



Battles

By the time World War I started, Canada had only been a nation for less than 50 years. Its military was almost non-existent, consisting of just a small number of militia troops. Despite this, the Canadian military played a key role in many of the most important battles of World War I. Canadian soldiers earned a reputation as fierce and effective fighters on the battlefield.

The **Canada in World War I** series explores the role Canadians played in this defining event in Canadian history. Each book in the series looks at a different aspect of Canada's involvement in the war. This includes the roots of the war, the effect of the war on Canada, the battles in which Canadians played a significant role, and the life of a soldier during the conflict.

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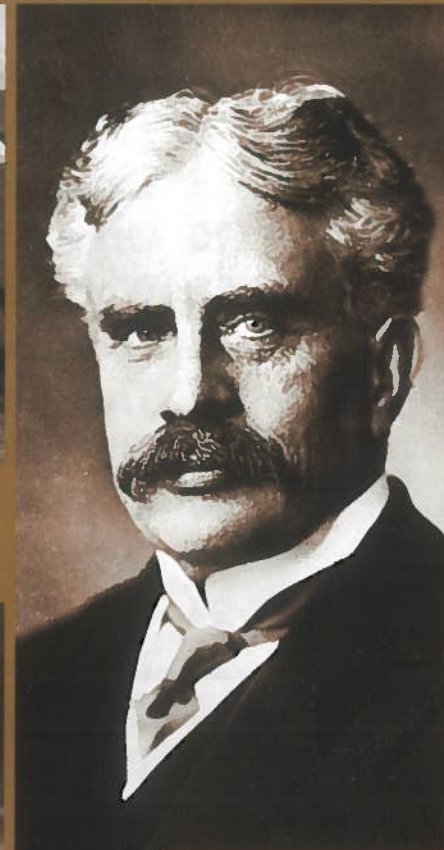
In Great Britain, people gathered in the streets on August 4, 1914, to hear news about the declaration of war.



In Canada, new recruits began training almost immediately after Great Britain declared war on Germany.



A dog named Sable Chief became the mascot of the Newfoundland troops.



Elected in 1911, Robert Borden served as prime minister of Canada until his retirement in 1920.



Training at Valcartier involves learning basic tactics and the use of different weapons.

The War Begins

On August 4, 1914, Great Britain declared war on Germany. As part of the British Empire, Canada was automatically at war as well. As a self-governing country, however, Canada could still decide how much it would contribute to the war effort. Discussions had taken place between Great Britain and Canada, with the Canadian government offering to send troops if Great Britain went to war. Prime Minister Robert Borden committed to sending 25,000 troops to create a Canadian **division**. At this time, Newfoundland was not part of Canada. It was a separate British colony. Newfoundland committed to send 500 of its own troops to fight in the war. Though only the size of a **battalion**, these soldiers were known as the Newfoundland **Regiment**.

When the war began, Canada's army only had about 3,000 permanent soldiers. The rest of Canada's armed forces were made up of **militia** units spread across the country. In August 1914, military recruiting offices opened all across Canada. Soon after, almost 40,000 men enlisted in the armed forces. The government created the **Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF)**, and new soldiers were sent to train at a camp in Valcartier, Quebec.

The war was already raging in Europe, so the soldiers had very little time to learn how to use their weapons and equipment. On October 3, 1914, the first 30,000 Canadian troops set sail for Great Britain. They arrived in mid-October. By December, the first Canadian units were in France, where they would soon face the enemy in battle.

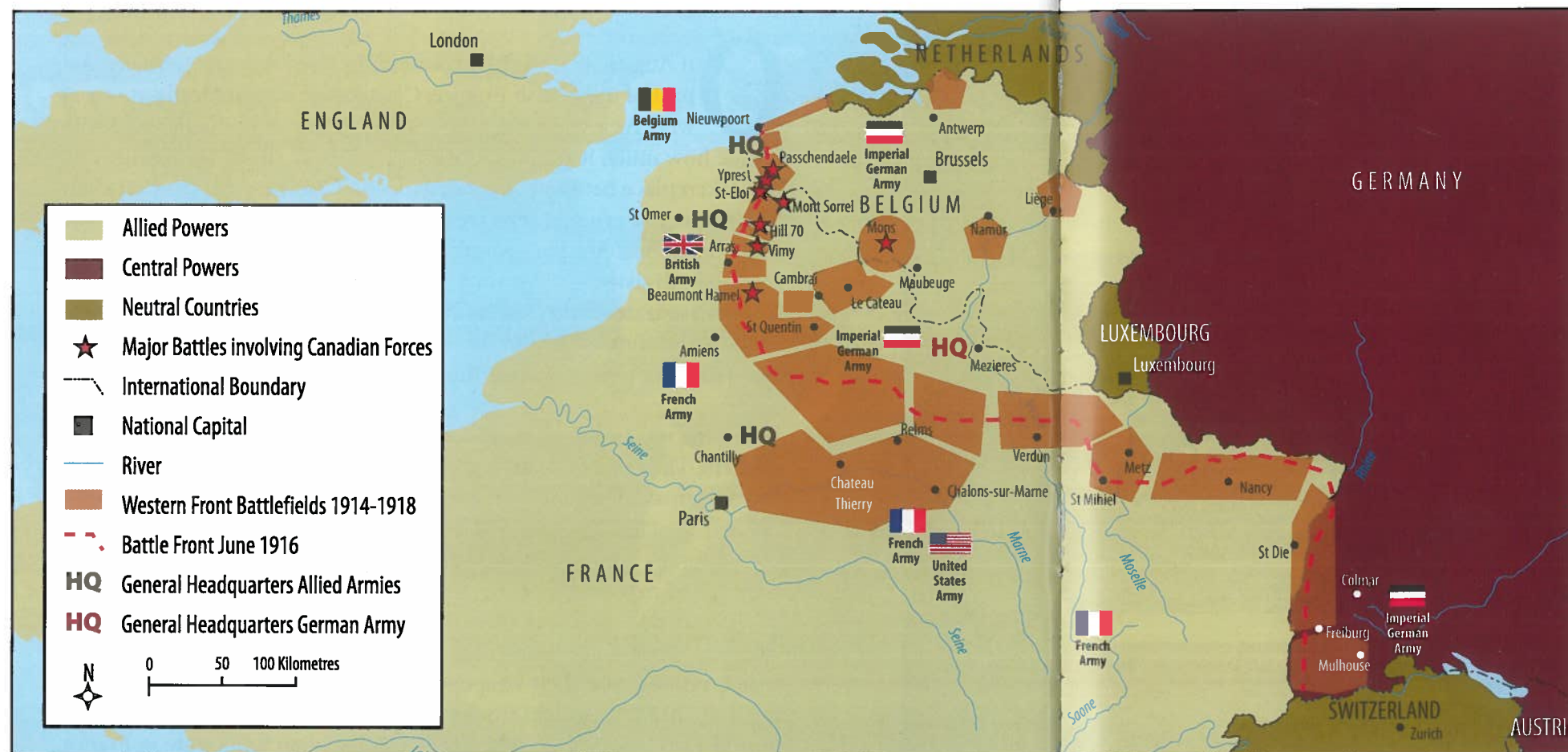


Theatre of War

Canadian soldiers fought in several key battles of World War I, sometimes making the difference between defeat and victory for the **Allies**. Most of the soldiers from Canada and Newfoundland fought in battles on the **Western Front** in northern France and Belgium. The Newfoundland Regiment also fought in Turkey.

After arriving in France in late 1914, Canadian troops quickly established themselves as brave and effective soldiers on the battlefield. The Canadians became highly regarded as an elite fighting force and were often sent into battles the Allies were in danger of losing, so that they could help turn the tide. Like other soldiers in World War I, Canadians faced a variety of new weapons, such as machine guns. Canadian soldiers were also among the first of the Allied forces to be attacked by German poison gas in 1915.

Canadians at the Western Front



For much of the war, soldiers on the Western Front experienced **trench warfare**. When the war began, the armies were mobile, and battle lines shifted often. Within a few months, however, a stalemate developed. Both sides dug trenches that stretched in an almost 1,000-kilometre-long line from the English Channel to Switzerland. Canadian forces were based near their British counterparts in the north. Enemy trenches were often very close together, sometimes only a few metres apart. The area between opposing trenches was known as “no man’s land.” Trenches were very well defended with machine guns and barbed wire.

During battles, soldiers had to leave the trenches and charge into no man’s land to attack the enemy. Many soldiers were killed or injured in these attacks, which often failed or sometimes only captured a few metres of land. Only in the last months of the war did the fighting on the Western Front become mobile again. In 1918, Canadian soldiers won many key victories in a series of battles known as the Hundred Days Offensive.

“To those who fall I say: You will not die but step into immortality. Your mothers will not lament your fate but will be proud to have borne such sons. Your names will be revered forever and ever by your grateful country, and God will take you unto Himself.”

Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie,
Address to Canadian Corps, March 1918



Timeline

1914

1915

1916

1917

1918



June 28 - Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, is assassinated.

August 3 - Germany invades Belgium.



August 4 - Following the invasion of Belgium, Great Britain declares war on Germany. Canada and Newfoundland are members of the British Empire and are now at war as well.

September 5 to 12 - The Battle of the Marne takes place outside Paris, France. The Allied forces turn back the German offensive. This begins four years of trench warfare on the Western Front.

October 3 - The first members of the CEF set sail for Great Britain. They arrive on October 14.

December 21 - The first Canadian unit, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, arrives in France.



April 22 to 25 - The Second Battle of Ypres is the first major battle in which Canadian troops take part.

May 15 to 25 - The Battle of Festubert results in 2,468 Canadian casualties, including 661 deaths.



June 2 to 14 - Canadian forces fight in the Battle of Mont Sorrel.



July 1 to November 18 - Canadian and Newfoundland soldiers are heavily involved in the Battle of the Somme.



April 9 to 17 - Canadian soldiers defeat the Germans in the Battle of Vimy Ridge.



August 15 to 25 - The Battle of Hill 70 is the first battle in which **mustard gas** is used against Canadian soldiers.

October 26 to November 10 - Canadian forces suffer more than 16,000 casualties in the Battle of Passchendaele.



August 8 to November 11 - Canadian troops fight in many battles during the Hundred Days Offensive.

August 8 to 12 - The Battle of Amiens is one of the first battles after trench warfare ends and fighting becomes mobile again.



August 21 to September 2 - At the Second Battle of the Somme, Canadian forces suffer more than 5,600 casualties.



September 27 to October 1 - The Battle of Canal du Nord breaks the German army's final defences.

October 8 - Canadian forces capture the city of Cambrai, France.

November 11 - George Price of the 28th Battalion, 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade, is one of the last soldier to die in the war. He is killed two minutes before the war officially ends with armistice at 11 a.m.

Most world leaders and their advisors believed the war would be very short. Kaiser Wilhelm II believed Germany would be victorious by autumn 1914.

By its end, World War I had caused so much destruction that it became known as the "war to end all wars." Less than 25 years later, World War II would begin.

Organizing for Battle

The CEF was created in August 1914. At first, the CEF consisted of a single division. The 1st Canadian Division included four **brigades** of infantry soldiers, three **artillery** brigades, as well units of engineers, cyclists, and support troops. In May 1915, the 2nd Canadian Division was formed. It arrived in France in September and joined the 1st division to form the Canadian Corps. The corps expanded over the next few years to become the largest combat unit of the CEF. The 3rd Canadian Division was formed in December 1915. The 4th division was formed in April 1916 from existing Canadian units and others that arrived later. A 5th Canadian Division was formed in February 1917, but it was disbanded a year later. Its members were used to reinforce the other four divisions.

The 1st Canadian Division arrived in France in February 1915. Canadian soldiers were based on the **front lines** near British forces in northern France and Belgium. Most of their battles took place in this area. At first, there were no Canadian generals qualified to command the troops. Sir Edwin Alderson, a lieutenant general in the British Army, was appointed to lead the Canadians for 18 months. Canadian soldiers fought alongside the British, but all four Canadian divisions did not fight together as a united force until the Battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917.

Canadian commanders knew that careful planning was essential to the success of a battle. Troops were trained so that they were well prepared for what they would face once they left the trenches. Some soldiers went on trench raids against German positions to gain **intelligence** about the enemy or capture prisoners to interrogate. Before some battles, engineers built tunnels under the battlefield that soldiers could use during their advance. Explosives could also destroy tunnels dug beneath German trenches during an Allied attack. Once the troops were ready, commanders would decide which soldiers would be in the first wave of the attack and which would follow after.



Leaving the Trenches

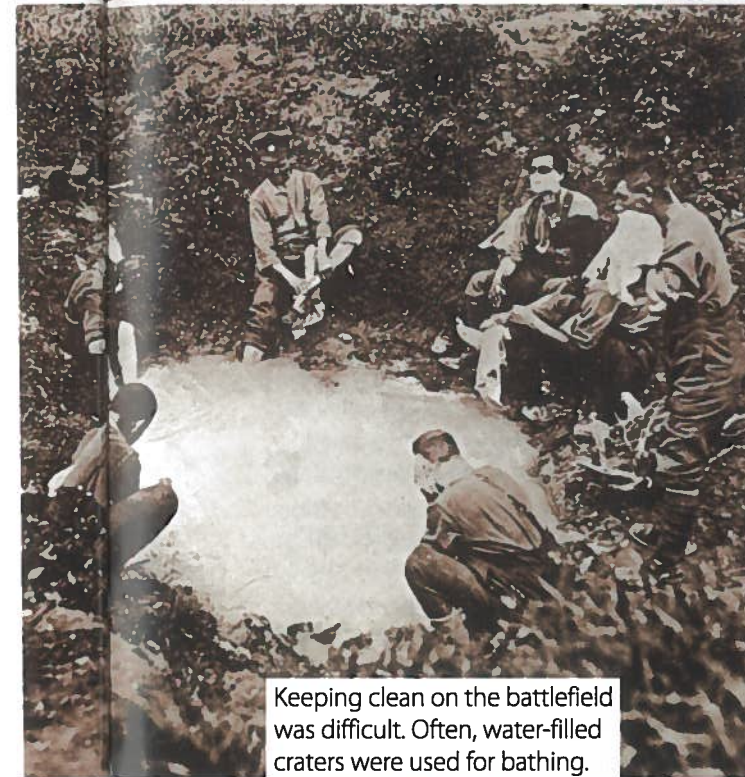
Having to climb from the safety of the trenches to charge across no man's land was one of the most terrifying moments in a soldier's life.



Artillery was one of the most important weapons of World War I. It was a devastating tool.



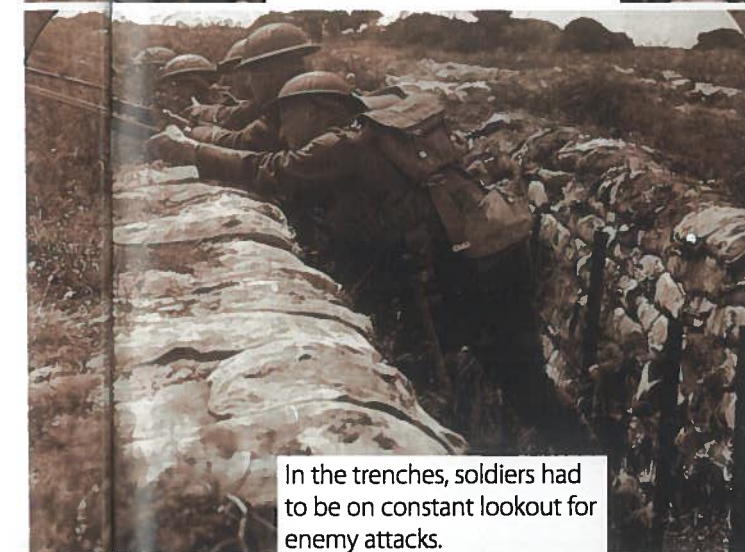
King George of Britain sometimes visited the Canadian troops.



Keeping clean on the battlefield was difficult. Often, water-filled craters were used for bathing.



Canadian soldiers were heavily involved in the final battles of the war, including the liberation of Mons.



In the trenches, soldiers had to be on constant lookout for enemy attacks.



Arthur Currie was the first Canadian to be appointed commander of the Canadian Corps in World War I.

World War I Weapons

In World War I battles, Canadian soldiers mostly used the same rifles and other weapons as the British Army.



Lee-Enfield Rifle

All front-line Canadian soldiers were using the British Lee-Enfield rifle by late 1916. The .303-calibre rifle had a 10-round **magazine** and was lighter than the Ross rifle. The Lee-Enfield was made for rapid-fire use. Soldiers could be trained to fire 12 shots in one minute. The rifle could also be fitted with a 45-centimetre **bayonet**.



Ross Rifle

Ross rifles were made in Canada and were considered to be very accurate. Canadian soldiers used these rifles early in the war, but the weapon was not suited to trench warfare. The rifles became increasingly unreliable. Dirt or mud often caused the rifles to jam. Beginning in 1916, Canadian soldiers were issued the British Lee-Enfield rifle instead.

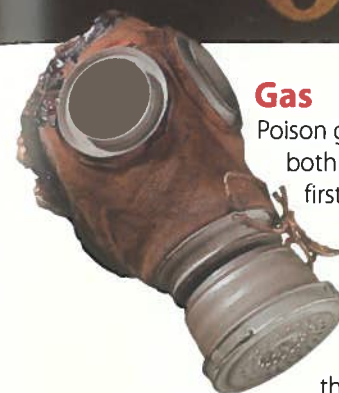


Hand Grenades

The No. 5 MK I grenade was also called the Mills bomb. Issued to soldiers for the first time in early 1915, this grenade was a very effective weapon. The soldier had to pull the pin on top of the grenade, then quickly throw it at the enemy. Soldiers only had five seconds before the grenade exploded. The grenade was usually effective within 10 metres, but also sent pieces of metal flying up to 200 metres from where it landed.



Gas



Poison gas was used as a weapon by both sides during the war. It was first used on the battlefield by the Germans against Allied lines in the Second Battle of Ypres on April 22, 1915. The chlorine gas was released as a yellow-green cloud blown by the wind toward the French and Canadian lines. This type of gas caused

lung damage and even death. The introduction of gas masks gave soldiers some protection. However, they found it difficult to see while wearing the masks. This made it difficult to fight effectively.

Later in 1915, the Germans used phosgene gas, which was even deadlier than chlorine. In 1917, they attacked with mustard gas. This caused bleeding and blisters on the skin and also inside a soldier's body. Gas masks offered little protection against mustard gas since it could be absorbed through skin and clothing. Gas could be an unpredictable weapon. When the British used chlorine gas against the Germans in September 1915, the wind changed. Thousands of British soldiers were injured when the gas was blown back in their direction.



Machine Guns

Canadian soldiers called the Colt-Browning M1895 machine gun the "potato digger." This name came from the gun's down-swinging piston arm, which would dig into the dirt if the gun was too close to the ground. The M1895 was used from early in the war until the summer of 1916, when it was replaced by the Vickers machine gun. The Vickers gun was a water-cooled weapon that used belted ammunition. It fired the same bullets as the Lee-Enfield rifle and could shoot 450 rounds per minute. The gun was heavy and operated by up to six men, which made it difficult to move around the battlefield. However, the Vickers machine gun was a very effective defensive weapon.

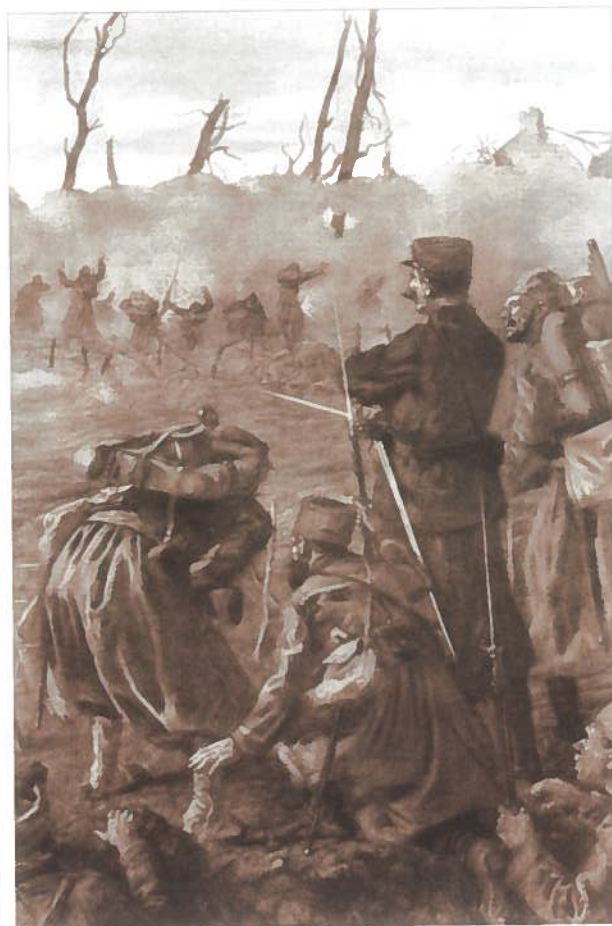
Tanks

The British Army first used tanks at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. These armoured vehicles were able to break through barbed wire and cross enemy trenches. The first tanks were very slow, vulnerable to heavy artillery fire, and often got stuck in the mud. Tank designs were improved, and new tactics for using tanks in battle were developed. These advances turned the tank into an important weapon in the final battles of the war.



The Second Battle of Ypres 1915

The Second Battle of Ypres was Canada's first major battle of World War I. The Ypres salient was a bulge in the Allied front line that extended toward the German lines. In the spring of 1915, the Germans planned an offensive to drive the Allies from the salient. Ypres was a small Belgian town, but was very important to both sides. It was close to the coast, and whichever side held Ypres could also control the ports on the English Channel. Ypres was vital to the Allied war effort. It had to be held at all costs.



After arriving at Ypres, the Canadian soldiers took a position between the British and French divisions. Two Canadian brigades were stationed on the front lines, while a third brigade stayed in reserve near the town. On April 22, the Germans used poison gas for the first time in the war. About 168 tonnes of chlorine gas was released against the French forces to the left of the Canadians. A huge green-yellow cloud

drifted across no man's land toward the French lines. When it reached their positions, the French soldiers began choking. Some managed to run to safety, but more than 6,000 French soldiers were killed when they were suffocated by the gas. Many others were permanently disabled.

"We have been in the most bitter of fights. For seventeen days and seventeen nights. None of us have had our clothes off, nor our boots even, except occasionally. In all that time while I was awake, gunfire and rifle fire never ceased for sixty seconds ... and behind it all was the constant background of the sights of the dead, the wounded, the maimed and a terrible anxiety lest the line should give way."

Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae

German soldiers secretly had planted the gas canisters weeks before the attack.

There was now a large gap in the Allied line. The Germans could attack and get behind the British and Canadian positions. Fortunately for the Allies, the Germans had not expected the gas to be so effective and were slow to take advantage. The Canadians moved into the gap as the Germans pressed forward. For the next two days, Canadian troops defended both the French part of the front line as well as their own. The Germans mounted another gas attack on April 24. By covering their faces with rags, the Canadians were able to get some protection from the gas and launched a counterattack.

The fighting was fierce, but the Canadians stopped the German advance. Then, they pushed the enemy back and held the line until British reinforcements arrived. After the Second Battle of Ypres, Canadians became known as tough and dependable troops, but the cost was high. The Canadian Corps suffered more than 6,000 casualties, and more than 2,000 men were killed.

Second Battle of Ypres

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.

Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae,
brigade-surgeon to the First Brigade of
the Canadian Forces Artillery at Ypres



The Battle of the Somme 1916

The Battle of the Somme began on July 1, 1916, and did not end until November 18. On the first day of the battle, British troops attacked and faced a furious German bombardment by rifles, machine guns, and heavy artillery. The attack was a disaster, and the Allies suffered nearly 60,000 casualties in a single day. Canadian soldiers were not part of the attack, but the 1st Newfoundland Regiment fought alongside the British. On July 1, 324 members of the regiment were killed and 386 were wounded in just 30 minutes of fighting.



Soldiers used broken or destroyed tanks and other debris as cover on the battlefield.

The Somme fighting continued throughout the summer. In late August, Canadian soldiers moved to the Somme front line near the village of Courcelette. The Canadians suffered 2,600 casualties in heavy fighting before a major attack was even launched. The main offensive began at dawn on September 15. The Canadian Corps attacked to the west of the village and were helped by some of the first tanks to be used in battle. The tanks were few in number, unreliable, and easily stopped by enemy artillery fire. However, they were effective in confusing the Germans during the attack.

The Newfoundland Memorial Park in France was opened in 1925 to honour the soldiers of the Newfoundland Regiment who died at the Somme.



By 8 a.m. on September 15, a strong German position called the Sugar Factory was taken. With one of their main objectives achieved, the Canadians then went on to capture Courcelette. The Germans counterattacked, but the Canadians managed to hold their position. More attacks took place in September and October against enemy positions nicknamed Desire Trench and Regina Trench. The Canadians repeatedly advanced, retreated, and counterattacked. They did this under heavy German fire and only gained little ground.

In late October, three Canadian divisions ended their fighting at the Somme. The 4th Canadian Division helped British troops to capture Regina Trench in November. Soon afterward, heavy rain turned the battlefield into a muddy swamp and the offensive ground to a halt.

The fighting cost Canada 24,029 casualties, but the Canadians confirmed their reputation as brave, reliable, and effective soldiers. Lessons were also learned about tactics and planning, which would prove very important in later battles.

"We were walking on dead soldiers ... I saw poor fellows trying to bandage their wounds ... bombs, heavy shells were falling all over them ... it is the worst sight that a man ever wants to see."

Frank Maheux, a Canadian soldier describing the Battle of the Somme in a letter to his wife

By the end of the Battle of the Somme, more than one million soldiers had been killed or wounded on both sides.



The Battle of Vimy Ridge 1917

Vimy Ridge dominates the landscape near Arras in northern France. The Germans captured the 8-kilometre-long hill in the early months of the war. Vimy Ridge had a network of tunnels, three lines of trenches, and was defended by experienced soldiers equipped with machine guns and heavy artillery. Attacks by British and French forces in 1914 and 1915 had been unsuccessful and led to more than 150,000 Allied casualties. When the British began planning another attack on this part of the German front line, called the Hindenburg Line, the Canadian Corps was given the task of taking Vimy Ridge. This would be the first time that all four divisions of the Canadian Corps fought together as one unit.



A soldier is reported to have said, "We went up Vimy Ridge as Albertans and Nova Scotians. We came down as Canadians."

Sir Julian Byng, the Canadian commander, decided that new tactics would be needed if the attack were to succeed. There was extensive planning and preparation, and soldiers underwent special training. In models of the trench systems, troops rehearsed the attack so that they would be ready for any situation. Soldiers conducted trench raids on German positions to gather intelligence on the enemy's defences. Allied engineers also constructed tunnels beneath the battlefield, to help the Canadians reach the ridge safely. Other tunnels were built under the Germans trenches so that they could be blown up just before the attack began.

"At the arranged time, to the absolute second, suddenly, as dawn was breaking, every gun on the whole front opened up. The roar of the heavy guns was deafening ... the attack was at daybreak, we had to lie in the open trenches all the night: the morning turned out grey, cold and drizzling, everybody shivering and chilled to the bone."

Lieutenant Claude Williams



On March 20, 1917, the Canadians began a massive two-week artillery barrage against the German positions. This was intended to damage German defences and barbed wire before the attack. The heaviest shelling lasted a week so the Germans would not know exactly when the attack would take place. At 5.30 a.m. on April 9, 1917, almost 1,000 guns opened fire on the Germans. In the midst of a winter storm, the first wave of 20,000 Canadian soldiers ran out of the trenches and advanced toward the ridge. Despite fierce resistance from the Germans, most of the ridge was captured by noon. The rest was secured over the next two days.



King George and Arthur Currie toured Vimy Ridge after it was captured by Canadian soldiers.

Capturing Vimy Ridge was a great success for the Canadian Corps, but it came at a heavy cost. The battle left the Canadians with more than 10,600 casualties, including 3,600 deaths. Yet the battle is remembered as the event in which men from all across Canada fought together for the first time and delivered an entirely Canadian victory.

France gave 100 hectares of Vimy Ridge to Canada for the construction of a memorial in honour of the Canadian soldiers who fell there.



The Battle of Passchendaele 1917

The Battle of Passchendaele in late 1917 was part of the larger Third Battle of Ypres. The Allied offensive was launched on July 31, but gained very little ground. Heavy shellfire and rainfall turned the battlefield into a swamp, filled with mud, bodies, shell craters, and the wreckage of military equipment. Eventually, the Allied attack came to a halt, with the Germans still in control of their lines. In mid-October, the Canadian Corps was sent to the Passchendaele front to try to break the deadlock. Their orders were to capture the town of Passchendaele and the nearby ridge.

Sir Arthur Currie took over command of the Canadian Corps a few months before the battle. When he first saw the battlefield, he objected strongly to the plan. Currie felt the poor conditions on the battlefield meant victory could not be assured without a terrible loss of life. When he was overruled, Currie began to make careful plans for the battle. Only when he believed that his troops were fully prepared did the attack begin.

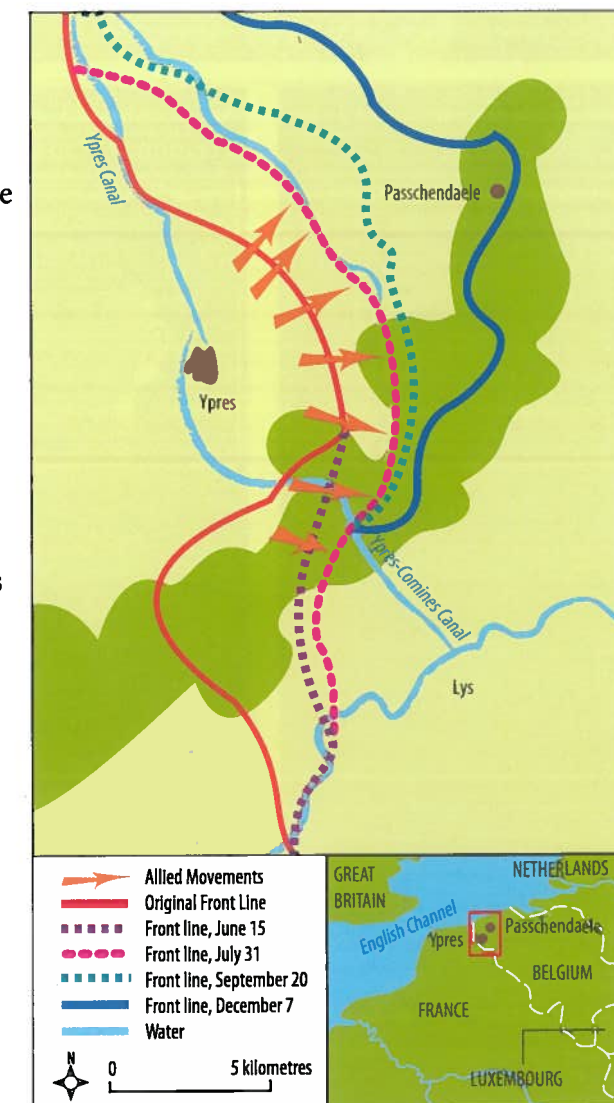
Almost 16,000 Canadians were either killed or wounded in the Battle of Passchendaele.



New roads were built, light railways were repaired and extended, and gun emplacements were either improved or new ones constructed. Horses and mules were used to move hundreds of thousands of shells to the front line for the artillery barrage that would be launched before the attack. All of these preparations took place under almost constant German fire, resulting in hundreds of Allied casualties.

On October 26, the Canadians launched their assault under heavy gunfire from the German forces positioned on Passchendaele ridge. The Canadians inched forward from one shell crater to another, sometimes wading through waist-deep mud. On October 30, they began attacking the town. Despite heavy shelling by the Germans, the Canadians captured Passchendaele on November 6. Four days later, the Canadian Corps also captured the ridge.

Battle of Passchendaele



"Everywhere was an air of desolation. Not a house was to be seen, as far as the horizon. Only the bare, terribly scarred plain, over which a cataclysm seemed to have passed. It was as if life could never return to these killing fields. In a flooded trench, corpses of Germans, their stomachs grotesquely bloated, floated in slushy water. Here and there were bodies buried in the mud with only an arm or a leg showing above the surface. Macabre faces appeared, blackened by their long stay on the ground. Everywhere I looked, all I could see was corpses covered in a shroud of mud."

Arthur-Joseph Lapointe, Quebec 22nd Regiment



Canadian Commanders

Sir Julian Byng
(1862–1935)



Sir Julian Byng commanded the Canadian Corps from May 1916 to June 1917. He led his men in many battles, most notably at Vimy Ridge.

Byng was born in England and educated at Eton College before beginning his military career. He served in Africa and India before World War I. Byng was the commander of the British Cavalry Corps and was later appointed to the Canadian Corps. He is remembered for turning the Canadian troops into a highly effective fighting force. Byng's soldiers called themselves the "Byng Boys." He led his troops to victory in the Battle of the Somme and at Vimy Ridge in April 1917. Later that year, Byng became commander of the British 3rd Army.

Byng later became Lord Byng of Vimy. From 1921 to 1926, he served as Governor General of Canada.

Sir Archibald Cameron Macdonell
(1864–1941)



Sir Archibald Cameron Macdonell was the commander of the 1st Canadian Division during World War I.

Macdonell was born in Windsor, Ontario, and graduated from the Royal Military College. He served in the South African War and commanded the Lord Strathcona's Horse Regiment before World War I. In 1915, he was promoted to Brigadier-General in command of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade. Two years later, he became a Major-General, commanding the 1st Canadian Division.

Macdonell saw himself as a front-line soldier. His men called him "Fighting Mac." At the Battle of the Somme, Macdonell often braved enemy fire as he walked among the wounded men, saluting the brave dead soldiers. He was promoted to Lieutenant-General when he retired.

Sir Henry Edward Burstall
(1870–1945)



Sir Henry Edward Burstall was the commander of the 2nd Canadian Division, which fought at the Somme, Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele, and many other notable battles.

Burstall was born in Quebec City and attended the Royal Military College before joining the Royal Canadian Artillery in 1889. Burstall became commander of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery in 1911. Burstall rose to the rank of Major-General and took command of the 2nd Canadian Division from 1916 until the end of the war.

After the war, Burstall worked for the Department of National Defence until his retirement in 1925. Afterward, he moved to England, where he died in 1945. The town of Burstall, Saskatchewan, and Mount Burstall in Alberta are both named after him.

Louis James Lipsett
(1874–1918)



Louis James Lipsett was the last British commander of a Canadian division in wartime and also the last British general to die in World War I.

Lipsett was born in Ireland. He received his first military commission in 1894. In 1911, Lipsett was posted to Western Canada, in charge of military training. One of the people Lipsett trained was Arthur Currie. In 1916, he took command of the 3rd Canadian Division. In 1917, Lipsett was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel, and his division played a key role at Vimy Ridge. He also led troops at Ypres, the Somme, Amiens, and Passchendaele.

In 1918, Lipsett rejoined the British Army. He was killed in action on October 14, 1918. Lipsett's funeral was attended by several key figures, including Arthur Currie and the Prince of Wales.

Sir David Watson
(1871–1922)



Sir David Watson commanded Canadian soldiers during many of the major battles of World War I.

Watson was born in Quebec City. His military career began in the 8th Regiment, Royal Rifles, and he rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel by 1912.

At the beginning of World War I, Watson joined the CEF and was given command of the 2nd Canadian Battalion. In 1916, he became a Major-General and took command of the 4th Canadian Division until the end of the war. Watson commanded Canadian troops at Ypres, the Somme, Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele, and at Amiens and Cambrai during the Hundred Days Offensive.

Watson was knighted for his wartime service in 1918. He returned to Quebec and became the main owner of the *Quebec Chronicle* newspaper.

Sir Arthur Currie
(1875–1933)



Sir Arthur Currie was the commander of the Canadian Corps in World War I. He was involved in all of Canada's major battles and is considered one of the war's finest generals.

Currie was born in Napperton, Ontario. In 1894, he moved to British Columbia, where he later joined the militia. He rose steadily through the ranks and became a commanding officer by the start of World War I. In 1917, he was promoted to Lieutenant-General and placed in command of the Canadian Corps. Currie was the first Canadian to hold this position. He insisted that Canadian soldiers all fight together.

Under Currie's command, the Canadian Corps won all the battles in which they fought. Currie's leadership of the Canadian Corps in the Hundred Days Offensive played a major part in the Allied victory.

Canada's War

Canadian soldiers fought in numerous battles on the Western Front during World War I. Most of the fighting took place in a small area of northern France and Belgium. This was the first time Canadian soldiers fought together as a distinct unit rather than as part of the British Army. World War I also marked the first time that Canada's soldiers had been commanded by a Canadian officer.

Until the final months of the war, Canadians engaged in trench warfare during most of their battles. Fighting often took place in terrible conditions, and casualties were heavy. Yet even when the war became mobile again in August 1918, there were still heavy casualties. By the end of the war, more than 60,000 Canadians had been killed and about 150,000 wounded.

The training new recruits received at Valcartier, Quebec, helped prepare Canadian soldiers for the challenges they would face in World War I.



Many Canadian First Nations people fought in World War I. They were among the most valued soldiers of the war.



By the Numbers

Canada mobilized about 620,000 soldiers during World War I, with about 424,000 serving overseas. Estimating casualties and the number of deaths from any war can be challenging, and totals often vary from one source to another. Figures may not be entirely accurate, due to the chaotic nature of war and battle, especially on the large scale of World War I.

Canadian Casualties

Killed or missing	58,990
Non-combat deaths	3,830
Total killed	62,820
Wounded	149,710
Total casualties	212,530

Casualties as a Percentage of Total Troops Mobilized

Killed or missing	9.5%
Non-combat deaths	0.6%
Total killed	10.1%
Wounded	24.1%
Total casualties	34.3%

World War I was one of the bloodiest conflicts in human history, with more than 37 million casualties in total.



Canadian Battle Statistics

6,000 estimated casualties including **2,000** deaths
Second Battle of Ypres
April 22 to 25, 1915

2,468 casualties
Battle of Festubert
May 15 to 25, 1915

8,430 casualties
Battle of Mont Sorrel
June 2 to 14, 1916

24,029 casualties
Battle of the Somme
July 1 to November 18, 1916

10,600 casualties including **3,600** deaths
Battle of Vimy Ridge
April 9 to 17, 1917

1,505 deaths **3,810** wounded **487** wounded by gas
Battle of Hill 70
August 15 to 25, 1917

15,654 casualties
Battle of Passchendaele
October 26 to November 10, 1917

4,000 casualties
Battle of Amiens
August 8 to 12, 1918



The War Comes to an End

In March 1918, Germany launched a major offensive on the Western Front in an effort to win the war. The offensive was unsuccessful, however, and by July, the Germans had retreated in order to regroup. The Allies took the opportunity to strike, beginning the Hundred Days Offensive.

The Canadian Corps played a major role in the campaign, which eventually led to the German surrender in November. Over the course of the war, the Germans had come to expect a major attack whenever Canadian troops were moved into certain positions in the Allied front line. Knowing this, the Allied commanders decided to trick the Germans about the real location of the upcoming attack. A few Canadians were moved to one sector of the front line, making the Germans think the rest of the troops would soon arrive. Meanwhile, most of the Canadian forces moved secretly to Amiens to prepare for the attack.



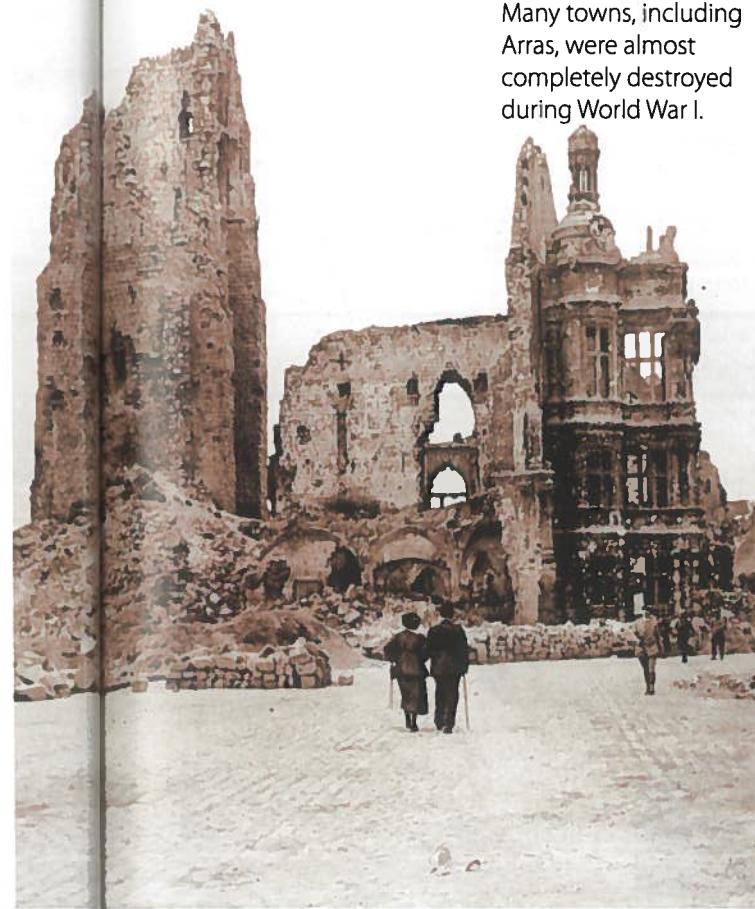
On November 11, Canadian soldiers marched through the streets of Mons, celebrating the end of the war.

The offensive began on August 8. It employed large numbers of tanks to great effect. The Allies broke through the German defences and created a gap in the German lines several kilometres wide. Canadian forces were very successful in the battle, but success came at a great cost. The Canadian Corps suffered more than 11,800 casualties, almost 4,000 of which occurred during the first day of the attack. Despite the casualties, the offensive continued. Next, Canada was involved in the fighting at Arras and Canal du Nord. In late September, the Canadian Corps finally broke Germany's defensive positions along the Hindenburg Line.

Cambrai was captured in early October, and Canadian troops pursued the retreating Germans for the next month. Valenciennes was captured on November 2. Then, on the last day of the war, Canadian soldiers captured the Belgian city of Mons. This was where British forces had fought the Germans very early in the war. It proved a fitting place for Canadian soldiers to bring the war to a close on November 11, 1918.



At the battle of Canal du Nord in September 1918, Canada helped the Allies break through part of the German defence lines.



Many towns, including Arras, were almost completely destroyed during World War I.



At Cambrai, the French who had been trapped behind the German lines celebrated their liberation.