

Canada and the First World War

2

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Society & Identity

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

Autonomy & World Presence

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

TIMELINE

1914

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

1915

Canadian troops exposed to poisonous gas at the Battle of Ypres

1916

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



CHAPTER FOCUS QUESTION

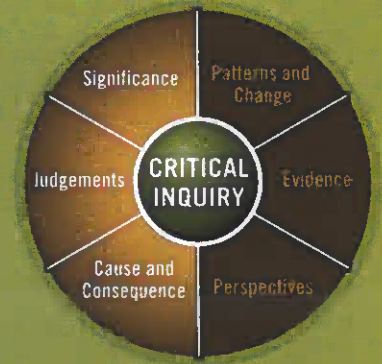
What effect did Canada's participation in the First World War have on Canadian society and its status as a nation?

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

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

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

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



KEY TERMS

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

1917

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

1918

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

KEY TERMS

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

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

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

Causes of the First World War

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

Imperialism and the Age of Empires

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

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

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

Increasing Militarism

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

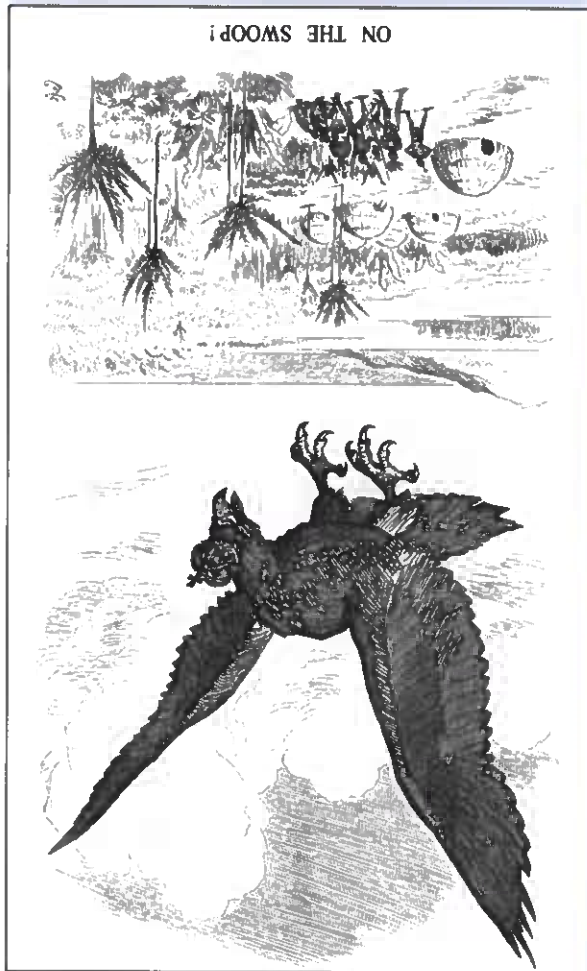


FIGURE 2-1 Germany as an eagle in this 1890 cartoon
Interpreting Political Cartoons What is the message of this cartoon?

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



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

The Role of the Balkans

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

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



FIGURE 2-3 Imperial struggles in the Balkans

KEY TERMS

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

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

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

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

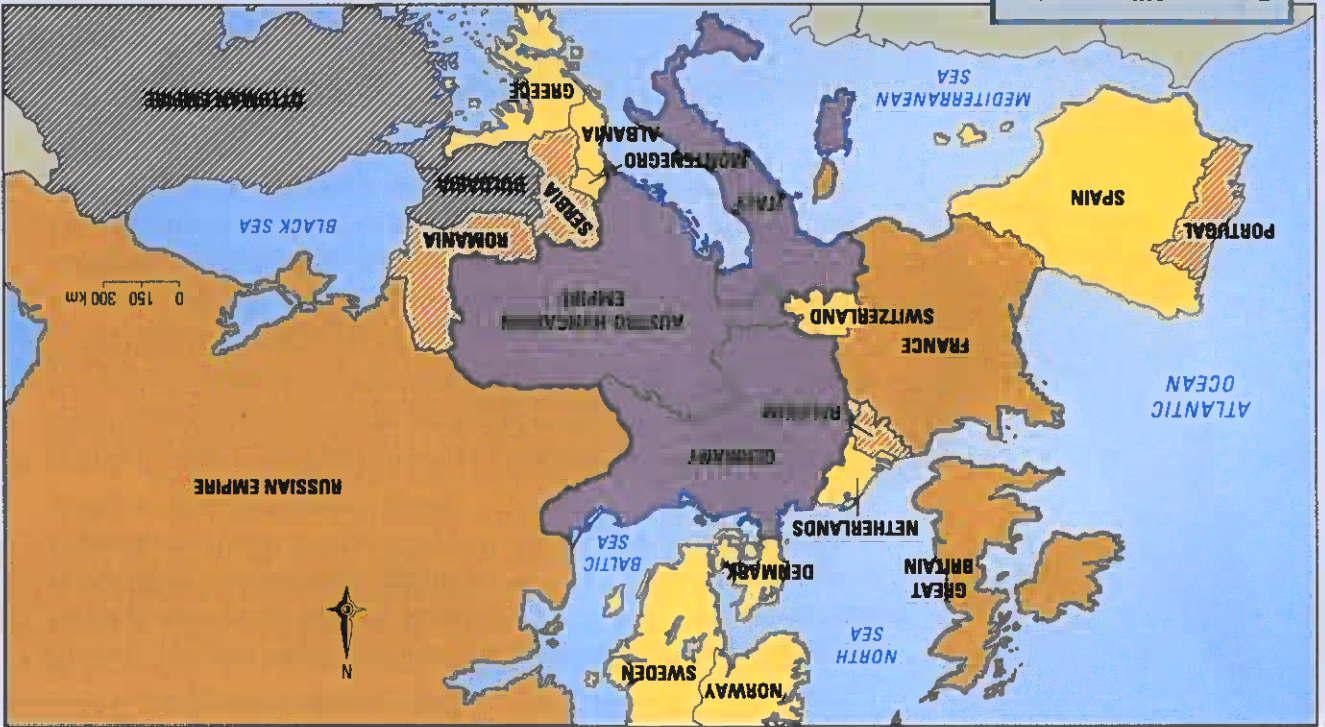
Black Hand a terrorist group of Bosnian Serbs that was determined to free Bosnia from Austria-Hungary

The False Security of Alliances

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

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

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



European Alliances, 1914

FIGURE 2-4 European alliances, 1914

Reading a Map

1. Look at the caption and legend of the map. These tell you the date and purpose of the map. Why are Britain, France, and Russia the same colour?
2. Check the scale and direction of the map. How far is it from the easterly point of Great Britain to the most westerly point of Russia? How might this distance affect Britain's and Russia's abilities to act as effective military allies?
3. Why would Germany feel threatened by the Triple Entente?
4. Compare this map to a map of modern Europe in an atlas. What major differences do you see?