

# 2

## Canada and World War I

### FOCUS ON

- What caused World War I, and why did Canada become involved?
- How did technological innovations change the way the war was fought?
- What effect did the war have on the status of women?
- What effect did the War Measures Act have on the legal rights of Canadians?
- Why did conscription become a major issue in Quebec?

### Counterpoints Issue

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



*For What?* by Frederick Varley. This sombre painting of Canadian troops uses a devastated landscape and a cart full of dead bodies to reflect the harsh realities of World War I. Many people, excited about the war at first, were traumatized by the massive destruction and the hundreds of thousands of dead and wounded left in the wake of the new weapons of war.



**Expressing ideas** What is the theme of Varley's painting? Describe the colours and style he used. How do colour and style convey the artist's impressions about the war?

## Introduction

In May 1917, Crawford Grier, a young Canadian soldier, lay in an English hospital, recovering from shrapnel wounds he had received while fighting in France. Grier was thankful he was in England, far from the horrors of the trenches and the smell of fear and death, safe from constant bombardment and sniper fire. He was proud of the battle he and other Canadians had won on Vimy Ridge in northern France just a few days earlier.

To Canadian soldiers like Grier, the war had seemed an exciting adventure when it began in the summer of 1914. But by the spring of 1917, Canadians were weary of the awful sacrifices they had to make. Nevertheless, in a letter home, Grier had a sense of hope when he wrote, “The whole thing looks like it’s developing into the push that will end the war.” Instead, the battles continued until hours before the armistice in 1918, and the effects of “the Great War”—later renamed World War I—were felt for decades to come.

In this chapter, you will learn how a regional conflict in a distant corner of Europe became World War I, and how the lives of Canadians were affected by this conflict. You will see how conscription became a major issue that divided Canadians. You will also learn how Canada gained new influence in international affairs.

## The Beginning of World War I

On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary, was visiting the city of Sarajevo, Bosnia. Bosnia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but neighbouring Serbia had claimed it as part of a “Greater Serbia” because the majority of Bosnia’s population was Serbian. The Archduke’s visit was very controversial, and a Serbian nationalist group called the Black Hand marked him for assassination. A first attempt to blow up his car failed, but as the motor procession sought another route, Gavrilo Princip rushed forward to shoot and mortally wound the Archduke and his wife, Sophie.

● **1914** Franz Ferdinand, Crown Prince of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is assassinated by a Serbian nationalist.

Germany invades Belgium and France.

Britain declares war on Germany; Canada is automatically at war.

War Measures Act is passed.

● **1915** Canadian troops exposed to poisonous gas at Ypres, Belgium.

● **1916** Women in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta gain the right to vote in provincial elections.

The Newfoundland Regiment almost destroyed as Battle of the Somme begins.

● **1917** Canadian troops capture Vimy Ridge, France.

Women in British Columbia and Ontario gain the right to vote in provincial elections.

War-time Elections Act gives federal vote to women related to servicemen.

Borden re-elected as head of Union Government.

Canadian troops succeed in muddy battles at Passchendaele in Belgium.

Halifax is flattened by explosion of a French munitions ship in its harbour.

● **1918** Conscription becomes mandatory.

Armistice declared on the Western Front in Europe.

The assassination in Sarajevo was the event that brought on World War I. How did this seemingly local event escalate into a global conflict? To understand, we must look beyond the event itself to other developments in Europe.

## Background to the War

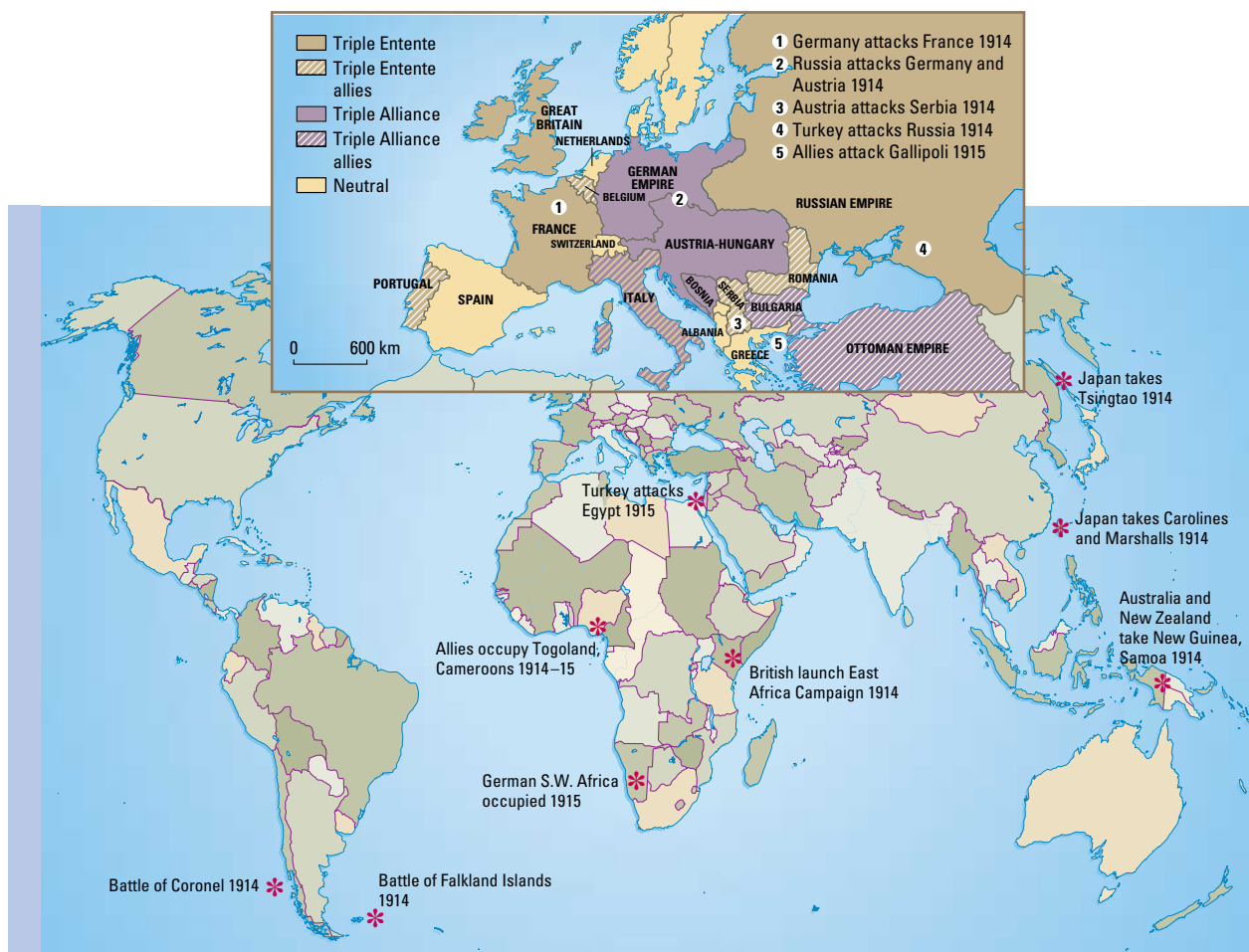
At the beginning of the twentieth century, much of eastern Europe was dominated by three weak and crumbling empires: the Austro-Hungarian, the Russian, and the Ottoman. Many nationalities within these empires resented being dominated by a foreign power. They wanted to be independent nations, free to determine their own political future and maintain their cultural identity.

When Austria-Hungary took control of Bosnia-Herzegovina, a province in the Balkans, many Serbs were outraged at suddenly being part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This sense of **nationalism**, or intense loyalty toward one's own country and culture, was a powerful force throughout Europe.

In an effort to reduce their vulnerability to attack, some countries had formed alliances, agreeing to support one another in the event of an invasion by another country. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy formed the **Triple Alliance**. Then France, feeling isolated and threatened by this power bloc to the east, joined with Russia and Britain in an opposing alliance called the

**Triple Entente**. By surrounding Germany, the countries of the Triple Entente hoped to reduce the threat of war. In fact, these alliances had the opposite effect because any one member of an alliance could rely on immediate assistance from its allies if it became involved in a conflict.

Alliances among various countries may have acted as a deterrent to war in the short term, but they failed to stop the massive build-up in armaments and armies, or **militarism**, that was taking place in Europe. Germany, in particular, had been rapidly expanding its army, and other European countries expanded their armies in an effort to maintain the **balance of power**. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Germany had



**Figure 2-1** Pre-war alliances.

**Using evidence** Why would Germany feel threatened by the Triple Entente?

# building your skills

## Interpreting a Political Cartoon

**P**olitical 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 by using symbols to represent ideas. They are a very effective means of convincing a reader to see an issue in a specific way.

### Steps in Interpreting a Political Cartoon

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, size of figures).
4. Identify the biases of the cartoonist by examining the devices used.
5. Interpret the cartoon.

### 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 2-1.
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.



**Figure 2-2** The Chain of Friendship. This cartoon highlights some of the main causes of World War I by representing the European countries in 1914 as different characters.



the strongest army and the most powerful arsenal of weapons in Europe. What it wanted next was a strong navy, but it was up against a formidable rival: Great Britain was the undisputed ruler of the seas. When Germany started to expand its navy, Britain responded by building the largest battleship ever, HMS *Dreadnought*. Not to be outdone, Germany built its own dreadnoughts with the result that, by 1914, both countries had amassed huge fleets of warships. A fierce arms race was on.

While nationalist tensions grew across Europe, *imperialism*, the acquisition of overseas territories, was also on the rise. Belgium and Italy had only recently begun to colonize areas in Africa as had Germany, but Germany also sought colonies in Asia and the Pacific. Britain and France were expanding their overseas empires from the colonies they had previously established throughout the world. By the late 1800s, the race to claim territories in Africa, a continent rich in gold, diamonds, and ivory, had become highly competitive. European countries often challenged each other for rights to the overseas territories and their resources.

With this range of background causes, the assassination of Franz Ferdinand was simply the spark that ignited an already tense situation. Austria-Hungary blamed Serbia for Ferdinand's death and eventually declared war on Serbia. As a follow-up to that action, Russia, Serbia's ally, mobilized her troops. Then Germany, as Austria-Hungary's ally, did the same. Within weeks, all the great powers had fielded armies and were at war. Even Britain, which had tried to stay out of European conflicts, declared war on Germany when it invaded Belgium. On the one side were the members of the Triple Entente—Russia, France, and Britain—which became known as the **Allies**. On the other were two of the members of the Triple Alliance that became known as the *Central Powers*—Germany and Austria-Hungary. Italy, an original member of the Triple Alliance, did not join the conflict at first, but eventually many other nations throughout the world became involved in the war.

## ACTIVITIES

1. Build a flow diagram that links the following in sequence, noting any that occurred simultaneously: Assassination of Franz Ferdinand and Sophie, Invasion of Belgium, Creation of the Triple Alliance, Britain Declares War on Germany, Russia Mobilizes Troops.
2. List the causes and contributing factors that resulted in the outbreak of war.
3. In a letter to the prime minister of Britain from the prime minister of Canada, explain why you do, or do not, support an alliance between Britain, Russia, and France.
4. Write a well-reasoned argument for the following proposition: "World War I was unnecessary and could have been prevented."

## Canada's Response to the War

The assassination in Bosnia was front-page news in Canada, but few Canadians thought much about it. It had been a particularly hot summer, and Prime Minister Robert Borden was vacationing at his cottage when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Although Canada had become a political union in 1867, Britain still controlled the foreign policy of all its dominions, which meant that when Britain declared war on Germany, Canada, along with the rest of the British Empire, was automatically at war.

Most English-speaking Canadians were of British origin, and they supported the war out of a strong patriotic feeling for Great Britain and the Empire. One Toronto newspaper captured the sense of excitement at the time when it reported:

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



**Figure 2-3** Colourful recruiting posters with urgent messages for volunteers appeared across Canada.

#### Identifying viewpoint

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

sense of the seriousness of the situation by singing “Onward Christian Soldiers”....

Source: *Toronto Mail and Empire*, August 5, 1914.

Wilfrid Laurier, the leader of the Liberals, joined English Canadians in pledging support for Britain and the Empire. Laurier, quoting a famous British naval song, stated that Canadians were “Ready, Aye, Ready” to help.

Prime Minister Borden initially offered Britain 25 000 troops, but more than 30 000 volunteers from across Canada signed up within the first month. Many people volunteered because they believed that the war would be a short one and that they would be home by Christmas. A few months of fighting in Europe could be an exciting adventure—they might even be heroes upon their return. Others signed up because they had no job and the war in Europe meant a chance to escape financial hardships at home. Still others felt the patriotic urge to defend their mother country.

Not all Canadians were welcome to participate in the war. Women were considered too frail and emotional to take part in battle, so they were encouraged to stay at home and support the men who did go. Those women who did join the ser-

vices were limited to activities as nurses and ambulance drivers behind the front lines. Initially the Canadian forces did not accept Aboriginal people, and the forces were also reluctant to take African- and Japanese-Canadians. Volunteers from these groups managed to overcome such racist attitudes and join, but few were promoted within



**Figure 2-4** Aboriginal volunteers from Files Hill Reserve, who joined the Saskatchewan 68th Battalion of the CEF, are shown here with family members.

the ranks. Such discrimination didn't prevent these recruits from serving their country well. One Aboriginal recruit, Tom Longboat (Cogwagee), 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.

## Training the Troops

Canadian troops had to be made ready for war. The enormous task of training and supplying the troops with clothing and munitions went to Sam Hughes, the minister of militia, who immediately set up a training centre in Valcartier, Quebec. After minimal basic training, 32 000 enthusiastic but rather ill-prepared Canadian and Newfoundland troops set sail for England in thirty-two transport ships.

Before the war, Canada was a patchwork of regions with few of the transportation and communication connections we know today. Canadians in these regions had little contact with one another. Wartime training brought diverse Canadians together as a group, first at Valcartier, then at bases in England. The trials of boot camp built bridges between them and they began to

develop a **national identity**, a sense of being Canadian. 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. Very often you didn't take any notice of the fact unless they happened to mention it.

Source: Ben Wagner, quoted in B. Greenhous and S.J. Harris, *Canada and the Battle of Vimy Ridge* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1992), 35.

The army that was formed from these volunteers was known as the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). When the CEF arrived in Britain, 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 Canadian unit, another factor that contributed greatly to a growing sense of national identity.

**Figure 2-5** The 29th Battalion (Vancouver), CEF, in training in Hastings Park, Vancouver, late 1914.

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







**Figure 2-6** World War I internment camp near Banff, Alberta.

**Gathering information** What can you learn about conditions in the internment camp from this photograph?

## Canada's Minister of Militia

Sam Hughes was also put in charge of Canada's armament industry. He created the Shell Committee to oversee the manufacturing of shells, and by 1917, Canada was supplying about one-third of the shells used by the British forces. Hughes, however, was a poor administrator and the Ministry of Militia soon became bogged down in patronage, inefficiency, and confusion. By mid-1915, contracts worth about \$170 million had been signed with wealthy industrialists, 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. Hughes also took advantage of his position by awarding large government contracts to friends who were *profiteers*, people more interested in making money than in producing quality goods. In one case, soldiers were equipped with boots that fell apart in the rain because the soles had been made of pressed cardboard. Canadian soldiers came to hate the Canadian-made Ross rifle because it tended to jam in rapid fire, so they picked up British-made Lee Enfield rifles from dead infantrymen whenever they could. Hughes was dismissed from his post in 1916 but not before being knighted by King George V.

## The War Measures Act

Prime Minister Borden realized that in order for Canada to meet the demands of war, the government would need more control over the country's affairs. Almost immediately after war was declared, Borden introduced the **War Measures Act**, which granted the Canadian government the authority to do everything necessary "for the security, defence, peace, order, and welfare of Canada." The federal government had never been granted such power before. For the first time it could intervene directly in the economy of the country and control transportation, manufacturing, trade, and agricultural production in whatever way it deemed necessary. The act gave the government the power to strip ordinary Canadians of their civil liberties. Mail could be censored, and **habeas corpus**, the right of a person under arrest to be brought before a judge to determine the lawfulness of the arrest, was suspended. This meant police had the power to 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. Over half a million of them had to carry special identity cards and report regularly to registration officers. Another 8579 were held in isolation in **internment camps**.



## ACTIVITIES

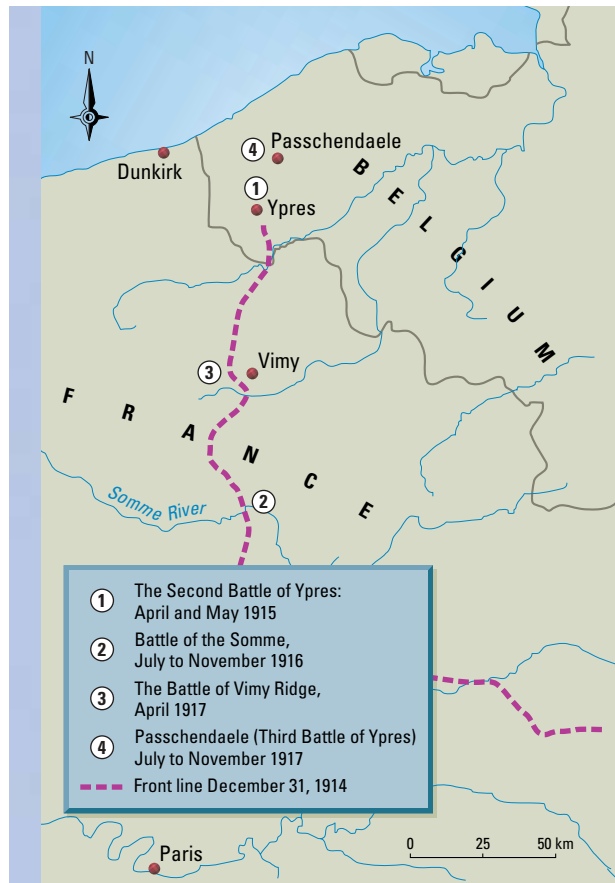
1. Examine the document on pages 24–25. What does this document say about the attitude of people in Canada towards Britain at this time? How does the document on page 26 demonstrate a growing feeling of Canadian identity among Canadian troops?
2. List the attitudes in Canada in 1914 that led to the exclusion of women and other groups from participating in the war.
3. Why did the government need power to control the economy, transportation, and trade when war was declared?
4. Name the civil liberties that were threatened by the War Measures Act.

## The War on Land

Before the war began, Germany had developed the Schlieffen Plan, a bold strategy for a two-front war. France to the west was the Western Front, and Russia to the east the Eastern Front. The plan was for the German army to quickly invade Belgium, then France, and capture the capital city of Paris. Once this was accomplished, Germany could turn its attention to Russia. The plan almost worked. By August of 1914, German troops were only 35 km from Paris. They were, however, exhausted by the pace of the Schlieffen Plan. France and Britain rallied to push them back into northern France, where the Germans dug a defensive line of trenches. The Allies dug their own system of trenches, often just a few metres away. 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 of 1914, the Western Front was locked in a stalemate with neither side able to make advances, yet both sides were unprepared to retreat.

## New Technology and the War

The muddy trenches and devastated landscape of northern France became symbols of the way the war was being fought. In earlier wars, infantry soldiers had fought in armed units supported by cavalry (soldiers on horses). They charged the enemy across open fields, firing rifles equipped with bayonets. By 1914, however, new weapons were so powerful and deadly that it was suicidal to charge across open ground. Newly developed machine guns fired at unprecedented speed. Airplanes, invented only a decade before the war began, flew over battlefields, allowing pilots to spy on enemy activity; later the planes were equipped with machine guns. By 1916, armoured tanks had been

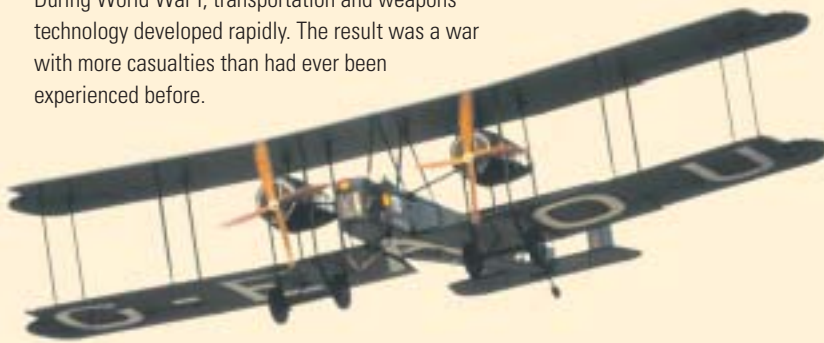


**Figure 2-7** The Western Front.

# Innovations

## War Technology

During World War I, transportation and weapons technology developed rapidly. The result was a war with more casualties than had ever been experienced before.



Germany used *dirigibles*, inflatable airships, for scouting and bombing missions. Ferdinand von Zeppelin built huge rigid dirigibles by covering a light framework of wood or metal with a thin “skin” of water-proof fabric or aluminum. The shell was filled with a lighter-than-air gas such as hydrogen, and the airship was propelled forward by an engine suspended underneath. Britain used smaller frameless dirigibles to protect ships from submarines. ▼



During World War I, bigger *field guns* and *cannon* were developed. Germany’s “Big Bertha” artillery could arch shells almost 25 km upward to hit targets up to 120 km away! Giant guns were moved into position on railcars, and worked together in groups called batteries. Often the guns fired shells filled with explosives and *shrapnel*, metal balls or fragments.

▲ At first, *fighter planes* were used to find the enemy; later they were used to attack. There was always a risk that the machine guns used to fire on the enemy would chop off the plane’s own wooden propeller, so engineers developed an interrupter system to block the machine gun from firing at the moment the propeller passed in front of it. This safeguard reduced the number of bullets shot, so many pilots used a top-mounted gun that fired above the propeller.

Although the United States and Britain were responsible for much of the development of the early *submarines*, Germany used them most. Their *U-boats* (from *Unterseeboot*, or “under-sea boat”) used diesel engines and travelled faster on the surface than most ships. A periscope allowed crew members to view the surface from under water. U-boat crews sank many Allied ships with *torpedoes*, cigar-shaped bombs driven by a propeller. ▼



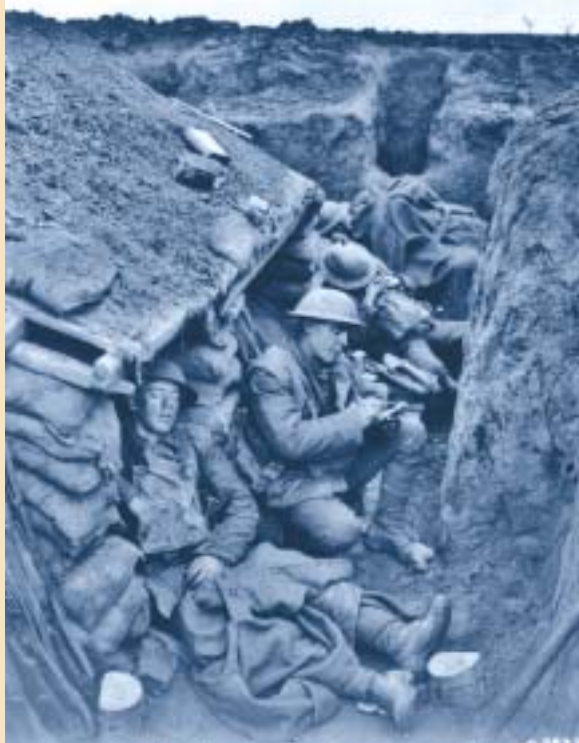
The British developed *tanks* to crush barbed wire and shelter the crew from gunfire while crossing no man’s land. Soldiers would follow a wide line of tanks as the tracked vehicles crawled slowly forward. The original tanks were underpowered and very hard to turn. They also often stuck in the mud. By 1917, though, improvements made them important in the Allied ground war. ▼



▲ Both sides used *poison gas* during World War I. Germany was the first to use chemical warfare, releasing clouds of chlorine gas at Ypres in 1915. The gas burned the skin and lungs of the Allied forces, including Canadians. Later, both sides used phosgene gas (invisible but suffocating) and mustard gas (which creates huge skin blisters). One young soldier temporarily blinded in a British gas attack in 1918 was Adolf Hitler, later to lead Germany in World War II. As the use of poisonous gas increased, troops were issued with *anti-gas respirators*.

built to protect crews as they advanced across the battlefield. Using tanks, troops could finally break through the protective wall of barbed wire in front of trenches. The early tanks were crude and often got stuck in the mud, but by the end of the war, they had become a more reliable weapon.

Soldiers may have been using modern weapons on the battlefield, but many of their commanders failed to understand how this new technology demanded new tactics. Over the next three years, hundreds of thousands of soldiers on all sides were slaughtered in the battlefields of France and Belgium as generals stubbornly engaged in a war of attrition, each side repeatedly attacking the other until one was completely exhausted and unable to continue.



**Figure 2-8** Many Canadian soldiers lost their lives in the trenches while others 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?

## 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 a heavy rain. Muddy trenches became stinking cesspools, overrun by rats. Soldiers' clothes were infested with lice, and many men developed trench foot, a painful condition that caused their feet to swell and turn black. An injured limb might require amputation because medical supplies were limited and repair was not possible. Many of those seriously injured in attacks were left to die in no man's land because rescue attempts were too dangerous. 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.

Source: *Toronto Globe*, April 15, 1916.

## The CEF in Battle

### The Second Battle of Ypres

Some of the bloodiest battles of the early war years were fought in and around the Belgian city of Ypres, located in the Flanders district. It was here on April 22, 1915, and again two days later that French and Canadian troops were blinded, burned, or killed when the Germans used chlorine gas even though the use of gas for military purposes 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 that destroyed their lungs. Many men suffocated or choked to death. Over the next month, neither side gained much ad-

vantage in the fields of Flanders though 6000 Canadians were killed, wounded, or captured.

## The Battle of the Somme

In July 1916, British and French forces under the command of General Douglas Haig launched a massive attack along a line of low ridges near the Somme River, France. A veteran of cavalry warfare, Haig insisted on using strategies he knew had worked well in previous wars, but they were useless in trench warfare. As wave upon wave of troops were ordered to march across open fields, they were mowed down by German machine guns. Almost 85 per cent of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, over 700 men including all officers, were killed or wounded within half an hour. When the battle finally drew to a close in November, there were over a million casualties—almost equal numbers on both sides—although Haig claimed victory. Almost 24 000 Canadians were among the casualties, and most soldiers were badly shaken by having witnessed the slaughter. One Canadian soldier, Frank Maheux, recalls the scene:

I passed the worst fighting here since the war started. We took all kinds of prisoners but God we lost heavy, all my comrades 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.

Source: Quoted in Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up* (Toronto: Random House, 1993), 158.

## The Battle of Vimy Ridge

Since their first offensive in 1914, the Germans had controlled Vimy Ridge, a strategically important area of land in northern France. The French had tried three times to regain Vimy, but they were unsuccessful. Late in 1916, Canadian troops were chosen to lead a new assault under the command of General Julian Byng, a popular British officer (later appointed a governor general of Canada). Byng developed strategies for attack and trained the troops well, rehearsing their movements thoroughly. From the west side of the ridge, Canadian troops bombarded German positions for over a month. Meanwhile, sappers (army engineers) constructed tunnels to move troops secretly to forward positions. At zero hour on April 9, 1917, Easter Monday and the first day of the attack, Canadian troops moved into position. The weather was cold and snowy, and a strong wind blew snow



### In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields

Punch  
Dec 9, 1915

John McCrae

**Figure 2-9** Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae, a Canadian surgeon, wrote his famous poem “In Flanders Fields” to commemorate the dead and injured Canadians he treated in Belgium. He wrote the poem in twenty minutes and signed it. Then, dissatisfied with the work, he tossed it aside. A soldier later found it and sent it to a popular British magazine for publication.

**Thinking critically** How reliable is this poem as a primary source?



**Figure 2-10** Canadian soldiers return from Vimy Ridge, May 1917.

**Expressing ideas** This photograph became one of the most famous images of Canadians in World War I. Why do you think this was so?



into the faces of the enemy on the ridge. The Canadian corps followed their plan of attack with precision and bravery, and in less than two hours they had taken their first objectives. On April 10, they captured Hill 145, the highest point on the ridge, and 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—over 3500 men killed and another 7000 wounded—the losses were significantly fewer than in any previous Allied offensive because of the meticulous planning and training.

The victory at Vimy Ridge marked a Canadian milestone, and Canadians took great pride in the success. Their victory was noted outside Canada as well. An editorial in the *New York Tribune* stated that “every American will feel a thrill of admiration and a touch of honest envy at the achievements of the Canadian troops.” Historian Pierre Berton captured these events in simpler terms: “They said it couldn’t be done and we did it.”

## Passchendaele

Byng was promoted for his role at Vimy and his replacement was a Canadian, General Arthur Currie, a former real estate dealer from Victoria, British Columbia. The first Canadian appointed to command Canada’s troops, Currie brought an increasingly independent Canadian point of view to the British war effort. Although a disciplined leader and open to new strategies, Currie still took orders from General Haig. In 1917, Currie and the CEF were called upon to retake Passchendaele Ridge in Belgium. Unlike Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele had little strategic value, but General Haig was determined to retake it. His earlier assault on Passchendaele had left massive shell craters in the ground, which the heavy autumn rains turned into a quagmire. Some soldiers and horses actually drowned in these appalling conditions. Currie warned that casualties would be high, but Haig would not change his mind. Currie was right. The Allies won the battle at Passchendaele, but the “victory” cost over 15 000 Canadian lives and nearly half a million soldiers from both sides.



**Figure 2-11** Nurses and surgeon in a World War I hospital.

**Gathering information** How does this scene differ from scenes in modern operating rooms? Identify three elements in the scene that could be sources of infection.

## Women on the Western Front

Almost 2500 Canadian women joined the medical and field ambulance corps. Some women served as nurses in the Canadian Army Medical Corps. Affectionately called “Bluebirds” after the colour of their uniforms, the nurses worked in military hospitals in the battle zones as well as in hospitals in Britain. Many were killed or injured by artillery fire, bombs, or poison gas. One nurse, Bertha Merriman, recorded her experiences in letters to her parents in Hamilton, Ontario:

La Panne, Belgium, June 12, 1915

Last night we had a perfectly terrible time. Patients came in in a rush, and were so awfully wounded. My operating room was going all night; I never experienced anything like it.... I am not telling you how many we lost last night, because the censor might not send this letter if I did. We are told not to give details or numbers.

The surgery is more like butchery, but of course it is necessary. They cut away any flesh or bone with which the shell has come in contact, leaving huge holes, and making no attempt at suturing. Then they cleanse the wound with ether,

and cover all around with iodine. This radical work is necessary on account of poison and of gas gangrene.

Source: Bertha Merriman, Merriman Family Papers (Ontario Archives).

## ACTIVITIES

1. With the aid of a diagram, explain how the failure of the Schlieffen Plan resulted in a stalemate on the Western Front.
2. Write a letter home from the Western Front, either from a soldier's or a nurse's point of view. In your letter, describe conditions where you are. Give your thoughts on leadership.
3. The use of gas as a weapon was outlawed by the 1907 Hague Convention. Discuss whether chemical weapons should be allowed in warfare.
4. Create a series of wartime sketches showing some of the conditions at the front. Include depictions of the air war and field hospitals.

# The War in the Air

At the beginning of the war, pilots flew alone in biplanes used mostly for *aerial reconnaissance*,

photographing and reporting on enemy troop movements. Soon, however, pilots on both sides were armed and fired pistols and rifles at the enemy below. Within a year, manufacturers for

## up close

### Billy Bishop

William Avery (Billy) Bishop, from Owen Sound, Ontario, started out as a cavalry officer. In 1916 Bishop transferred to the Royal Flying Corps where he became Canada's top ace with seventy-two "kills." Bishop was the first Canadian pilot awarded the Victoria Cross, a prestigious medal for bravery. He became the toast of Canada because of his success, going on speaking tours to promote the war effort and help sell Victory Bonds. In the following passage from his diary he describes some of his daring adventures:

I fired on 7 machines on the aerodrome.... One of them took off and I fired 15 rounds at him from close range ... and he crashed. A second one taking off, I opened fire and fired 30 rounds ... he crashed into a tree. Two more were then taking off



**Figure 2-12 Thinking critically** What does this photograph show you about the skills a pilot needed? Who do you think took the photograph? How might this picture have been used during the war?

together. I climbed and engaged one at 1000 feet, finishing my drum [of bullets], and he crashed 300 yards from the aerodrome.... I changed drums and climbed East. A fourth H.A. [hostile aircraft] came after me and I fired one whole drum into him. He flew away....

Source: Quoted in David Barker, *The Man and the Aircraft He Flew* (London: Outline Press, 1990), 15.

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.

Source: Grey County Museum, [www.greycounty.on.ca/museum/bishstor.html](http://www.greycounty.on.ca/museum/bishstor.html)

### Questions

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. Use the two sources presented here to write a character study of Bishop, being careful to note emotions and other aspects of Bishop's personality revealed in his diary.

both the Allies and the Central Powers had built small fighter aircraft with machine guns mounted on the planes. Fighter pilots had to be sharp shooters with nerves of steel and lots of luck. Aerial dogfights were spectacular scenes as pilots used elaborate spins and rolls to shake off attacking planes.

When a pilot could prove that he had shot down five enemy aircraft, he was identified as an **ace**. Because these air aces became heroes in their homelands, they were often withdrawn from active duty overseas to promote fund-raising and recruitment at home. A pilot's life was exciting but there was no escaping the danger. They did not even use parachutes. In 1917, the peak year for aerial dogfights, the average life expectancy for a Royal Flying Corps (RFC) pilot was only three weeks. In all, more than 50 000 pilots and air crew were killed between 1914 and 1918.

Because Canada did not have its own air force, Canadians who wanted to be pilots had to join the British RFC. Nevertheless, Canada produced a number of aces including Billy Bishop, Ray Collishaw, Billy Barker, William May, and Roy Brown, the pilot credited with shooting down the German flying ace, Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron.

## The War at Sea

Although Germany could not match Britain's navy in size and strength, its U-boat, or submarine, was a dangerous weapon because it could travel under water without being seen or detected. With this advantage, German U-boats were highly successful at disrupting British shipping. When later equipped with torpedoes, they completely destroyed warships or merchant ships. In 1915, a U-boat sank the British passenger liner, the *Lusitania*, killing close to 1200 passengers, including many Canadians and Americans. In April 1917, Germany announced that U-boats would sink any ship within the war zone around Britain, a threat that added one more reason for the United States to enter the war. The effectiveness of the U-boat had hurt the British war effort because Britain had been unable at first to retaliate. Eventually the Allies developed the convoy system and an underwater listening device that helped them locate and destroy U-boats. In the terms of settlement at the end of the war, the Allies forced the Germans to surrender the U-boats they had left, and forbade them to build more.

Prior to the war, Canada's navy consisted of only two warships: the *Rainbow* which patrolled the West Coast, and the *Niobe* stationed in



**Figure 2-13**



Troop ships carrying the First Canadian Division and the Newfoundland Regiment to Europe, 1914.

### Identifying view-

**point** This painting is titled *Canada's Answer*. Why do you think the artist, N. Wilkinson, gave it this title?



Halifax. The strategic location of Halifax and its protected harbour made it a base for the refuelling and repair of Allied warships and the chief departure point for Europe. Canada's **merchant marine** became involved in the dangerous work of ferrying munitions and food to Britain. Although not officially members of the armed forces, many merchant seamen lost their lives during the dangerous crossings of the Atlantic.

## The War at Home

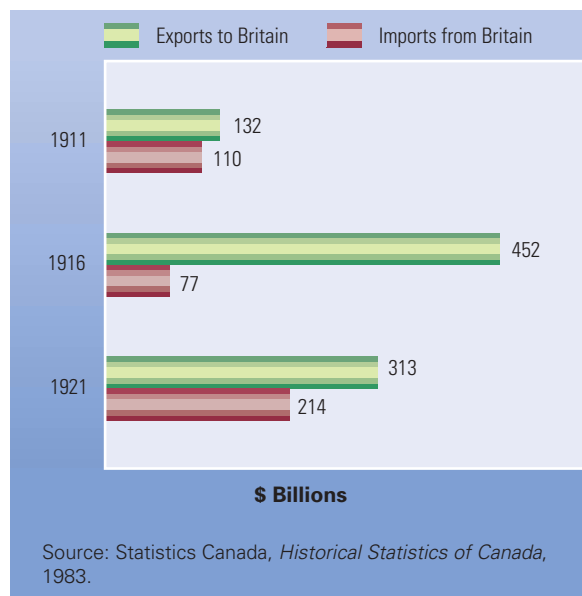
When Canada had entered the war, the country was in an economic recession, but by 1916, the economy was booming. After Prime Minister Borden replaced the Shell Committee with the more efficient Imperial Munitions Board, munitions factories started building ships and airplanes as well as shells. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians were employed in these factories to fill the huge orders that poured in from England

and Belgium. The production and export of Canadian goods reached record highs. Resources such as lumber, nickel, copper, and lead were also in high demand, as was Canadian wheat and beef. Because most of what Canada produced was exported to Europe, many goods became scarce within Canada. This scarcity caused the prices to rise. Some Canadian businesses made enormous profits from the inflated prices, but 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.

## Paying for the War

While production levels were at an all-time high, the Canadian government was unable to raise sufficient money to pay for its contribution to the war. New technology and the large number of troops involved made this war a very expensive conflict. The government decided to try to pay its debts through a combination of bonds, taxes, and loans. In a campaign that appealed to patriotism and thrift, Canadians were urged to buy Victory Bonds that they could cash in, with interest, when the war was over.

The government also introduced the income tax—a measure that was supposed to be temporary. Well-off individuals and families had to pay a tax of 3 per cent of their income. The tax of 4 per cent levied on business profits was criticized as too low by many Canadians aware of the enormous incomes earned by some companies during the war. The money from these two initiatives was not enough, and by 1918 a deeply indebted Canadian government was forced to borrow money from other countries, particularly the United States.



**Figure 2-14** Wartime trade with Britain (in \$ billions).

**Gathering information** In which year were Canadian exports to Britain the highest? How significant was the increase from 1911? Why did exports decrease in 1921?

## The Changing Role of Women

With so many men overseas, women had to take on new roles in wartime Canada. Some organized committees to send food and letters overseas; others became involved in volunteer organizations such as the Red Cross. The most significant



**Figure 2-15** About 35 000 Canadian women worked in munitions factories where shells were manufactured, and thousands more drove the delivery trucks.

change, however, was in women's contribution to the labour force. Before 1914 women had been employed at low-skill, low-paying jobs in food and clothing industries, and as domestic servants. When Canada's increased industrial production created a great demand for labour, women were hired for all types of work, from operating fishing boats in Atlantic Canada to running prairie farms. Without the efforts of women on the home front, Canada's wartime economy would have collapsed. Most employers assumed that the women would leave these jobs and return to work in their homes when the war ended.

One Toronto woman volunteered to work filling artillery shells. After the war she described her introduction to the job:

The foreman [of the munitions factory] met me at the door and he just beckoned to me. The reason why he couldn't say anything was because you couldn't have heard him! I just had to follow him. I went through all these avenues and avenues of clanking, grinding, crashing machines. Some of them were so close together that in order to get to the machines, they'd built a kind of stile—several

steps up and then you walked across and went down again.... The foreman ... demonstrated how to do one shell, and then he stood aside and pointed to me.... I was panic-stricken. But I got used to it.

Source: Sandra Gwyn, *Tapestry of War: A Private View of Canadians in the Great War* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1992), 442–443.

The changing roles of women during the war strengthened the campaign for women's suffrage. The women of Manitoba had been at the forefront of women's struggle to win the right to vote. Conservative Premier Dufferin Roblin refused even to consider allowing women to vote in any election. Then in 1915, the Liberals in Manitoba campaigned in the election with the promise that women would have the right to vote, which they received in January 1916. Alberta and Saskatchewan followed Manitoba's example later that year, and in 1917, women in Ontario and British Columbia also won the right to vote in provincial elections. All Canadian women won the right to vote in federal elections in 1918 in recognition of their patriotic effort during the war.

## Propaganda As a Tool of War

During World War I, Canadians, like citizens in the other warring nations, were bombarded with government **propaganda** designed to persuade people to support the war. Propaganda appeared in a variety of media: films, magazine articles, radio programs, political speeches, and posters. Appealing to a sense of patriotism, propaganda encouraged people to join the army, buy savings bonds, use less fuel, eat less meat, and support the government in whatever way necessary. For example, colourful posters that encouraged able-

bodied men to enlist contributed to the fact that more than 80 per cent of the Canadians who served in World War I were volunteers.

Propaganda is selective and it often distorts the truth. Reports about conditions on the Western Front were inaccurate; and 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 had invaded Belgium in 1914, the Belgian refugees who escaped to England told horrible stories about the invasion. Writers used these stories to portray German troops as “the Huns,” a horde of barbarians intent on destroying the civilized world. This portrayal of Germans aroused prejudice against all Germans, including those who had settled in Canada. When a German U-boat sank the *Lusitania* in 1915, some angry mobs attacked innocent German businesses in several Canadian cities.

Residents of the town of Berlin, Ontario, many descended from German immigrants, faced criticism because their town bore the same name as Germany’s capital. In response to this criticism, the citizens raised almost \$100 000 for the war effort, a huge amount in those days. Nevertheless, in early 1916, unruly soldiers stationed in the city destroyed a German social club, raided German businesses, and attacked people who were said to be pro-German. The city eventually changed its name to Kitchener, after the British War Secretary, Lord Kitchener.

## The Halifax Disaster

On December 6, 1917, the horrors of the war in Europe came closer to home. The *Mont Blanc*, a French vessel carrying more than 2500 t of dynamite, was accidentally hit by another ship. The collision caused an explosion so powerful that it devastated Halifax’s harbour and much of the city. In all, between 2000 and 3000 people were killed in the explosion or fires that followed, and more than 10 000 were injured.



**Figure 2-16** This poster showing a Canadian nurse reminded the public of Edith Cavell, a British nurse at a medical training institute in Belgium. Cavell was executed by the Germans in 1915 for helping Allied soldiers escape the German-occupied countries.



**Figure 2-17** Emergency relief poured into Halifax from across Canada, the United States, and Britain, but after three years of war, money was scarce, and many survivors whose homes had been destroyed had to spend the bitter winter living in tents.

## ACTIVITIES

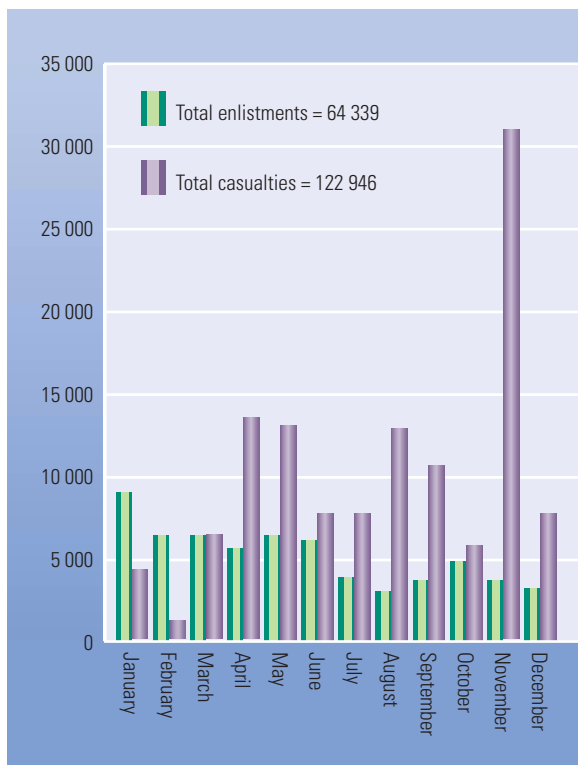
1. How was propaganda used during the war? Discuss whether it is appropriate to manipulate information for patriotic purposes during war. What differences, if any, are there between propaganda and advertising?
2. Examine the poster on page 38. All the names that appear in the poster are meant to stand for German atrocities. Edith Cavell was a nurse executed as a spy; the *Lusitania* was sunk by a German U-boat; the ancient library of Louvain, a world heritage treasure, was burned by the Germans. What is the message in this poster? Imagine you are a Canadian of German descent, and write a protest note to the prime minister on the subject of this poster.
3. Explain how women contributed to the war effort, and describe how their status in Canadian society changed as a result.
4. Read the personal account of work in a munitions factory on page 37. Describe working conditions in the factory.
5. Write a letter from the mayor of Halifax asking for aid after the *Mont Blanc* explosion of 1917. Write a second letter from the prime minister explaining why help will be limited.

## The Conscription Crisis

When war was declared in 1914, most Canadians expected that it would be over soon. By 1917, however, many thousands of Canadian men had been killed and many thousands more had been seriously wounded. With so many working in industry for the war effort at home, the number of men who volunteered for war was too low to provide replacement troops in Europe.

Prime Minister Borden had promised there would be no **conscription**, compulsory enlistment for military service. However, he was in England at the time of the Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge, and he was shocked to learn how many men had been needed to win that battle. David Lloyd George, the British prime minister, convinced Borden that the war had to be won at all costs and that victory would require many more troops. On his return to Canada, Borden introduced the Military Service Act, a bill that would make enlistment compulsory. At first, the act allowed exemptions (for the disabled, the clergy, those with essential jobs or special skills, and **conscientious objectors**, those who did not believe in the war on religious grounds). Conscription turned out to be a very controversial and emo-





**Figure 2-18** Enlistment and casualty rates by month, 1917.

**Using evidence** In which month did Canada suffer the most casualties? Why were Canadian casualties so high in 1917?

tional issue that divided the country and left lasting scars.

While Canada had a high overall rate of volunteers, the recruitment rates were uneven across the country, with the lowest levels from Quebec. Few French recruits spoke English and few in the officer corps spoke French. There was little attempt to keep French-speaking recruits together as a unit other than the Twenty-second Battalion, the Van Doos. As well, relations between French- and English-speaking Canadians became strained over restrictions in the use of French in schools outside Quebec. The majority of French-Canadians 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 war that they didn't feel was theirs.

Quebec nationalist Henri Bourassa was one of the most outspoken critics of conscription. He argued that Canada had lost enough men and spent enough money on a war that had little to do with this country. Spending even more money and sending even more troops would bankrupt the country and put a strain on Canada's agricultural and industrial production. A weakened economy would eventually threaten Canada's political independence. Perhaps most significantly, he believed that conscription would bitterly divide the nation.

Other groups that opposed conscription included farmers, particularly in the Prairies. They needed their sons, and hired workers, to do the farm work. Industrial workers felt they were already contributing to the war effort and didn't want to give up their jobs to fight overseas. In British Columbia, opposition to conscription was led by the labour movement, in particular, the coal miners of Vancouver Island. They were urged to increase their output, but wages and working conditions did not improve. Workers were already having problems providing for their families, and conscription would mean they would earn less. Resistance to conscription in British Columbia turned violent when labour leader Ginger Goodwin, along with several other union members, hid from the authorities after his application for exemption from service was turned down. He was eventually tracked down and killed by a police constable.

## Canada's Most Divisive Election

In the face of such opposition, Prime Minister Borden decided to call an election over the issue of conscription. Prior to announcing the election, he passed two new pieces of legislation designed to ensure his re-election. The first was the Military Voters Act, which allowed the men and women serving overseas to vote. The second was the Wartime Elections Act, which gave the vote to all Canadian women directly related to servicemen. At the same time, the act cancelled the vote for all conscientious objectors and immigrants who had come from enemy countries in the last fifteen years.

Borden had also invited opposition Liberals who favoured conscription to join with him in forming a wartime Union Government. These Liberals were offered important Cabinet positions as an incentive to join the government. Wilfrid Laurier, the Liberal leader, was against conscription. He believed that “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.” The Liberals lost much support in the election outside Quebec because of Laurier’s position on conscription.

The Union Government won the election with the strong support of the armed forces and the women related to them, but the anger and resentment stirred up by the conscription debate did not subside. In Quebec, people continued to demonstrate against conscription even after the election. Crowds in Montreal marched through the streets shouting “*A 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 Quebec

City during the Easter weekend of 1918. Four demonstrators were shot dead by soldiers, and ten soldiers were wounded in the riot.

Nevertheless, conscription went ahead. Of the 404 000 men across Canada who were called up, 380 500 applied for exemptions for medical or other reasons. In the end, 130 000 were enlisted, but only about 25 000 conscripted soldiers reached France before the end of the war.

Region	Union Government (Borden)	Liberals (Laurier)
Atlantic Canada	21	10
Quebec	3	62
Ontario	74	8
Western Canada	54	2
Total	152	82

**Figure 2-19** Results of the 1917 election by region: Number of seats in Parliament.

**Using evidence** Find evidence to support the view that this election divided the nation.



**Figure 2-20** 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. Borden counted on the support of the military, and the election became known as the “Khaki” Election. What do you think this name meant?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Why did Prime Minister Borden believe that conscription was necessary? Why were many people opposed to conscription?
2. Write a letter to the editor of the *Toronto Globe* from Henri Bourassa explaining why conscription was not good for the country.
3. In pairs, create two thumbnail election posters for the Khaki Election, for either political party. Aim your advertising at two of the following groups: soldiers, women, French-Canadians, 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.

## The Central Powers Collapse

Two important events in 1917 changed the direction of the war. First, Czar Nicholas of Russia was forced to abdicate in March of 1917 and a provisional Russian government was formed. Second, the United States, angered by the sinking of neutral ships and passenger liners such as the *Lusitania*, declared war on Germany on April 2. In October 1917, revolutionaries, called Bolsheviks, overthrew the provisional government in Russia and, promising the war-weary public “peace and bread,” signed a peace treaty with Germany. This truce on the Eastern Front in early 1918 freed German troops for fighting on the Western Front. Germany moved to take advantage of its last chance at victory before large numbers of American troops reached France.

In a last desperate offensive, the German army struck at weak points in the enemy lines and succeeded in driving deep into France. Positions that had been won at great cost in lives were lost in weeks: Ypres, the Somme, Passchendaele, everything but Vimy Ridge. By the summer of 1918,

**Figure 2-21** Europe in 1922.

### Gathering information

Compare this map with the map of Europe in 1914, on page 22. Describe the changes in national borders, then list the names of the new countries created.



the new front line was only 75 km from Paris. But the Germans had exhausted themselves. They had no reserves, and without fresh troops, food, and supplies, they could not continue. The generals knew the war was over.

During the final months of the war, known as the “Hundred Days,” Canada’s offensives were among the most successful of all the Allied forces. 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 collapsed one by one; the German Kaiser abdicated and fled to Holland. An **armistice**, or truce, was finally signed in a railway car in France, and the war ended at 11:00 a.m., November 11, 1918. An unfortunate Canadian was the last soldier to die on the Western Front—Private George Price was killed by a sniper’s bullet just a few minutes before the armistice.

## Canada on the World Stage

After the signing of the armistice, the Allies and the new leadership of Germany met in Paris to discuss the terms of a peace agreement. Prime Minister Borden fought successfully for Canada to have its

own seat at the **Paris Peace Conference**, and not simply be represented by Britain. He also insisted that he be included among those leaders who signed the **Treaty of Versailles**, the document that eventually set out the terms of the peace agreement in 1919. American President Woodrow Wilson had proposed, early in 1918, a fourteen-point plan for peace that emphasized forgiveness, but the French and Belgian leaders wanted compensation from Germany for the damage their countries suffered during the war. They insisted in the 1919 conference that:

- Germany had to agree to a war “guilt clause,” meaning that the country had to accept responsibility for causing the war.
- Germany had to pay war reparations totalling about \$30 billion.
- The map of Europe was to be redrawn, reducing Germany’s territory and dividing it into two parts so that the newly independent Poland would have a corridor to the sea.
- The German army was to be restricted to 100 000 men; the nation was not to be allowed U-boats or an air force.

The reparation terms were particularly harsh. After the war, Germany’s economy, like that of



**Figure 2-22** The first Remembrance Day parade.

**Identifying viewpoint** How do you think these women felt about their sacrifice? Give reasons for your view.



## Did the War Have a Positive or Negative Effect on Canada?

World War I brought profound changes to Canada. It changed the way we saw ourselves as a country and a nation. Canadian troops fought well as a united force and their victories, particularly at Vimy and Passchendaele, distinguished them as disciplined and courageous fighters. The need for war munitions had stimulated the economy, resulting in major growth in Canadian industry. Women for the first time achieved the right to vote. Canada gained international status with its participation 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. World War I 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.

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.

Source: George Woodcock, *A Social History of Canada* (Toronto: Penguin, 1988), 297.

But the war also had a very negative effect on Canada. As well as the tragedy of the more than 60 000 dead and thousands more wounded, government measures taken during the war left scars on the nation. The issue of conscription and the bitterness of the debate

between English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians have never been completely forgotten. Those who spoke out against conscription were accused of being unpatriotic and labelled cowards and “Hun sympathizers.” 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.

The losses both at home and throughout the world were staggering. Approximately thirteen million people were killed during the war, and millions more were psychologically or physically wounded. The economic costs of World War I, in destruction and lost productivity, were also enormous: Canada sent about a billion dollars worth of war materials overseas between 1914 and 1918, a debt that took decades to pay off.

Some historians challenge the belief that World War I 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 Canadians suffered so much in the war that they needed to attach some greater importance to this event. In his view, 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.

### Analysing the Issue

1. Define “coming of age,” and explain how World War I helped bring about Canada's coming of age.
2. Make a PMI chart on the theme of Canadian unity and the effects of World War I.
3. You and a partner have been chosen to be on a radio panel to discuss the impact of World War I on Canada's development. One of you is to defend the position of historian George Woodcock. The other is to defend Jonathan Vance's point of view. Prepare and organize your arguments, then present them to the class for further discussion.

other European countries, was in ruins so it was unable to meet the payments. It also greatly resented the guilt clause, a fact that would come back to haunt the world twenty years later.

## Participating in Peace

Prime Minister Borden also fought hard to have Canada become a member of the newly formed League of Nations. The League of Nations was the brainchild of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. It was established by the Treaty of Versailles.

The League was made up of many nations throughout the world and was based on the principle of **collective security**. If one member state of the League came under attack, all members were to cooperate in suppressing the aggressor.

The idea of a League of Nations was not welcomed by the great powers. Britain and France had doubts about such an organization. They wanted the freedom to pursue their imperialist

ambitions. But their leaders realized that Wilson's proposal had good propaganda value—it would gain them publicity and support. As a result, they agreed to the basic concept, in principle at least. Smaller nations, always concerned about becoming victims of the great powers, eagerly looked forward to a new era of peace.

## The League's Limitations

Unfortunately, the League of Nations proved to be more an idealistic vision than a practical solution to world problems. 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 had no military force of its own to impose its decisions upon aggressor nations.



**Figure 2-23** Leaders from around the world gathered in Versailles, outside Paris, to negotiate a peace agreement, which became known as the Treaty of Versailles.

Ironically, the Americans refused to join the League of Nations, even though their own president was responsible for its creation. Wilson had powerful opponents who rejected the principle of collective security. During a heated debate on the issue, the president became ill. Half paralyzed by a stroke, he could no longer campaign for a vote in favour of the United States joining the League, and the motion was defeated. The refusal of the United States to join the League greatly undermined its effectiveness to resolve disputes in the years after World War I.

## The Aftermath of War

The armistice of November 11, 1918, did not end people's suffering. During the winter of 1918–1919, people went hungry across large areas of Europe, their crops and transportation systems ruined. At the same time a deadly influenza virus (known as the Spanish Flu) swept across Europe, killing millions, and many returning soldiers carried the virus to North America. Young people

were especially susceptible to the virus, which caused the deaths of an estimated 22 million people worldwide, more than the war itself. From 1918 to 1920, approximately 50 000 Canadians died during the epidemic. Schools and public places were closed for months in an effort to stop the spread of the virus, and in some communities, Canadians were required to wear breathing masks in public.

## ACTIVITIES

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. Write a medical bulletin on the Spanish Flu of 1918 to be circulated as a warning to all communities and to all Canadian military bases.
3. Research the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Make a PMI chart on the treaty's terms and their possible consequences.

**Figure 2-24** After the devastation of World War I, conditions were right for the flu virus to spread rapidly.

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



## LOOKING BACK

### Develop an Understanding

1. In your opinion, what is Frederick Varley saying about World War I in his painting on page 20? Based on what you have learned, explain whether you agree or disagree with his interpretation.
2. Some historians have described Europe in 1914 as a “powder keg” waiting for the fuse to be lit. Explain what is meant by this judgement, and give reasons why you agree or disagree with it.
3. Complete the following organizer to show how Canada changed in the four years of World War I.

August 1914	November 1918
----------------	------------------

Relations with Britain	
Status of women	
Feelings of national identity	
Role of government	
French–English relations	

4.
  - a. Explain what is meant by nationalism.
  - b. Give examples from this chapter of the Canadian government’s appeal to nationalistic feelings in Canada during the war.
5. Review the descriptions of technology and trench warfare. How would you explain the huge numbers of soldiers killed in World War I?
6. Imagine you and your classmates are workers in a factory making cardboard-soled boots for troops. Discuss together what options you would have to let the public know about this situation without running the risk of losing your jobs.
7. Make a list of points that support the hypothesis that Canada emerged from World War I as an industrial nation.

### Explore the Issues

8. During World War I, the women’s suffrage movement was very active, and women were arguing for the same rights as men. Write a newspaper column in support of women’s rights. For this exercise, it is important that you try to place yourself “in” the Canadian society of 1914–1918.

9. Examine the decisions of the leaders described in this chapter. Write a letter to the government outlining the moral and ethical problems that prevent you from volunteering for the war.
10.
  - a. Why was the conscription issue so divisive?
  - b. In hindsight, who do you think was right: Henri employers.
11. Reread the section on the conscription crisis. With a partner, write a radio play script on the subject of conscription.

### Research and Communicate

12. Research the technique of storyboarding. With a partner, create storyboards for the opening part of a feature-length cartoon on Canadians and World War I. Display your storyboards.
13. Imagine that you have the opportunity to interview either Robert Borden or Henri Bourassa about the conscription issue. Prepare either a program script or make an audiotape or videotape of the interview. Be sure to include questions on the Wartime Elections Act, the Military Service Act, and the election of 1917.
14. Create a newspaper for women during World War I. Include articles on the right to vote, women who worked in non-traditional jobs, children whose fathers and brothers were fighting on the Western Front, and other war-related issues.
15. With a partner, create an advertising poster designed to increase support for the war. Your poster should be aimed at students your age and designed to increase support in all areas of the country. All of your advertising should be based on fact, but you may exaggerate facts for effect as much as you like.
16. Analyse the advertising poster you made in activity 15. What parts of the poster manipulate information? What parts of it use propaganda? Write a summary of your findings and post it next to your advertising display.