

WORLD WAR I, 1914–1918

It was called the “Great War.” No previous war had involved so many people; worldwide, more than 25 million people died in the conflict. Canada’s population in 1914 was just 8 million, but over 600 000 Canadians served in the armed forces during the war. Of these, 60 000 were killed and more than 178 000 were wounded.

World War I had a tremendous impact on Canada. Almost everyone saw friends return home wounded or knew a family who had lost someone.

The impact was more than personal, though. Many historians claim that Canada first developed its sense of identity and became a true nation during World War I. The victories and brave deeds of Canadians developed Canada’s national pride. People in this country began to think of themselves less as British subjects and more as Canadians. The rest of the world began to recognize Canada as an independent country because of its achievements in the war.

We will examine the many ways in which the war affected Canada. We will not study all aspects of World War I, but look at why the war is an important part of Canadian history.

How the War Began

World War I began in Europe. For many years there had been disputes among European nations over colonies in Africa, national borders in Europe, and the freedom of various groups of people inside the country then known as Austria-Hungary. Extreme feelings of **nationalism** and **militarism** ruled the passions of people in many countries. “My country, right or wrong” was a common sentiment. By 1914 Europe was essentially divided into two camps. The **Triple Entente** consisted of France, Russia, and Great Britain. The **Triple Alliance** consisted of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. However, Italy joined the Entente in 1915.

A great arms race developed in Europe as the more powerful countries competed to have bigger armies and navies. Germany’s emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, wanted to have a large navy to ensure German prestige and to challenge the might of Britain’s Royal Navy. The competition between Germany and Britain led to a revolution in naval warfare, as new ships modelled on the battleship HMS *Dreadnought* made all earlier ships obsolete.

In June 1914 Archduke Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary and his wife Sophie were assassinated in the small state of Serbia in the Balkans. Throughout June and July of 1914 tensions in Europe rose. When Austria-Hungary threatened Serbia, Russia promised to help the small country. A chain of events then involved each of the major European powers in the worsening situation. On August 1 the French army was mobilized, and on

Militarism is the practice of placing a higher value on the armed forces and military goals than on democracy or other political systems. Under militarism, a solution using armed force is preferred to other methods of problem solving.

August 3 the German army invaded Belgium. This attack brought in the British, who had promised to defend Belgium. World War I had begun.

In 1914 Canada was a member of the British Empire and was at war as soon as Britain was. The Canadian government was not consulted about the war, nor did the Canadian Parliament vote on going to war.

The Canadian Parliament could, however, decide what to do in the war. It could decide whether to send soldiers or only food and clothing. It could also decide to do nothing about the war. This was not likely, though, since most Canadians were loyal to Britain and wanted to help. In Québec there were many people who opposed Canada taking part in a British war. The debate about participation in the war was best shown by the conscription crisis of 1917 (see pages 239–241).

The government decided to send both soldiers and economic aid to Britain. In September 1914 the First Canadian Division assembled and left for Britain. Volunteers flocked to join the Canadian army. In a country of just 8 million people, an average of 10 000 men volunteered each month.



FIGURE 8–1 Europe in 1914: the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente

Why were there so many volunteers for a war being fought far away in Europe? Some were attracted by what they thought was the adventure and romance of war. The mass deaths of trench warfare soon changed such romantic ideas. Most volunteered out of a sense of patriotism or duty. The patriotism, though, was usually for Britain and the Empire, not for Canada. In parts of Canada, support for the war was so strong that young men not in uniform were called cowards.

FIGURE 8-2 *Canadian troops rest after capturing a part of Vimy Ridge, 1917. If you were a Canadian soldier in World War I, how would you describe this scene to people at home?*



Using Your Knowledge

1. Which groups of Canadians would most likely be in favour of or opposed to the war?
2. Which countries involved in the war were important to Canada? Explain two of your choices.

Inquiring Citizen

3. Research the causes of World War I. Prepare a display for a bulletin board that explains
 - a) the immediate causes of the war,
 - b) the long-range causes of the war,
 - c) the role of Germany in starting the war,
 - d) the roles of France and Russia in starting the war, and
 - e) why the United States did not join the war in 1914.

Canada's Role in World War I

Canadians in Combat

The Canadian army entered combat in the spring of 1915. Five thousand Canadians were killed or wounded in the first week. Canadians at home read about the poison gas attacks at Ypres and the hand-to-hand fighting between Canadians and Germans. The Canadian army was involved in many bitter battles. Thousands died in the trenches, and yet the struggle aroused pride in Canadians. Canada's army soon gained a reputation for bravery and good organization. General Currie, Commander of the Canadian Corps, was rated one of the most competent generals on the Allied side. Canadian victories in battle included Ypres, Vimy, Passchendaele, Hill 70, Sanctuary Wood, Amiens, and Cambrai.



For more information about Canada in World War I, check the links on our Web site:

www.pearsoned.ca/ccw

FOCUS

The Battle for Vimy Ridge

ON EASTER MONDAY, April 9, 1917, 40 000 Canadians rose from their trenches and attacked German-held Vimy Ridge. The Canadian Corps of four divisions had prepared meticulously for the attack. French and British troops had been unable to take the ridge, but Sir Julian Byng, the British general who commanded the corps, had insisted on a long artillery bombardment of the German trenches. Tunnels were dug so that soldiers could safely shelter from German fire as they approached the front line.

By April 12, the Canadian Corps had taken Vimy Ridge. Although 3598 Canadian soldiers were killed and 7004 were wounded, this was a lower price in lives than was usual in the Great War. It was the first victory for the whole Canadian Corps. Pride in their victory was immense. For the first time, said many of the soldiers, they truly felt Canadian. Historians have argued that at Vimy, Canada truly became a nation.



FIGURE 8-3 The Canadian War Memorial on Vimy Ridge lists the names of more than 12 000 Canadians who died in the Great War, but for whom there is no known grave.



CASE STUDY War Diaries

Talbot Papineau

In diaries and letters home, Canadians serving in the war wrote about their experiences. Talbot Papineau was a Montréal lawyer who served as a major in Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

"If I am a little obscure or erratic you must forgive me as I am in a dugout within a hundred yards of the Boche and they send an occasional rifle grenade or whizz-bang in my direction. . . . Since August I have been a licenced killer, since January I have tried to kill — I have succeeded in not being killed at any rate. Out of forty officers I am the only one neither killed nor wounded nor sick

"I have seen so much death — and brains and blood — and marvellous human machines suddenly smashed like Humpty Dumpty. I have had a man bite my finger in agony while I tried to give him morphine. I have bound up a man without a face I have had a man apparently uninjured die from shock of the explosion as his elbow touched mine Never shall I shoot duck again, or draw a speckled trout to gasp in my basket — I would not wish to see the death of a spider."

Talbot Papineau was killed in action on October 30, 1917. He was hit by a shell and his body was never found. All of Canada mourned the loss of a man who had become a national hero.

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

Grace MacPherson

Grace MacPherson was born in Winnipeg in 1895. In 1917 she joined the Red Cross as an ambulance driver and was posted to a medical unit behind the Canadian and British lines. In May 1918 German aircraft attacked a nearby rail yard, but also hit the hospital area. Grace recorded the incident in her diary: "Last night biggest raid on record. Appalling damage and loss of life."

In 1919 she described her experience in more detail:

"The men's staff quarters of the No. 1 Canadian General Hospital were the first to be hit, suffering about 115 casualties, seventy or more killed, among whom was Sergeant Brown, a charming Vancouver boy. The nurses' quarters suffered as well: three nurses were killed instantly and many severely wounded."

Captain Donald Martin praised Grace in a letter to the *Vancouver Province* newspaper. "She is a very gritty woman. She was the first on the scene with her machine, and she worked all night without a quiver, and let me say, there were not a few men panic-stricken on that awful night of horror. In



FIGURE 8-4 Grace MacPherson and her ambulance

the estimation of officers here . . . Miss MacPherson is described as the bravest of them all, to quote one high official's words."

After the war, Grace returned to Vancouver, where she died in 1979.

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

Thinking It Through

4. Did Papineau and MacPherson show patriotism? Explain your answer.
5. What other values did these heroes stand for?
6. Write a paragraph explaining why you think these and other war heroes behaved as they did.
7. Some people feel that when individuals who take part in a war are made into he-

ros, war is being glorified. This may encourage people to seek war. What do you think about this? Write a short paragraph explaining your opinions.

Inquiring Citizen

8. Research trench warfare. Using the information that you find, write the diary of a soldier or ambulance driver. Try to make the entries reflect the thoughts and experiences of the Canadians who served in the “Great War.”

Conscription

Casualties were very high. Before long, there were no longer enough volunteers to replace those killed or wounded in battle. The government decided that **conscription** would be needed. This led to a split between Anglophone and Francophone Canadians. Many Quebeckers opposed any Canadian participation in the war. They saw the war as a British affair that had nothing to do with Canadian interests. They did not believe that they should be compelled to fight. In Québec there was organized opposition to conscription, which at times led to violence. Many English-speaking Canadians viewed such opposition as unpatriotic.

In Ontario and Manitoba, farmers also opposed the conscription of their sons. They argued that the war effort would suffer even more if there were no young men to help with the harvests.

The Statistics of War

Population of Canada in 1918	8 000 000
Size of army in 1918	600 000
Size of navy in 1918	8 000
Casualties: Dead	60 000
Wounded	178 000

FIGURE 8-5 *What percentage of Canada’s population became casualties in World War I?*



FIGURE 8-6
By buying a war bond, Canadians were loaning the government money, which would be repaid after the war. How does the design of this poster encourage Canadians to contribute to the war?

Some people refused to fight because of their religious beliefs. They were known as **conscientious objectors**. Although it was legal for these people to avoid military service, they were often insulted by other citizens. The bitter feelings caused by conscription would last for decades. In Québec, conscription became a symbol of the tyranny of the English-speaking majority. Although many English-speaking Liberals supported conscription, it was the Conservatives who were to pay the political price in Québec.

On the Home Front

In Canada the war was responsible for a surge of growth in the economy. New factories were opened, and many existing factories switched their production to war goods. Agricultural production increased as Canada sent food to Europe.

The war was expensive. Before 1914 the annual federal budget was about \$130 million. The total cost of the war to Canada was \$3 billion. This means that

for the years of the war the government spent about six times as much as it usually spent. The debt caused by the war came to about \$150 million per year. Canadians helped to pay for this by buying war bonds, and when this was not enough, the government introduced the first income tax in Canada.

Women played an important role in the war effort. They took over jobs left vacant by men in the armed forces and served overseas as nurses and ambulance drivers.

The Great War and Canadian Sovereignty

Canada became more independent from Britain as a result of the Great War. Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden demanded that Canada have its own seat at the Versailles peace conference in 1919 and later with the League of Nations. Before then, Canada was represented internationally by Britain. After the war Canada continued to loosen its ties with Great Britain until it became a fully independent nation.

Between the Wars: 1919–1939

World War I had brought death and destruction to every corner of Europe. National leaders were determined to prevent another such war. They created the League of Nations and promised not to use war to settle disputes.

Throughout the 1920s, disarmament conferences were held to reduce the size of the armed forces around the world. The Washington Treaty of 1922 imposed restrictions on the size and number of warships a nation could build. In 1928 the Pact of Paris (the Kellogg-Briand Pact) declared that all who signed it would never again use war as a means of settling disputes with other countries. Virtually the whole world signed.

Although Canada was a member of the League of Nations, it was not interested in playing a major role in world affairs. The split over conscription in 1917 convinced many people that Canada had to be more careful in foreign affairs. Further conflict over world relations could be dangerous to the country's unity. In addition, in the 1930s, Canada was suffering from the effects of the Great Depression, and most Canadians were more concerned about unemployment at home than about events in Europe, Asia, or Africa.

Along with other countries, Canada reduced defence spending in the face of the economic crisis of the Depression and the desire to have peace. By 1939 Canada had few modern weapons and few highly trained military leaders. The full-time army numbered just 4300.

Throughout the 1930s, the League of Nations proved itself a failure. Member states were unwilling to risk war in order to stop ruthless dictators. Japan invaded China; Italy invaded Ethiopia. Germany rearmed and invaded Czechoslovakia and Austria. The League was paralyzed. Some leaders, such as Winston Churchill in England, called for increased defence spending, but were denounced as warmongers. The issue facing Canada and the free world was how to respond to those who threatened peace.

Inquiring Citizen

9. Research Canadian involvement in World War I. Some possible topics include
 - the Versailles peace conference, 1919;
 - women and the war;
 - the war at sea;
 - the growth of Canadian industries;
 - songs and entertainment during World War I.
10. Research Canadian battles in World War I. Some battles to report on include
 - Ypres
 - Festubert
 - St. Eloi
 - Sanctuary Wood
 - Courcellette
 - Vimy Ridge
 - Hill 70
 - Passchendaele
 - Hindenburg Line
 - Cambrai

Thinking It Through

11. Did Canada win or lose in World War I? Review the causes of the war and the events described before you explain your answer.

WORLD WAR II, 1939–1945

How Did World War II Start?

The **Nazi Party** (National Socialist Workers' Party) ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945.

World War II started in September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. When Adolf Hitler and the **Nazis** gained power in Germany in 1933, the country was in a state of economic depression, as was the rest of the world. Hitler, however, blamed Germany's problems on the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, signed at the end of World War I. The treaty had reduced Germany's territory and military power, and Hitler was determined to regain them. Once in power, the Nazis violated the treaty by rebuilding the German armed forces and began to threaten the sovereignty of neighbouring countries.

Hitler did not just want to regain the territory lost at the end of World War I; he wanted to make Germany the dominant power in Europe. In March 1938 the Nazis invaded Austria. In June, they invaded part of Czechoslovakia, and in March 1939 they took over the rest of Czechoslovakia.

At first many people in the world felt that a number of Hitler's demands were acceptable. Later they were willing to give him what he wanted because they feared another world war. This policy was called **appeasement**. By the summer of 1939, however, it was obvious that Hitler could not be trusted. In September 1939, when German armies invaded Poland, England and France declared war on Germany. Before World War II ended in 1945,

FIGURE 8-7
Hitler giving the Nazi salute, surrounded by other Nazi leaders, at a rally of Nazis in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1938. How can large parades and rallies manipulate people's emotions?



it had spread to Africa, Asia, and even to the shores of North America. The **Allies**, which included Britain, France, the USSR, the United States, Canada, and other Commonwealth countries, fought against the **Axis**, which included Germany, Italy, and Japan.

The Nazi Revolution

Before he seized power in Germany, Adolf Hitler wrote a book called *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), in which he outlined his beliefs and plans. Among other things, Hitler believed that lies, warfare, and terror tactics were acceptable means to obtain his goals. He believed that the **Aryan** people were the “master race,” superior to all other peoples. He believed that non-Aryans, such as Slavs, Jews, and Gypsies, were inferior people. These beliefs were based on unscientific racial theories.

Hitler aimed his hatred at Jewish people in particular, blaming them for Germany’s loss in World War I and the economic depression that followed. *Mein Kampf* contained a plan to eliminate all Jewish people, to take over the Soviet Union, and to invade France. Hitler’s followers, the Nazis, adopted his beliefs.

When they came to power in 1933, the Nazis put their anti-Jewish beliefs into practice. They organized a propaganda campaign against Jews using films, books, newspapers, and radio. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 took away the citizenship rights of Jews. They could no longer vote, hold public office, or be employed in the public service. Jews were expelled from the professions and from most jobs. Violence against Jews and their property was encouraged by the Nazi government.

Famous Jewish people, such as Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein, managed to escape from Germany, but tens of thousands of others did not. Many countries, including Canada, refused to accept Jewish refugees.

The Holocaust

After 1939, as German armies conquered Europe, more and more of Europe’s 9 million Jews came under Nazi control. The Nuremberg Laws were applied to conquered territories, and Jews were forced to move into ghettos. After 1941 the Nazis began what they called the “Final Solution,” a systematic plan to kill all the Jews in Europe. Any attempt to destroy an entire group of people is called **genocide**. Jews were shipped to concentration camps such as Auschwitz, Dachau, and Bergen-Belsen. When they arrived, they were either killed immediately or used as slave labour. Camp inmates suffered brutal and degrading conditions before their deaths. In some concentration camps they were shot, and in others they were gassed in large rooms made to look like showers. Bodies were stripped of valuables and cremated in ovens or buried in mass graves.

In every country occupied by the Nazis, some people fought against them in guerrilla warfare. Members of these resistance groups risked their lives and showed that, despite their country being defeated, their spirit remained strong.

Jews were not the only people sent to concentration camps. Germans who opposed the Nazis, members of resistance groups, Soviet prisoners of war, Gypsies, communists, socialists, and those with mental disabilities were also sent to camps.

The mass murder of Jews in the concentration camps came to be known as the Holocaust. It is estimated that of the more than 14 million people who died in Nazi concentration camps, 6 million were Jews.

The films taken by the liberating armies of the concentration camps in 1945 shocked the world. The Nazis had kept careful records of their activities in the camps, and these were found after the war. Survivors of the camps also provided evidence. A hunt for the organizers of the Holocaust was started.

FIGURE 8-8
Emaciated survivors of a concentration camp are sprayed with disinfectant after being liberated by Allied troops.



Using Your Knowledge

12. Suggest an explanation for each of the following:
- Canada rejected Jewish refugees in the 1930s.
 - Millions of people believed and followed Hitler.
 - A few people today believe that the Holocaust never occurred.
- Discuss your ideas and reasons in class.

13. How might other genocides be prevented?

Inquiring Citizen

14. Research the Holocaust and the Nuremberg Trials. Research other examples of the mass murder of peoples, for example, Cambodia in the 1970s, Ukraine in the 1930s, Armenia in the 1920s, Rwanda in 1994, and the Beothuk people of Canada.

How Did Canada Enter World War II?

Canada did not go to war automatically in September 1939, as it did in 1914. Passage of the Statute of Westminster in 1931 gave Canada complete control over its dealings with foreign nations. However, support for Britain was still strong in Canada. Prime Minister Mackenzie King called Parliament, and on September 10, 1939, a declaration of war was passed. King told Canadians the government planned to send only a few soldiers to fight. Most Canadian help would take the form of food and manufactured goods. The Commonwealth Air Training Plan would train pilots in the safety of Canadian skies. Conscription was not to be used. King was concerned about national unity. He did not want the war to divide Canada as World War I had.

Only after the defeat of France in 1940 did Canada make a full-scale war effort. By then the struggle was more desperate. France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and other countries had fallen to the Nazis. Britain stood alone and was in danger of defeat. In December 1941 Japan declared war on Britain and the United States with attacks throughout the Pacific. Canadian forces in Hong Kong were attacked and the survivors were taken prisoner. As a result, Canada also declared war on Japan.

The drive for victory required the efforts of the whole country. Volunteers flocked to the armed forces. Many of them went to help Britain, to defend freedom, or because they needed work after the Depression. By 1942 Canada was ready to make major contributions to the fighting.



To see more photos related to Canada at war, visit the link on our Web site:

www.pearsoned.ca/ccw



FIGURE 8-9 This painting by Paul Goranson shows Halifax bombers of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) preparing to take off for a bombing raid on Germany. Nearly 16 000 young Canadians died on such missions. How does the artist portray the danger facing bomber crews?

Thinking It Through

15. Should Canada have entered World War II? Why or why not?

Inquiring Citizen

16. Research the causes of World War II. Some topics to report on include:

- the Nazi Party

- Adolf Hitler
- the Munich Crisis
- the role of the Treaty of Versailles, 1919
- the League of Nations
- German rearmament
- Neville Chamberlain and appeasement
- the German-Soviet Pact of 1939

17. Find out why Canada went to war with Japan in 1941.

Canadians at War

Canadian Achievements in World War II

Read about the achievements of Canadians in World War II below.

The Victoria Cross: For Valour

FOCUS

THE “VC” is Canada’s highest award for bravery. It is rarely awarded. Company Sergeant-Major John R. Osborn of the Winnipeg Grenadiers was one of the few soldiers who received this medal in World War II.

When the Japanese attacked Hong Kong in December 1941, Canada sent 1975 Canadian soldiers to help defend the colony. Osborn led a small group of Canadians in a fight to hold a hill-top. As the Japanese threw hand grenades, Osborn caught them like baseballs and threw them back. When one fell where he could not pick it up, Osborn shouted a warning to the others and then jumped onto the grenade as it exploded. He saved at least six other soldiers who later became prisoners. Osborn was awarded the Victoria Cross after his death.



FIGURE 8-10 *The Victoria Cross*

CASE STUDY War Diaries

Official diaries were kept by each combat unit of the Canadian Army. Each day an officer would write out the events of the day. What do the following entries reveal about Canadians in the war?

Excerpts from the War Diary of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, D-Day, June 6, 1944:

0400 hrs. Tea and cold snack served.

0515 hrs. LCAs manned and lowered 10 miles off coast.

0655 hrs. Not a shot from shore; Royal Navy and artillery bombardment opens up with SP guns firing short as usual.

0900 hrs. The bombardment having failed to kill a single German or silence one weapon, these companies had to storm their positions "cold" and did so without hesitation.

1800 hrs. D Company had by this time gapped a minefield at La Valette and cleared Graye Sur Mer. B Company crossed Seulles, cleared out 4 positions on the island . . . A Company started inland 0805 towards St. Croix pinned by 6 to 8 machine-guns. C Company approached Banville pinned down by 3 machine-guns on commanding ground.

A very special note should be made about the general tone of the Battalion during this day called D — 6 June 44. Not one man flinched from his task, no matter how tough it was — not one officer failed to display courage and energy and a degree of gallantry. It is thought that the Little Black Devils, by this day's success, have managed to maintain the tradition set by former members. Casualties for the day exceeded 130.



FIGURE 8-11
Artist Alex Colville shows the Royal Winnipeg Rifles advancing through Holland in the winter of 1945. How do paintings help create feelings about events?

Fact Sheet: Canada and World War II

Through its efforts during World War II, Canada became an industrial nation. War supplies were shipped to Britain, the USSR, China, India, and other Allied countries.

Canadian Production

The Record

- 14 000 planes
- 1 500 000 machine guns
- 700 000 trucks
- 100 000 artillery guns
- 50 000 armoured vehicles
- 900 ships
- 1 million people served in the armed forces (41 700 dead or missing)

Other Statistics

- Value of all war goods produced: \$10 billion (1945 dollars)
- Cost of war: \$20 billion (1945 dollars)
- Commonwealth Air Training Plan: 130 000 flyers trained in Canada
- Agriculture: 40% increase in agricultural production

Thinking It Through

18. Is Canada's role in World War II important to our history? Explain your answer.

Inquiring Citizen

19. Do research in the library or on the Internet to find other diary entries from World War II. Discuss these diary entries in class.

20. Research one of the battles Canadians fought in during World War II. Some possible ones are:
- the Dieppe Raid, 1942
 - the Battle of the Atlantic
 - the Italian Campaign, 1943–1944
 - Hong Kong, 1941
 - D-Day, June 6, 1944
 - the Battle of the Falaise Gap, 1944
 - the liberation of the Netherlands
 - the RCAF and the bombing of Germany

Conscription Crisis Again

Active Citizenship

Interview a Veteran

Develop questions and interview a veteran of World War II.

As in the First World War, conscription was an issue. Despite the aggression of the dictatorships, some people believed that the war was not Canada's war. In Québec the experience of the first conscription crisis turned many against the war. What was the government's response? Prime Minister Mackenzie King had promised that there would not be conscription for overseas service in World War II. For home defence, the *National Resources*