

declaration of war meant that Canada was at war, too. World War I had begun.

The Schlieffen Plan

Germany's first target was France. The German general Alfred von Schlieffen had planned an attack on France nine years earlier, and he now also knew that Germany would have to fight both France and Russia. The Russian army was large but badly trained, poorly equipped, and scattered across a huge country. It would take time for Russia to prepare its armed forces for full-scale war. Schlieffen's plan was to defeat France while Russia was struggling to get its army in order. Then Germany could turn its full firepower on Russia.

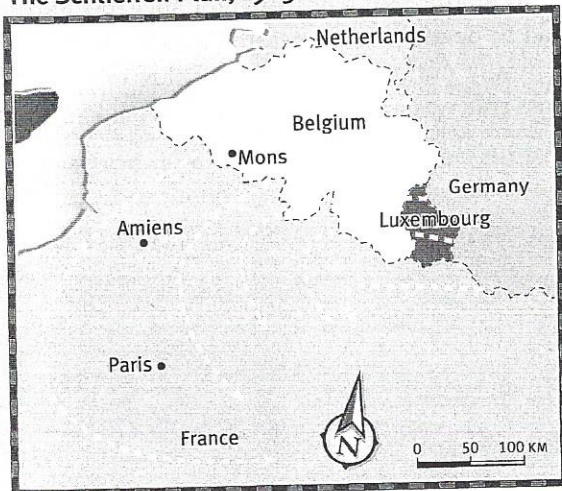
Since France had heavily fortified its border with Germany, a direct frontal attack across the French-German border would take too long. Schlieffen planned an attack on France through the "back door" of Belgium, despite that country's neutrality. According to his plan, a small force would be sent straight across the French-German border to attract French troops. The German force would then retreat, pulling the French army after it into the mountains of Lorraine. Meanwhile, a much larger

German force would march across neutral Belgium and into France. Once on French soil, it would swing wide to the west and then circle back toward Paris to catch the French army in a giant trap.

Schlieffen realized that invading Belgium would bring other nations, especially Britain, into the war. He believed that invading Belgium was worth the risk if Germany was able to score a quick victory over France. But his plan failed; the French troops rallied and stopped the German army on the River Marne in France. Although the Germans had captured France's rich industrial region and had almost reached the gates of Paris before they were halted, they failed to score a decisive victory. The chance for a short war was gone.

After the Battle of Marne, the armies bogged down. Both sides began to dig in for the winter. Soon, two thick systems of trenches twisted across Europe: from the English Channel through a corner of Belgium, and across France to Switzerland. Enemy troops stood in the trenches and faced each other across a wasteland of mud and tangled wire called "no-man's land." By Christmas 1914, the war had ground to a halt. Neither side was able to make any significant progress along the Western Front. It was the beginning of a new kind of warfare — trench warfare.

The Schlieffen Plan, 1905



According to Schlieffen's plan, conceived in 1905, Germany would strike France by sweeping south through neutral Belgium (each arrow represents a separate German army). The key to the plan's success would be the speed with which it was carried out. Why was this a risky plan?

Canada Prepares For War

Although Canada was automatically at war with Germany, as a part of the British Empire it could decide how far to support Britain's war effort. In the early days of the war, Canada's support was more than whole-hearted; it was overwhelming. When the call went out for volunteers to fight in Europe, recruiting stations across the country were mobbed by people wanting to enlist for duty. By September 1914, more than 30 000 Canadians had signed up.

Canada was better prepared for war than many Canadians had expected it to be. Defence spending was already six times higher than it had been at the turn of the century. Since 1909, most provinces had made military training a requirement for male high-school students. Military plans for keeping bridges, canals, and ports safe from "sneak attack" were in



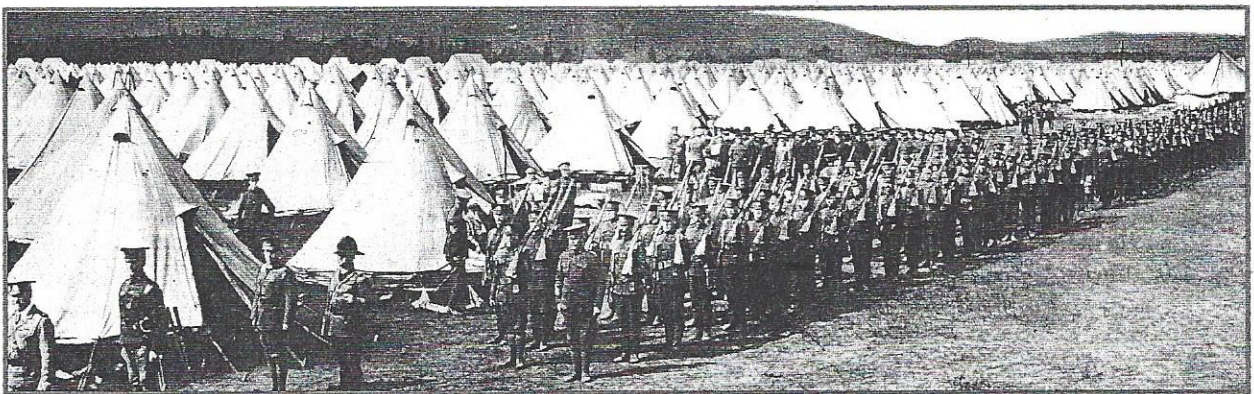
When war was declared in 1914, volunteers such as these troops boarding trains in St. Thomas, Ontario, were anxious to enlist. Why did the rush of volunteers slow to a trickle by 1917?

place, as was a detailed plan for mobilizing 25 000 volunteers as a Canadian expeditionary force.

When the minister of militia, Sam Hughes, ordered a huge training camp to be built at Valcartier, Quebec, an army of workers was assembled on the sandy plain outside Quebec City. They began laying out roadways, mess halls, latrines, drill fields, and the biggest rifle range in the world. Thirty days later, the huge tent city — complete with a power plant, a chlorinated water supply, and a rail link to Quebec City — was ready. By early September 1914, more than 30 000 soldiers and 8000 horses had poured into Valcartier Camp. The volunteers were issued equipment, and training began.

The soldiers' equipment, however, was often badly designed and poorly made. On one occasion a load of boots arrived, all for the right foot.

Hughes insisted on using the **Ross rifle**, a personal favourite of his because it was excellent for sharpshooting and it was manufactured in Canada. Unfortunately, it was useless in trench warfare. It was long and heavy and easily jammed by dirt. When it was fired rapidly, the firing mechanism overheated and seized up. On the battlefield, Canadian troops unofficially re-equipped themselves with Lee-Enfield rifles they had stripped from dead British soldiers or had stolen in raids on British arms depots, even at the risk of possible court martial. But a British War Office investigation had to be undertaken before Canadian forces were officially outfitted with Lee-Enfields in 1916. The Ross rifle was just one example of Canadian equipment that failed the test of warfare.



Sam Hughes created a mini-tent city at Valcartier to train raw recruits before they were sent overseas.

The Valcartier Camp was not equipped for the Canadian cold. Hughes wanted to get the training over and have the men packed off to war before winter set in. Prime Minister Borden, like most other Canadians, was impressed with Hughes's efforts. He gave permission for all 32 000 volunteers to ship out. On September 23, the soldiers were ready to board their ships for England. But the disorder in loading men, horses, and equipment on thirty ships was beyond description. As the convoy was about to leave, Hughes ordered leaflets to be handed out that read, "Men, the world regards you as a marvel." Many of the men crumpled the leaflets up and threw them to the ground.

Web Connections

<http://www.school.mcgrawhill.ca/resources>

Go to the above Web site to find out more about Canada and World War I. Go to *History Resources*, then to *Canada: A Nation Unfolding, Ontario Edition* to find out where to go next.

The Canadian forces spent the winter of 1914 in tents on the windswept Salisbury Plain in southern England. It was the wettest winter in memory, and the plain was a sea of mud. Every morning, soldiers hung their blankets up in the rain to wash out the caked mud. They were always wet, cold, and hungry, and rations were short. The soldiers were lucky to get porridge and tea for breakfast, and leftover porridge and a bit of meat stew for supper. However, a few things changed for the better. Some of the Canadian equipment was replaced by sturdier British-made equipment. One Canadian soldier wrote, "We have been given new black boots, magnificent things, huge, heavy 'ammunition' boots, and the wonderful thing is they don't let water in. They are very big, and they look like punts, but it's dry feet now."

At this point in the war, Canadian officers were not yet ready to take command of a full division. The Canadian troops were placed under the command of the British general, Sir Edwin Alderson. Alderson weeded out the least well prepared of Hughes's recruits. Now the real training began. The



Training for battle, Canadian troops march past Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain. Would the conditions that the soldiers encountered in England have changed their views on the war?

Canadian troops drilled and marched, fired rifles, dug trenches, and practised with bayonets in the hard winter rains of England. But they would learn the reality of battle only in the trenches of France. By February 1915, the Canadian Division was ready for the Western Front. It took up its position near the small Belgian town of Ypres (pronounced ee-preh). There, Canadians would learn first-hand the horror of trench warfare.

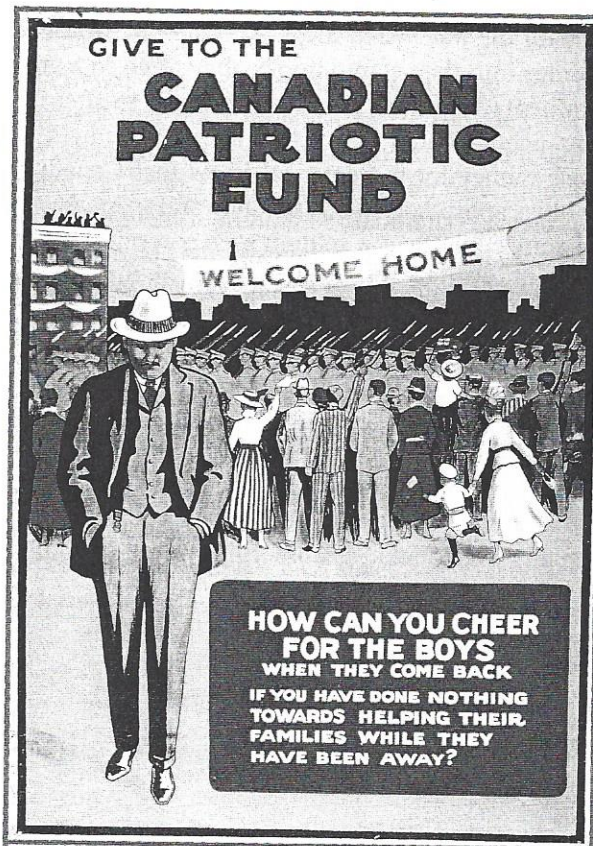
The optimism so characteristic of the first decade of the twentieth century was shattered by the war some called "the war to end all wars." All of the supposed progress of the nineteenth century seemed to have suddenly been conscripted to wreak havoc and devastation on Europe. Technology that had held out so much promise for better lives now turned the battlefields of Europe into a deadly killing ground. Neither the soldiers who eagerly volunteered in 1914 nor the politicians who sent young Canadians off to war could have imagined what lay in store for the young nation. Unquestionably the events of the next four years would profoundly shape the destiny of Canada for years to come.

By the winter of 1914, war in all its glory and ugliness had engulfed Canada. During the next four years Canada's war effort would yield heroic efforts and noble sacrifices from thousands, both on the battlefield and on the home front. Yet, at the same time the war would expose the racism and xenophobia that many Canadians were forced to endure. As well, while thousands died horrific deaths or suffered crippling wounds, a few used the war as an opportunity to make huge profits. In the end, the war years seem to have served as Canada's adolescence, an awkward age during which many blemishes appeared and mistakes were made. Nonetheless, it was an age during which Canada learned a great deal about itself and made huge steps toward national maturity.

Gearing Up for War

At the outset of the war, Canadians knew little about the horrors that their relatives and neighbours were facing in the trenches. A government press censor banned all news stories that were considered harmful to the war effort. Government propaganda posters appeared on street corners all over the country, and some artists were commissioned to paint pictures glorifying the "Great War."

In 1914, Canadians from coast to coast rallied for the war effort. Although not everyone supported Canada's participation in what some saw as a European war, support was generally widespread. Hundreds of church groups, women's organizations, and charities sprang into action. A Canadian Patriotic Fund, created by an Act of Parliament and staffed largely by volunteers, began to collect money for soldiers' families, many of whom were struggling to survive on a private's pay of \$1.10 a day. Within three months the fund had raised \$6 million in donations and was providing families in need with up to \$50 a month. As well as providing monthly cheques, the Canadian Patriotic Fund also set up small co-operative stores, where families could buy food and fuel at the lowest possible prices. A military hospitals commission set up hospitals and health-care units in Canada to care for sick and wounded soldiers. Another organization



How effective would a poster such as this have been in persuading you to donate to the Canadian Patriotic Fund?

founded and equipped a Red Cross hospital in London, England. Women's voluntary societies provided food, clothing, medical supplies, and ambulances for returning troops. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and other groups set up clubs and canteens for soldiers on leave in England and Canada.

As the war dragged on, food and fuel became increasingly difficult to find. To support the war effort, families voluntarily changed their eating habits so that more butter, meat, sugar, wheat, and other foods could be sent to troops overseas. With hundreds of thousands of young men fighting overseas, women and children in Canada were left to harvest vital farm crops. Almost twelve thousand boys became "Soldiers of the Soil" to help out on Canadian farms. Even young children pitched in; they went without their favourite foods at home and bought 25¢ "thrift stamps" to help the government

pay for the war. When they had pasted \$4 worth of stamps into their stamp books, they received a government war savings stamp worth about \$5 after the war. School rallies and variety shows were held to raise money for the personal items that Canadian soldiers appreciated, such as candy and soap, as well as army equipment. Children even scavenged along the railway lines for coal to burn in furnaces at home when the fuel shortage hit.

A White's Man's War: Racism in the Canadian Military

While Canadians from coast to coast were eager to do their part in the war, not all contributions were equally welcomed. Visible minorities, including

Black, Asian, and Aboriginal Canadians, often found their efforts to enlist thwarted by racist attitudes. Gordon Wilson, a Black Canadian from Halifax, recalled, "Black people refused to accept the attitude that it was a White man's war. As loyal citizens we wanted to serve our country. It was our duty, our responsibility." Although only Aboriginal Canadians were directly denied admission to the army at the beginning of the war, other visible minorities were rejected for a variety of reasons, despite the official declaration that there was no "colour line" in the Canadian army. Some officials attempted to argue that Aboriginal Canadians might not be given civilized treatment if captured by the enemy, while others claimed that visible minorities would upset the delicate balance of the

Canadian voices

ABORIGINAL INVOLVEMENT IN WORLD WAR I

Canadian Aboriginal peoples were involved in all aspects of the war, including active duty at the front on land and in the air, as well as serving as railway troops and in forestry units.

Initially the minister of the militia, Sam Hughes, decided not to accept Aboriginal recruits, claiming: "While British troops would be proud to be associated with their fellow subjects, yet Germans might refuse to extend to them the privileges of civilized warfare." However, many Aboriginals had already enlisted and were being readied for active duty overseas. In 1915, as the need for more recruits increased, Hughes reversed his decision. By the end of war, over 3500 Aboriginals from all of Canada's provinces had enlisted.

Private David Kisek, a member of the Shoal Lake Band in Ontario, was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his bravery. The citation that accompanied the medal read:

He displayed marked courage and intelligence during the attack on enemy positions at Tilloy on 1st October 1918. When his company was held up by heavy fire, he on his own initiative ran into the

open, and, with his Lewis gun at the hip, fired four pans into the enemy machine guns. His fire was so effective that a party of the company on the right were able to advance and capture four machine guns together with about 70 prisoners....

Two other Aboriginal Canadians who distinguished themselves on the battlefield were Henry Norwest and Francis Pegahmagabow. Norwest, a Cree from Alberta, has been described as one of the most successful snipers on the Western Front. At the time of his death on August 18, 1918, Norwest was officially credited with 115 hits. Pegahmagabow, an Ojibwa from the Parry Island Band in Ontario, was also an excellent sniper, whose bravery earned him the Military Medal three times: at Mount Sorrel in 1916, at Passchendaele in 1917, and at Amiens in 1918. Pegahmagabow, Norwest, and Kisek were only three of the many Aboriginal soldiers who made valuable contributions to Canada's war effort.



Private David Kisek.

military units. One recruitment officer even went so far as to tell fifty Black Canadians from Sydney, Nova Scotia, "This is not for you fellows, this is a White man's war." Underlying the weak excuses were racist assumptions, which were all too prevalent at the time. Some of the excuses expressed a sense of paranoia, a fear that giving non-Whites the experience of killing Whites on the battlefield might lead to problems at home after the war.

As the war dragged on and casualties mounted, the reluctance to admit non-Whites to the army was lessened. In the fall of 1915 the ban on Aboriginal Canadian enlistment was lifted, and by the summer of 1916 Japanese and Chinese Canadian men were reluctantly admitted into several battalions. Black Canadians were also allowed into the army, although most were restricted to a Black-only, non-combat battalion. Despite these changes, visible minorities remained on the fringe of the military. Having cleared the many hurdles placed before them, visible-minority Canadians who served overseas were often kept separate from White soldiers on ships and in camps; they even received their evening entertainment from a separate "coloured" YMCA. By the end of the war, 3500 Aboriginal Canadians, over 1000 Black Canadians, and several hundred Asian Canadians had served overseas in the Canadian army.

The No. 2 Construction Battalion

When war was declared in 1914, it soon became apparent that Black Canadians were considered second-class citizens. Brigadier General W.E. Hodgins stated in October 1915: "There are no regulations or restrictions which prohibit or discriminate against the enlistment and enrolment of Coloured men who possess the necessary qualifications. The final approval of any man, regardless of colour or other distinction, must of course rest with the officer commanding the particular unit in which the man in question is desirous of joining." This effectively allowed commanding officers to set recruitment policy. It was at this level that the racist attitudes were disturbingly apparent. Colonel Ogilvie, the officer commanding District Eleven, Victoria, B.C., stated: "Several cases of Coloured applicants for enlistment have been reported on by officers commanding units, and the universal opinion is that if this were allowed, it would do much harm, as White men here will not serve in the same ranks with Negroes or Coloured persons."

Despite the willingness of Black Canadians to serve in the military in defence of Canada, it was obvious that Canadian officials were not prepared to encourage their participation in combat battalions. As a result of Hodgins's memorandum, a separate Black Canadian battalion was formed. The No. 2 Construction



The No. 2 Construction Battalion was an entirely Black Canadian battalion of volunteers from across Canada. What does the existence of a segregated battalion say about racial tolerance in Canada during the first few decades of the twentieth century?

Battalion, unlike other battalions, was granted permission to recruit from across Canada. Despite earlier rejections, Black Canadians from across Canada eagerly enlisted. By December 1916, 575 Black Canadians had joined the No. 2 Construction Battalion.

When the battalion reached France, it consisted of 624 young men. It was attached to the Canadian Forestry Corps, where its members dug trenches, built bridges, and defused land mines. A few members were eventually transferred to front-line units, where they experienced trench combat, but the wartime experience of the vast majority of the No. 2 Battalion was limited to non-combat activities. Facing the same horrors of war, including mustard and chlorine gas attacks, many Black Canadians died serving their country. They received little recognition for their sacrifices. The song *Black Soldier's Lament*, by Captain George Borden, captured the Black Canadians' loyalty to Canada and their dismay at the lack of recognition.

*With deep lament we did our job
Despite the shame our manhood robbed
We built and fixed and fixed again
To prove our worth as proud black men
And hasten sure the Kaiser's end*

*From Scotia port to Seaford Square
Across to France the conflict there
At Villa La Joux and Place Peronne
For God and King to right the wrong
The number two six hundred strong*

*Stripped to the waist and sweated chest
Mid-day's reprieve much needed rest
We dug and hauled and lifted high
From trenches deep toward the sky
Non-fighting troops and yet we die*

*The peace restored the battle won
Black sweat and toil had beat the hun
Black blood was spilled black bodies maimed
For medals brave no black was named
Yet proud were we our pride unshamed*

*But time will bring forth other wars
Then give to us more daring chores
That we might prove our courage strong
Preserve the right repel the wrong
And proud we'll sing the battle song.*

Opponents of Canada's War Effort

Not all Canadians shared in the general enthusiasm for war. Small minorities of Canadians either opposed the war for religious reasons or were sympathetic toward Germany or the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For these people, the war years brought conflict and discomfort because fellow Canadians often viewed them with suspicion.

Pacifists

Before 1914, many Canadians had been against war on principle. Once Britain declared war, however, many former **pacifists** (those who oppose war on moral grounds) became staunch war supporters. The few Canadian pacifists who continued to speak out against war, such as the well-known social reformer J.S. Woodsworth, often lost their jobs. Some Canadian farmers, while not opposed to the war in principle, resisted participation on the basis that they were needed on the farm to plant and harvest badly needed crops. When the government cancelled the farmers' exemption from the draft in 1918, many reconsidered their support for the war.

Pacifist religious groups that had been welcomed to Canada before the war — Doukhobors, Mennonites, and Hutterites — were now treated with suspicion and hostility. Many Canadians believed that defeating the Germans was Canada's moral duty. Some even believed that Canadians who opposed the war were as dangerous as the enemy across the Atlantic. As a result, pacifist religious sects endured much anxiety throughout the war. Some of them saw their freedom of education abolished by an Act prohibiting teaching in the German language. As well, the Military Service Act, passed in 1917, extended the right to vote to all soldiers while taking away the right to vote from all who, due to their religious beliefs, opposed the war.

Prior to 1914 many religious sects were granted military exemptions, but in 1917 these exemptions were reconsidered. After a hearing that considered the continued exemption of Mennonites from military duty, a commanding officer concluded: "I am granting this exemption, but I think that you are