

# 2

## Canada and the First World War

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

#### Society & Identity

- What challenges did Aboriginal soldiers face during the war and upon their return home?
- What effect did the War Measures Act have on the legal rights of Canadians?
- How did Canada's contribution on the battlefield affect Canadian identity?
- What effect did the war have on the role of women?
- What impact did conscription have on Canadian unity?

#### Autonomy & World Presence

- How did Canada get involved in the First World War?
- What was the war's impact on the home front?
- How did the nature of warfare and technology contribute to a war of attrition?
- What were conditions like for men in the trenches?
- Describe Canada's military role in the First World War.
- What factors contributed to Canada's emerging autonomy?



### TIMELINE

1914

Archduke Franz Ferdinand assassinated in Sarajevo  
Germany invades Belgium and France  
Britain declares war on Germany; Canada automatically at war  
War Measures Act passed in Canada

1915

Canadian troops exposed to poisonous gas at the Battle of Ypres

1916

Canadians suffer heavy losses in the Battle of the Somme  
Women in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta gain the right to vote in provincial elections

## CHAPTER FOCUS QUESTION

What effect did Canada's participation in the First World War have on Canadian society and its status as a nation?



When the First World War began in 1914, few believed it would last very long. Many young people in Canada and elsewhere saw the war as an exciting chance for travel, adventure, and glory. Most were afraid that the conflict would be over before they could get into the action. Many people signed up with noble, romantic ideas, such as the honour of fighting for the British Empire to which Canada belonged:

*These young men were the cream of Canada's youth and chivalry, all volunteers, all willing to face the great adventure for King and country, for freedom and civilization. No conscripts were they, but freemen, glad and willing to demonstrate Canada's loyalty and to make some return to England for the civil and religious liberty we had enjoyed under the protection of her flag....*

—Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War, 2001

“The Great War,” however, was a far different reality than this romantic vision. It was modern, industrialized warfare on a vast scale. The “war to end all wars” claimed the lives of more than 8 million soldiers, cost almost \$350 billion, and changed the map of Europe. What could cause such a devastating international conflict? Why was the war so long and terrible, and what were the long-term effects of the war on our nation? To answer these questions, we must understand the historical forces at work in Canada and around the world at the time—in particular, nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, and militarism.

### KEY TERMS

imperialism  
militarism  
Triple Alliance  
Triple Entente  
nationalism  
War Measures Act  
enemy aliens  
internment camps  
no man's land  
Western Front  
war of attrition  
Battle of Ypres  
Battle of the Somme  
Battle of Vimy Ridge  
Passchendaele  
convoy  
Victory Bonds  
honour rationing  
propaganda  
conscription  
khaki election  
Hundred Days Campaign  
Paris Peace Conference  
Treaty of Versailles  
War Guilt Clause

#### 1917

Canadian troops battle at Passchendaele  
Canadian troops capture Vimy Ridge  
Women in British Columbia and Ontario gain the right to vote in provincial elections  
Wartime Elections Act gives federal vote to women related to servicemen  
Borden re-elected as head of Union Government  
Conscription introduced in Canada  
Halifax devastated by an explosion  
Income tax introduced as a temporary measure

#### 1918

Enlistment begins  
Armistice declared on Europe's Western Front  
Women win the right to vote in federal elections

## KEY TERMS

**imperialism** the policy of one nation acquiring, controlling, or dominating another country or region

**militarism** a nation's policy of enlisting, training, equipping, and maintaining armed forces ready for war

**Slavic** relating to peoples in eastern, southeastern, and central Europe, including Russians, Serbians, Croatians, Poles, Czechs, etc.

## Causes of the First World War

What caused the First World War? There is no simple answer. At the beginning of the 20th century, several factors pushed the world to the brink of war. Industrialization drove the Great Powers—Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Russia—to expand their territories. As they sought more land, resources, and influence, they also tried to protect their territory by building up their military resources and creating alliances. Meanwhile, the nations colonized by the Great Powers struggled to keep their independence. These power struggles created tension around the world, and one event, as you will read about later, triggered the First World War.

### Imperialism and the Age of Empires

Why were the Great Powers so prepared to engage in war? Since the 15th century, several European nations had been aggressively expanding their territory (see Unit opener map). Powerful countries practised **imperialism** by establishing colonies all over the world to create empires. They exploited the land and resources of the weaker nations they controlled. Massive

industrialization in the 19th century fuelled the Great Powers' desire to expand their domains, giving them access to more raw materials and creating new markets for their manufactured goods. Africa—with its wealth of gold, diamonds, ivory, agricultural land, and other resources—became the last frontier for colonizers in the late 1800s. European empires aggressively pursued their interests in Africa, often competing for the same territory.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Germany was struggling to establish itself as an imperial power. Its colonies in Africa were not as economically or strategically advantageous as the areas controlled by Britain. Germany's leaders wanted their country to have its own "place in the sun" and to extend its sphere of influence. Germany's aggressive pursuit of this goal brought it into conflict with other imperial powers, in particular Britain and France.

### Increasing Militarism

Imperialism brought crisis after crisis, fostering distrust and tension among the Great Powers. As they expanded their empires, the Great Powers developed their military resources to protect their interests and intimidate each other. They glamorized their armed forces, and the size of their armies and navies became essential to national prestige. They embraced **militarism** and saw war as an acceptable way to resolve conflicts and achieve their goals. Militarism was a constant threat to peace in the years leading up to the First World War.



**FIGURE 2-1** Germany as an eagle in this 1890 cartoon  
**Interpreting Political Cartoons** What is the message of this cartoon?

By the beginning of the 20th century, Britain had established the largest navy in the world to protect its vast empire. Germany's desire to be a major power in Europe drove it to build up its military resources to match Britain's naval strength. In response, Britain dramatically increased the size of its navy and built the HMS *Dreadnought*, the largest and fastest battleship in the world. Germany in turn built more ships, including dreadnoughts of its own. It also increased the size of its army and its reserve of weapons. This buildup of military resources forced France—who had long-standing grudges with Germany—to arm itself in a desperate attempt to maintain the balance of power. This arms race increased international tensions, and by 1914 Europe had become an armed camp.



**FIGURE 2-2** Ships such as the British warship HMS *Dreadnought* were heavily armored to protect them from enemy fire.

## The Role of the Balkans

As the Great Powers struggled to expand their colonies around the world, they also fought over limited resources in Europe. Of particular interest were the Balkans, a cultural and geographic region on the Adriatic Sea in southeastern Europe. Three different empires—Russia, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottomans—wanted to control this area.

- Russia's approach was to promote Pan-Slavism, the idea of uniting the **Slavic** peoples of the Balkans. Russia hoped that supporting these nations would allow it access to the region's warm-water ports. This was extremely important to Russia as most of its ports were frozen in winter, limiting its ability to import and export goods.
- Austria-Hungary saw Pan-Slavism as a threat to its power. Several of the nations under its control were Slavic and located in the Balkans, including Slovenia and Croatia. Austria-Hungary feared that it would lose its grip on its territory if these peoples united.
- For more than 100 years, the Ottoman Empire had controlled the Balkans and southeastern Europe, as well as areas of northern Africa and the Middle East. But this empire was crumbling by the beginning of the 20th century. It had already lost its hold of the Balkans and feared losing even more territory.



**FIGURE 2-3** Imperial struggles in the Balkans

## KEY TERMS

**alliance** a union or agreement among groups working toward a common goal

**Triple Alliance** the alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy prior to the First World War

**Triple Entente** the alliance of France, Britain, and Russia prior to the First World War

**nationalism** devotion to and support of one's culture and nation, sometimes resulting in the promotion of independence

**Black Hand** a terrorist group of Bosnian Serbs that was determined to free Bosnia from Austria-Hungary

## The False Security of Alliances

These intense rivalries in Europe resulted in a rush to make or join **alliances**. By the early 1900s, all the Great Powers in Europe were in alliances with other countries, promising to support one another if they were attacked.

- The **Triple Alliance** was made up of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. However, when the war broke out in 1914, Italy did not follow the Triple Alliance into battle. Instead it joined the war in 1915 on the side of the Triple Entente.
- The **Triple Entente** (also known as the Allies) consisted of France, Britain, and Russia.

These countries hoped that forming alliances would reduce the threat of war, but it proved to have the opposite effect. Alliances made it easier for a country to be drawn into war. Because members pledged to protect one another, if any one of them was involved in a conflict, its allies would automatically have to fight as well. As you will see, one dramatic event was all it took to drag the whole of Europe into war.



## The Threat of Nationalism

As the Great Powers sought to expand their empires, they paid little attention to the interests of the nations they colonized. They practised their own type of **nationalism**, showing great pride in and patriotism for their mother country. But another type of nationalism—an intense loyalty toward and desire to preserve one’s own cultural identity, language, and traditions—simmered in the colonized countries.

The Balkans were a hotbed of nationalism. Some of the countries in the area were newly created while others regained independence as the Ottoman Empire disintegrated. The Austro-Hungarian Empire also controlled several Slavic nations that wanted independence and rebelled against Austrian rule. Bosnia, in particular, was highly contested as Serbia wanted to include this territory within its borders. Some Bosnian Serbs formed the **Black Hand**, a group willing to fight for their nationalistic goals. They wanted to unite the Slavic peoples to form “Greater Serbia.” To Austro-Hungarian imperialists, Serbian nationalism was a deadly idea that had to be crushed at all costs.

## A Chain Reaction

In 1914, to demonstrate its imperial rule, the Austro-Hungarian Empire sent its crown prince, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, to Bosnia’s capital of Sarajevo. His visit gave the Black Hand an opportunity to strike back at the Empire, whom they viewed as an invader. As their procession made its way through the city, a Black Hand member, Gavrilo Princip, shot and killed Archduke Ferdinand and his wife.

● How did Canada get involved in the First World War?



**FIGURE 2-5** Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Duchess Sophie, moments before they were assassinated on June 28, 1914

This assassination triggered a chain reaction that started the First World War. Austria-Hungary blamed Serbia for the assassination. As part of the agreement of the Triple Alliance, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany offered Austria-Hungary a “blank cheque,” promising to support them even if they went to war. When Serbia refused to submit to an ultimatum from Austria-Hungary, the Empire declared war. This caused Russia to mobilize its troops to defend Serbia as part of its promotion of Pan-Slavism. Germany responded with its own mobilization. This prompted Britain to put its navy on alert and France to mobilize its army. When Germany violated the neutrality of Belgium in order to attack France, Britain declared war on Germany to protect its ally. Canada, as part of the British Empire, automatically went to war, too. Gradually, the conflict drew in more and more countries around the world.

## TIMELINE

### Timeline to War, 1914

●	<b>June 28</b>	Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie are assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia.
●	<b>July 6</b>	Germany promises Austria-Hungary a “blank cheque” to support any military action in Serbia.
●	<b>July 23</b>	Austria-Hungary delivers an ultimatum to Serbia, threatening severe consequences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serbia must dismiss all anti-Austrian teachers, government workers, and army officers.</li> <li>• Austrian officials will be allowed to enter Serbia to investigate the assassination.</li> <li>• Serbia must cooperate with the Austrian investigation.</li> </ul>
●	<b>July 26</b>	Russia begins to mobilize its armed forces in anticipation of war.
●	<b>July 28</b>	Austria-Hungary rejects Serbia's partial acceptance of its demands and declares war.
●	<b>July 31</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Russia announces its general mobilization.</li> <li>• Austria-Hungary and Germany demand that Russia stop mobilizing; Russia ignores this command.</li> <li>• France agrees to respect Belgium's neutrality, but Germany refuses.</li> </ul>
●	<b>August 1</b>	Germany declares war on Russia.
●	<b>August 3</b>	Germany declares war on France.
●	<b>August 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Germany invades Belgium and Luxembourg to attack France.</li> <li>• Britain declares war on Germany.</li> <li>• Canada is automatically at war as part of the British Empire.</li> </ul>

## PRACTICE QUESTIONS

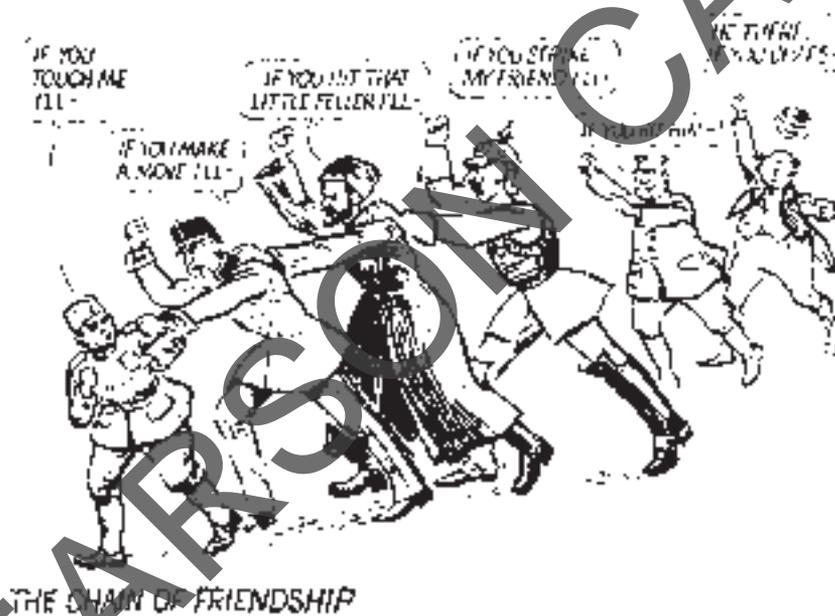
- Build a flow diagram that links the following in sequence, noting any events that occurred simultaneously: assassination of Franz Ferdinand and his wife, invasion of Belgium, creation of the Triple Alliance, Britain declares war on Germany, and Russia mobilizes troops.
- Significance** List the causes and contributing factors that resulted in the outbreak of war and then select the three you think are most important. Justify your choices.
- Imagine you are the prime minister of Canada. Compose a letter to the prime minister of Britain explaining why you do, or do not, support an alliance between Britain, Russia, and France.
- Write a well-reasoned argument for the following proposition: “The First World War was unnecessary and could have been prevented.”

Political cartoons are a useful source of information about historical or current issues. They simplify an issue by portraying political personalities or events in an exaggerated way and using symbols to represent ideas. In this way, they are a very effective means of convincing a reader to see an issue in a specific way. But the perspective about the issue presented in a political cartoon is often extreme and harshly critical. They represent political figures as caricatures, exaggerating their physical and personality traits for comic effect. Political cartoons often use stereotypes to emphasize their message. They also employ analogy to compare people or events to other things that the audience will relate to and understand. While these devices help convey perspectives on historical events

or current issues, you need to be aware of the biases and prejudices that may taint political cartoons when you interpret them.

### Steps to Interpreting Political Cartoons

1. Read the text and look closely at the drawing.
2. Identify the central issue or event in the cartoon.
3. Identify the devices used by the cartoonist (caricature, analogy, words, symbols, stereotypes, sizing, etc.).
4. Identify the biases of the cartoonist by examining the devices used.
5. Interpret the cartoon.



**FIGURE 2-6** The Chain of Friendship. This British cartoon appeared in some Canadian newspapers at the outbreak of war. It highlights some of the main causes of the First World War by representing the European countries in 1914 as different characters.

### Applying the Skill

1. Identify the countries represented by the child and the adult who is picking on him. Why is one country shown as a child?
2. The cartoon uses caricatures of speech and clothing to identify European countries. Identify Germany, Britain, France, and Russia. Explain your choice in each case.
3. Use the cartoon to make a list of the countries on either side of the conflict. Compare your list to the map in Figure 2-4.
4. What is the meaning of the title of the cartoon? Could it be interpreted as an ironic or sarcastic title? Explain.
5. Evaluate the cartoon. How effectively does it deliver its message? Explain.

- What challenges did Aboriginal soldiers face during the war?

## Canada's Response to the War

Although Canada had become a political union in 1867, Britain still controlled the foreign policy of all its dominions. This meant that when Britain declared war on Germany, Canada was automatically at war, along with the rest of the British Empire.

### Mobilizing the Forces

In 1914, most English-speaking Canadians were of British origin, and they supported the war out of a strong patriotic feeling for Britain and the Empire. One Toronto newspaper captured the excitement of the time:

*Cheer after cheer from the crowds of people who had waited long and anxiously for the announcement of Great Britain's position in the present conflict in Europe greeted the news that the Mother Country had declared war against Germany. Groups of men sang "Rule Britannia," others joined in singing "God Save the King"; some showed their sense of the seriousness of the situation by singing "Onward Christian Soldiers"....*

—Toronto Mail and Empire, August 5, 1914



**FIGURE 2-7** At the start of the First World War, crowds gathered to cheer the soldiers on their way.

**Thinking Critically** What do you think the public attitude was after a few years of war? What might public reaction be to Canada's involvement in a war today?

Wilfrid Laurier, the leader of the Liberals and a French Canadian, joined English Canadians in pledging support for Britain and the Empire. Laurier stated, "It is our duty to let Great Britain know and to let the friends and foes of Great Britain know that there is in Canada but one mind and one heart and that all Canadians are behind the Mother Country."

Prime Minister Borden initially offered Britain 25 000 troops, but more than 30 000 volunteers from across Canada signed up within a month. Many felt the patriotic urge to defend their "mother country." A lot of people volunteered because they believed that the war would be over by Christmas. Others signed up because they were unemployed and the war meant a chance to escape financial hardships at home.

Not all Canadians who wanted to volunteer were welcome. Women were considered too frail and too emotional to partake in battle, so they were encouraged to stay at home and support the soldiers. Women who did join the services worked as nurses and ambulance drivers behind the front lines. Initially, the Canadian forces did not accept Aboriginal peoples and were reluctant to take African and Japanese Canadians. Volunteers from these groups managed to overcome such racist attitudes to join, but few were promoted. Such discrimination did not prevent these recruits from serving their country well (see Case Study, page 48). Tom Longboat, an Onondaga from the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, was a well-known athlete and Boston Marathon runner. During the war, he became a courier, carrying messages between the trenches in France, a position reserved for the fastest runners in the army.

Rank	Daily Rate
Major-General	\$20.00
Colonel	\$6.00
Major	\$4.00
Captain	\$3.00
Lieutenant	\$2.00
Sergeant	\$1.35
Corporal	\$1.05
Private	\$1.00

**FIGURE 2-8** Canadian Army rates of pay, 1917

## A National Identity Emerges

Canada had to prepare for war. When Canada joined the war, its army swelled from 3000 to more than 30 000 soldiers. The enormous task of training and supplying the troops with clothing and munitions went to Sam Hughes, the Minister of Militia. Camp Valcartier in Québec was built in only four weeks to house and train Canada's soldiers. After basic training that lasted only four months, 32 000 enthusiastic, but ill-prepared, Canadian and Newfoundland troops set sail for England.

Before the war, Canada was a patchwork of regions. Few transportation and communication connections existed, and travel across the country was difficult. Regions had little contact with one another; people lived their lives close to home. Wartime training changed that. Young men from all over the country came together to train, first at Valcartier, then at bases in England. As they gathered and worked together, they began to develop a national sense of Canadian identity. In the words of one Canadian soldier:

*We were in Witley Camp [in England] and right alongside us was a battalion from French Canada. We didn't speak much French and they didn't speak much English, but they were the finest sports you ever saw.... You met people from Nova Scotia, or from Prince Edward Island, clean through to British Columbia.*

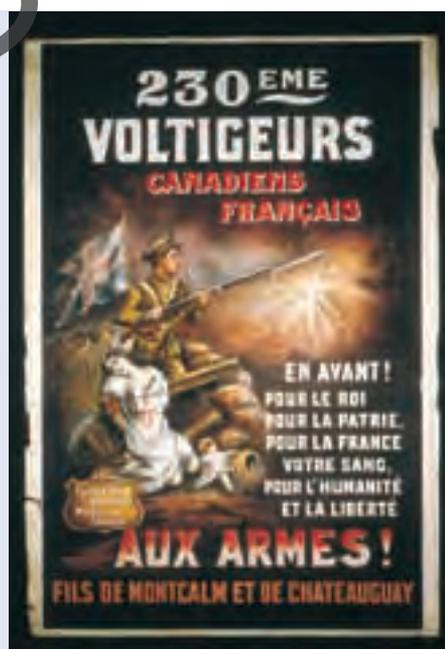
—Ben Wagner

The army formed by these volunteers was known as the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). When the CEF arrived in England, British commanders assumed that, as a colonial army, the CEF would be integrated into the larger, more experienced British units. For much of the war, however, the CEF maintained its independence and fought as a separate unit, which contributed greatly to a growing sense of national identity and autonomy.

- What factors contributed to Canada's emerging autonomy?

### WEB LINK

Find out more about wartime training on the Pearson Web site.



**FIGURE 2-9** Colourful recruiting posters with urgent messages for volunteers appeared across Canada.

**Identifying Viewpoints** Compare these two posters. What methods does each one use to appeal to different language groups? What image of war does each one present?

- What was the war's impact on the home front?



**FIGURE 2-10** The 29th Battalion (Vancouver), CEF, in training in Hastings Park, Vancouver, late 1914

**Using Evidence** How are these men preparing for war?

## Canada's Minister of Militia

Sam Hughes was also in charge of Canada's armament industry. He created the Shell Committee to oversee the manufacture of artillery shells. Canada

provided a large portion of Britain's shells. Hughes, however, was a poor administrator and the Ministry of Militia soon became bogged down in inefficiency and war profiteering. While he insisted on using Canadian manufacturers, troops were often supplied with equipment that was inappropriate or of poor quality. By mid-1915, contracts worth about \$170 million had been signed with wealthy businessmen, but only \$5.5 million in shells had actually been made. Some of the shells were of such poor quality that they exploded before being fired, killing the gun crews. In one case, soldiers were equipped with boots that fell apart in the rain due to soles made of pressed cardboard. Troops came to hate the Canadian-made Ross rifle because it jammed, so they picked up British-made Lee-Enfield rifles from dead soldiers when possible. Hughes was dismissed from his post in 1916, but not before being knighted by King George V.

- What effect did the War Measures Act have on the legal rights of Canadians?

## The War Measures Act

To meet the demands of war, Prime Minister Borden introduced the **War Measures Act** in 1914. The Act gave the government the authority to do everything necessary "for the security, defence, peace, order, and welfare of Canada." For the first time, the federal government could intervene directly in the economy to control transportation, manufacturing, trade, and agricultural production. The government also had the power to limit the freedom of Canadians. It could censor mail. It suspended *habeas corpus*, which meant that police could detain people without laying charges. Anyone suspected of being an "enemy alien" or a threat to the government could be imprisoned, or **deported**, or both. Recent immigrants from Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire were treated particularly harshly under this Act. Approximately 100 000 of them had to carry special identity cards and report regularly to registration officers. More than 8500 people were held in isolation in **internment camps**. These policies fostered nationalism and prejudice in Canada, and led to attacks on German-owned clubs and businesses.

### PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Examine the quotation on page 32. What does this document say about the attitude of people in Canada toward Britain at this time? How does the quotation on page 33 demonstrate a growing feeling of Canadian identity among Canadian troops?
2. What prevented women and other groups from participating in the war?
3. Why did the government feel the need to control the economy, transportation, and trade after war was declared? Was this a genuine need? Explain.
4. List the civil liberties suspended by the War Measures Act.
5. Explain why there was such enthusiasm for the war when it began.

# The War on Land

Germany's **Schlieffen Plan**, developed years before the First World War began, was a bold strategy for a two-front war. Germany believed it could fend off Russia in the east while it defeated France in the west with a lightning-speed massive attack. The timetable left little room for error. German armies needed to drive through Belgium and swing south to capture Paris within a few weeks. Once this was accomplished, Germany could turn its attention to Russia. The Schlieffen Plan made two critical assumptions:

- It would take Russia time to mobilize its huge army. But Russia's forces were already on the move when Germany declared war.
- Britain would remain neutral. The plan relied on the fact that in the past, Britain had not become involved in disputes between countries in Europe. But, as part of the Triple Entente, Britain had promised to defend France if it was attacked. Also, all the Great Powers had promised not to attack Belgium, so Britain felt compelled to enter the war when Germany did just that.

## The Reality of the Schlieffen Plan

The Schlieffen Plan almost worked. By August 1914, German troops were only 50 kilometres from Paris. But German leaders had made some changes that weakened the original plan. They pulled troops from the west to reinforce their defences in the east. The soldiers were exhausted by the pace of their attack through Belgium and into France. The Allies were able to rally and stop Germany's advance at the Battle of the Marne in September 1914, making a quick German victory impossible. Instead, the German army dug a defensive line of trenches along the river Somme and into Belgium. To counter this, British and French troops dug their own system of trenches to face them. Eventually a vast network of trenches stretched from the English Channel to the Swiss border. Between the trenches of the two enemies lay **no man's land**, a terrible wasteland of corpses, barbed wire, and mud. By Christmas 1914, armies protected by trenches that ran through northern France and Belgium on the **Western Front** were locked in a stalemate. With millions of soldiers on each side, neither Britain and France nor the Germans were able to advance, and no one was prepared to retreat.

## KEY TERMS

**profiteering** making a profit by raising prices on needed goods or producing poor quality materials

**War Measures Act** an Act that gives the federal government emergency powers during wartime, including the right to detain people without laying charges

**habeas corpus** the right of a detained person to be brought before a judge or other official to decide whether the detention is lawful

**enemy alien** a national living in a country that is at war with his/her homeland

**deport** to send a person back to his/her country of origin

**internment camp** a government-run camp where people who are considered a threat are detained

**Schlieffen Plan** Germany's plan to stage a two-front war with Russia in the east and France in the west

**no man's land** the area between the trenches of two opposing forces

**Western Front** the area of fighting in western Europe during the First World War, characterized by trench warfare and inconclusive battles with heavy casualties on both sides

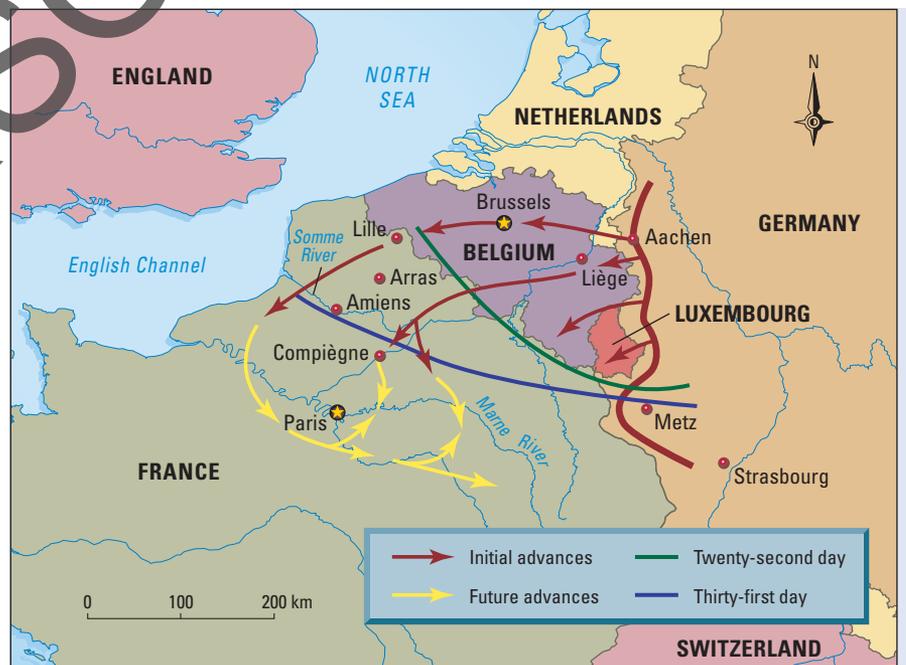


FIGURE 2-11 The Schlieffen Plan



**FIGURE 2–12** Many Canadian soldiers lost their lives in the trenches and suffered psychological disorders and nervous breakdowns.

**Gathering Information** What can you tell about life in the trenches from this photograph? How might these conditions have contributed to psychological problems?

- What were conditions like for men in the trenches?
- How did the nature of warfare and technology contribute to a war of attrition?

## KEY TERMS

**artillery** large guns used to fire shells

**war of attrition** a military strategy based on exhausting the enemy's manpower and resources before yours are exhausted, usually involving great losses on both sides

## Life in the Trenches

No soldier could ever have been prepared for the horrible conditions of trench warfare. Trenches were cold and damp in the winter and often flooded in the heavy rains of northern France and Belgium. Muddy trenches became stinking cesspools, overrun by rats. Men spent weeks in the trenches without washing, which allowed disease to spread. Soldiers' clothes were infested with lice, and many men developed trench foot, a painful condition that caused their feet to swell and turn black. Many of the wounded were left to die in no man's land because rescue attempts were too dangerous. Mental exhaustion also took its toll. Men were in constant fear for their lives, either from deadly sniper fire or from exploding shells. One soldier reported:

*The air is full of shells... the small ones whistling and shrieking and the heaviest falling silently, followed by a terrific explosion which perforates even the padded eardrums, so that a thin trickle of blood down the neck bears witness that the man is stricken stone-deaf. The solid ground rocks like an express [train] at full speed, and the only comparison possible is to a volcano in eruption with incessant shudder of earthworks and pelting hail of rocks.*

—Quoted in *Toronto Globe*, April 15, 1916

## New Technology and the War

New technologies developed at the beginning of the 20th century changed the way wars were fought. In earlier wars, foot soldiers, supported by cavalry (soldiers on horses), tried to outmanoeuvre the enemy to take control of the battlefield. By 1914, however, new weapons were so powerful and deadly that it was suicidal to charge across open ground. Machine guns fired at unprecedented speed; massive **artillery** attacks killed thousands. Airplanes, invented only a decade before the war began, flew over the battlefields to pinpoint the enemy's location and movements and were later equipped with machine guns and bombs.

Although soldiers were using modern weapons on the battlefield, many of their commanders failed to understand how the new technologies demanded new tactics. Over the next three years, generals stubbornly engaged in a **war of attrition**, each side repeatedly attacking the other until one was completely exhausted and unable to continue. To attack the enemy, soldiers were ordered “over the top,” meaning they had to leave the relative safety of the trenches to face the horror of no man's land. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers on all sides were slaughtered as they were mowed down by machine guns. These weapons kept either side from advancing, which was the main reason for the stalemate on the Western Front. Later in the war, armoured tanks were used to protect soldiers as they advanced across the battlefield. Tanks could break through the protective wall of barbed wire in front of trenches. By 1918, the trench system was itself obsolete.

## Major Canadian Battles

The first division of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) arrived in France in February 1915. These forces soon became involved in combat along the Western Front, including decisive battles in France and Belgium at Ypres, the Somme, Vimy Ridge, and Passchendaele.

● Describe Canada's military role in the First World War.

● How did Canada's contribution on the battlefield affect Canadian identity?

### The Second Battle of Ypres

Some of the bloodiest battles of the early war were fought in and around the Belgian town of Ypres. On April 22, 1915, French and Canadian troops were blinded, burned, or killed when the Germans used chlorine gas, a tactic that had been outlawed by international agreement since 1907. As the clouds of gas drifted low across the battlefield, soldiers tried to escape from the deadly fumes. Many suffocated or choked to death. One soldier described the scene as follows:

*[We noticed] a strange new smell.... A queer brownish-yellow haze was blowing in from the north. Our eyes smarted. Breathing became unpleasant and throats raw.... Some fell and choked, and writhed and frothed on the ground.... It was the gas.*

—Canada and the Battle of Vimy Ridge, 1992

Despite the Germans' use of poison gas, the battle continued for a month, but neither side gained much advantage. More than 6000 Canadians were killed, wounded, or captured holding their ground until reinforcements arrived.

One of the doctors serving with the Canada Corps was Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, who wrote the famous poem "In Flanders Fields" to commemorate Canadians serving at the Second Battle of Ypres. It is said that he wrote the poem in about 20 minutes, but tossed it aside because he was dissatisfied with it. The story goes that a soldier later found it and convinced him to send it to a popular British magazine.

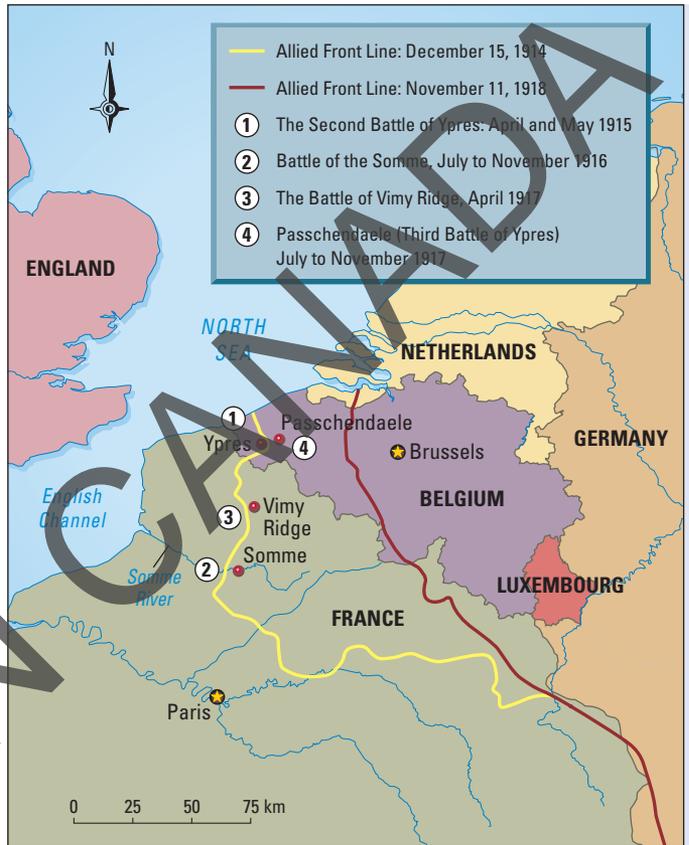


FIGURE 2-13 Map showing the Western Front and major battles



FIGURE 2-14 The Belgian town of Ypres in 1917 showing the massive destruction caused by the war

## KEY TERM

**casualties** those injured, killed, captured, or missing in action

*I past the worse fighting here since the war started, we took all kinds of prisoners but God we lost heavy, all my camarades killed or wounded.... dear wife it is worse than hell, the ground is covered for miles with dead corpses all over.... pray for me dear wife I need it very bad.... as long as I live I'll remember it.*

—Francis Xavier Maheux,  
September 20, 1916

Note: The quotation above contains spelling and punctuation errors. It has been reproduced as it was originally written.



**FIGURE 2-15** The Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France commemorates Canadian soldiers who were killed during the First World War.

**Thinking Critically** Do you think that war memorials are important? Why or why not?

### What If...

Imagine that Canada had lost at Vimy Ridge. How might that have affected Canada's identity?

## The Battle of the Somme

In July 1916, the Allies launched a massive attack against a line of German trenches near the Somme River in France. The attack failed because

- The Allies shelled the German lines for days before the attack began, but the shells did not destroy the Germans' defences or the barbed wire around their trenches.
- The commanders used tactics that, though previously successful, proved to be useless in trench warfare. Troops were ordered to march across open fields, and wave upon wave of men were shot down by German machine guns.
- Despite heavy losses on the first day of battle—including nearly 58 000 British troops—the attack continued.

The battle lasted five months and the Allies captured only 13 kilometres of land. Both sides suffered heavy losses. There were more than 1.25 million casualties, with almost 24 000 Canadians among them. The Royal Newfoundland Regiment alone lost approximately 90 percent of its men, and every officer was either wounded or killed. Most soldiers were badly shaken by the slaughter.

Despite their heavy losses, Canadian troops distinguished themselves during the Battle of the Somme and were brought in to lead assaults in several major battles over the course of the war.

## The Battle of Vimy Ridge

In 1914, the Germans took control of Vimy Ridge, a key position near the Somme. This vantage point gave a clear view of the surrounding countryside, supply routes, and enemy positions. For more than two years, both French and British forces tried to capture the ridge but were unsuccessful.

Late in 1916, Canadian troops were chosen to lead a new assault on Vimy Ridge. Lieutenant-General Julian Byng, a popular British officer (later appointed a governor general of Canada; see Chapter 3), carefully planned the attack. His troops trained and rehearsed until Byng decided they were ready. In preparation for the attack, artillery bombarded German positions for more than a month. Meanwhile, sappers (army engineers) built tunnels to secretly move troops closer to the ridge. On April 9, 1917, Canadian troops moved into position. The Canadian Corps followed their plan of attack and in less than two hours they had taken their first objective. On April 10, they captured Hill 145, the highest point on the ridge. By April 12 they had taken “the pimple,” the last German position.

It was a stunning victory. The Canadians had gained more ground, taken more prisoners, and captured more artillery than any previous British offensive in the entire war. Although the cost was high—more than 3500 men were killed and another 7000 wounded—the losses were significantly lower than in any previous Allied offensive. Byng's meticulous planning and training, and Canadian professionalism and bravery, had paid off. The Battle of Vimy Ridge marked the first time that Canadian divisions attacked together. Their success gave them a sense of national pride and the reputation of being an elite fighting force.

## Passchendaele

Byng was promoted for his role at Vimy. His replacement was a Canadian, General Arthur Currie, a former realtor from Victoria, British Columbia. As the first Canadian appointed to command Canada's troops, Currie brought an increasingly independent Canadian point of view to the British war effort. Although he was a disciplined leader open to new strategies, Currie still took orders from General Haig. In October 1917, Currie and the CEF were asked to break through German lines and retake the town of Passchendaele in Belgium.

Haig's earlier assault on Passchendaele had left massive shell craters, which the heavy autumn rains turned into a muddy bog. Currie warned that casualties would be high, but Haig overruled him. Currie was right. The Canadians captured Passchendaele, but the "victory" resulted in more than 200 000 casualties on each side, including more than 15 000 Canadians. The Allies had gained only seven or eight kilometres, and the Germans soon recaptured the town.

## Women on the Western Front

More than 2800 women served during the First World War. They were part of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps and worked on hospital ships, in overseas hospitals, and in field ambulance units on the battlefields. Many were killed or injured by artillery fire, bombs, and poison gas.



**FIGURE 2-16** Passchendaele; soldiers and horses sometimes drowned in the mud-filled craters which could be more than 30 metres wide.



**FIGURE 2-17** Edith Anderson, of the Six Nations Grand River Reserve, cared for wounded soldiers in France.

## PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. What was the Schlieffen Plan, and why did its failure result in a stalemate on the Western Front?
2. **Judgements** Discuss whether chemical weapons should be allowed in warfare. The use of gas as a weapon was outlawed by the 1907 Hague Convention. What is the point of an international agreement if, when the time comes, countries do whatever they wish?
3. Make a list of conditions at the front that might have contributed to psychological stress damage. Use the information on pages 35–39 to gather information.
4. How did new technological developments make the First World War a war of attrition? Give specific examples.

# Innovations War Technology

During the First World War, transportation and weapons technology developed rapidly as nations dedicated their resources to the war effort. The result was an industrial war with more casualties than had ever been experienced.

**A new type of warfare** The machine gun was largely responsible for changing the way wars were fought. Its ability to fire about 400–500 rounds per minute made it an effective defensive weapon. Both sides lined their trenches with hundreds of machine guns, making infantry attacks across no man's land futile and forcing leaders to develop new strategies.



**Lighter than air** Dirigibles (inflatable airships) were developed in the late 1800s. Germany's Ferdinand von Zeppelin built huge, rigid dirigibles that were filled with a lighter-than-air gas, such as hydrogen, and propelled by an engine suspended underneath. Germany, France, and Italy used dirigibles for scouting and bombing missions during the First World War.



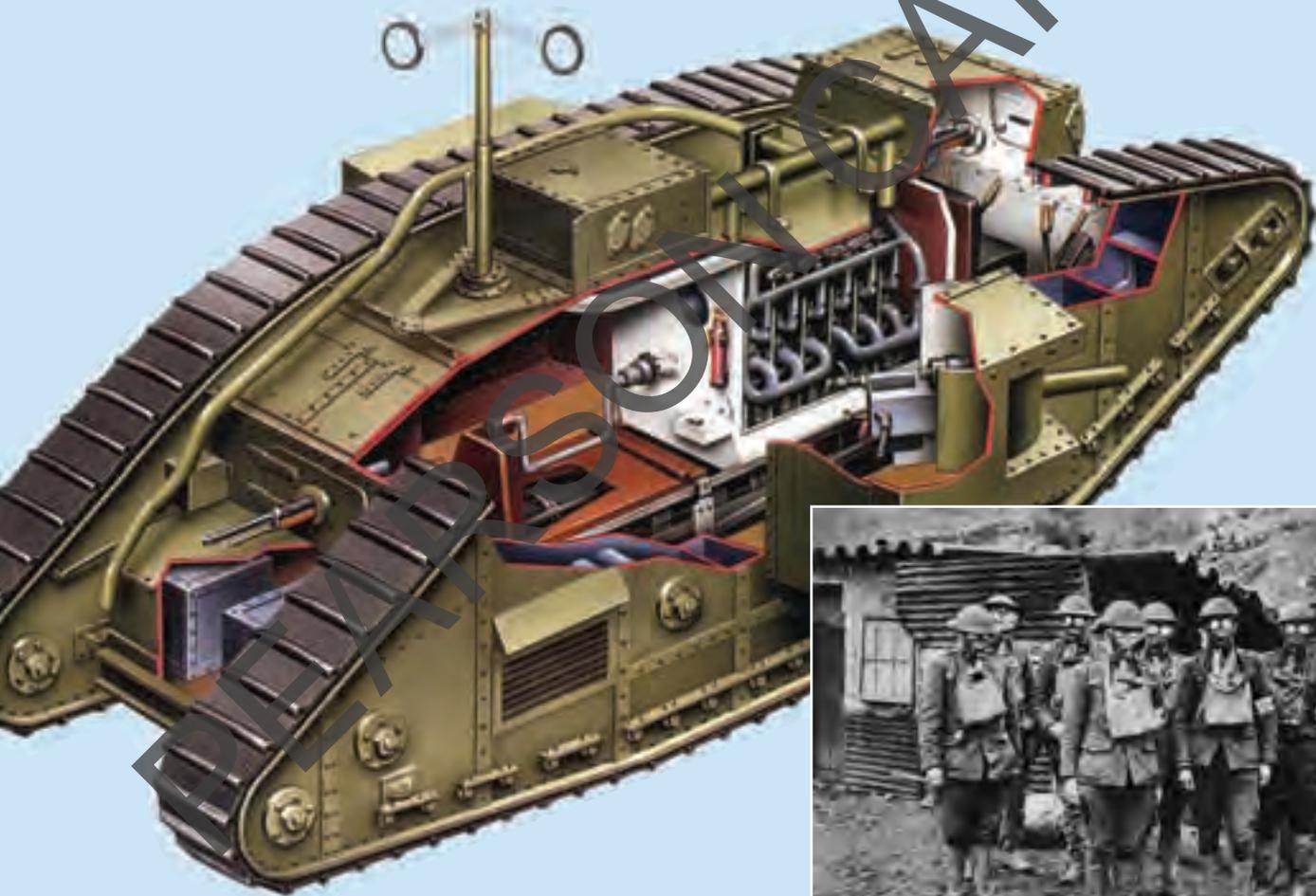
**Deadly fire** During the First World War, more powerful and accurate artillery was developed. New field guns could fire shells almost 40 kilometres upward to hit targets 130 kilometres away. Often the shells were filled with explosives and shrapnel, deadly metal balls, or steel fragments.



**Warfare in the air** Planes were first used to scout enemy positions. Later in the war, pilots would throw grenades at enemy planes or shoot at them with hand-held guns. Eventually, top-mounted guns were added to planes and both sides engaged in aerial dogfights.



**The silent enemy** Although the United States and Britain did much of the work developing early submarines, Germany used them the most. Their U-boats (from *Unterseeboot*, or “under-sea boat”) were armed with torpedoes that could sink large ships. Germany used its submarines to attack the convoys of merchant ships and freighters that carried supplies to Britain in the hopes of starving the British into submission.



**New armour** The British developed tanks to shelter soldiers from gunfire while crossing no man's land and to drive through the barbed wire that lined the trenches. In doing so, tanks solved the problems of trench warfare. They were first used during the Battle of the Somme to break through the German lines.



**Chemical warfare** Germany was the first to use poison gas on the battlefield, releasing clouds of chlorine gas at Ypres in 1915. The gas blinded soldiers and attacked their respiratory systems. Early in the war, the only defence against poison gas was rags soaked in water or urine. Later, anti-gas respirators, or gas masks, made poison gas a less effective weapon.

- Describe Canada's military role in the First World War.

## KEY TERMS

**biplane** an airplane with two sets of wings, one on top of the body, and one underneath

**reconnaissance** military search or exploration

**sharpshooter** a person skilled in shooting

**dogfight** aerial duels between aircraft

**ace** a fighter pilot who has shot down five enemy aircraft

## The War in the Air

During the First World War, airplanes were still a new invention and being a pilot was very dangerous. Many pilots were killed in training and due to mechanical failure. The average life expectancy of a pilot in 1917 could be measured in weeks. Parachutes were not introduced until late in the war. Thousands of air crew and pilots were killed, many in training.

At the beginning of the war, pilots flew alone in **biplanes** doing aerial **reconnaissance**, photographing and reporting on enemy troop movements. Soon, however, pilots on both sides were armed, dropping bombs on the enemy below and firing guns at each other in the air. Fighter pilots had to be **sharpshooters** with nerves of steel and lots of luck. Aerial **dogfights** were spectacular scenes as pilots used elaborate spins and rolls to avoid enemy planes and stay out of their line of fire.

### Air Aces

When a pilot could prove that he had shot down five enemy aircraft, he became an **ace**. Although Canada did not have its own air force (Canadians who wanted to be pilots had to join the British Royal Flying Corps), it produced a number of aces. Among them were Billy Bishop, Ray Collishaw, Billy Barker, William May, and Roy Brown. Some historians credit Brown with shooting down the German flying ace Manfred von Richthofen, who was known as the Red Baron. Because air aces became heroes in their homelands, they were often withdrawn from active duty overseas to promote fundraising and recruitment at home.

**FIGURE 2-18** A pair of Canada's ace pilots: Nanaimo's Raymond Collishaw (62 victories) and Arthur Whealy (27 victories). Many air aces were Canadian even though Canada supplied only a quarter of Britain's pilots.

**Thinking Critically** Why would valuable pilots be pulled from active service to promote the war effort at home? Why were they good for promotion? How do you think they felt about recruiting after they saw so many of their friends killed in battle?



Canada's top air ace in the First World War was William Avery "Billy" Bishop, from Owen Sound, Ontario. His record was impressive. He shot down 72 planes, the second highest number of "kills" in the war (Germany's Red Baron had 80). Bishop was the first Canadian pilot to be awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's most prestigious medal for bravery. He became the toast of Canada because of his success, and toured to promote the war effort and help sell Victory Bonds. In the following passage from his diary, he describes some of his daring adventures:

*He dived for about 600 feet [180 metres] and flattened out. I followed him and opened fire at forty to fifty yards [35 to 45 metres] range, firing forty to fifty rounds. A group of tracers ("visible bullets") went into the fuselage and centre section, one being seen entering immediately behind the pilot's seat and one seemed to hit himself. The machine then fell out of control in a spinning nose-dive. I dived after him firing....*

*I must say that seeing an enemy going down in flames is a source of great satisfaction. The moment you see the fire break out you know that nothing in the world can save the man, or men, in the doomed machine.*

But the life of this Canadian legend was less glamorous than it appeared. In a letter home to his wife, Margaret, he wrote:

*I am thoroughly downcast tonight.... Sometimes all of this awful fighting makes you wonder if you have a right to call yourself human. My honey, I am so sick of it all, the killing, the war. All I want is home and you.*

—Billy Bishop

In warfare, society's norms are put on hold, as soldiers are often expected to kill, and in some cases are glorified for their number of kills. Many soldiers, past and present, suffer emotional trauma after experiencing the atrocities of war and have difficulty adjusting when they return home. At the time of the First World War, soldiers' battle stress was called shell shock or battle fatigue. It is currently identified as post-traumatic stress disorder.

1. Bishop's diary is his personal account of what happened. His "kill" total has sometimes been questioned because his deeds were not always witnessed. Explain why you think Bishop was given credit for the "kills." Is the diary a primary source? Evaluate it as a historical source.
2. Using the two sources presented here, identify Bishop's personal reactions to killing in warfare. What might account for his conflicting feelings?
3. Bishop most likely killed the pilots he shot down. He needed courage and nerve to do what he did. What do you think the effect of the war would be on someone like Bishop?
4. Do you think soldiers today are encouraged to count "kills"? Why or why not?
5. Are there times when killing is not justified in the heat of battle? Explain.



FIGURE 2-19 A stamp commemorates Canadian air ace Billy Bishop.

- Describe Canada's military role in the First World War.

## KEY TERMS

**allegiance** loyalty or faithfulness

**merchant marine** civilian ships and sailors that transported food, weapons, and munitions

**convoy** a group of ships travelling together protected by an armed force

**Victory Bonds** bonds issued by the Canadian government to support the war effort

**honour rationing** a civilian effort to consume less and conserve supplies on the home front

**income tax** a tax on personal income

**corporate tax** a tax charged to businesses based on their total revenues

## The War at Sea

When war broke out between Britain and Germany, leaders expected that huge battles would be fought at sea. As part of the growing militarism in the years before the war, Britain asked Canada to help contribute to its naval forces. In 1910, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier introduced the Naval Service Act, which authorized the building of Canadian warships. The ships would be under Canadian control but could be turned over to Britain if war broke out. Many French Canadians felt that Canada should not automatically support Britain in war. This created tensions with English Canadians, most of whom felt they owed Britain their **allegiance**.

During the war, Britain relied heavily on its own navy to protect the freighters that brought supplies and troops to the Western Front. While Canada's navy was small and unable to contribute much to the war effort, Canada's **merchant marine** played a significant role in the war by doing the dangerous work of ferrying munitions and food to Britain. Although not officially members of the armed forces, many merchant marines lost their lives when their ships were attacked crossing the Atlantic.

### Submarine Warfare

Although Germany could not match Britain's navy in size and strength, its U-boat was a dangerous weapon because it could travel under water without being detected. Equipped with torpedoes, U-boats took their toll on Allied warships and merchant ships. Eventually the Allies developed the **convoy** system to help protect their ships from the German U-boats. Freighters travelled together and were defended by armed destroyers. The Allies also developed an underwater listening device that helped them locate and

destroy U-boats. Both of these advances helped to greatly reduce the threat of German submarines.

Germany's aggressive use of submarines also contributed to the United States entering the war in 1917. In 1915, a German U-boat sank the *Lusitania*, a British passenger liner, killing close to 1200 passengers. Among the dead were Canadian and American civilians. In February 1917, Germany announced that U-boats would sink any ship within the war zone around Britain—including ships that were not from Allied countries. German leaders believed that this move would put a stranglehold on Britain and help end the war. But this threat also made American ships targets and encouraged the United States to enter the war on the side of the Allies on April 2, 1917.



**FIGURE 2–20** The sinking of the *Lusitania*

**Thinking Critically** Explain why the United States felt justified in entering the war after the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Can you think of any recent events that resulted in political and military conflict? What are some non-military options to resolve disputes between countries?

## The Home Front

Canada and many of its citizens were committed to supporting the war effort. Prime Minister Borden replaced Sam Hughes's Shell Committee with the more efficient Imperial Munitions Board, and munitions factories started building ships and airplanes as well as shells. The production and export of Canadian goods reached record highs. Resources such as lumber, nickel, copper, and lead were in high demand. Canadian farmers produced as much wheat and beef as they could to feed the troops overseas. This demand for Canadian goods helped its economy boom during the war.

Most of what Canada produced was exported to Europe, so many goods became scarce within Canada, which caused prices to rise. Some Canadian businesses made enormous profits from the inflated prices. Workers became increasingly frustrated by government controls that kept wages low yet allowed prices to rise. Workers' demands for higher wages and better working conditions became a major issue after the war.

### Supporting the War Effort

By 1918, the war effort was costing Canada about \$2.5 million daily. The government launched several initiatives to cover these costs.

- Canadians were urged to buy **Victory Bonds**. The government raised close to \$2 billion through these bonds, which Canadians could cash in for a profit when the war was over.
- **Honour rationing** was introduced to help combat shortages on the home front. Canadians used less butter and sugar, and the government introduced "Meatless Fridays" and "Fuel-less Sundays" to conserve supplies.
- In 1917, the Canadian government introduced **income tax**—a measure that was supposed to be temporary. Affluent individuals and families had to pay a tax of between 1 and 15 percent of their income.
- A **corporate tax** was also introduced, charging businesses four percent of their revenues. Many Canadians thought this was too low, considering the profits some companies made during the war.

Despite these efforts, the government still did not raise enough money to cover the costs of the war effort. It had to borrow money from other countries, in particular the United States, to pay its debts.

- What was the war's impact on the home front?

Year	Forest Products	Mineral Products	Agricultural Products	Animal Products
1911	\$12.0	\$6.7	\$61.4	\$40.6
1912	\$11.0	\$5.6	\$81.8	\$36.9
1913	\$10.1	\$12.1	\$106.5	\$30.3
1914	\$10.6	\$16.0	\$146.2	\$26.7
1915	\$9.9	\$12.2	\$95.8	\$38.2
1916	\$14.1	\$12.4	\$196.8	\$67.8
1917	\$14.9	\$15.5	\$266.2	\$93.3
1918	\$4.5	\$14.0	\$403.5	\$112.2

**FIGURE 2–21** Value of exports from Canada to Britain during the First World War (in millions)

**Using Evidence** In which year were Canadian exports to Britain the highest? How significant were the increases in 1916? Why did some exports decrease in 1918?



**FIGURE 2–22** This poster, showing a Canadian nurse, reminded the public of Edith Cavell, a British nurse who was executed by the Germans in 1915 for helping Allied soldiers escape German-occupied countries. The names on the poster represent German atrocities.

**Thinking Critically** What is the message in this poster?

## Getting the Message Out

During the First World War, Canadians were bombarded with **propaganda**. It was everywhere: films, magazine articles, radio programs, political speeches, and posters. Appealing to their sense of patriotism, propaganda encouraged people to join the army, buy Victory Bonds, use less fuel, eat less meat, and support the government. Some of the campaigns used social pressure to encourage men to join the army, contributing to the fact that the majority of Canadians who served in the First World War were volunteers.

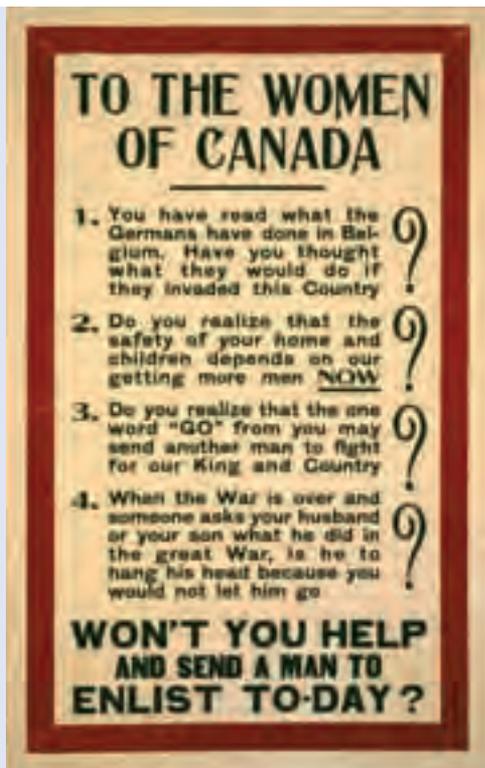
Propaganda often distorted the truth. The number of Allied soldiers killed or wounded was minimized, while enemy casualties were exaggerated. British commanders were praised even as they continued to waste lives in futile attacks. When Germany invaded Belgium in 1914, refugees who escaped to England told horrible stories about the invasion. Writers used these stories to portray German troops as barbarians intent on destroying the civilized world. While this propaganda was intended to recruit soldiers, it also fuelled prejudice on the home front. Many Canadian citizens were treated as enemy aliens, subjected to harsh restrictions by the government and violent attacks by angry citizens.

## Women and the War

Before 1914, middle-class women had few options for working outside the home. Some became nurses or teachers. Others were employed as domestic servants or worked at low-skill, low-paying jobs in food and clothing industries. During the war, increased industrial production created a demand for labour. Women were hired for all types of work, from operating fishing boats to working on farms. One Toronto woman who worked filling artillery shells described her motivation on the job as follows:

*There was everybody, every single class... [W]e began to realize that we were all sisters under the skin... [T]here's nothing that draws people together more than mutual trouble... [W]e felt, "The boys are doing that for us, what are we doing for them?" You just rolled up your sleeves and you didn't care how tired you were or anything else.*

—*Tapestry of War*, 1992



**FIGURE 2-23** This recruiting poster was aimed at Canadian wives and mothers.

**Thinking Critically** Why do you think a war poster targeted women? How effectively does this poster communicate its message to its intended audience? Explain.

- What effect did the war have on the role of women?



**FIGURE 2-24** Munitions assembly, Verdun, Québec. About 35 000 Canadian women worked in munitions factories where shells were manufactured, and thousands more drove delivery trucks.

## Suffrage Is Granted to Women

Without women's efforts on the home front, Canada's wartime economy would have collapsed. But when the war ended, most employers assumed that women would return to work in their homes. Many women believed that their contribution to the war effort should allow them to make decisions about how their country was run. During the 1915 provincial election in Manitoba, one of the Liberal Party's campaign promises was to give women the right to vote. They kept their promise, and Manitoban women received this right in January 1916. Thanks to the efforts of suffragists across the country, women in other provinces soon won the right to vote as well. Alberta and Saskatchewan followed Manitoba's example later in 1916, with Ontario and British Columbia following in 1917. In 1918, women were granted the right to vote in federal elections, with the exception of Aboriginal and immigrant women.

## KEY TERM

**propaganda** information, usually produced by governments, presented in such a way as to inspire and spread particular beliefs or opinions

## The Halifax Explosion

During the war, Halifax was a valuable base for refuelling and repairing Allied warships. It was also the chief departure point for soldiers and supplies headed to Europe. The harbour was extremely busy, but there was little traffic control and collisions were frequent.

On December 6, 1917, the *SS Mont Blanc*, a French vessel carrying more than 2500 tonnes of explosives, was accidentally hit by another ship. The collision caused an explosion so powerful that it devastated Halifax's harbour and levelled much of the city. More than 2000 people were killed, another 9000 were injured, and thousands were left homeless by the explosion and the fires it caused.



**FIGURE 2-25** Halifax Harbour after the explosion, in 1917

**Thinking Critically** Do you think the Halifax explosion might have made people think differently about the war? Explain.

## PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. How was propaganda used during the war? Discuss whether it is appropriate to manipulate information for patriotic purposes during war. What differences, if any, are there between propaganda and advertising?
2. List specific military contributions made by Canada.
3. Explain how women contributed to the war effort, and describe how their status in Canadian society changed as a result.
4. What contributions did Canadians on the home front make to the war effort?
5. Imagine you are the prime minister and you have received a request for aid from the mayor of Halifax after the 1917 explosion. Write a response explaining why help will be limited.

## Aboriginal Peoples and the First World War

Canada's Aboriginal peoples contributed greatly to the war effort, both by giving money to the cause and by volunteering for the armed forces. This was despite the fact that First Nations' land claims were being brought before the government, and they faced racism, bigotry, and poverty. In fact, at the start of the war, the government discouraged Aboriginal peoples from enlisting. Why, then, did they take part in the conflict?

Many Aboriginal peoples felt strongly about their relationship with the British Crown, with which they had signed important agreements. Many were descended from Loyalists who had fought for Britain in the American Revolution and in the War of 1812. In the words of one Aboriginal soldier:

*...[T]he participation of Great Britain in the war has occasioned expressions of loyalty from the Indians, and the offer of contributions from their funds toward the general expenses of the war or toward the Patriotic Fund. Some bands have also offered the services of their warriors if they should be needed.*

—*Indian Affairs, Annual Report, 1913–1914*

Young Aboriginal men saw the war as a chance to prove themselves. Most came from isolated communities and thought the war would be an opportunity for adventure. Also, soldiers were paid, so there was an economic incentive for volunteering.

The hunting tradition of many Aboriginal peoples was excellent training for the battlefield, where steady nerves, patience, and good marksmanship made them excellent sharpshooters. Francis Pegahmagabow, an Ojibwa, and Henry Louis Norwest, a Métis, both won Military Medals for their exceptional service as snipers and scouts. Inuit soldier John Shiwak compared sniping to swatching, shooting seals in open water as they popped up to breathe. Often, Aboriginal spiritual traditions went to the Western Front, as recounted by Francis Pegahmagabow:



**FIGURE 2-26** Francis Pegahmagabow won his Military Medal for bravery at Passchendaele.



**FIGURE 2-27** National Aboriginal Veterans Monument in Ottawa

**Thinking Critically** What do you think the various elements of the monument symbolize?

*When I was... on Lake Superior, in 1914, some of us landed from our vessel to gather blueberries near an Ojibwa camp. An old Indian recognized me, and gave me a tiny medicine-bag to protect me, saying that I would shortly go into great danger. Sometimes [the bag] seemed to be as hard as rock, at other times it appeared to contain nothing. What really was inside it I do not know. I wore it in the trenches, but lost it when I was wounded and taken to a hospital.*

—*Francis Pegahmagabow*

In the end, more than 4000 Aboriginal peoples volunteered for service, including nurse Edith Anderson Monture and Boston Marathon winner Tom Longboat, an Onondaga, who served at the Somme.

### Looking Further

1. What motivated Aboriginal peoples to enlist in the First World War? What qualities helped them to excel on the battlefield?
2. Do you think Aboriginal peoples' contribution to the war effort would have been featured in a textbook 50 years ago? Why or why not?

## The Conscription Crisis

By 1917, thousands of Canadian men had been killed and many thousands more had been seriously wounded. Many men were working in essential industries at home to support the war effort, so there were not enough volunteers to replenish the Canadian forces in Europe.

When the war began, Prime Minister Borden promised there would be no **conscription**, or compulsory enlistment, for military service. But when Borden learned how many men were needed to win the battle at Vimy Ridge, he saw that Canada would have to send more troops to Europe. In 1917, Borden introduced the **Military Service Act**, which made enlistment compulsory. At first, the Act allowed exemptions for the disabled, the clergy, those with essential jobs or special skills, and **conscientious objectors** who opposed the war based on religious grounds. Conscription turned out to be a very controversial and emotional issue that divided the country and left lasting scars.

### Opposition in Québec

While Canada had a high overall rate of volunteers, recruitment was uneven across the country, with the lowest levels in Québec. Many French Canadians were farmers and were needed at home. The majority of them did not feel a patriotic connection to either Britain or France because their ancestors had come to Canada generations before. They saw the Military Service Act as a means of forcing them to fight in a distant war that had no connection to them. Relations between Francophones and Anglophones were also strained because French language rights had been lost in many schools outside Québec. When Francophone men did volunteer, there was little effort to keep them together and few officers spoke French. This did little to encourage French Canadians to volunteer to fight overseas and made them feel like second-class citizens on the home front.

Québec nationalist Henri Bourassa was one of the most outspoken critics of conscription. Bourassa believed that the country had lost enough men and spent enough money on a war that had little to do with Canada. Spending more money and sending more troops would bankrupt the country and put a strain on Canada's agricultural and industrial production. He argued that a weakened economy would eventually threaten Canada's political independence. He also believed that conscription would bitterly divide the nation by aggravating tensions between Francophones and Anglophones. Bourassa was right. Violent clashes erupted in Québec between people protesting conscription and those who supported the war.

- What was the war's impact on the home front?

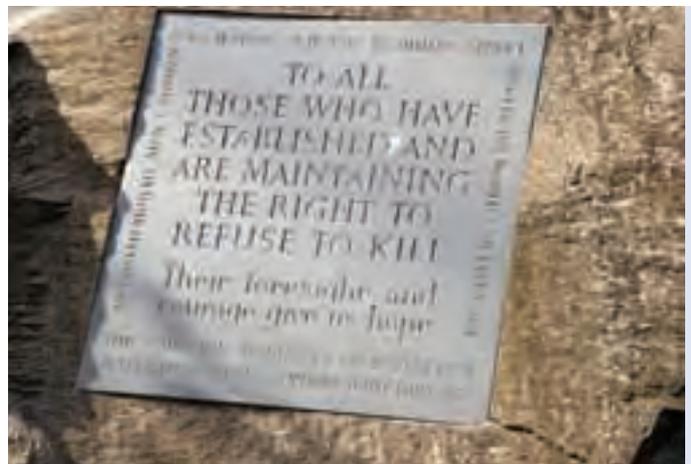
### KEY TERMS

**conscription** forced enlistment in the armed forces of all fit men of certain ages

**Military Service Act** a 1917 Act that made conscription compulsory for all Canadian men between the ages of 20 and 45, calling up the younger men first

**conscientious objector** a person who opposes war for religious or moral reasons

- What impact did conscription have on Canadian unity?



**FIGURE 2–28** Stone dedicated to conscientious objectors; thousands of conscientious objectors from the United States took refuge in Canada in the early 1970s to avoid fighting in the Vietnam War (see Chapter 7). They were termed “draft dodgers” (those who wanted to avoid mandatory conscription) or “deserters” (those who abandoned military posts without permission).

**Thinking Critically** What is your opinion of conscientious objectors? If you were drafted, how would you respond?

## KEY TERMS

**labour movement** groups organized to improve conditions for workers

**Military Voters Act** an Act that allowed men and women serving overseas to vote

**Wartime Elections Act** an Act that gave the vote to Canadian women related to servicemen, but cancelled the vote for conscientious objectors and immigrants from enemy countries

**khaki election** the name given to the 1917 federal election because of Borden's efforts to win the military vote

**Union Government** the coalition government formed by Conservatives and some Liberals and independents that governed Canada from 1917 to 1920

## The Labour Movement

Farmers, particularly on the Prairies, also opposed conscription because they needed their sons to work the farm at home, not fight a war overseas. Industrial workers felt they were already contributing to the war effort and did not want to give up their jobs to fight in Europe.

In British Columbia, the coal miners of Vancouver Island led the **labour movement's** opposition to conscription. During the war, miners were urged to increase their output, while wages and working conditions did not improve and the mining companies made more profit. Workers were already finding it difficult to provide for their families because of soaring prices and low wages, and conscription would mean they would earn even less. In 1917, labour leader Albert “Ginger” Goodwin led a group of smelter workers in a strike, demanding an eight-hour workday. During the strike, Goodwin received his conscription notice to report for duty, even though he had been previously excused from active service because he had “black lung” from working in the mines. Goodwin applied for exemption from service. When he was turned down, he hid in the mountains with several other union members and conscientious objectors. He was eventually tracked down and killed by the police.

## The Khaki Election of 1917

Prime Minister Borden soon realized that there was strong opposition to conscription in many parts of Canada. To try to strengthen his position, he asked Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberals to join his Conservatives to form a union or coalition government. But Laurier was firmly against conscription, believing the “law of the land... declares that no man in Canada shall be subjected to compulsory military service except to repel invasions or for the defence of Canada....”

Failing to get the Liberal leader's support, Borden passed two pieces of legislation to try to ensure he would win an election. He introduced the

**Military Voters Act**, which allowed men and women serving overseas to vote. He also passed the **Wartime Elections Act**, which gave the vote to all Canadian women related to servicemen, but cancelled the vote for all conscientious objectors and immigrants who had come from enemy countries in the last 15 years. The 1917 election became known as the **khaki election** because of these attempts to win the support of people serving during the war.

Before the election, Borden was able to sway some Liberals and independents who favoured conscription to join him in forming a wartime **Union Government**. In addition, the Liberals lost much support outside Québec because of Laurier's position on conscription. As a result, the Union Government won the majority of votes in the 1917 election.



**FIGURE 2–29** Prime Minister Borden gave Canadian men and women serving overseas the right to vote in the federal election of 1917. For the women in this photograph, it was their first time voting in a federal election.

## Conscription Divides the Country

The Union Government won the election with strong support from the armed forces and women, but the anger and resentment stirred up by the conscription debate did not subside. In Québec, people continued to demonstrate against conscription even after the election. Crowds in Montréal marched through the streets shouting “À bas Borden” (“down with Borden”). Canadian troops were pelted with rotten vegetables and stones when they taunted French Canadians for refusing to enlist. Tensions finally erupted at anti-conscription riots in Québec City during the Easter weekend of 1918. On April 1, four demonstrators were shot and killed by soldiers. Ten soldiers were wounded over that weekend as well.

Nevertheless, conscription took place. Of the 401 882 men across Canada who were called up, only 125 000 were enlisted and about 25 000 conscripted soldiers reached France before the end of the war.

	Union Government (Borden)	Liberals (Laurier)
Atlantic Canada	21	10
Québec	3	62
Ontario	74	8
Western Canada	55	2
Total	153	82

**FIGURE 2–30** Results of the 1917 election by region; number of seats in Parliament

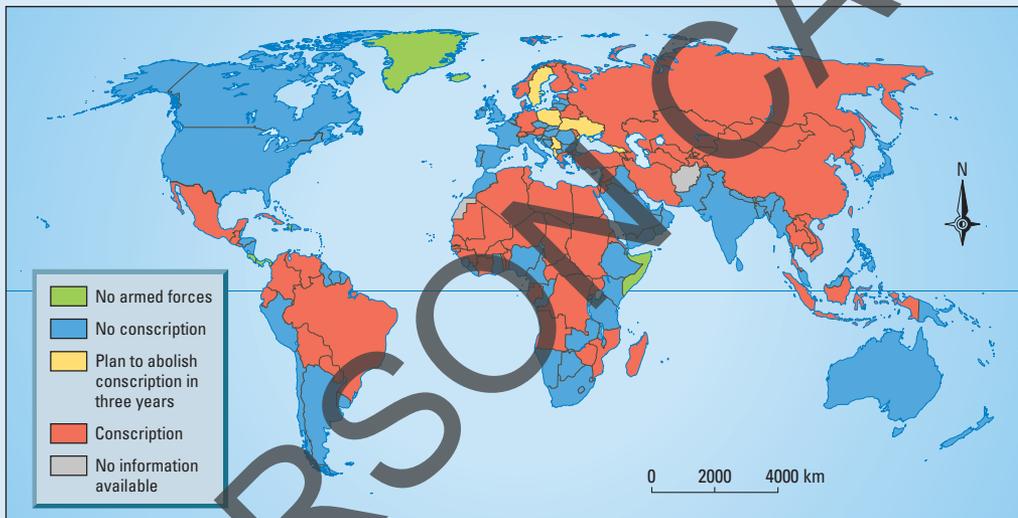
**Using Evidence** Find evidence to support the view that the 1917 election divided the country.

### FAST FORWARD

CRITICAL INQUIRY

Judgements

## Conscription Around the World, 2009



**FIGURE 2–31** Mandatory military service in countries around the world in 2009

1. Why do you think some countries have conscription while others do not?
2. Do you think that there should be mandatory military service in Canada? Explain your thinking.

### PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Why did Prime Minister Borden believe that conscription was necessary? Who was opposed to conscription and why?
2. Write a letter to the editor of the *Vancouver Sun* from Henri Bourassa explaining why conscription was not good for the country.
3. In pairs, create small election posters for the khaki election. Aim your advertising at two of the following groups: soldiers, women, French Canadians, or English Canadians.
4. Why do you think Borden did not allow conscientious objectors or recent Canadian immigrants from enemy countries to vote in the 1917 election? Why did he not give the vote to all women in 1917?
5. By 1917, Canadian soldiers were being used as “shock” troops, leading the attacks in battles. Imagine you are in the position of Robert Borden. Make a list of pros and cons for sending more troops.

## KEY TERMS

**abdicate** to give up a position of authority

**socialist** a believer in a political and economic system in which the means of production and distribution in a country are publicly owned and controlled for the benefit of all members of a society

**Central Powers** the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Kingdom of Bulgaria

**Hundred Days Campaign** the final Allied offensive against the Central Powers on the Western Front, from August 8 to November 11, 1918

**armistice** an agreement by warring parties to end hostilities

**Paris Peace Conference** a meeting in Paris in 1919 to discuss the terms of a peace agreement after the First World War

**Treaty of Versailles** one of the treaties that ended the First World War; it imposed strict sanctions on Germany

## The End of the War

After three long years in a stalemate on the Western Front, two important events in the spring of 1917 changed the direction of the war. Like the other members of the Triple Entente, Russia dedicated its resources to the war. Thousands of soldiers died fighting along the Eastern Front. At home, supplies and food were limited and prices soared. People became increasingly frustrated, and a series of revolutions forced Czar Nicholas to **abdicate** in March of 1917. The Provisional Government was formed, but the Russian people were still dissatisfied with it and the war. In October 1917, **socialist** revolutionaries, called Bolsheviks, overthrew the Provisional Government, promising the war-weary public “peace and bread.” They began negotiating with the **Central Powers** to end the war.

While Russia’s internal politics weakened the Allies on the Eastern Front, another important event of early 1917 shifted power on the Western Front. The United States, still angered by the sinking of neutral ships such as the *Lusitania*, learned that Germany promised to support Mexico if it attacked the United States. On April 2, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. In eight months, American soldiers reached the Western Front.

### The Hundred Days Campaign

On March 3, 1918, Russia and the Central Powers signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. This truce on the Eastern Front freed German troops to fight on the Western Front. Germany knew that it needed a quick victory before American troops reached France. In a desperate offensive beginning in March 1918, the German army struck at weak points in the Allies’ lines and drove deep into France. Positions that had been won at great cost in lives, including Ypres, the Somme, and Passchendaele, were lost within weeks. By the summer of 1918, the new front line was only 75 kilometres from Paris.

With the arrival of the Americans, the Allies rallied and were able to stop the German advance. In August 1918, the Allies launched a series of attacks that came to be known as the **Hundred Days Campaign**. Canada’s offensives were among the most successful of all the Allied forces during this campaign. Canadian troops, under the disciplined command of General Currie, broke through German lines and won important battles at Arras, Cambrai, and Valenciennes.

### The Central Powers Collapse

Their final offensive in France and the battles of the Hundred Days Campaign exhausted the Germans and the rest of the Central Powers. They had no reserves and could not continue without fresh troops, food, and supplies. The Central Powers collapsed one by one. In November 1918, the German Kaiser abdicated and fled to Holland and Austria-Hungary agreed to a ceasefire. An **armistice**, or truce to end the war, on the Western Front was finally signed in a railway car in France at 5:00 a.m. on November 11, 1918. The war was to stop at 11:00 a.m. This corresponds to the date and time of our modern-day Remembrance Day ceremonies.



**FIGURE 2-32** Workers march with banners of the Russian Revolution, 1917

## Canada's Emerging Autonomy

After signing the armistice, the leaders of the Allies and the other countries that won the war met in Paris in 1919 to discuss the terms of a peace agreement. The **Paris Peace Conference** lasted for six months and resulted in a number of treaties that defined new borders and compensation for losses suffered during the war. More than 30 countries attended the conference, each with their own agenda. Germany and its allies were not allowed to participate. Russia, which had already negotiated the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany in 1918, was not invited.

- What factors contributed to Canada's emerging autonomy?

### What If...

Imagine Canada had not been given a separate seat at the Paris Peace Conference. How might that have affected Canadian autonomy?

### Participating in Peace

The Paris Peace Conference marked an important moment in Canada's emerging autonomy from Britain. Because Canada had contributed so much to the war and its soldiers had fought under Canadian leaders on the battlefields, Prime Minister Borden demanded Canada have its own seat at the conference. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson opposed Canada's participation. He thought that Britain should vote on behalf of the British Empire and that a separate vote for Canada was really just another vote for Britain. But British Prime Minister Lloyd George reminded Wilson that Canada had fought longer and supplied more troops than other countries. In the end, Canada won a seat at the conference and Borden insisted that he be included among those leaders who signed the Treaty of Versailles. For the first time, Canada gained international recognition as an independent nation.

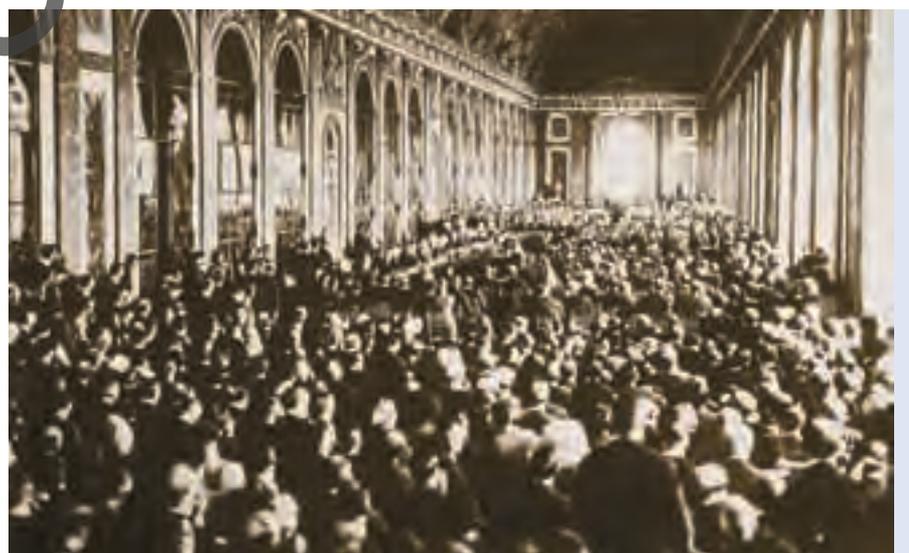
	Dead	Wounded	Missing	Total
Canada	57	150	unknown	207
Britain	659	2032	359	3050
France	1359	4200	362	5921
Germany	1600	4065	103	5768
Russia	1700	5000	unknown	6700
Austria-Hungary	922	3600	855	5377
United States	58	190	14	262

**FIGURE 2-33** Approximate\* number of military casualties of the First World War (in thousands)

\* Although precise casualty numbers for the First World War are not available, these numbers can be considered a reliable estimate of the casualties incurred by these countries.

### The Treaty of Versailles

One of the treaties that came out of the Paris Peace Conference was the **Treaty of Versailles**. This document laid out the terms of peace between Germany and the Allies. Initially, U.S. President Wilson proposed a 14-point plan for "just and lasting peace" that emphasized forgiveness and future international cooperation. But some Allied leaders wanted to shame Germany and make it pay for the damage their countries had suffered during the war.



**FIGURE 2-34** Leaders from around the world gathered in Versailles, outside of Paris, to negotiate a peace agreement, which became known as the Treaty of Versailles.

## KEY TERM

**War Guilt Clause** an article in the Treaty of Versailles that made Germany responsible for starting the First World War

In the end, the Treaty of Versailles included the following terms:

- Germany had to agree to a **War Guilt Clause**, meaning that it had to accept sole responsibility for causing the war.
- Germany's territory would be reduced. Alsace-Lorraine would be returned to France. Rhineland, on the west bank of the Rhine River, would remain part of Germany but would be demilitarized. Some of Germany's land would be given to Poland so it would have a corridor to the sea. Germany also had to give up control of its colonies.
- Germany had to pay war reparations totalling approximately \$30 billion.
- The German army was to be restricted to 100 000 men. Germany also had to surrender its navy—including its U-boats—and much of its merchant fleet. It was not allowed to have an air force.
- Austria and Germany were forbidden to unite.

The Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919. Naturally, Germany was reluctant to agree to such punishing terms, but it submitted because the Allies threatened to resume fighting. The reparation terms were particularly harsh. Like other European countries, Germany's economy was in ruins after the war and it could not make full reparation payments. Under the Treaty of Versailles, different ethnic and cultural groups were combined to create new nations, which left many people without a homeland. This meant that the feelings of nationalism that helped fuel the war were still unresolved. Many historians believe that, instead of lasting peace, the treaty brought the certainty of renewed war. Even British Prime Minister Lloyd George later found the terms too harsh. He observed that, "We shall have to fight another war all over again in 25 years at three times the cost."



**FIGURE 2-35** Europe in 1922

### Using Evidence

Compare this map with the map of Europe on page 28. Describe the changes in national borders, then list the names of the new countries created.

## Did the war have a positive or negative effect on Canada?

The First World War brought profound changes to Canada. It changed the way we see ourselves as a nation. Canadian troops fought well as a united force and their victories at Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele distinguished them as disciplined and courageous fighters. The need for war supplies stimulated the economy, resulting in major growth in Canadian industry. Women won the right to vote for the first time. The First World War marked Canada's coming of age as it moved from a collection of disparate communities to a nation united by a sense of pride and identity. Canada gained international status by participating at the Paris Peace Conference, and Canadians began to see themselves less as colonials in the British Empire and more as citizens of an independent country. According to Canadian historian George Woodcock,

*...the emergence of Canada... as a nation among nations within the broader world context, caused people to think less of what divided them than of what united them. They shared a single, if immense, geographical terrain, a common historical tradition in which their various pasts intermingled of necessity, and an identity in which the sense of being colonial—and therefore being linked irrevocably to a land far away—metamorphosed into a sense of being Canadian.*

—George Woodcock

### A Country Divided

The war had a very negative effect on the solidarity of Canada. The issue of conscription and the bitterness of the debate between Anglophones and Francophones have never been completely forgotten. Those who spoke out against conscription were accused of being unpatriotic and labelled cowards. Such accusations isolated many French Canadians from the federal government that had broken its promise not to impose conscription. The War Measures Act also caused problems in many communities where immigrants from Eastern European countries suffered racial discrimination even after the

war. Aboriginal leaders, who hoped their peoples' contributions to the war would ensure them a better situation, were disappointed. If anything, Canadian society was more discriminatory than ever.

### The Cost of War

The losses both at home and throughout the world were staggering. Approximately 13 million people were killed during the First World War, and millions more were psychologically or physically wounded. The economic costs of the war in destruction and lost productivity were enormous. Between 1914 and 1918, Canada sent many millions of dollars worth of materials overseas, creating a debt that took decades to pay off. Some historians challenge the idea that the First World War marked Canada's coming of age. Historian Jonathan Vance asks, "How could a war that saw the deaths of 60 000 Canadians and the wounding of 170 000 others become a constructive force in the nation's history?" Vance believes that Canada's "coming of age" was a myth that developed during the 1920s and 1930s to transform the horrors of the war into a more positive experience. The maturity myth was meant to help heal the country, Vance says, because believing in it meant wartime losses had served a real purpose for Canada.

### Analyzing the Issue

1. Define "coming of age." How did the First World War help bring about Canada's "coming of age"?
2. Make a study tool on the theme of Canadian unity and the effects of the First World War. Which events enhanced Canadian unity and which diminished it?
3. You and a partner have been chosen to be on a panel to discuss the impact of the First World War on Canada's development. One of you will defend George Woodcock's position, the other, that of Jonathan Vance. Prepare your arguments and present them to the class for further discussion.



Prime Minister  
**Robert Laird Borden**

- born 1854, Grand Pré, Nova Scotia
- teacher, lawyer
- first elected to Commons in 1896
- prime minister 1911–1920

#### Domestic Record

- passed the War Measures Act (1914) during the First World War
- introduced income tax as a “temporary” measure in 1917
- made conscription mandatory in 1917 by passing the Military Service Act
- won the 1917 khaki election by passing the Military Voters Act and the Wartime Elections Act
- sent federal troops to break up the Winnipeg General Strike (1919)

#### International Record

- led the Canadian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919
- fought to allow Canada to sign the Treaty of Versailles
- won Canada a place in the League of Nations
- was lead author of Resolution IX at the Imperial War Conference (1917), arguing that Canada deserved recognition as an autonomous nation

## The League of Nations

The Treaty of Versailles included the formation of the League of Nations. The League was Woodrow Wilson’s brainchild—as the idea of international cooperation was one of the most important elements of his 14-point plan for lasting peace. The League was based on the principle of collective security. If one member came under attack, all members united against the aggressor, much as the forging of alliances hoped to accomplish at the beginning of the war. As part of his struggle to be included in the Paris Peace Conference, Prime Minister Borden also won the right for Canada to become a member of the newly formed League. The League’s 42 founding nations first met in Paris on January 16, 1920.

The idea of a League of Nations was not welcomed by everyone. Britain and France had doubts about it and wanted the freedom to pursue their imperialist ambitions. But their leaders realized that Wilson’s proposal had propaganda value, so they agreed to the basic concept, at least in principle. Smaller nations, always concerned about becoming victims of the great powers, eagerly looked forward to a new era of peace. Ironically, the United States refused to join the League. Wilson had powerful opponents who rejected the principle of collective security, which would involve the U.S. in world affairs.

## The League’s Limitations

In many ways, the League of Nations proved to be a more idealistic vision than a practical solution to world problems. The refusal of the United States to join the League greatly undermined its effectiveness to resolve disputes in the years after the First World War. It required the nations of the world to cooperate with one another, which was not something they had done very well in the past. The League could punish an aggressive nation by imposing economic sanctions against it, thus restricting trade with the offending nation. But the League did not have a military force of its own to impose its decisions on aggressor nations. Nor was it easy to impose sanctions.

### PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. With a partner, prepare briefing notes for the Canadian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. Emphasize Canada’s status as a nation, its contributions to the war, and the costs of the war to Canada.
2. Research the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Make a PMI chart on the treaty’s terms and their possible consequences.

## Canada After the War

After four long years of fighting, Canadian soldiers were finally on their way home. Most returned to Canada in early 1919 only to find that there were no steady pensions for veterans, no special medical services for those wounded in the war, and above all, few jobs. To make matters worse, many employers had grown rich during the war. The veterans had made the sacrifices, but it seemed that others were reaping the rewards.

Aboriginal soldiers returning to Canada faced even greater disappointments. During the war, they benefited from some of the social changes that took place, including gaining the right to vote under the Military Voters Act. Aboriginal peoples also believed that their contributions to the war effort would be acknowledged. But they found that nothing had changed. They still faced prejudice, and Aboriginal soldiers received even less support and opportunities than other veterans after the war.

- What challenges did Aboriginal soldiers face upon their return home?

### Flu Pandemic of 1918

During the winter of 1918 to 1919, a deadly influenza virus (called Spanish Flu) swept across Europe, killing millions. Many returning soldiers carried the virus to North America. Young people were especially susceptible to the virus, which caused the deaths of an estimated 21 million people worldwide, more than the war itself. From 1918 to 1920, approximately 50 000 Canadians died during the epidemic. Many small Aboriginal communities were almost wiped out. Schools and public places were closed for months in an effort to stop the spread of the virus, and in some communities, people were required to wear breathing masks in public.



**FIGURE 2-36** After the devastation of the First World War, conditions were right for the flu virus to spread rapidly.

**Developing Understanding** Why are these people wearing masks?

## FAST FORWARD

### Worldwide Pandemics

When an infectious disease spreads rapidly across a continent or the whole world, it is called a pandemic. The World Health Organization (WHO) is an agency of the United Nations that coordinates international efforts to monitor outbreaks of infectious diseases. It has three criteria to determine whether a flu outbreak is a pandemic:

- It is a new flu germ to which humans did not have immunity.
- Infected people can become very ill or even die.
- It is contagious and spreads easily.

Today, pandemics can spread more rapidly due to increased mobility of the global population. The SARS outbreak of 2003 demonstrated how air travel could help spread disease across continents. H1N1, or Swine Flu, which was first identified in Mexico in 2009, rapidly spread around the globe. H1N1 is a very similar strain to the Spanish Flu, which caused the pandemic of 1918 that killed millions.