General Douglas MacArthur.⁷⁵ Two Canadians took on important roles in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, Judge Edward Stuart McDougall and Military Prosecutor Henry Nolan.⁷⁶ E. H. Norman—a scholar of Japan whose 1940 study *Japan’s Emergence as a Modern State* became a prized reference for the occupation forces—returned to Tokyo in 1946, becoming head of the Canadian liaison mission to Japan.⁷⁷ The Canadian government had already identified the integration of Japan into the world economic system as a key element in the long-term preservation of peace in the Far East.⁷⁸ The shift in control of Canadian representation from Cosgrave, a military man, to Norman, a diplomat, symbolized the importance of a mission that was separate from the occupation structure dominated by the SCAP soldiers.⁷⁹

The April 1952 entry into force of the Treaty of San Francisco signalled the end of the Allied occupation and Japan’s return to full sovereignty.⁸⁰ Ottawa and Tokyo re-established diplomatic relations that same year—relations that would continue to be dominated primarily by economic factors in the decades that followed. To this day, Japan continues to express its appreciation for Canada’s support in its 1954 admission to the Colombo Plan (accompanied by a bilateral trade agreement), its inclusion in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1955, its entry into the United Nations in 1956, and its admission to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1963.⁸¹ Nevertheless, the Canadian military was called upon to set foot on Japanese soil even before all these agreements were concluded, as the Cold War was heating up on the Korean peninsula.

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Canada soon announced its intention to join the United Nations force put in place under American command (United Nations Command [UNC]) to repel the North Korean troops who had attacked their southern neighbour on 25 June 1950.⁸² Five days later, three RCN destroyers were ordered to set out for Korea. 426 Transport Squadron began its participation in the North America–Far East air bridge on 20 July, which was essential to maintaining allied forces in the region. Meanwhile, RCAF fighter pilots attached to American units were soon going to take part in combat missions in the skies over the peninsula. Then,

on 7 August, the Canadian Army began establishing a volunteer force to serve in Korea, the 25th Canadian Infantry Brigade, which was eventually integrated into the 1st Commonwealth Division.⁸³ More than 26,000 Canadians served during the three-year conflict and 516 lost their lives, a considerable sacrifice for Canada, as its military had been largely demobilized after the Second World War, requiring a commensurate logistical and administrative support structure.⁸⁴

Japan, still under Allied occupation in 1950, could not join the UN force, but the Japanese islands served as a major rear base.⁸⁵ While General MacArthur remained in Tokyo, combining command of SCAP and UNC, many of the nations contributing troops in the Korean peninsula, including Canada, also moved to Japan. In September 1950, Brigadier General F. J. Fleury arrived in Tokyo to head a liaison mission with UNC headquarters. In May, a support group moved to Kure (near Hiroshima) to take advantage of the infrastructure already established by the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, which had been deployed there since 1945.⁸⁶ The group included several nursing sisters employed at the British Commonwealth General Hospital until 1954.⁸⁷ As for the destroyers, they could take advantage of the support of the American navy at the base in Sasebo (where an RCN liaison mission was established in 1952) and in Kure, at a base administered by Australia.⁸⁸ Canada also opened a rest and relaxation (R&R) centre in that city and another in Tokyo for combatants enjoying leave during their tour in Korea.⁸⁹

The armistice of 27 July 1953 ended the fighting, but the parties remained at war as no peace treaty was established, making it difficult to repatriate combatants. The Canadian brigade remained deployed near the demilitarized zone until November 1954, while a medical group in Korea was not disbanded until June 1957.⁹⁰ 426 Squadron ceased trans-Pacific transport flights

in June 1954, and the last of the RCN's destroyers left the area in September 1955.⁹¹ In the meantime, SCAP disappeared as the Allied occupation of Japan ended, although the Americans were allowed to leave forces in Japan as part of the bilateral security treaty signed at the same time.⁹² However, the UNC also remained in place and still needed Japan's support as a rear base, necessitating the signing in 1954 of an agreement between the United Nations and Tokyo regarding the status of these forces on Japanese territory.⁹³ When it became clear that the stalemate in Korea would continue, it was decided that UNC headquarters would be moved from Tokyo to Seoul in 1957, but a small staff—United Nations Command – Rear (UNC-R)⁹⁴—remained in place to maintain access to US bases in Japan in case of renewed conflict.



Korean War Armistice signed at Panmunjon, 27 July 1953. US Army Lieutenant General William Harrison, Jr. signs on behalf of United Nations Command.

As a UNC Sending State, Canada was one of the signatories

of the UN–Japan agreement even though its military presence in the region was coming to an end. The units in Tokyo, Kure and Sasebo were disbanded in 1954. Colonel E. D. Elwood, who was already serving with the military liaison mission in Japan, was accredited in 1955 as the first Canadian defence attaché to the Japanese government.⁹⁵ From 1957 onwards, he was housed at the Canadian embassy in Tokyo and was supported by a non-commissioned officer to handle administrative needs.⁹⁶ One of their duties, which continues today, was to make regular visits to the Yokohama War Cemetery, which holds the graves of 136 Canadian prisoners of war who died in detention during the Second World War, along with the graves of twenty-three other Korean War veterans, most of whom died of their wounds after being evacuated to hospitals in Japan.⁹⁷ Since that time, the attaché has also served as a liaison officer to UNC-R, a useful role in facilitating access to American bases for Canadian ships and aircraft passing through the area.

A useful role but not always that busy. With hostilities over in Korea, Canada–Japan relations remained dominated by trade issues. Canada concentrated its military effort during the Cold War on the defence of North America (NORAD) and its European allies (NATO) while contributing to UN peacekeeping efforts.⁹⁸ Japan quickly reconstituted its armed forces but limited their use to the defence of the Japanese islands alongside their American ally, leaving little chance for regular collaboration between the Canadian and Japanese militaries.⁹⁹

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The two navies were the first elements to come into more regular contact, as their ships would cross paths on mutual visits (such as the annual deployment of the Japanese Training Squadron beginning in 1957) or on multinational exercises (such as RIMPAC, a bi-yearly event conducted by the US Navy in Hawaii that has included Canadian participation since its inception in 1971 and Japanese participation since 1980).¹⁰⁰ But the vastness of the Pacific remained a challenge for more regular interaction. Thus, the attaché posted to Tokyo in 1980–82 later claimed that no Canadian ships or aircraft had made a stop in Japan during his stay, while the memoirs of a successor posted in 1995–98 makes no mention of such a visit.¹⁰¹

Canadian leaders attempted to pivot their focus to the Asia-Pacific region a few times after the Cold War, but international upheaval continually shifted their attention back to Europe and Africa in the 1990s (the Balkans, Rwanda, and Somalia) and the Middle East, including the almost continuous deployment of military forces to Afghanistan and the Indian Ocean after 9/11.¹⁰² At times, Canadian and Japanese peacekeepers crossed paths during operations, such as in Cambodia in 1992, when the first Japanese Self-Defense Forces contingent was deployed under the UN flag. Military personnel from both countries served simultaneously in Mozambique, the Golan Heights, Sudan and South Sudan, as well as in Haiti.¹⁰³ More recently, in April 2019, two Japanese officers joined the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai alongside Canadians

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who have served there since 1985. This effort, which continues to this day, was the first deployment of Japanese military personnel with an independent UN peacekeeping force.¹⁰⁴ However, direct military exchanges between Canada and Japan have been irregular. Tokyo created a position in its embassy in Ottawa in 1975 for a civilian defence agency official (a first in the Japanese system), but military attachés posted in Washington since 1954 were not accredited in Canada until 2010.¹⁰⁵

In spite of these fits and starts, the challenges of the post-Cold War era have led Canada and Japan to realize that they share common interests in the face of the 21st century's uncertainties. As far back as 1991, as a Canadian naval group prepared to head home after the liberation of Kuwait, a flotilla of Japanese minesweepers set sail for the Persian Gulf to participate in the multinational effort to sweep up mines planted by Saddam Hussein's forces—the first such operational deployment for both countries since the Korean War.¹⁰⁶ The two navies met in the same region a decade later when Japanese supply groups rotated in between 2001 and 2009 to support multinational forces, including Canadian ships, conducting counter-terrorism operations there.¹⁰⁷ Also in 2009, as a sign of their common interest in humanitarian aid missions, Ottawa and Tokyo concluded a memorandum of cooperation allowing RCAF transport aircraft to use certain Japanese bases when called upon to deploy to Asia to distribute humanitarian aid in the event of a natural disaster.¹⁰⁸ Canada then accepted a request from the UN forces in Korea to take responsibility for the position of Deputy Commander of the UNC-R (still based in Japan), and the first RCAF major assumed this position in 2012, a commitment that continues to this day.¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile, as these events were unfolding, a number of initiatives at various levels were initiated, leading to greater military dialogue between the two countries. These initiatives include:

- The Joint Declaration on Political, Peace and Security Cooperation by Prime Ministers Stephen Harper and

Naoto Kan in 2010;

- The first “2+2” deputy minister-level dialogue (foreign affairs and defence) in 2011;
- The introduction of Japan as an implementing partner of Canada's Military Training and Cooperation Program in 2011; and
- The first participation in 2012 of a Japanese instructor in the Canadian-sponsored civil–military relations course in Tanzania as part of a joint commitment to continue building the peacekeeping capacity of African partners.¹¹⁰

This was followed by a flurry of mutual visits and activities in Canada and Japan, including the unprecedented deployment to Northeast Asia of submarine *Chicoutimi* in 2017 and the launch of the Canada–Japan KAEDX maritime exercises, as well as the participation of Canadian ships in US–Japan Exercise KEEN SWORD the following year.¹¹¹ That culminated in a flurry of exchanges in 2019 with Prime Minister Abe's visit to Ottawa in April and Defence Minister Sajjan's visit to Tokyo in June, as well as the ratification in July of the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) as Canada affirmed its support for Japan's vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region.¹¹² That was followed by further bilateral discussions between the two joint staffs, the RCAF and the Air Self-Defense Force, and the two navies; the first visit to Canada by the chief of staff of the Ground Self-Defense Force; the presence of Canadian Army observers at U.S.–Japan Exercise YAMA SAKURA in Japan; and the participation of a Japanese instructor in a Canadian-led seminar in Malaysia on women, peace and security, while Canadians observed a Japanese-taught construction engineering training session in Vietnam.¹¹³ Although the 2020 pandemic slowed this unprecedented momentum, dialogue between Canadian and Japanese authorities continues, and it remains to be seen how these relationships will recover as health restrictions are gradually lifted in both countries.

Conclusion

The history of military relations between the two countries in the 20th century is, at best, a series of unrelated episodes: Major Thacker in Manchuria, the hunt for the German East Asia Squadron, the intervention in Siberia, rear support for troops deployed in Korea, and a few peacekeeping operations after the Cold War. Regrettably, we must also remember the appalling abuses of Canadian prisoners at the hands of the Imperial

US Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Erica Bechard



US Navy ships assigned to *Ronald Reagan* Carrier Strike Group joined ships of Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Royal Canadian Navy HMCS *Winnipeg*, in formation during Exercise KEEN SWORD, Philippine Sea, 26 October 2020.

Army and the unjust internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War. Yet the common interests between Canada and Japan that have led to a flurry of activity since the beginning of the 21st century remain. Operation NEON is a striking example of this collective willingness to participate side by side in a multinational effort to counter [translation] "... threats that challenge the rules-based international order."¹¹⁴ The revival of this Canadian operation after some

delays at the start of the pandemic seems to mark an interest on Ottawa's part to maintain a credible and persistent military presence in the region. It remains to be seen (at the time of writing in July 2021) whether this desire will translate Canada's recent pivot towards the Land of the Rising Sun into a concrete long-term commitment.



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