



## CANADA REMEMBERS

# THE BATTLE OF KAPYONG

### INTRODUCTION

The Korean War took place in the Far East from 1950 to 1953 and more than 26,000 Canadians served in the cause of peace and freedom in this struggle. Some of the heaviest fighting our soldiers experienced in the war took place during the Battle of Kapyong in April 1951.

### THE KOREAN WAR ERUPTS

The Cold War was the tense struggle for dominance in international affairs between the forces of communism and democracy that arose in the aftermath of the Second World War. One of the places this played out was in the Korean Peninsula in East Asia where, after the occupying Japanese had been defeated, a communist regime was established in the North while a democratic government was established in the South.

On June 25, 1950, after years of rising tensions, North Korean forces poured over the border at the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel and into South Korea. This invasion touched off more than three years of fighting in the place traditionally known as the “Land of the Morning Calm.” The United Nations (UN) responded to this aggression with a call to its members to form a multinational force under the command of the United States to restore the peace, and Canada agreed to help.

### CANADA RESPONDS

Canadians would serve at sea, in the air and on the ground during the Korean War. The early stages of the conflict saw major swings in momentum. When the first Canadian soldiers—members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry (2 PPCLI)—set sail across the Pacific on November 25, 1950, the war looked to be nearing its end as the communist forces had been

pushed back almost to the Chinese border. By the time the Canadians’ ship reached its destination, however, the situation had completely changed as China had intervened in support of North Korea and had launched a major offensive that retook much of the lost territory. The 2 PPCLI joined the action in mid-February 1951 under the command of the 27<sup>th</sup> British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade that was taking part in the UN advance pushing the enemy once again back across the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel.

### THE BATTLE OF KAPYONG

In late April 1951, the retreating Chinese and North Korean forces regrouped and counter-attacked in the western and west-central sectors of the front. The South Korean forces in one area were overwhelmed and hurriedly fell back, putting them in danger of being overrun and wiped out. The 27<sup>th</sup> British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade—along with its Canadian contingent—was called up from reserve to the Kapyong Valley to cover this desperate retreat.

Less than three kilometres across at its widest point, the Kapyong Valley was dominated by the surrounding hills. A defensive position was quickly established with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Australian Regiment on Hill 504, the 2 PPCLI on Hill 677, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Middlesex Regiment (a British unit) situated south of the Canadians.

During the night of April 23, the Australians came under heavy attack, holding out until the next day before being forced to withdraw. Their retreat left the Canadians exposed and, at 10:00 p.m. on April 24, the communist assaults began.

It was a wild battle and some of our positions were overrun; at one point the Canadians even called in an artillery strike on their own location to hit the enemy soldiers amongst them. The Canadians took cover while

Troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry on patrol, March 1951. Photo: Library and Archives Canada PA-11564

the attackers bore the brunt of the fire. The risky move worked and the enemy was driven off. The danger was not yet over and the morning of April 25 saw an intermittent exchange of fire. Canadian Veteran Gerald Gowing was there:

*“We were surrounded on the hills of Kapyong and there was a lot of fire. We were pretty well out of ammunition and out of food too. We did get some air supplies dropped in, but we were actually surrounded.”*

The enemy was soon cleared from one side of the Canadians, however, and a supply line was re-established. Our soldiers had done it, holding out in the face of a much larger force while inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy and helping the Commonwealth brigade maintain its position. By May 1, the larger communist offensive had come to a halt.

The Korean War soon moved into a new phase as truce negotiations began in July 1951 and the front lines began to stabilize. For the Commonwealth contingent, the remainder of the conflict became largely a “war of patrols,” with few large-scale battles taking place. On July 27, 1953, an armistice finally ended the active fighting.

## SACRIFICE

Holding the line at Kapyong was an impressive achievement, but came at a cost. Ten Canadians were killed and 23 were wounded, a total that could be considered

relatively light in view of the fierce fighting there and a testament to the skill and organization of the defenders. Our fallen soldiers at Kapyong were among the 516 Canadians who died in service during the Korean War.

## LEGACY

The Battle of Kapyong was an important episode in the Korean War. The soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry persevered in the face of great adversity to help prevent a potentially costly defeat for the South Korean and UN forces. Their heroic efforts did not go unnoticed with the Americans awarding them the United States Presidential Unit Citation—a very rare honour for a Canadian unit.

## CANADA REMEMBERS PROGRAM

The Canada Remembers Program of Veterans Affairs Canada encourages all Canadians to learn about the sacrifices and achievements made by those who have served—and continue to serve—during times of war and peace. As well, it invites Canadians to become involved in remembrance activities that will help preserve their legacy for future generations. To learn more about Canada’s role in the Korean War, please visit the Veterans Affairs Canada website at [veterans.gc.ca](http://veterans.gc.ca) or call 1-866-522-2122 toll free.

*This publication is available in other formats upon request.*

