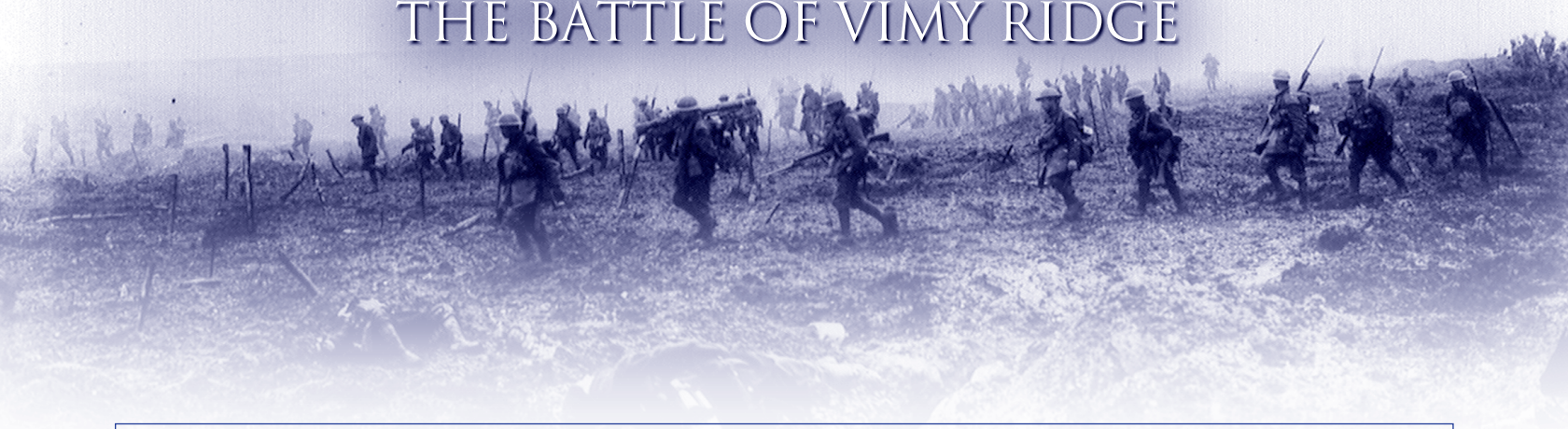
C A N A D A R E M E M B E R S

THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE



INTRODUCTION

The decades since the Battle of Vimy Ridge have slipped by, but the legacy of the Canadians who accomplished so much in that important First World War battle lives on. Some say that Canada came of age as a country on those harsh April days in 1917.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The First World War was the largest conflict the world had ever seen up until that time. It came about due to the political tensions and complex military alliances of the era. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in the summer of 1914 resulted in an international crisis and by August, the fighting had begun. This bloody four-year war would see Britain (and her Empire), France, Russia and the United States lining up against Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire.

CANADA GOES TO WAR

In 1914, Canada's external affairs were governed by the United Kingdom. This meant that once Britain declared war, Canada automatically followed. The First World War opened with great enthusiasm and patriotism on the part of many Canadians, with tens of thousands rushing to join the military in the first months of the conflict so they would not miss the action. They need not have worried as the war would grind on for more than four years, killing as many as ten million combatants in fighting that would be revolutionized by high-explosive shells, powerful machine guns, poison gas, submarines and war planes.

THE WESTERN FRONT

After the initial German advances of the war, the battle on the Western Front quickly turned into a stalemate of trench fighting, with the front line zigzagging for nearly 1,000 kilometres from the coast of Belgium to the border of Switzerland.

Life for soldiers in the trenches was miserable. They were often muddy and cold and had to live in the midst of pests like rats, lice and fleas. In this form of warfare, soldiers faced the enemy across a narrow strip of land between the opposing trenches. This was a harsh "No Man's Land" of mud, barbed wire and shell craters, swept by enemy machine gun fire, and menaced by artillery and snipers. This is what soldiers had to cross when they went "over the top" and launched an attack. The dead and injured who fell in No Man's Land often could not be recovered.

By the spring of 1917, Europe had been at war for more than two-and-a-half years, with neither side being able to make a significant breakthrough. As part of an Allied offensive, a major attack was planned for April in the area of Arras, France. In this attack, the Canadians would be tasked with capturing Vimy Ridge.

PREPARATION FOR BATTLE

Vimy Ridge is located in northern France, about 175 kilometres north of Paris. It is a long, high hill that dominates the surrounding landscape. Germany captured Vimy Ridge early in the war

Canadian soldiers advancing through the enemy barbed wire at Vimy Ridge. Photo: Library and Archives Canada PA-001086

and transformed it into a strong defensive position, with a complex system of tunnels and trenches manned by highly trained soldiers with many machine guns and artillery pieces. Previous Allied assaults on Vimy Ridge in 1914 and 1915 had resulted in hundreds of thousands of casualties but had been largely unsuccessful.

The Canadians moved to the front lines across from Vimy Ridge in the late autumn of 1916. The Battle of Vimy Ridge would be the first time all four divisions of the Canadian Corps fought together as one formation. The planning and preparations for the battle were extensive. The Canadians spent the entire winter strengthening the lines, preparing for the assault on Vimy and training rigorously. Models of the trench systems were built and the soldiers drilled on what they were to do. They also raided German positions to gather intelligence on enemy defences.

Extensive "mining" operations were undertaken in which the Allies dug tunnels beneath the German lines and set large caches of explosives to be detonated when the time for the attack came. Elaborate tunnel systems with train tracks, piped water, lights, and huge underground bunkers to stockpile supplies and arms were also established to aid the Canadians in the battle.

To soften enemy defences in preparation for the attack, the Allies made a massive and prolonged artillery barrage. The heaviest shelling was spread over a week to avoid tipping off the Germans on exactly when the assault would begin. More than a million shells rained down during what the Germans called the "Week of Suffering." The early military aircraft of the day also played a role in the battle by sweeping enemy aircraft and observation balloons from the skies.

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

The Battle of Vimy Ridge began at 5:30 a.m. on Easter Monday, April 9, 1917. The first wave of 15,000-20,000 Canadian soldiers, many heavily laden with equipment, attacked through the wind-driven snow and sleet into the face of deadly machine gun fire.

The Canadians advanced behind a "creeping barrage." This precise line of intense Allied artillery fire moved ahead at a set rate and was timed to the minute. The Canadian infantrymen followed the line of explosions closely. This allowed them to capture German positions in the critical moments after the barrage moved on to the next targets but before the enemy soldiers could emerge from the safety of their underground bunkers.

Canadian battalions in the first waves of the assault suffered great numbers of casualties, but the assault proceeded on schedule. Most of the heavily defended ridge was captured by noon. Hill 145, the main height on the ridge, was taken on the morning of April 10. Two days later, the Canadians took "the Pimple," as the other significant height on the ridge was nicknamed. The Germans were forced to withdraw three kilometres east and the Battle of Vimy Ridge was over. The Allies now commanded the heights overlooking the Douai Plain, which was still occupied by the enemy.

Canadian machine gunners digging in during the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Photo: Library and Archives Canada PA-001017

The Canadian Corps, together with the British Corps to the south, had captured more ground, prisoners and artillery pieces than any previous British offensive of the war. Canadians would act with courage throughout the battle. Four of our soldiers would earn the Victoria Cross, the highest medal for military valour, for separate actions in which they captured enemy machine gun positions. They were: Private William Milne, Lance-Sergeant Ellis Sifton, Captain Thain MacDowell and Private John Pattison.

SACRIFICE

The Battle of Vimy Ridge proved to be a great success, but it only came at a heavy cost. The some 100,000 Canadians who served there suffered more than 10,600 casualties, nearly 3,600 of which were fatal. By the end of the First World War, Canada, a country of less than eight million people, would see more than 650,000 men and women serve in uniform. The conflict took a huge toll with more than 66,000 Canadians losing their lives and over 170,000 being wounded.

LEGACY

At Vimy Ridge, regiments from coast to coast saw action together in a distinctly Canadian triumph, helping create a new and stronger sense of national identity in our country. Canada's military achievements during the war raised our international stature and helped earn us a separate signature on the Treaty of Versailles that formally ended the war.

Today, on land granted to Canada for all time by a grateful France, the Canadian National Vimy Memorial sits atop Hill 145, rising above the now quiet countryside. This great monument is inscribed with the names of 11,285 Canadian soldiers who were listed as "missing, presumed dead" in France during the First World War. It stands as a tribute to all who served our country in the conflict and paid a price to help ensure the peace and freedom we enjoy today.

CANADA REMEMBERS PROGRAM

The Canada Remembers Program of Veterans Affairs Canada encourages all Canadians to learn about the sacrifices and achievements made by those who have served—and continue to serve—during times of war and peace. As well, it invites Canadians to become involved in remembrance activities that will help preserve their legacy for future generations. To learn more about Canada's role in the First World War, please visit the Veterans Affairs Canada website at **veterans.gc.ca** or call **1-866-522-2122** toll free.

This publication is available upon request in alternate formats.

A tank advancing with infantry soldiers during the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Photo: Library and Archives Canada PA-004388

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FIRST WORLD WAR TIMELINE

1914

JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC

1915

JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC

1916

JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG

28 June 1914

Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie are assassinated by a Serbian nationalist, setting in motion a chain of decisions by European governments that leads to war.

4 August 1914

After Britain's ultimatum to Germany to withdraw its army from Belgium expires at midnight on the third, the British government declares war on Germany the next day. As dominions of the British Empire, Canada and Newfoundland are also at war.

18 August 1914

The first internment camp for "enemy aliens," meaning people residing in Canada who were born in enemy countries, opens at Fort Henry, Ontario.

Margaret MacDonald at her office in London (courtesy St. Francis Xavier University Archives/Macdonald Family fonds, MG 7/1)

22 August 1914

The Canadian Parliament passes the *War Measures Act*, which compromises democratic rights in Canada by allowing the government to censor speech and lock up or deport those it deems to be obstructing the war effort.

19–23 August 1914

Canadians, a large proportion of them British-born, show enthusiasm for the war and thousands of men from across the country enlist. Public celebrations are held in many towns and cities.

Crowd in Toronto waiting to join the army, 1 September 1915 (courtesy Corbis/ HU031231).

19 September 1914

Nova Scotian nurse Margaret MacDonald volunteers for overseas service and begins enlisting others to serve in Europe. She becomes the first woman in the British Empire to achieve the rank of major.

14 October 1914

The first contingent of 31,000 Canadian soldiers arrives in Plymouth, England, after a 10-day voyage across the Atlantic. The troops spend the winter months undergoing military training.

November 1915

The Canadian government launches what will later be called the "Victory Loan" program. It allows citizens and companies to purchase government bonds to help finance the war.

10–11 February 1916

A rioting mob of men destroys several German-owned businesses in Calgary. The same day, Calgary City Council decides to fire all employees born in countries at war with Canada.

Canadian soldier with mustard gas burns, France, c 1916–18 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-080027).

22 April 1915

German soldiers release poisonous chlorine gas against the Canadian lines during the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium in spite of some opposition to its use. Soldiers who breathe in the gas have their lungs painfully burned and many choke to death due to a buildup of fluid.

The interior of an Australian advanced dressing station on the Menin Road during the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), 20 September 1917 (courtesy Imperial War Museum/ E(AUS) 715).

1 July 1916

On the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the Newfoundland Regiment is ordered to attack at Beaumont-Hamel, France. Due to tactical errors, most of the men are mowed down by machine-gun fire. At roll call the following day, 68 men had survived.

June 1916

Canadian soldier Percy Graves suffers from "shell shock" caused by the horrors at the front. Due to a lack of understanding of the condition, some victims are subjected to treatments such as electrocution. Today, this mental disorder is known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The following table summarizes the original nations and governments that instigated the conflict in 1914:

ALLIES (TRIPLE ENTENTE)	CENTRAL POWERS
France United Kingdom (including Canada & Newfoundland) Russian Empire	German Empire Austria-Hungary

TIMELINE *(CONTINUED)*

1916

JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC

1917

MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC

1918

MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC

1919

JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP

15 September 1916

As part of the Somme offensive, Canadian soldiers capture the French town of Courcelette, taking many German prisoners. Some soldiers are commanded to take no prisoners and kill captured German soldiers.

5 July 1916

Due to activism from men like J.R.B. Whitney, the military forms the No. 2 Construction Battalion for Black soldiers. This segregated unit provides support service to other Canadian soldiers in Europe throughout the war.

Soldiers from the No. 2 Construction Battalion waiting to load Canadian Corps tramways with ammunition, July 1918 (courtesy Canadian War Museum/19930012-397).

9–12 April 1917

Canadian soldiers, attacking as part of the Canadian Corps, capture the German-held fortress of Vimy Ridge, France. The victory becomes a symbol of the sacrifice and daring of Canadian soldiers.

November 1916

Canadian soldiers near Vimy hear SOS calls from German soldiers trapped underneath the Canadian trenches while digging a tunnel to place an explosive mine. Canadian soldiers work for two days to dig out the trapped Germans, yet never reach them.

26 October 1917

The Canadian Corps attacks at Passchendaele ridge near Ypres, which they capture by mid-November, incurring 15,600 casualties.

29 August 1917

The government passes the *Military Service Act*, which makes male citizens of Canada between the ages of 20 and 45 subject to conscription or mandatory military service.

Francis Pegahmagabow (courtesy Mathers Museum of World Cultures, Indiana University).

6–7 November 1917

Cpl. Francis Pegahmagabow, an Ojibwa person from Wasauksing (Parry Island), wins his first Military Medal for bravery at Passchendaele. Pegahmagabow will become Canada's most decorated Aboriginal war veteran.

September 1917

Activist Helen Jury Armstrong opposes the government's decision to imprison "enemy aliens" and argues for better treatment of the wives and children of interned men.

20 September 1917

The Conservative government of Sir Robert Borden passes the *Wartime Elections Act*, which permits some women to vote in federal elections and removes this same right from many citizens labelled "enemy aliens."

1 April 1918

Anti-conscription rioting in Québec City ends on 1 April when Canadian troops operating under the *War Measures Act* open fire on protestors, killing four.

8 August 1918

The Canadian Army begins an assault on Amiens, France, marking the start of "Canada's Hundred Days," a series of military offensives against the German army in the final months of the war that lead to the armistice on 11 November 1918.

January 1919

The federal government passes the *Soldier Settlement Act*, which provides returning veterans with free land to farm in the Canadian West and $2,500 in interest-free loans. Some of the land is questionably acquired from First Nations reserves, and First Nations veterans are not entitled to veterans' benefits.

11 November 1918

An armistice is signed between France, Britain and Germany, which puts an end to fighting on the Western Front. Spontaneous celebrations take place throughout Canada to mark the war's end.

Armistice Day at Bay and King Streets, Toronto, 1918 (courtesy City of Toronto Archives/Fonds 1244, Item 8910).

January 1919

Canada attends the Paris Peace Conference as part of the British Empire delegation. The resulting Treaty of Versailles launches the League of Nations, which Canada will join as a charter member in 1920.

May–June 1919

Many demobilized servicemen join striking workers in a general strike in Winnipeg demanding union rights, higher wages and better working conditions.

#1 The Halifax Herald – "The Cause of the Catastrophe"

The following excerpt is from a newspaper article published in The Halifax Herald on December 8, 1917, two days after the explosion.

PRIMARY SOURCE
Significance of the Halifax Explosion

Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

The Halifax Herald
December 8, 1917


THE HALIFAX HERALD

YET MORE APPALLING

The Death Roll Still Grows and the Tremendous Properly Loss Is Beginning to be Realized

The Cause of the Catastrophe

... On Thursday morning the French steamer Mont-Blanc was steaming up the harbour with Pilot Frank Mackay in charge and reached a point opposite the northern terminals of the C.G.R., while the Belgian Relief steamer Imo was proceeding out in charge of Pilot William Hayes and they were approaching each other. For some inscrutable [incomprehensible / strange / odd] reason the Belgian steamer violated the rules of navigation and the result was that she collided with the Mont-Blanc. Soon the Frenchman burst into flames. She was loaded with 5000 tons of high explosives. The crew abandoned her and all escaped safely to the Dartmouth shore.

Then came the terrific explosion which destroyed the extreme south-eastern part of Halifax, caused the deaths of more than 2000 persons, and perhaps double that number rendered 5000 people homeless, and involved a property loss of from $12 000 000 to $15 000 000 ... because someone had blundered, or worse.

Behind all as responsible for the disaster, is that arch criminal the Kaiser of Germany who forced our Empire and her allies into the fearful war.

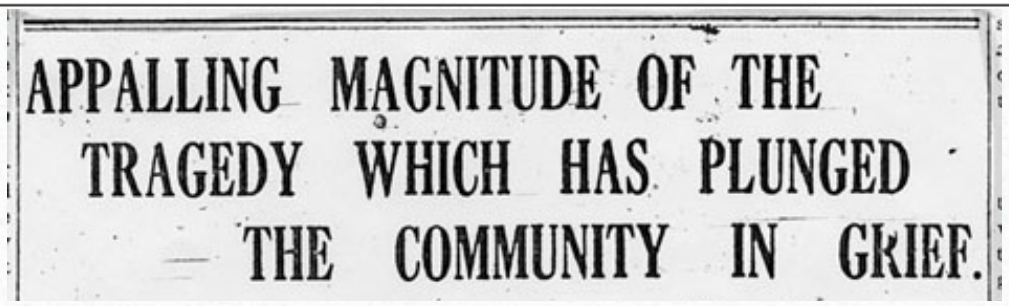
"The cause of the catastrophe," The Halifax Herald, December 8, 1917, http://www.virtualhistorian.ca/large-pages/newspaper/405 (Accessed November 6, 2011).

#2 Morning Chronicle – "The appalling magnitude of the tragedy"

PRIMARY SOURCE
Significance of the Halifax Explosion

Excerpt from a newspaper article published in the Halifax Morning Chronicle on December 8, 1917.

Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.



APPALLING MAGNITUDE OF THE TRAGEDY WHICH HAS PLUNGED THE COMMUNITY IN GRIEF.

The toll of dead of the terrific blast of explosives from the French transport Mont-Blanc, which swept like a death-carrying tornado over the City of Halifax on Thursday morning remains uncounted. The actual number of those who perished will probably never be known. When a large section of the City has been wiped out, whole families have disappeared and the surviving wounded, scattered over a dozen hospitals and countless private house, are still too dazed or too weak to recall what occurred on the dire [terrible] morning, it is extremely difficult to form any accurate estimate of the loss of life. The furious blizzard of yesterday which buried the ruins in snow-drifts, made the task of searching parties almost impossible and the bodies of many victims will probably not be recovered until the debris has been cleared away in months to come. The general opinion continues to be that the list of dead will total from 1,500 to 2,000 and that the injured will number at least 3,000 more.

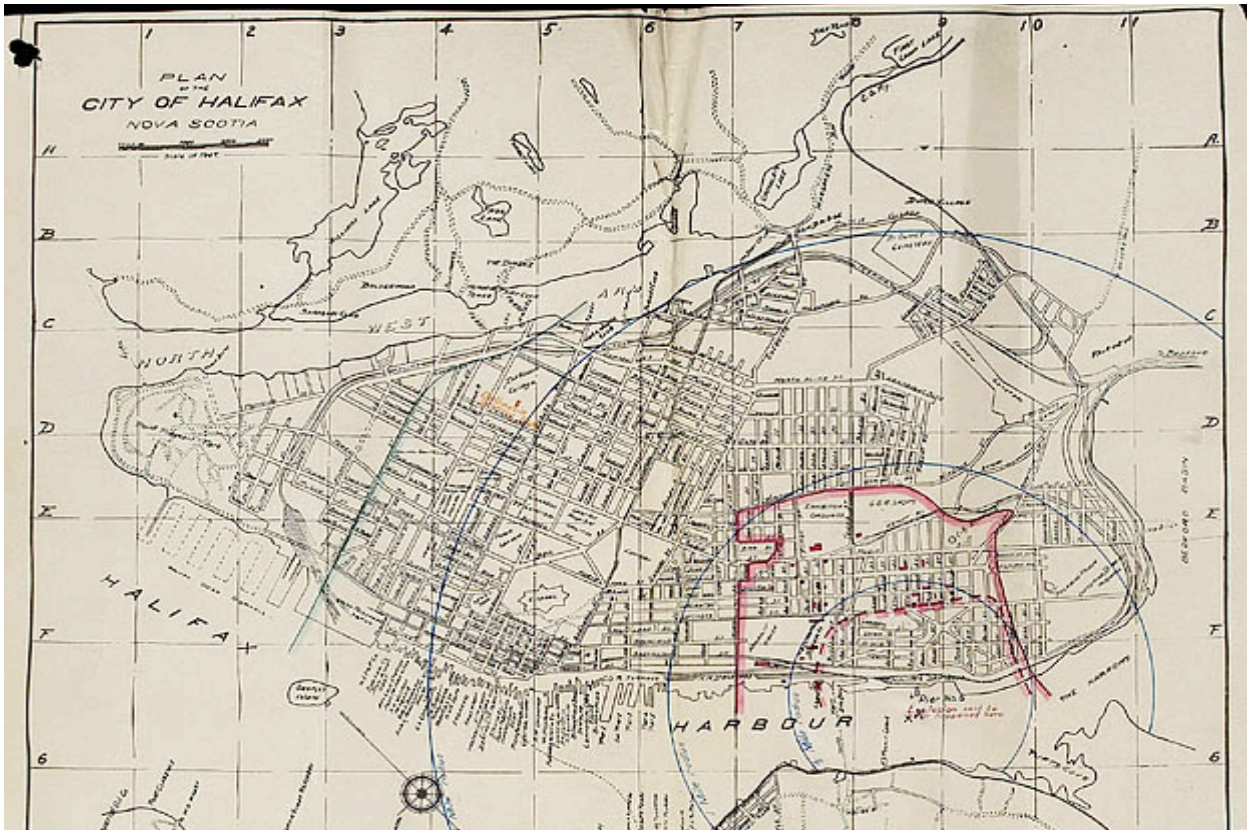
... Stricken Halifax shrouded [covered] in sorrow is being cheered and encouraged by the flood of sympathetic messages and offers of aid which are pouring in from all quarters at home and abroad. The expressions of sympathy from our American kinsmen are wonderful. The Governors of several States, the Secretary of the Navy, numerous cities all over the Union have tendered [offered] assistance, the great State of Massachusetts has sent a fully equipped relief train, which arrived in Halifax early this morning and a second train, dispatched from Washington, will reach the City today bearing the tangible [physical] proof of American sympathy in this day of distress.

Morning Chronicle [microform] "Appalling magnitude of the tragedy which has plunged the community in grief," (December 8, 1917) Public Archives of Nova Scotia - microfilm reels: ill.; 35 mm. - ISSN 1186-5393. - P. 1, 3 - nlc-10643 © Public Domain http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/sos/002028-119.01-e.php?disaster_id_nbr=115&PHPSESSID=95h4t4i0holp6k30nquiu061f6 (Accessed November 11, 2011).

#3 Map of the devastated area

Map published by the Royal Society of Canada details the causes and effects of the Halifax explosion and shows the rings of devastation around the point where the Mont-Blanc exploded.

PRIMARY SOURCE
Significance of the Halifax Explosion



"Map of the Devastation of the Blast," Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, series D-1-a, vol. 5634, file 37-25-1, part 1, November 7, 2011, http://nlc-bnc.ca/firstworldwar/025005-3100.013-e.html (Accessed November 11, 2011). Published with the permission of the Royal Society of Canada.

#4 Photographs of the devastated area

PRIMARY SOURCE
Significance of the Halifax Explosion

Panorama photographs taken by W. G. MacLaughlan on December 6, 1917 showing the damage done to the Halifax harbour by the explosion.

W. G. MacLaughlan, "View of Halifax after disaster, looking south, 6 December 1917," Library and Archives Canada, C-019944, C-019948, C-019953, November 7, 2011, © Public Domain.

#5 Richmond school

Photograph of the remains of the Richmond School on Roome Street in Halifax, taken sometime between December 6, 1917 and January 1918.

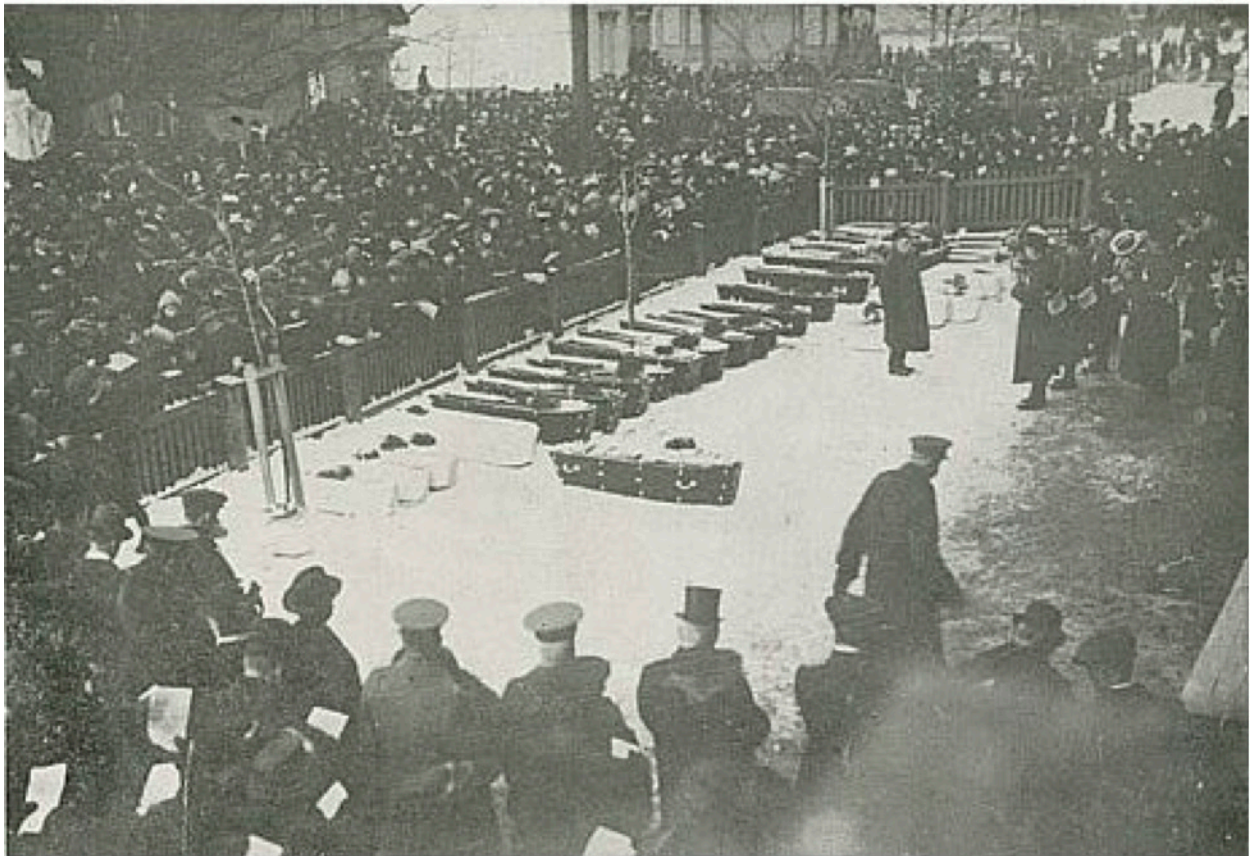
PRIMARY SOURCE
Significance of the Halifax Explosion

"Roome Street School," Nova Scotia Canada: A vision of regeneration, Halifax City Regional Library NSARM accession no. 1983-212 / negative: N-1263, 1917 or 1918, December 2, 2010, http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/explosion/archives.asp?ID=17 (Accessed November 10, 2011). Courtesy of Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, N.S.

#6 Public funeral for the dead

Photograph taken during a public funeral service for the unidentified dead on Monday, December 17, 1917.

PRIMARY SOURCE
Significance of the Halifax Explosion

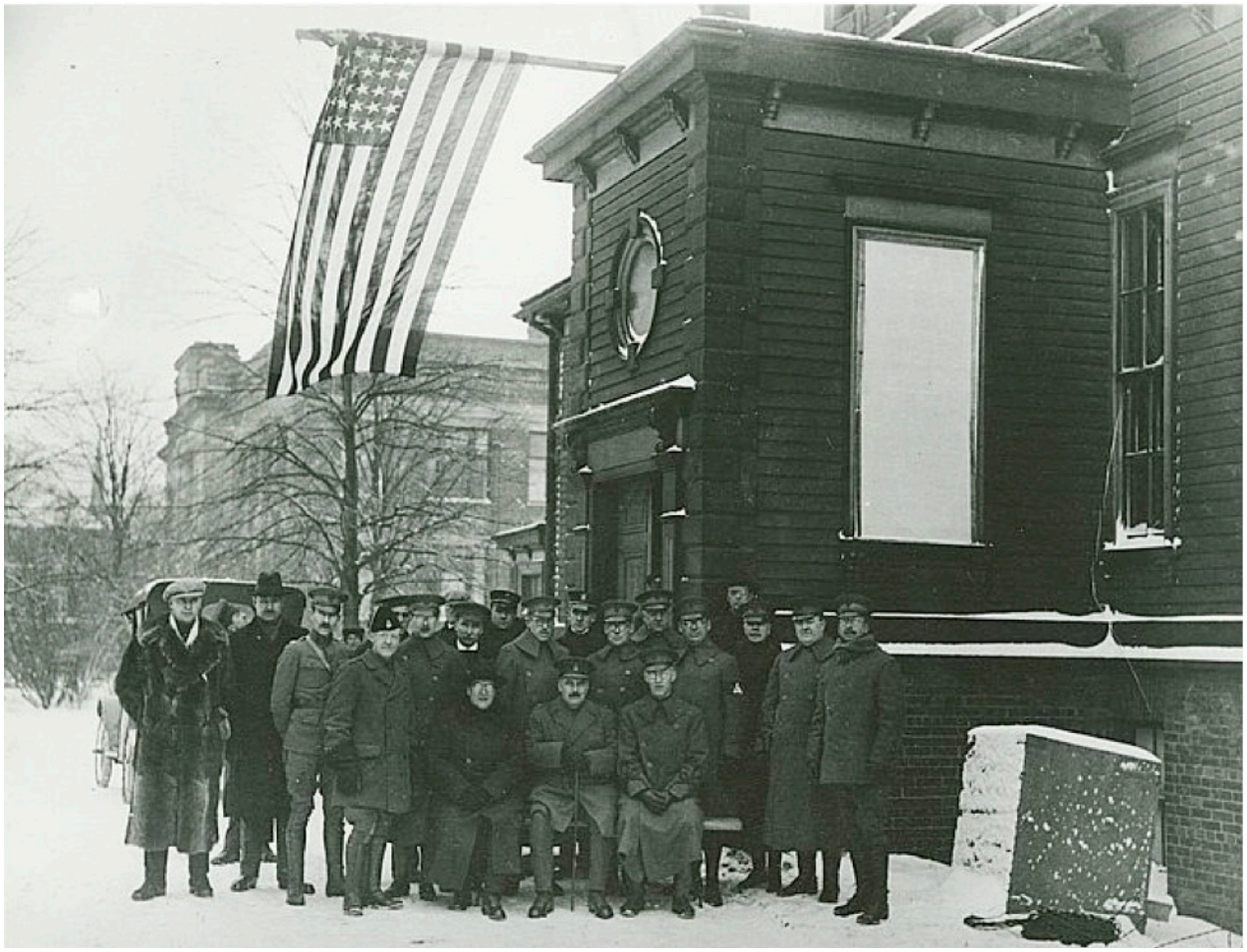


"Public funeral of unidentified dead - Monday, December 17th: services by all denominations," Nova Scotia Canada: A vision of regeneration, NSARM F107 H13 Ex7 no. 5, 1917, December 2, 2010, http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/Explosion/archives.asp?ID=34 (Accessed November 10, 2011). Courtesy of Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, N.S.

#7 Support from the United States of America

Photograph taken in December 1917, of American relief workers standing outside the American relief hospital in Halifax.

PRIMARY SOURCE
Significance of the Halifax Explosion



Nathaniel N. Morse, "American relief workers, probably including members of Harvard University medical team, standing in front of Bellevue, the American relief hospital on Spring Garden Road at the corner of Queen Street, Halifax," Nova Scotia Canada: A vision of regeneration, Nathaniel N. Morse NSARM accession no. 1989-298 / negative: N-7079, 1917, December 2, 2010, http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/Explosion/archives.asp?ID=34 (Accessed November 10, 2011). Courtesy of Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, N.S.

#8 Response to the disaster

Excerpt from the introduction to the book Views of the Halifax catastrophe: Showing effects of explosion December sixth 1917 that was published in 1917 by Royal Print and Litho, a Halifax printing house.

PRIMARY SOURCE
Significance of the Halifax Explosion

Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

Introduction

No sooner had the appalling news flashed across the cables than messages of sympathy and offers of practical aid poured in from all parts of the Dominion [Canada] and the U.S.A. The local Relief Committee was inspired and heartened by the prompt [quick] despatch from Boston of a special relief train, bringing a corps of doctors, surgeons, and Red Cross nurses with full equipment .... Premier Borden arrived in Halifax on Friday morning, and issued the following statement expressive of the keen appreciation which all Canada felt at the magnanimous [generous] assistance of the American people:

"The people of Canada are profoundly grateful for the generous sympathy of the people of the United States in the terrible disaster which has overtaken the City of Halifax, and they most deeply appreciate the splendid aid which has been offered and sent from so many communities of our great kindred nation."

In an incredibly short space of time ... confusion took on the semblance [appearance] of order, and the eager hands of willing citizens were busily engaged under the direction of committees in ministering [providing] to the maimed [wounded] and injured, reverent [deep and solemn respect] burial of the untimely dead, catering for the hungry and providing for the thousands rendered destitute [penniless] and homeless through the sudden stroke of swift catastrophe which has laid the city low. Not yet. At this hour of writing, has Halifax recovered fully from the shattering blow of that fateful Thursday, the sixth of December; but with optimistic fortitude [strength], with courage and with ardor [passion], is already grappling [beginning] with the Herculean task of reconstruction; and thus it is that the gloom of the present is even now radiantly relieved with the gleam of a splendid vision—The Greater Halifax of Tomorrow. Surely here is ample evidence that there is something in man, frail and human as he is, which nevertheless defies and rises above catastrophe.

Royal print & litho, Views of the Halifax catastrophe: Showing effects of explosion, December sixth, 1917 (Halifax, NS: Royal print & lithos, 1917), p. 5, Ontario Council of Univeristy Libraries: Scholars Portal, n.d., http://booksnow1.scholarsportal.info/ebooks/oca5/37/halifaxcatastrop00hali/halifaxcatastrop00hali.pdf (Accessed March 18, 2012).

#9 Rebuilding the city

Poster published in 1919 showing the building of the new hydrostone district in the North End of Halifax.

PRIMARY SOURCE
Significance of the Halifax Explosion

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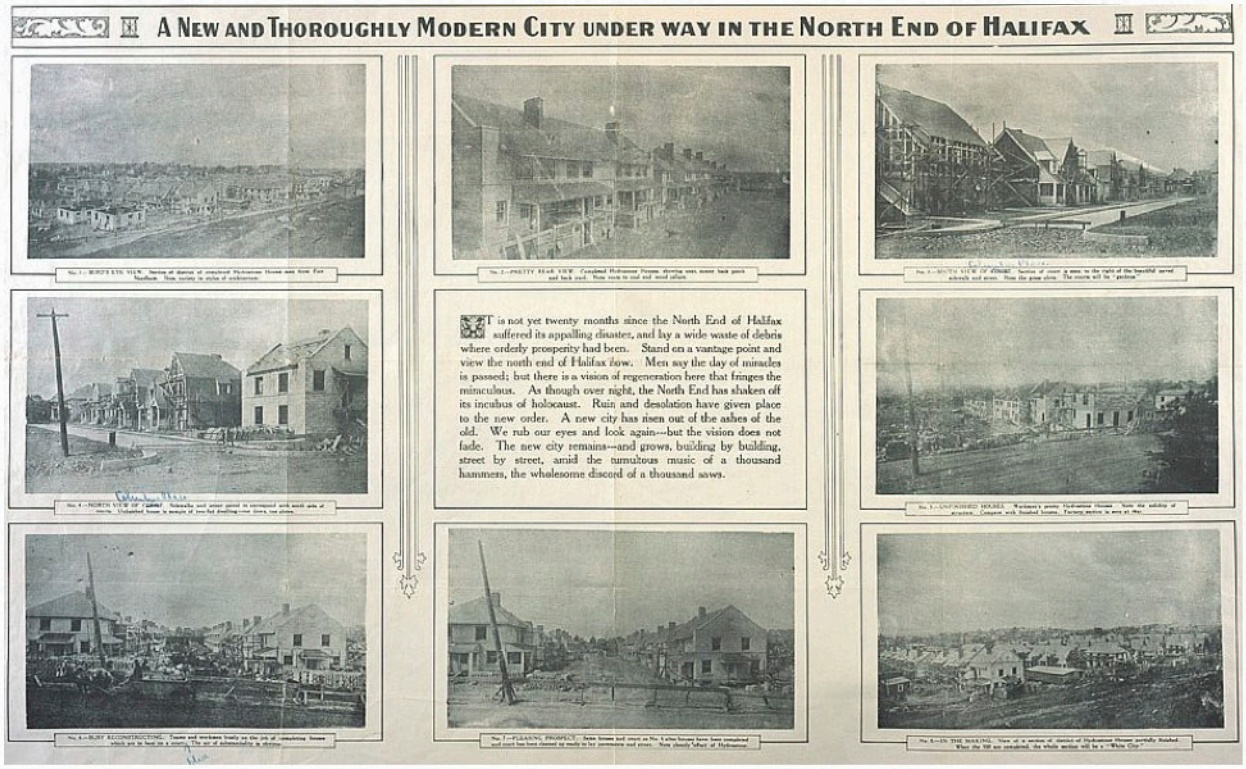


[Centre text] It is not yet twenty months since the North End of Halifax suffered its appalling [horrible] disaster, and lay a wide waste of debris where orderly prosperity had been. Stand on a vantage point and view the north end of Halifax now. Men say the day of miracles is passed; but there is a vision of regeneration [renewal] here that fringes [borders] on the miraculous. As though overnight, the North End has shaken off its incubus [demon] of holocaust. Ruin and desolation have given place to the new order. A new city has risen out of the ashes of the old. We rub our eyes and look again—but the vision does not fade. The new city remains—grows, building by building, street by street, amid the tumultuous [noisy] music of a thousand hammers, the wholesome discord of a thousand saws.

"A new and thoroughly modern city under way in the north end of Halifax," Nova Scotia Canada: A vision of regeneration, Halifax Relief Commission NSARM MG 36 Series R no.1720.4, 1919, December 2, 2010, http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/explosion/archives.asp?ID=71 (Accessed November 10, 2011). Courtesy of Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, N.S.

#10 The legacy of the explosion

Transcript of a speech delivered in the House of Commons by Member of Parliament Scott Armstrong on December 6, 2010.

PRIMARY SOURCE
Significance of the Halifax Explosion

Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

House of Commons Speech
December 6, 2010

Mr. Speaker, 93 years ago today, at 9:04 in the morning, Halifax suffered a great tragedy when it lost nearly 2000 of its men, women, and children and saw thousands more injured due to a tragic Halifax explosion that rocked the city. The collision in The Narrows of Halifax Harbour of the Imo and the Mont-Blanc was the largest man-made non-nuclear explosion in the history of the world.

Neighbourhoods near the explosion were levelled. Halifax was in shock with the destruction, the devastation, the wounded and the dead. Despite an oncoming blizzard, relief efforts from local communities such as Truro, Kentville, Moncton and New Glasgow were sent to Halifax to help. Relief efforts from as far away as Boston arrived in the next days and weeks.

The city of Halifax was shattered that day, but Halifax was not broken. The port city lost many, but those who survived and residents who live there today will never forget this tragedy and will always remember those who sent help during a time of need.

- Member of Parliament Scott Armstrong

"Scott Armstrong on Halifax explosion in the House of Commons on December 6th, 2010," Open Parliament.ca, Statements By Members - Scott Armstrong, December 6th, 2010 / 2:10 p.m. http://openparliament.ca/hansards/2330/82/only/ (Accessed November 11, 2011).

#11 An explosion survivor remembers

Transcript of an interview between historian Janet Kitz and Halifax explosion survivor Don Crowdis, published in 2007 as part of a website dedicated to the Halifax explosion.

PRIMARY SOURCE
Significance of the Halifax Explosion

Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

Interview with Don Crowdis

K. When you were at school, surely, the children in your class even must have been badly affected by the explosion. Like orphans, children with scars and ….

C: Oh sure, but you took it for granted. You see in my growing up the world divided into before the explosion and after explosion, it wasn't that it did, that was the way we spoke. "Oh that musta been a couple'a years before the explosion." And so similarly the crippled or the blind or whatever, they were all just a part of it; and the foundations were a part of things, and the "day goes" were part of things, and the construction workers, and they immediately got categorized and they were the guys who did the digging … and it was just the way we grew up. It was only later on did you realize that it was not normal.

Don Crowdis, "I was there … Don Crowdis recounts family experiences," The Halifax explosion: In the blink of an eye, 2007, http://www.halifaxexplosion.org/iwasthere/d_crowdis.html (Accessed November 11, 2011).

#1 Lessons learned

Excerpt from a website created by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in collaboraration with various research bodies, community groups and individuals.

Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

The world moved on and the Halifax Explosion faded from the public memory outside Nova Scotia … but the influences of December 6 remain, and not just in Halifax.

The tragedy was a spur to many of the international maritime standards and treaties we have today. Marine law in Canada and around the world includes detailed reporting systems, strict regulations on dangerous goods, and professional harbour traffic management.

Halifax's military background served it well in crisis, in a time when civic disaster and emergency plans were nonexistent. The experience informed other cities as Emergency Measures Organizations, or EMO's, evolved throughout North America and beyond.

The lessons learned in a true trial by fire pushed progress in science and various medical areas: emergency medicine, psychology and psychiatry, ophthalmology, anaesthesia, orthopedics, reconstructive surgery and prosthetics.

Other sciences have also grown since—and learned from—the Explosion.

The struggle to come to terms with unimaginable disaster, and the grief that followed, coloured [influenced] Canadian literature, art and culture.

Finally, memorials large and small pay their respects to those who died, and those who survived, on December 6, 1917.

"Lessons learned," The Halifax explosion, 2012, http://www.cbc.ca/halifaxexplosion/he5_connections/he5_connections_lessons_learned.html (Accessed November 11, 2011). Reproduced with permission of CBC Learning.

#2 International significance

Excerpt from a website created by the CBC in collaboration with various research bodies, community groups and individuals.

Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

Newspapers around the world—even in Germany—carried headlines like "Explosion Horror" on their front pages in the days following.
Picture magazines like the Illustrated London News made the most of photography.
Postcard books were popular records of events in 1917, even of such unhappy sights as the north end of Halifax. Those collections are treasured archival material today.
Of course the Halifax papers carried exhaustive coverage of the disaster and its aftermath. The inquiry got blanket coverage, although editorial points of view were said to vary. Newsreels were in their early days. There is less than ten minutes' worth of known moving-picture footage from the aftermath of the Explosion. It is preserved at Nova Scotia's public archives.
The archives and the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic own hundreds of still photographs, some of which appear in the archives' online exhibition, A Vision of Regeneration.

#3 Historical context of explosion

Excerpt from an article written by historian Jay White entitled, "The Collision of the Imo and the Mont Blanc," published in 1994 in Ground Zero: A Reassessment of the 1917 Explosion in Halifax Harbour.

Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

So many natural and human-caused disasters have taken place since the First World War that the enduring fascination with the 1917 Halifax Harbour explosion is rather puzzling…No doubt there is truth to the notion that the Halifax Harbour explosion is promoted to some extent as a "world-class" historical event for the benefit of tourists, who are invited to experience it vicariously through books, exhibits, and memorabilia…

In some ways the 1917 explosion will forever remain larger in myth than it ever was in reality. The death toll in the disaster was horrifying, to be sure, but at the time the terrible casualties of trench warfare had been filling headlines for more than three years. Moreover, as is clearly evident from the record of accidental explosions in the munitions industry during the First World War, hundreds if not thousands of civilian men and women on both sides of the conflict had lost or would soon lose their lives in accidents similar to the Halifax Harbour explosion…

Depending on how one interprets size, there are several possible candidates for the largest non-natural explosion prior to the atom bomb. Halifax remains unchallenged in overall magnitude as long as five criteria are considered together: number of casualties, force of the blast, radius of devastation, quantity of explosive material, and total value of property destroyed.

Jay White, "Exploding myths: The Halifax harbour explosion in historical context" in Alan Ruffman and Colin D. Howell (eds.), Ground zero: A reassessment of the 1917 explosion in Halifax Harbour (Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing, 1994), pp. 264–266.

#4 Halifax explosion remembered today

Excerpt from a book written by Blair Beed entitled 1917 Halifax Explosion and American Response, published in 1999.

Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

Often when telling the story of the explosion to a group, many express surprise that they have never heard of it. For some it is a statistic in knowledge books listing disasters or explosions. Few know it was studied by those who developed the atomic bomb to understand the force of the blast, or that the collision was used as an example to show US navy personnel what not to do with a ship in similar circumstances ….

In Halifax, December 6th is an honoured day of remembrance. Part of that is remembering the Americans who came unhesitatingly, worked tirelessly and gave money and supplies generously.

Since 1971 the Province of Nova Scotia has sent a Christmas tree to Boston as a token of appreciation for help given by the State of Massachusetts ….

Locally the 1917 Halifax explosion will never be forgotten. It is remembered for the more than 2,000 dead. We remember it for the 387 doctors, the 30 members of the Canadian Army Dental Corps and the 760 Nurses who aided the 9,000 seriously wounded …. It is an event that brought out the best out in people who were complete strangers. It should always be remembered as a shining example of those who give aid to others in times of disaster.

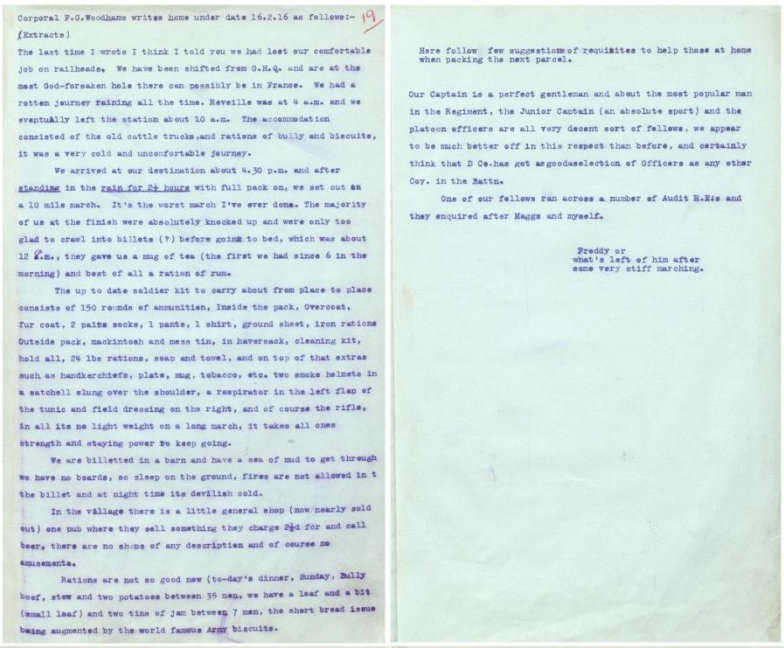
Blair Beed, 1917 Halifax explosion and American response (Halifax, NS: Nimbus, 1999), pp. 132–133.

Letters from the First World War, 1916- 18

Here you will find all the letters and transcripts from this collection that relate to the soldiers' experience of the trenches.

1916- 18, trenches: contents

Military kit: 'no light weight'



Corporal F.G.Woodhams writes home under date 16.2.16 as follows:- 19

(Extracts)

The last time I wrote I think I told you we had left our comfortable job on railheads. We have been shifted from G.H.Q. and are at the most God-forsaken hole there can possibly be in France. We had a rotten journey raining all the time. Reveille was at 4 a.m. and we eventually left the station about 10 a.m. The accommodation consisted of the old cattle trucks and rations of bully and biscuits, it was a very cold and uncomfortable journey.

We arrived at our destination about 4.30 p.m. and after standing in the rain for 2½ hours with full pack on, we set out on a 10 mile march. It's the worst march I've ever done. The majority of us at the finish were absolutely knocked up and were only too glad to crawl into billets (?) before going to bed, which was about 12 p.m., they gave us a mug of tea (the first we had since 6 in the morning) and best of all a ration of rum.

The up to date soldier kit to carry about from place to place consists of 150 rounds of ammunition, Inside the pack, Overcoat, fur coat, 2 pairs socks, 1 pants, 1 shirt, ground sheet, iron rations Outside pack, mackintosh and mess tin, in haversack, cleaning kit, hold all, 24 lbs rations, soap and towel, and on top of that extras such as handkerchiefs, plate, mug, tobacco, etc. two smoke helmets in a satchell slung over the shoulder, a respirator in the left flap of the tunic and field dressing on the right, and of course the rifle. In all its no light weight on a long march, it takes all ones strength and staying power to keep going.

We are billetted in a barn and have a sea of mud to get through we have no boards, so sleep on the ground, fires are not allowed in t the billet and at night time its devilish cold.

In the village there is a little general shop (now nearly sold out) one pub where they sell something they charge 2½d for and call beer, there are no shops of any description and of course no amusements.

Rations are not so good now (to-day's dinner, Sunday, Bully beef, stew and two potatoes between 35 men, we have a loaf and a bit (small loaf) and two tins of jam between 7 men, the short bread issue being augmented by the world famous Army biscuits.

Here follow few suggestions of requisites to help those at home when packing the next parcel.

Our Captain is a perfect gentleman and about the most popular man in the Regiment, the Junior Captain (an absolute sport) and the platoon officers are all very decent sort of fellows, we appear to be much better off in this respect than before, and certainly think that D Co. has got as good a selection of Officers as any other Coy. in the Battn.

One of our fellows ran across a number of Audit H.Qrs and they enquired after Maggs and myself.

Freddy or
what's left of him after
some very stiff marching.

GUARANTEEING EFFICIENCY AND COMFORT: WHAT THE BRITISH SOLDIER BEARS TO THE FIRING-LINE.

IN POCKETS

IN HAVERSACK

IN KNAPSACK

EQUIPMENT

ON PERSON

IN HAVERSACK: IN POCKETS: IN KNAPSACK: ON PERSON: AND EQUIPMENT—THE BURDEN CARRIED BY "TOMMY" WHEN MARCHING TO THE TRENCHES.

Frederick G. Woodhams, 16 February 1916, France. **Regiment:** 13 London Rifles, **Regiment number:** 1383, **Rank**: Private; Lance Corporal; Sergeant, **Died:** Killed in action on 16 August 1917, having been struck by shrapnel; prior to this, he had been wounded twice.

These are typed extracts of a letter that Frederick Woodhams had written to his family (RAIL 253/516). Below that is an article from the Illustrated London News, 1915 (ZPER 34/146s9).

Transcript

The last time I wrote I think I told you we had lost our comfortable job on railheads. We have been shifted from General Headquarters and are at the most godforsaken hole there can possibly be in France. We had a rotten journey raining all the time. Reveille* was at 4am and we eventually left the station about 10am. The accommodation consisted of the old cattle trucks, and rations of bully and biscuits. It was a very cold and uncomfortable journey.

We arrived at our destination about 4.30pm and after standing in the rain for 2½ hours with full pack on, we set out on a ten mile march. It's the worst march I've ever done. The majority of us at the finish were absolutely knocked up and were only too glad to crawl into the billets before going to bed, which was about 12pm. They gave us a mug of tea (the first we had since six in the morning) and best of all a ration of rum.

The up to date soldier kit to carry about from place to place consists of 150 rounds of ammunition, inside the pack; overcoat, fur coat, two pairs socks, one pants, one shirt, ground sheet, iron rations [emergency food supply]. Outside pack; Mackintosh and mess tin, in haversack; cleaning kit, hold all, 24lbs rations, soap and towel, and on top of that extras such as handkerchiefs, plate, mug, tobacco, etc, two smoke helmets* in a satchel slung over the shoulder, a respirator in the left flap of a tunic and field dressing on the right, and of course the rifle, in all it's no light weight on a long march, it takes all one's strength and staying power to keep going.

We are billeted in a barn and have a sea of mud to get through. We have no boards, so sleep on the ground, fires are not allowed in the billet and at night time it's devilish cold.

In the village there is a little general shop (now nearly sold out), one pub where they sell something they charge 2½d for and call beer, there are no shops of any description and of course no amusements.

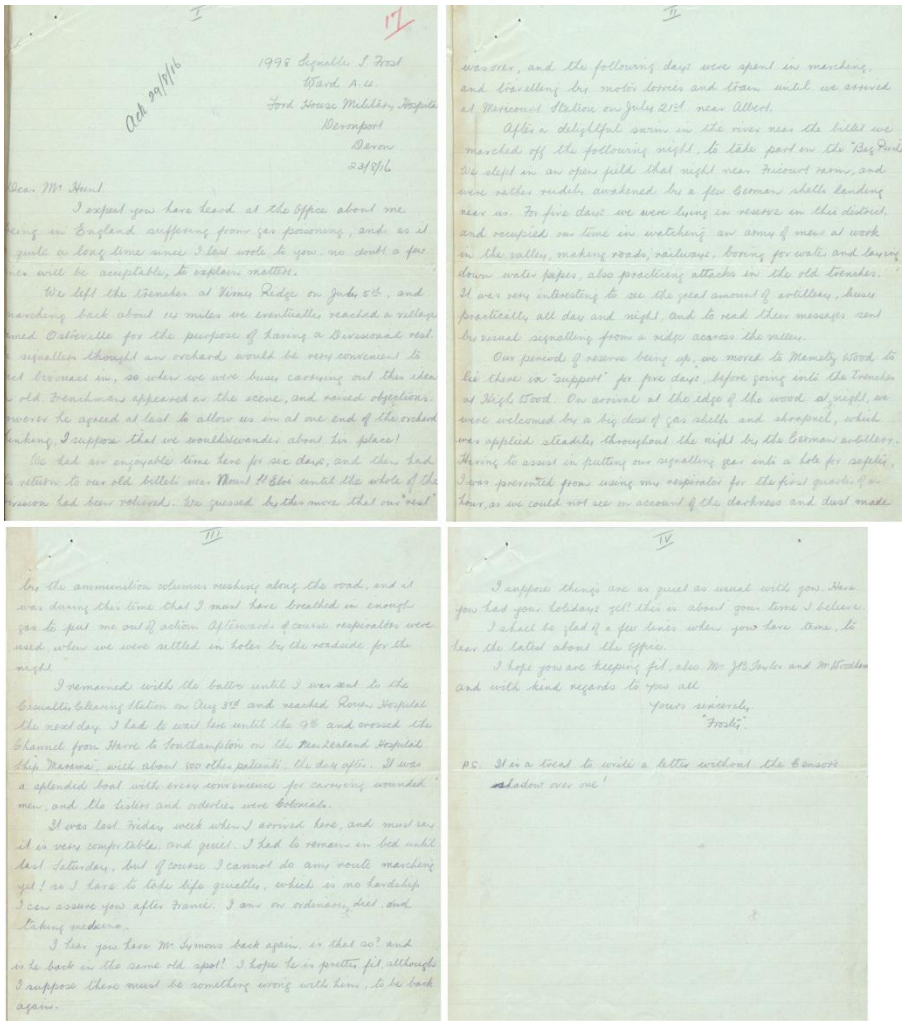
Rations are not so good now (today's dinner, Sunday, bully beef, stew and two potatoes between 35 men. We have a loaf and a bit (small loaf) and two tins of jam between seven men, the short bread issue being augmented by the world famous army biscuits.

Our captain is a perfect gentleman and about the most popular man in the regiment, the junior captain (an absolute sport) and the platoon officers are all very decent sort of fellows. We appear to be much better off in this respect than before, and certainly think that D. Co. has got as good a selection of officers as any other company in the battalion. One of our fellows ran across a number of Audit R.E.s and they enquired after Maggs and myself.

Freddy or

What's left of him after some very stiff marching.

Trenches: 'a big dose of gas shells'



Richard Charles Stanley Frost, 23 August 1916, Devonport, England. **Born:** 30 January 1888, **Regiment:** 8th

Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders; Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, **Regiment number:** 1998; 300470, **Rank:** Private; Second Lieutenant, **Died:** 1962

Transcript

Dear Mr Hunt,

I expect you have heard at the office about me being in England suffering from gas poisoning, and as it is quite a long time since I last wrote to you, no doubt a few lines will be acceptable, to explain matters.

We left the trenches at Vimy Ridge on July 5th, and marching back about 14 miles we eventually reached a village named Ostreville for the purpose of having a divisional rest. The signallers thought an orchard would be very convenient to erect bivouacs in, so when we were busy carrying out this idea an old Frenchman appeared at the scene, and raised objections. However he agreed at last to allow us in at one end of the orchard, thinking, I suppose, that we would wander about his place! We had an enjoyable time here for six days, and then had to return to our old billets near Mount St. Eloi until the whole of the division had retired. We guessed by this move that our 'rest' was over, and the following days were spent in marching, and travelling by motor lorries and train until we arrived at Mericourt Station on July 21st near Albert.

After a delightful swim in the river near the billet we marched off the following night, to take part in the 'big push.' We slept in an open field that night near Fricourt farm, and were rather rudely awakened by a few German shells landing near us.

For five days we were lying in reserve in this district, and occupied our time in watching an army of men at work in the valley, making roads, railways, boring for water and laying down water pipes, also practicing attacks in the old trenches. It was very interesting to see the great amount of artillery, busy practically all day and night, and to read their messages sent by visual signalling [often using lights] from a ridge across the valley.

Our period in reserve being up, we moved to Mametz Wood to lie there in support for five days, before going into the trenches at High Wood. On arrival at the edge of the wood at night, we were welcomed by a big dose of gas shells and shrapnel, which was applied steadily throughout the night by the German artillery. Having to assist in putting our signalling gear into a hole for safety, I was prevented from using my respirator for the first quarter of an hour, as we could not see on account of the darkness and dust made by the ammunition columns rushing along the road, and it was during this time that I must have breathed in enough gas

to put me out of action. Afterwards of course respirators were used, when we were settled in holes by the roadside for the night.

I remained with the battalion until I was sent to the casualty clearing station on August 3rd and reached Rouen hospital the next day. I had to wait until the 9th and crossed the channel from Havre to Southampton on the New Zealand ship *Marama*, with about 800 other patients, the day after. It was a splendid boat with every convenience for carrying wounded men, and the sisters and orderlies were colonials.

It was last Friday week when I arrived here, and must say it is very comfortable and quiet. I had to remain in bed until last Saturday, but of course I cannot do any route marching yet! So I have to take life quietly, which is no hardship I can assure you after France. I am on an ordinary diet, and taking medicine.

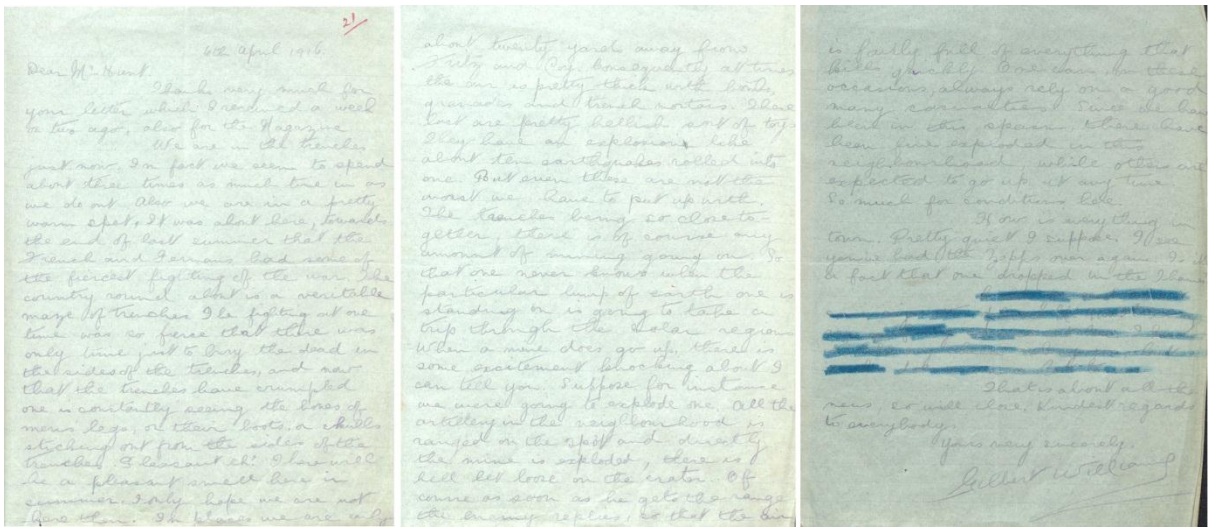
I hear you have Mr Symons back again, is that so? And is he back in the same old spot? I hope he is pretty fit, although I suppose there must be something wrong with him, to be back again.

I suppose things are as quiet as usual with you. Have you had your holidays yet? This is about your time I believe. I shall be glad of a few lines when you have time, to hear the latest about the office. I hope you are keeping fit, also Mr J.B. Taylor and Mr Woodhams and with kind regards to you all. Yours sincerely,

Frosty.

P.S. It is a treat to write a letter without the censor's shadow over one!

Trenches: 'a veritable maze'



Gilbert Williams, 6 April 1916, France. **Born:** 18 April 1894, **Regiment:** 1/6 Seaforth Highlanders, **Regiment number:** 2175, **Rank:** Private, **Died:** 1967. **Note:** Williams also fought in Second World War returned from war on 15 November 1948

Transcript

Dear Mr Hunt,

Thanks very much for your letter which I received a week or two ago, also for the magazine.

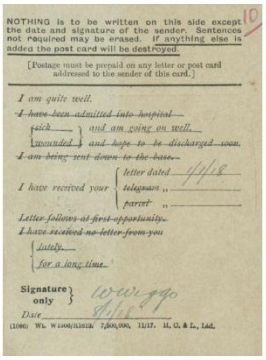
We are in the trenches just now. In fact we seem to spend about three times as much time in as we do out. Also we are in a pretty warm spot, it was about here, towards the end of last summer that the French and German had some of the fiercest fighting of the war. The country around about is a veritable maze of trenches. The fighting at one time was so fierce that there was only time just to bury the dead in the sides of the trenches, and now that the trenches have crumpled one is constantly seeing the bones of men's legs or their boots, or skulls sticking out from the sides of the trenches, pleasant, eh? There will be a pleasant smell here in the summer. I only hope we are not here then. In places we are only about twenty yards away from Fritz and company. Consequently all times the air is pretty thick with bombs, grenades and trench mortars. These last are pretty hellish sort of toys. They have an explosion like

about ten earthquakes rolled into one. But even these are not the worst we have to put up with. The trenches being so close together there is of course any amount of mining going on. So one never knows when the particular lump of earth one is standing on is going to take a trip through the solar regions. When a mine does go up, there is some excitement knocking about I can tell you. Suppose for instance we were going to explode one, all the artillery in the neighbourhood is ranged on the spot and directly the mine is exploded, there is hell let loose on the crater. Of course as soon as he gets the range the enemy replies, so that the air is fairly full of everything that kills quickly. One can on these occasions always rely on a good many casualties. Since we have been in this spasm there have been five exploded in this neighbourhood, while others are expected to go up at any time. So much for conditions here.

How is everything in town? Pretty quiet I suppose. I see you've had the zepps (Zeppelins) over again? Is it a fact that one dropped in the Thames? (Lines censored.) That is about all the news, so will close, kindest regards to everybody. Yours very sincerely,

Gilbert Williams.

Trenches: 'Fritz was bombing us'


NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

I am quite well.
~~I have been admitted into hospital~~
~~{sick / wounded} and am going on well.~~
~~I am being sent down to the base.~~
I have received your {letter dated 4/12/17 / telegram / parcert}
~~Letter follows at first opportunity.~~
~~I have received no letter from you~~
~~{lately / for a long time}~~

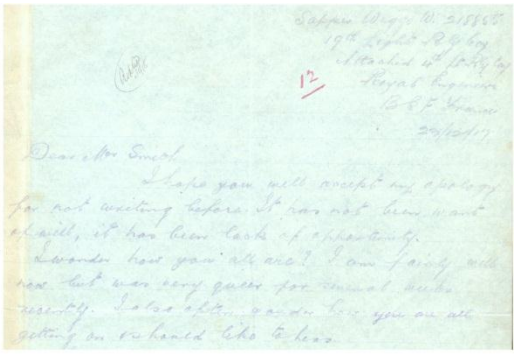
Signature only W Wiggs
Date 8/1/18


POST CARD.

The address only to be written on this side. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

Mr J R Smith
Audit Office
St Westerns Rly
Paddington
London W

[Crown Copyright Reserved.]



William Charles Frederick Wiggs, letter sent 23 December 1917, field card sent 8 January 1918, France. **Born:** 2 February 1881, **Regiment:** Royal Engineers, Railway Troop, **Regiment number:** 218855, **Rank:** 2nd Corporal, **Died:** Oct-Dec 1971

Transcript

Dear Mr Smith,

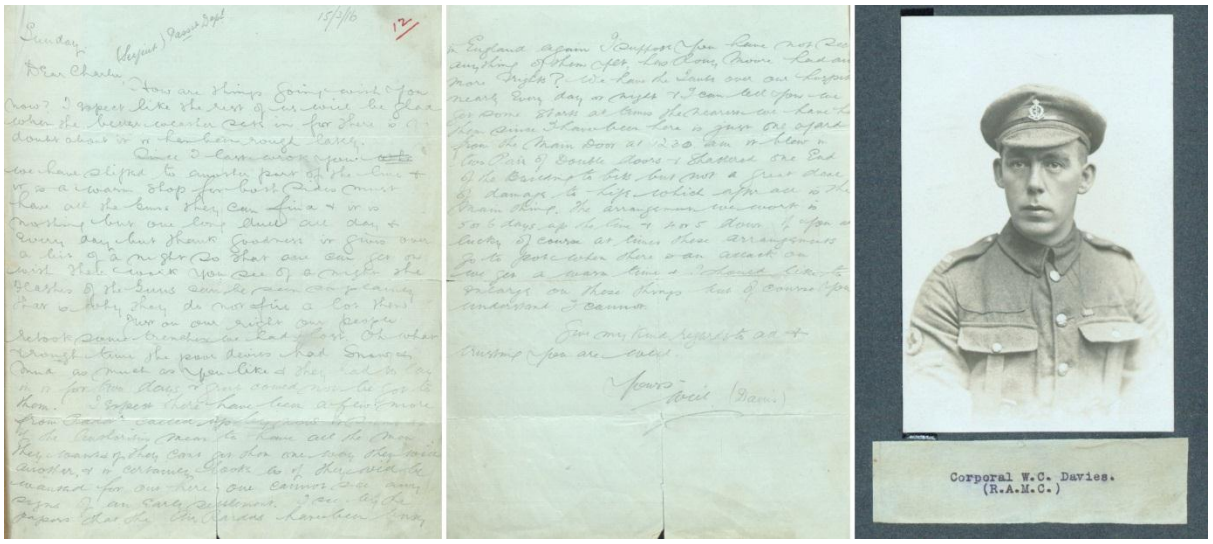
I hope you will accept my apology for not writing before. It has not been want of will it has been lack of opportunity. I wonder how you all are. I am fairly well now but was very queer for several weeks recently. I also often wonder how you are all getting on and should like to hear.

A matter of about five minutes ago Fritz was bombing us, and I have just got up off the ground where I was laying for about twenty minutes. One fellow has been hit, but not severely by shrapnel. This is his second visit this evening.

It will soon be twelve months since I left you. It seems a very long time ago. I am afraid I have very little I may tell you, so will conclude by asking you to accept my best wishes for the New year and desiring that you will remember me kindly to any enquiring friends. Believe me, dear Mr Smith, sincerely yours,

W. Wiggs

Trenches: 'it is a warm shop'



William Charles Davis, 15 March 1916, France. **Born:** 12 November 1884, **Joined GWR:** 12 January 1900, **Regiment:** Royal Army Medical Corps, **Regiment number:** 31223, **Rank:** Lance Corporal; Sergeant, **Retired:** 1944

Transcript

Sunday

Dear Charlie,

How are things going with you now? I expect like the rest of us will be glad when the better weather sets in for there is no doubt about it, it has been rough lately.

Since I last wrote to you we have shifted to another part of the line and it is a warm shop, for both sides must have all guns they can find and it is nothing but one long duel all day and every day but thank goodness it gives over a bit a night so that one can get on with their work. You see of a night the flashes of the guns can be seen so plainly that is why they do not fire a lot then.

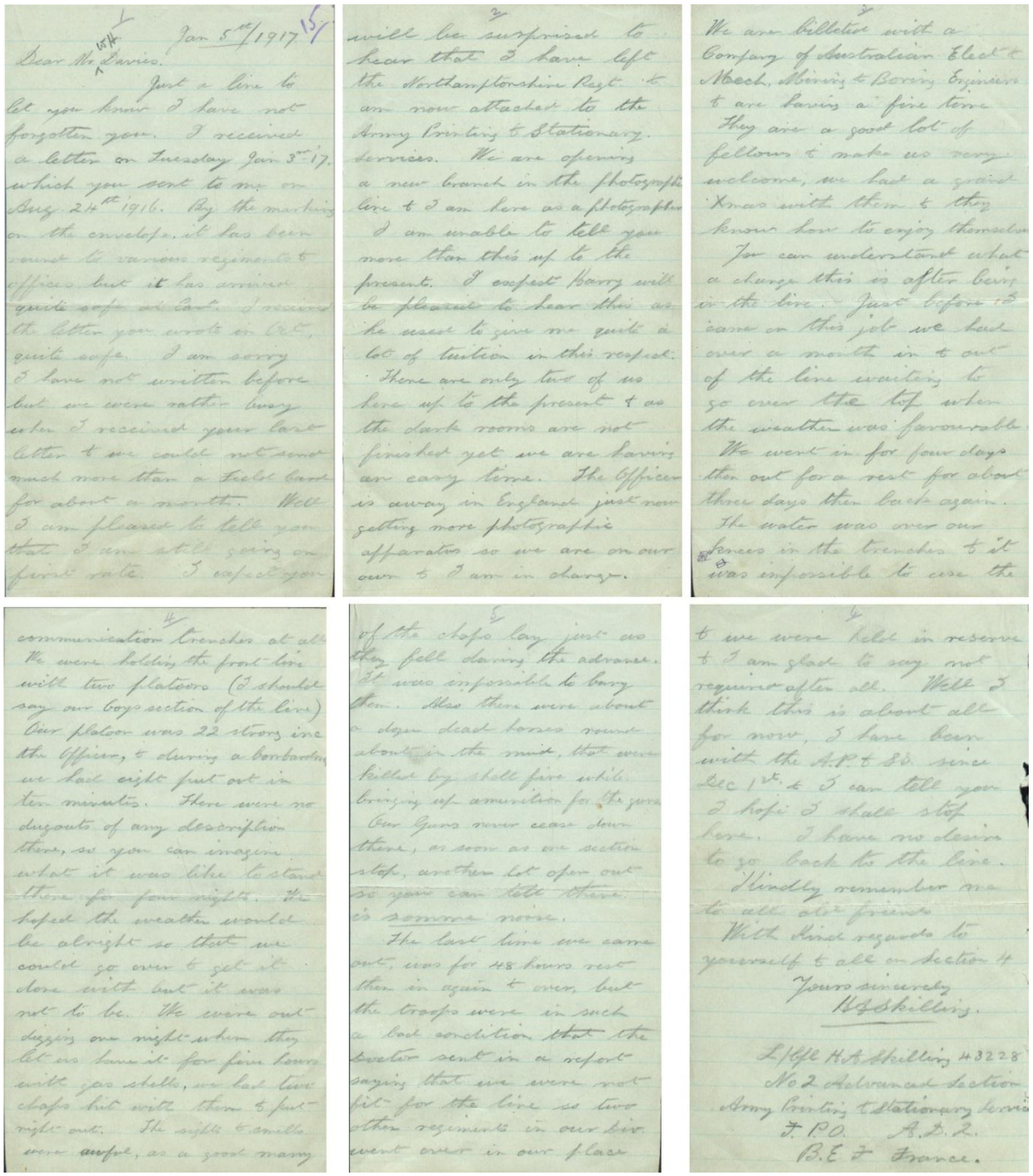
Just on our right our people retook some trenches we had lost, oh what a rough time the poor devils had, snow and mud as much as you like and they had to lay in it for two days and grub could not be got to them. I

expect there have been a few more from Paddington called up by now, it seems if the authorities mean to have all the men they want and if they can't get them one way they will another, and it certainly looks as if they will be wanted for out here. One cannot see any signs of an early settlement. I see by the papers that the air raids have been busy in England again. I suppose you have not seen anything of them yet, has Rory Moore had any more frights? We have the taubes [German aircraft] over our hospital nearly every day or night and I can tell you we got some starts at times. The nearest we have to them since I have been here is just one yard from the main door, at 12.30 it blew in two pairs of double doors and shattered on end of the building to bits but not a great deal of damage to life which after all is the main thing. The arrangements we in work is five or six days up the line and four or five down if you are lucky. Of course at times these arrangements go to pot when there is an attack and we get a warm time and I should like to enlarge on these things but of course you understand I cannot.

Give my kind regards to all and trusting you are well.

Yours Will

Trenches: 'there is Somme noise'



Hugh Andrew Skilling, 5 January 1917, France. **Born:** 17 April 1891, **Regiment:** 3 Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment; 7 London Brigade Field Artillery, **Regiment number:** 43228, **Rank:** Lance Corporal, **Died:** 1970

Transcript

Dear Mr W.H. Davies,

Just a line to let you know I have not forgotten you. I received a letter on Tuesday 3rd of January 1917 which you sent to me on August 24th 1916. By the marking on the envelope it has been round to various regiments and officers, but it has arrived quite safe at last. I received the letter you wrote in October quite safe. I am sorry I have not written before but we were rather busy when I received your last letter and we could not send more than a field card for about a month. Well I am pleased to tell you that I am still going on first rate. I expect you will be surprised to hear that I have left the Northamptonshire Regiment and am now attached to the Army Printing and Stationary Services. We are opening a new branch in the photography line and I am here as a photographer.

I am unable to tell you more than this up to the present. I expect Harry will be pleased to hear this as he used to give me quite a lot of tuition in this respect.

There are only two of us here up to the present and as the dark rooms are not finished yet we are having an easy time. The Officer is away in England just now getting some more photographic apparatus so we are on our own and I am in charge.

We are billeted with a company of Australian electricians, mechanics, mining and boring engineers and are having a fine time. There are a good lot of fellows and make us very welcome. We had a grand Xmas with them and they know how to enjoy themselves. You can understand what a change this is after being in the line. Just before I came on this job we had over a month in and out of the line waiting to go over the top when the weather was favourable.

We went in for four days then out for a rest for about three days then back again. The water was over our knees in the trenches and it was impossible to use the communication trenches at all. We were holding the front line with two platoons (I should say our boys' section of the line). Our platoon was twenty two strong including the Officer, and during the bombardment we had eight put out in ten minutes. There were no dugouts of any description there, so you can imagine what it was like to

stand there for four nights. We hoped the weather would be alright so that we could go over and get it done with but it was not to be. We were out digging one night when they let us have it for five hours with gas shells, we had two chaps hit with them and put right out.

The sights and smells were awful, as a good many of the chaps lay just as they fell during the advance. It was impossible to bury them. Also there were about a dozen dead horses round about in the mud that were killed by shell fire while bringing up ammunition for the guns. Our guns never cease down there, as soon as one section stop, another lot open out so you can tell there is Somme noise.

The last time we came out, was for forty eight hours' rest then in again and over, but the troops were in such a bad condition that the doctor sent in a report saying we were not fit for the line so two other regiments in our division went over in our place.

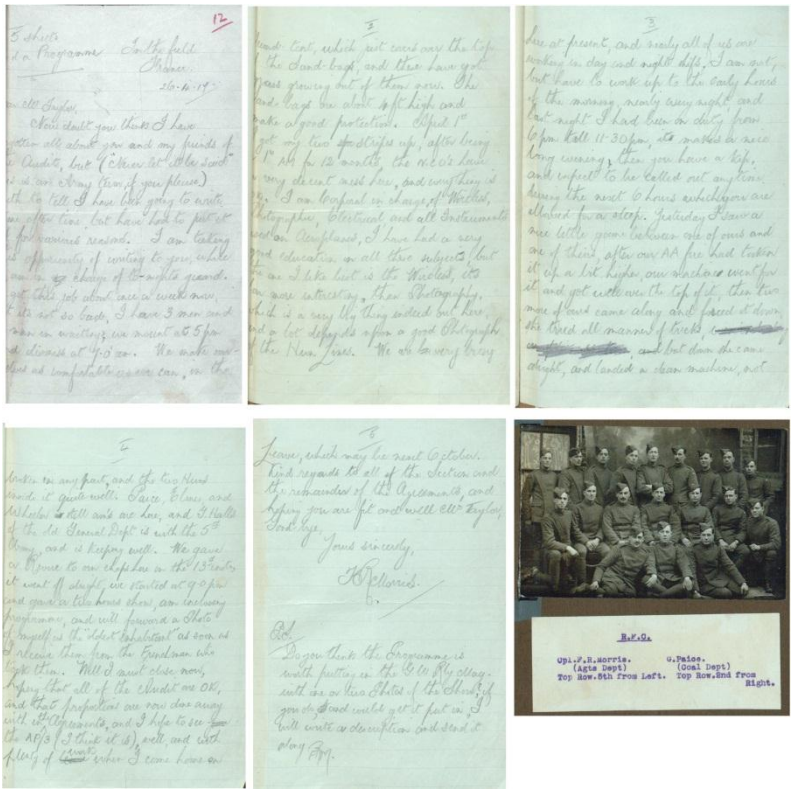
We were held in reserve and I am glad to say not required after all. Well I think this is about all, for now, I have been with the A.P. & S.S. since December 1st and I can tell you, I hope I shall stop here. I have no desire to go back to the line. Kindly remember me to all old friends. With kind regards to yourself and all on Section 4.

Yours sincerely, H.A. Skilling

No. 2 Section Advanced Section

Army Printing & Stationary Service…

Trenches: 'anti-aircraft fire'



Frederick Ronald Morris, 26 April 1917, 'in the field', France. **Born:** 1 April 1893, **Regiment:** Royal Flying Corps, **Regiment number:** 16922, **Rank:** 1st class Air Mechanic, **Returned to office:** 10 March 1919, **Retired:** Resigned on 25 March 1925.

Transcript

Dear Mr Taylor,

No doubt you think that I have forgotten all about you and my friends of the Audit, but never let it be said (this is an army term, if you please.) Truth to tell I have been going to write time after time, but have had to put it off for various reasons. I am taking this opportunity of writing to you, while I am in charge of tonight's guard. I get this job about once a week now, it's not so bad, I have three men and a man in waiting; we mount at 5pm and dismiss at 7am. We make ourselves as comfortable as we can, in the guard tent, which just covers over the top of the sand bags, and these have got grass growing out of them now. The sand bags

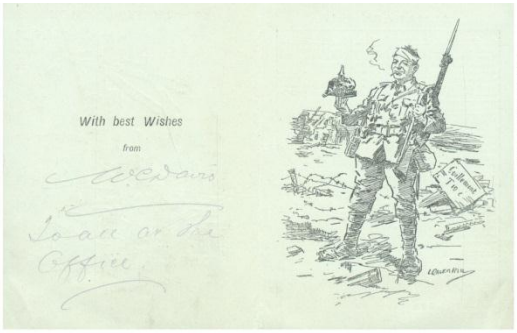
are about 4ft high and make a good protection. April 1st I got my two stripes up, after being a 1st Air Mechanic for 12 months, the Non-Commissioned Officers have a very decent mess here, and everything is ok. I am corporal in charge of wireless, photographic, electrical and all instruments used on aeroplanes, I have had a very good education on all those subjects, but the one I like best is the wireless, it's far more interesting than photography, which is a very big thing indeed out here, and a lot depends upon a good photograph of the Hun lines…

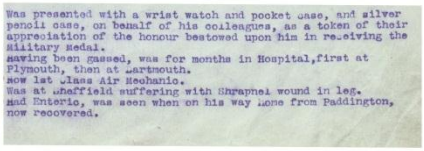
Yesterday I saw a nice little game between one of ours and one of theirs, after our anti-aircraft fire had taken it up a bit higher, our machine went for it and got well over the top of it, then two more of ours came along and forced it down, she tried all manner of tricks, but down she came alright, and landed a clean machine, not broken in any part, and the two Huns inside it quite well.

We gave a revue (theatrical show) to our chaps here on the 13th, it went off alright, we started at 9pm and gave a two hours show, am enclosing programme, and will forward a photo of myself as the 'oldest inhabitant' as soon as I receive them from the Frenchman who took them…Kind regards to all of the section and the remainder of the agreements, and hoping you are fit and well. Good bye. Yours sincerely,

F.R. Morris

Trenches: 'Military Medal'




Was presented with a wrist watch and pocket case, and silver pencil case, on behalf of his colleagues, as a token of their appreciation of the honour bestowed upon him in receiving the Military Medal.
Having been gassed, was for months in Hospital,first at Plymouth, then at Portsmouth.
Now 1st Class Air Mechanic.
Was at Sheffield suffering with Shrapnel wound in leg.
And Enteric, was seen when on his way Home from Paddington, now recovered.

William Charles Davis, January 1917. **Born:** 12 November 1884, **Regiment:** Royal Army Medical Corps, **Regiment number:** 31223, **Rank:** Lance Corporal; Sergeant, **Returned to office:** 10 February 1919 **Retired:** 12 November 1944

William Davis sent the card to E.H. Serjent who worked in the Great Western Railway Audit office at Paddington. Davis was also mentioned in the office newsletter for March 1917 for his bravery on the battlefront (RAIL 253/516). Read a letter from William Davis and see his photograph.

Transcript

Christmas card:

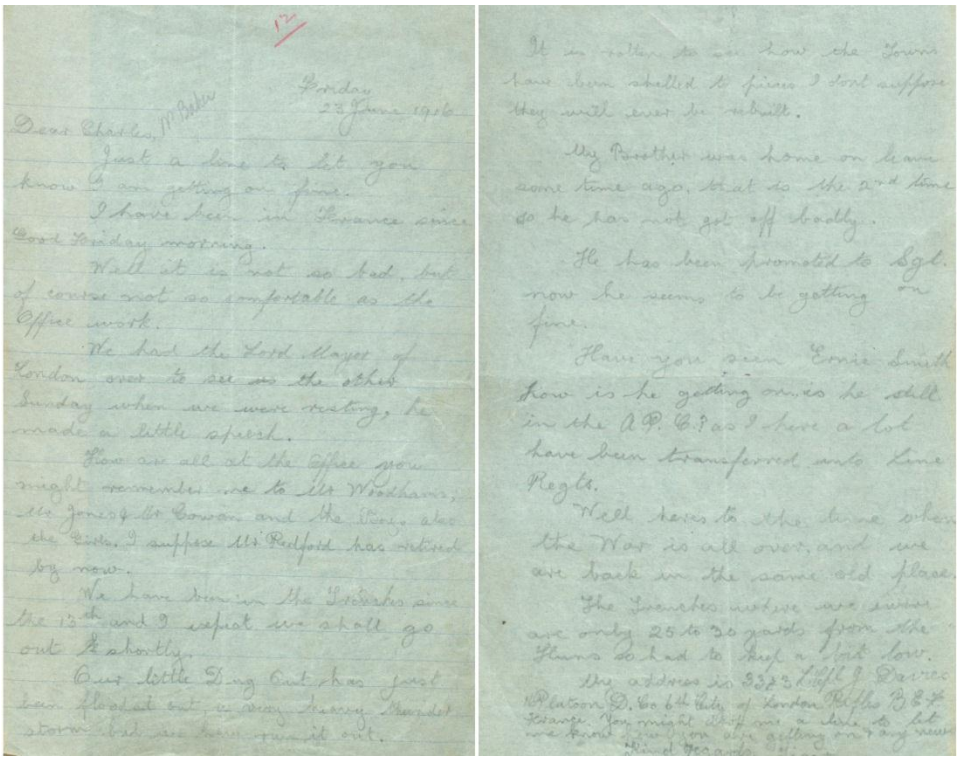
XXa "LIGHT" DIVISION, A few days' rest in billets, January 1917.

With best wishes from W.C. Davis to all at the office.

Newsletter (extract):

…. (Davis) was presented with a wrist watch and pocket case, and silver pencil case on behalf of his colleagues as a token of their appreciation of the honour bestowed upon in receiving the Military Medal.

Trenches: 'towns shelled to pieces'



James Davies, 23 June 1916, France. **Regiment:** 6 City of London Rifles, **Regiment number:** 3343, **Rank:** Lance Corporal

Transcript

Dear Charles,

Just a line to let you know I am getting on fine. I have been in France since Good Friday morning. Well it is not so bad, but of course not so comfortable as the office work.

We had the Lord Mayor of London over to see us the other Sunday when we were resting, he made a little speech.

How are all at the office? You might remember me to Mr Woodhams, Mr Jones and Mr Cowan and the boys also the girls. I suppose Mr Redford has retired by now.

We have been in the trenches since the 13th and I expect we shall go out shortly. Our little dugout has just been flooded out, a very heavy

thunderstorm, but we have run it out. It is rotten to see how the towns have been shelled to pieces. I don't suppose they will ever be rebuilt.

My brother was home on leave some time ago that is the second time so he has not got off badly. He has been promoted to Sergeant now. He seems to be getting on fine.

Have you seen Ernie Smith? How is he getting on, is he still in the A.P.C. (Army Pay Corps, non-fighting troops)? As I hear a lot have been transferred into line regiments.

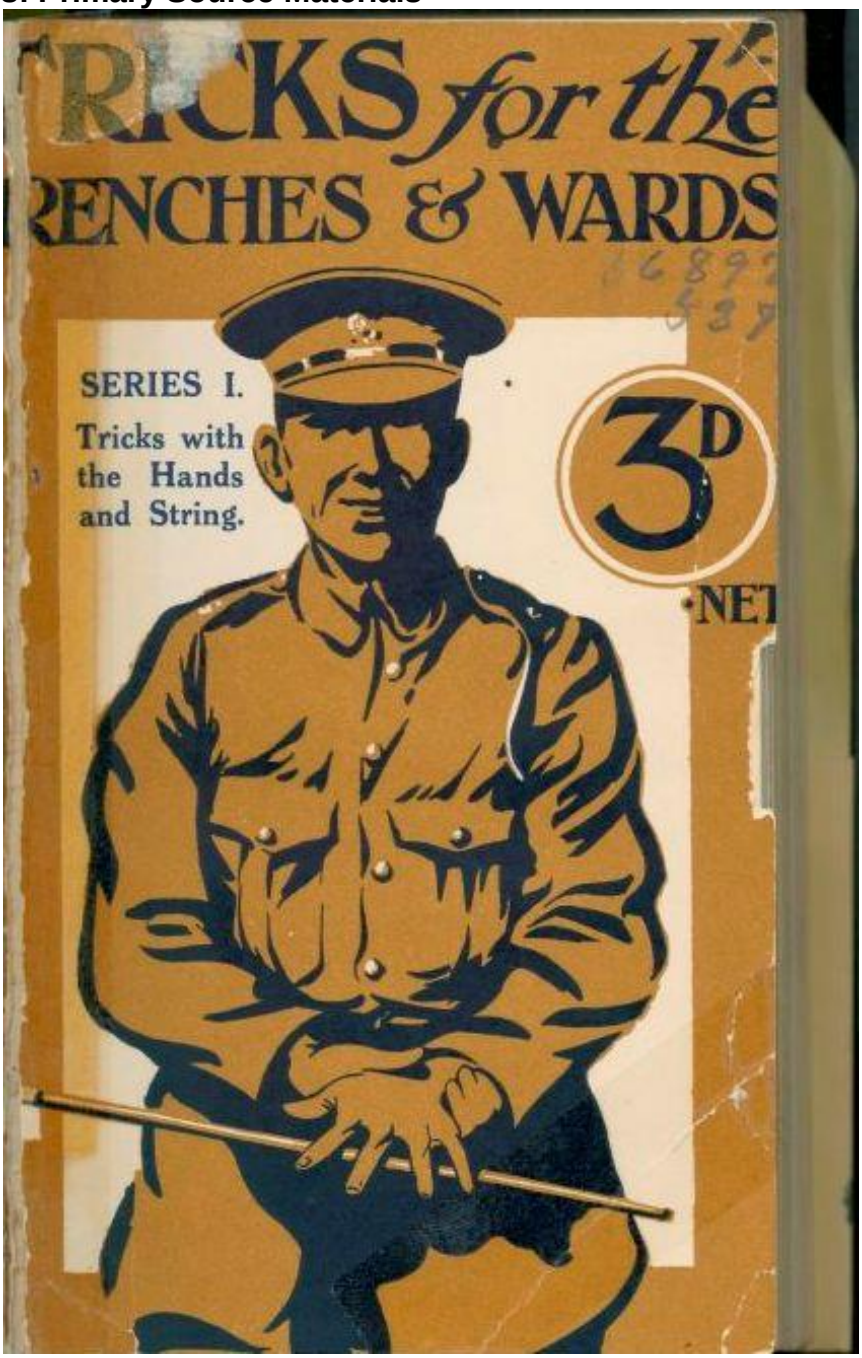
Well here's to the time when the war is all over and we are back in the same old place. The trenches where we were are only 25 to 30 yards from the Huns so had to keep a bit low.

My address is 3343 Lance Corporal J. Davies, No. 1 Platoon D Company, 6th City of London Rifles, B.E.F., France. You might drop me a line to let me know how you are getting on and any news,

Kind regards…

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

A Soldier's Life
Resources: Primary Source Materials



Tricks for the Trenches and Wards

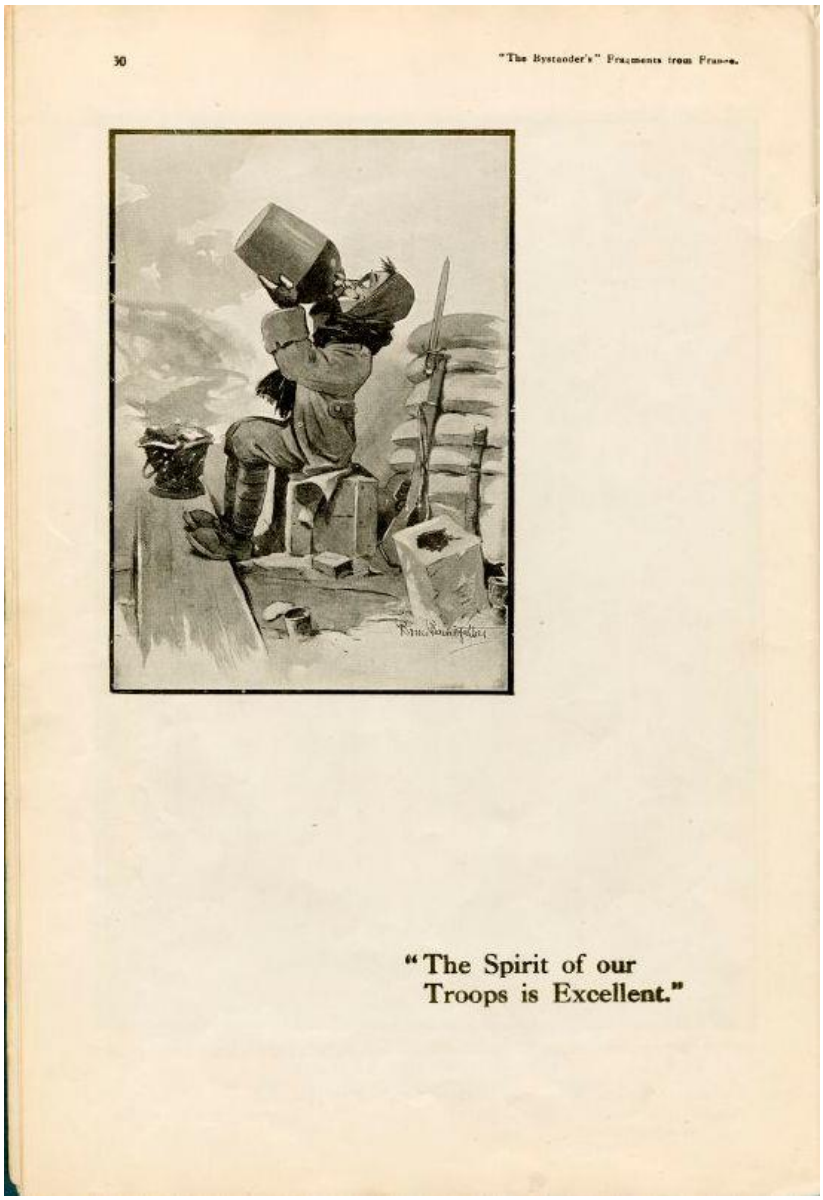
This army pamphlet of simple hand and string tricks provided entertainment for soldiers. In spite of routine military tasks and the trenches ever-present danger, soldiers often had free time.

Tricks for the Trenches and Wards, cover
D 525 W37 v.65,
Hartland Molson Library Collection

Canada

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

A Soldier's Life
Resources: Primary Source Materials



The Spirit of Our Troops is Excellent

Bruce Bairnsfather, the famous British officer and cartoonist, illustrated the soldiers' appreciation of rum with playful use of the word 'spirit'. Rum was a significant part of trench life in the First World War, serving as reward, medicine, and combat motivator.

"The Spirit of our Troops is Excellent," The "Bystander's" Fragments from France, p. 30,
D 526.2 B25 v.1,
Hartland Molson Library Collection

Canada

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

A Soldier's Life
Resources: Primary Source Materials

Tea Set

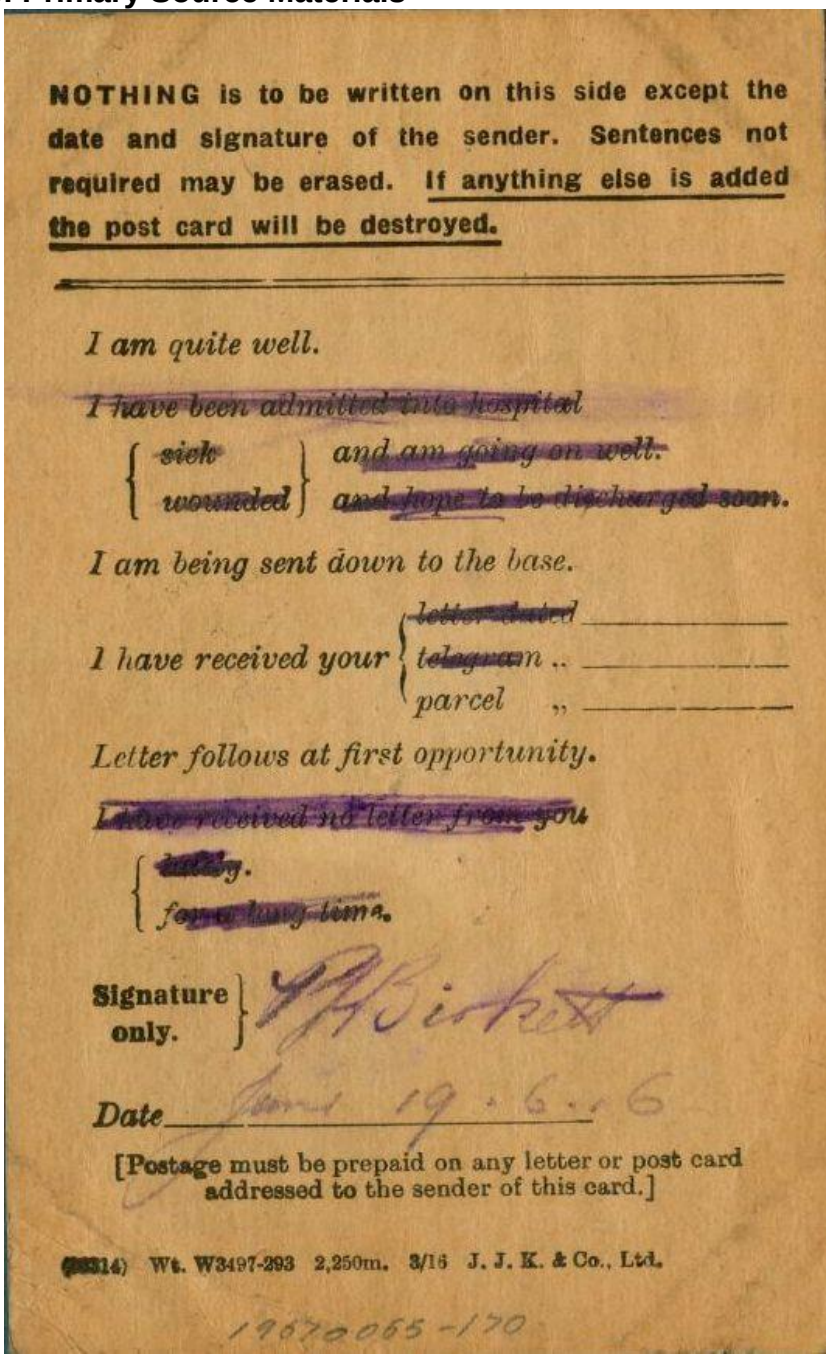
Corporal Frank Alexander Cameron of Barrie, Ontario was a signaller with the 2nd Canadian Division. In his spare time, Cameron crafted a four-piece tea set for his mother, sending each piece home as it was completed. The materials include British 13- and 18-pounder shell cases, a French 75 mm case, and French rifle bullets. Cameron took four years to complete the set. He survived the war, but his younger brother, Allan Stanley, was killed in action in 1918.

Tea Set CWM 20010174-001

Canada

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

A Soldier's Life
Resources: Primary Source Materials



NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

I am quite well.

~~*I have been admitted into hospital*~~
{ ~~*sick*~~ / ~~*wounded*~~ } ~~*and am going on well.*~~ ~~*and hope to be discharged soon.*~~

I am being sent down to the base.

I have received your { ~~*letter dated*~~ _____ / ~~*telegram*~~ .. _____ / *parcel* „ _____

Letter follows at first opportunity.

~~*I have received no letter from you*~~
{ ~~*lately.*~~ / ~~*for a long time.*~~

Signature only. J. A. Birkett

Date June 19.6.16

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

(23314) Wt. W3497-293 2,250m. 3/16 J. J. K. & Co., Ltd.

19670065-170

"Whiz Bang": Field Service Postcard

Nicknamed "whiz bangs" after light-calibre German shells that arrived with little warning, these field service postcards provided an easy way for soldiers to keep in touch with loved ones. Writers scratched out phrases that were not applicable and were warned that any additional information would result in the card's destruction by military censors.

George Metcalf Archival Collection CWM 19670065-170

Canada

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MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

A Soldier's Life
Resources: Primary Source Materials

Teddy Bear

Ten-year-old Aileen Rogers gave this bear to her father, Lieutenant Lawrence Browning Rogers, before he left for war. The gift was meant as both a good luck charm and as a memento of home. Rogers, a lieutenant with the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles, was killed by enemy fire at Passchendaele in 1917, as he tended to a wounded soldier. This bear was found in Rogers' pocket and returned home to his family.

Teddy Bear CWM 20040015-001

Canada

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
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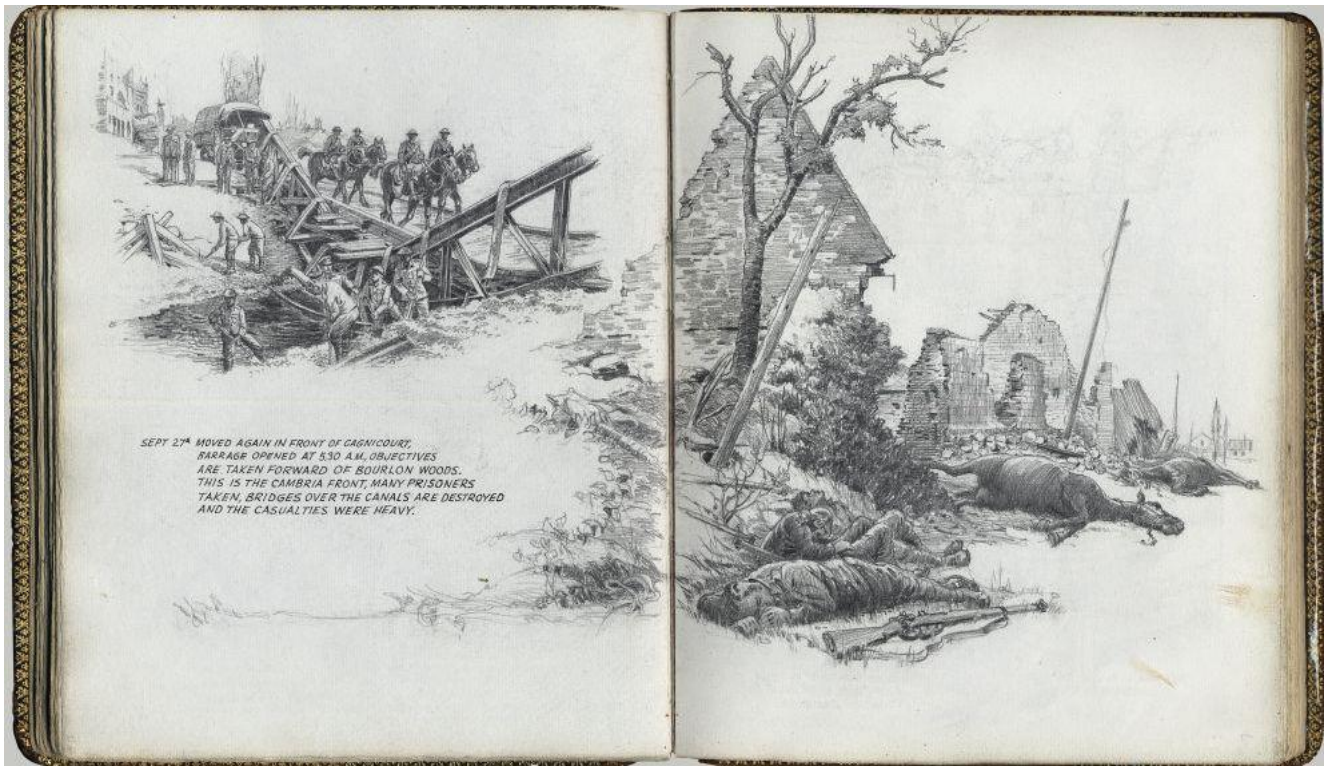
A Soldier's Life
Resources: Primary Source Materials



Sketch-book

This drawing by Sapper Russell Hughes Rabjohn is one of many in his wartime sketchbook. It depicts a bridge repair operation and the aftermath of recent fighting on the Western Front.

Sketch-book CWM 19920154-001

Canada

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

A Soldier's Life
Resources: Primary Source Materials

Helmet

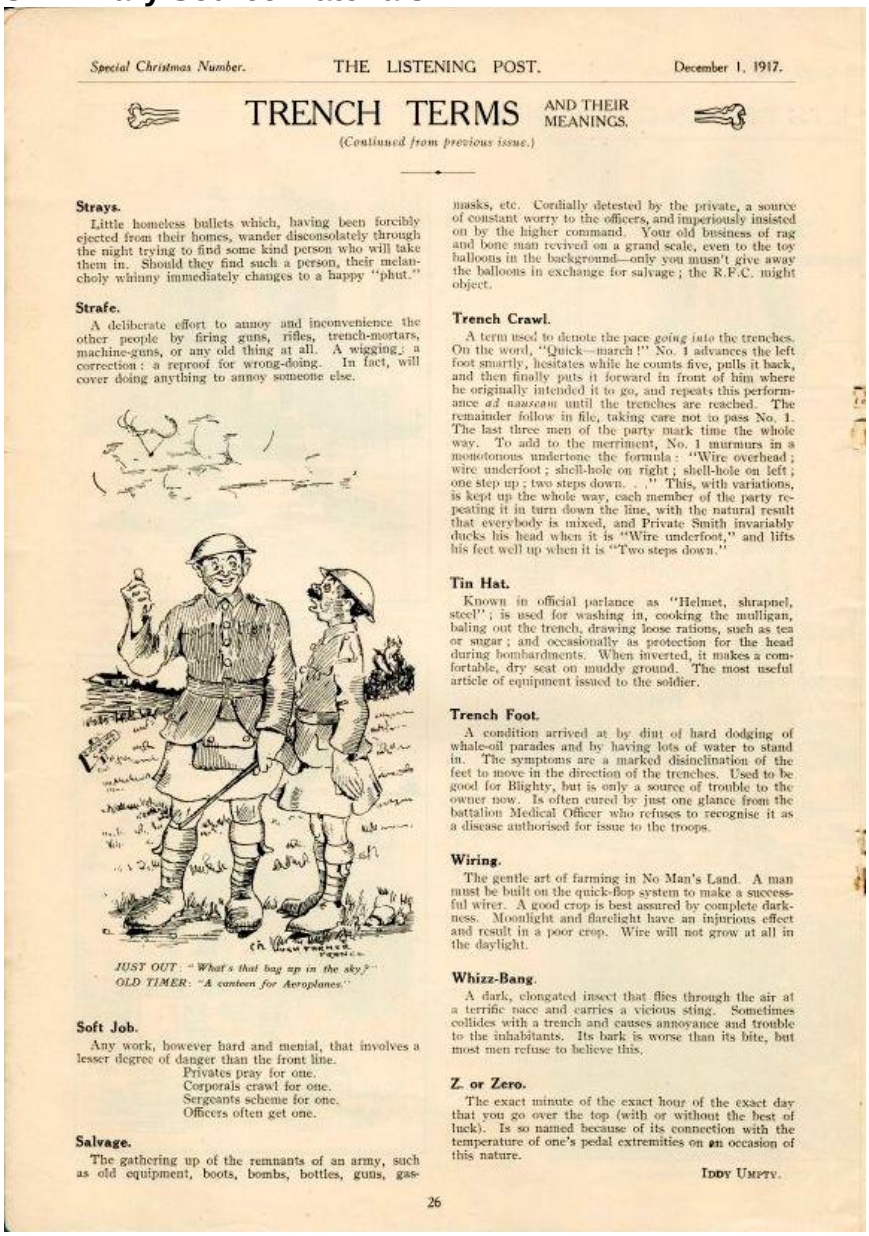
Helmets, first used at the battle of St. Eloi in Spring 1916, were introduced to help reduce the number of head wounds due to shrapnel and shell fragments. A helmet generally could not stop a bullet fired directly at its wearer. The red rectangle on the front of this helmet indicates its owner served in the 2nd Infantry Battalion.

Helmet CWM 20000112-010

Canada

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

A Soldier's Life
Resources: Primary Source Materials



Special Christmas Number. THE LISTENING POST. December 1, 1917.

TRENCH TERMS AND THEIR MEANINGS.

(Continued from previous issue.)

Strays.
Little homeless bullets which, having been forcibly ejected from their homes, wander disconsolately through the night trying to find some kind person who will take them in. Should they find such a person, their melancholy whinny immediately changes to a happy "phut."

Strafe.
A deliberate effort to annoy and inconvenience the other people by firing guns, rifles, trench-mortars, machine-guns, or any old thing at all. A wigging; a correction; a reproof for wrong-doing. In fact, will cover doing anything to annoy someone else.

JUST OUT: "What's that bag up in the sky?"
OLD TIMER: "A canteen for Aeroplanes."

Soft Job.
Any work, however hard and menial, that involves a lesser degree of danger than the front line.
Privates pray for one.
Corporals crawl for one.
Sergeants scheme for one.
Officers often get one.

Salvage.
The gathering up of the remnants of an army, such as old equipment, boots, bombs, bottles, guns, gas-masks, etc. Cordially detested by the private, a source of constant worry to the officers, and imperiously insisted on by the higher command. Your old business of rag and bone man revived on a grand scale, even to the toy balloons in the background—only you mustn't give away the balloons in exchange for salvage; the R.F.C. might object.

Trench Crawl.
A term used to denote the pace *going* into the trenches. On the word, "Quick—march!" No. 1 advances the left foot smartly, hesitates while he counts five, pulls it back, and then finally puts it forward in front of him where he originally intended it to go, and repeats this performance *ad nauseam* until the trenches are reached. The remainder follow in file, taking care not to pass No. 1. The last three men of the party mark time the whole way. To add to the merriment, No. 1 murmurs in a monotonous undertone the formula: "Wire overhead; wire underfoot; shell-hole on right; shell-hole on left; one step up; two steps down. . ." This, with variations, is kept up the whole way, each member of the party repeating it in turn down the line, with the natural result that everybody is mixed, and Private Smith invariably ducks his head when it is "Wire underfoot," and lifts his feet well up when it is "Two steps down."

Tin Hat.
Known in official parlance as "Helmet, shrapnel, steel"; is used for washing in, cooking the mulligan, baling out the trench, drawing loose rations, such as tea or sugar; and occasionally as protection for the head during bombardments. When inverted, it makes a comfortable, dry seat on muddy ground. The most useful article of equipment issued to the soldier.

Trench Foot.
A condition arrived at by dint of hard dodging of whale-oil parades and by having lots of water to stand in. The symptoms are a marked disinclination of the feet to move in the direction of the trenches. Used to be good for Blighty, but is only a source of trouble to the owner now. Is often cured by just one glance from the battalion Medical Officer who refuses to recognise it as a disease authorised for issue to the troops.

Wiring.
The gentle art of farming in No Man's Land. A man must be built on the quick-flop system to make a successful wirer. A good crop is best assured by complete darkness. Moonlight and flarelight have an injurious effect and result in a poor crop. Wire will not grow at all in the daylight.

Whizz-Bang.
A dark, elongated insect that flies through the air at a terrific pace and carries a vicious sting. Sometimes collides with a trench and causes annoyance and trouble to the inhabitants. Its bark is worse than its bite, but most men refuse to believe this.

Z. or Zero.
The exact minute of the exact hour of the exact day that you go over the top (with or without the best of luck). Is so named because of its connection with the temperature of one's pedal extremities on an occasion of this nature.

IDDY UMPTY.

26

Trench Slang

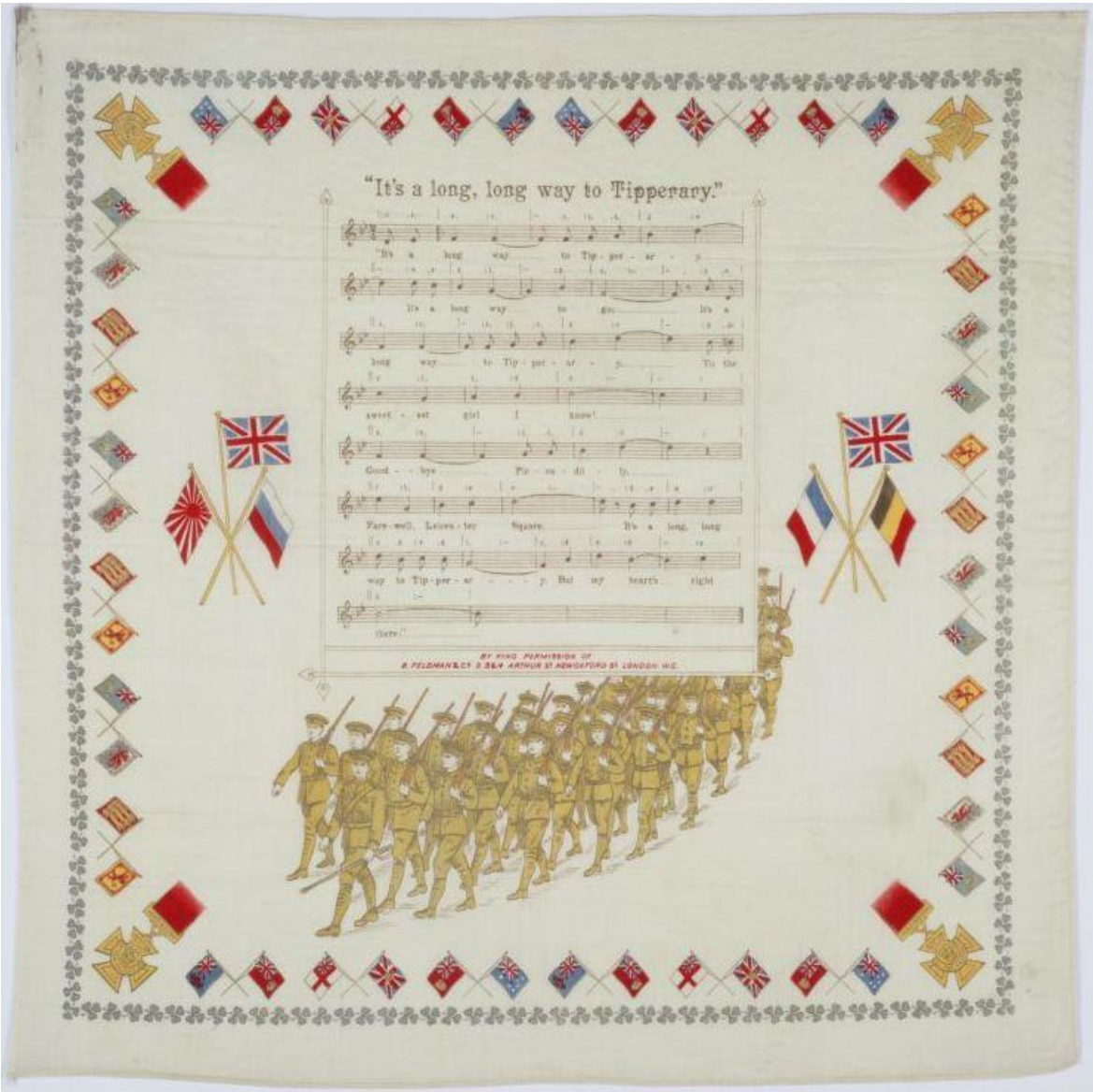
"Trench Terms and Their Meanings" was a regular installment of *The Listening Post*, a Canadian trench newspaper. This page covers "Soft Job," any work with less danger than being at the front, and "Whizz-Bang," a small shell humourously described as a dark, elongated insect. Trench slang was an exclusive dialect that helped to unify front line soldiers. At the same time, it excluded civilians from the inner world of the trenches.

"Trench Terms and Their Meanings,"
The Listening Post, No. 29, 1 Dec 1917, p. 26,
RARE PER D 501 L578,
Hartland Molson Library Collection

Canada

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

A Soldier's Life
Resources: Primary Source Materials



Long Way to Tipperary

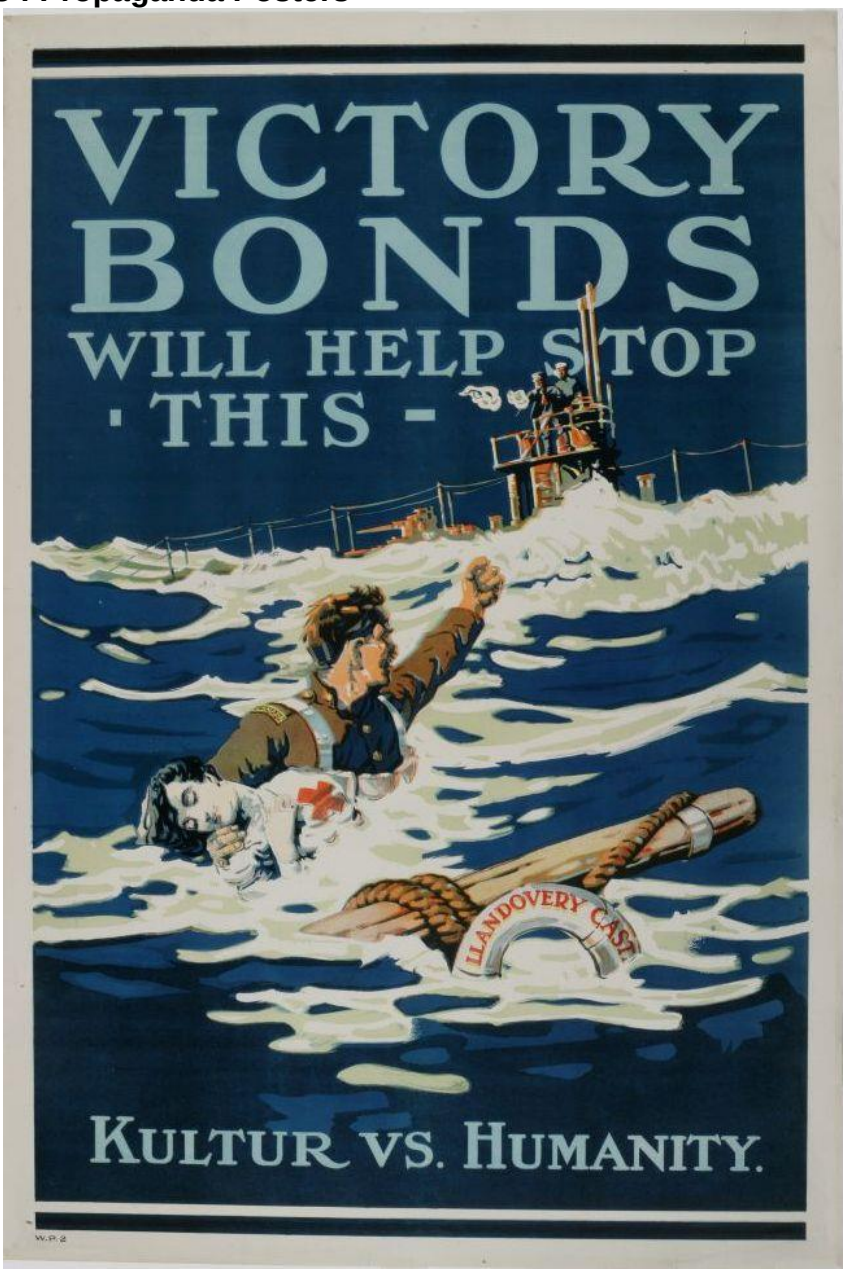
This handkerchief displays a scene of marching soldiers around the words to the popular wartime song, *It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary*. Tipperary was one of the most popular songs of the war, widely sung by both civilians and soldiers. In the trenches, its popularity led to many derivations and innovations, including the addition of cruder lyrics concerning drink, sex, and conditions at the front.

Handkerchief CWM 19830170-002

Canada

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

Resources : Propaganda Posters



"Kultur vs. Humanity"

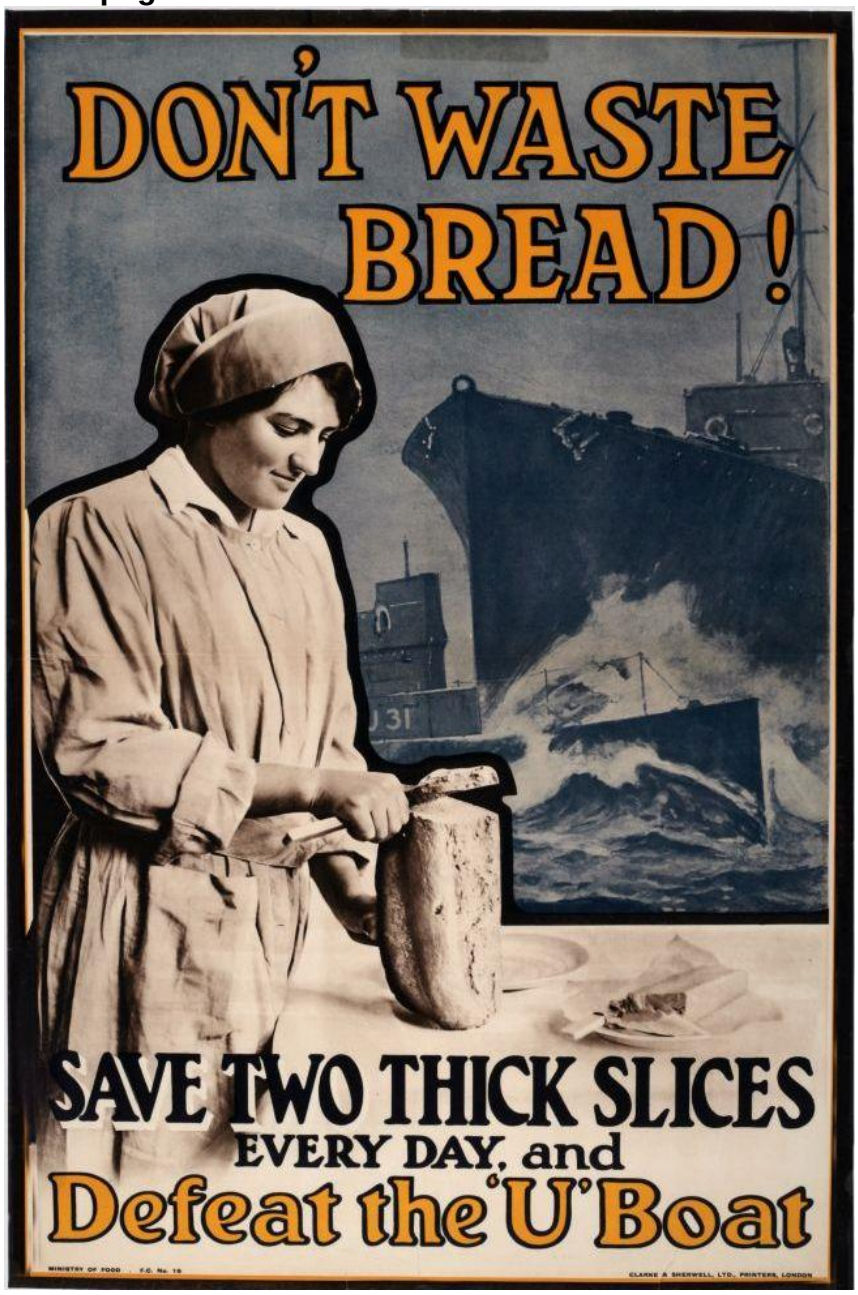
This Canadian Victory Bond poster evokes the image of the *Llandovery Castle*, a Canadian hospital ship torpedoed by German U-boat U-86, off the coast of Ireland on 27 June 1918. The attack killed 234 people, including 94 Canadian medical officers and nurses. At the bottom of the poster is the message: "Kultur vs. Humanity." Wartime propaganda soon referred to German *Kultur* (culture) as a damning insult, a supposed predisposition for war, cruelty, and destructiveness that placed Germany outside the community of civilized nations. A total effort against such an enemy was more than justified, it was expected.

Fund-Raising Poster CWM 198520475-034

Canada

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

Resources : Propaganda Posters



Don't Waste Bread!

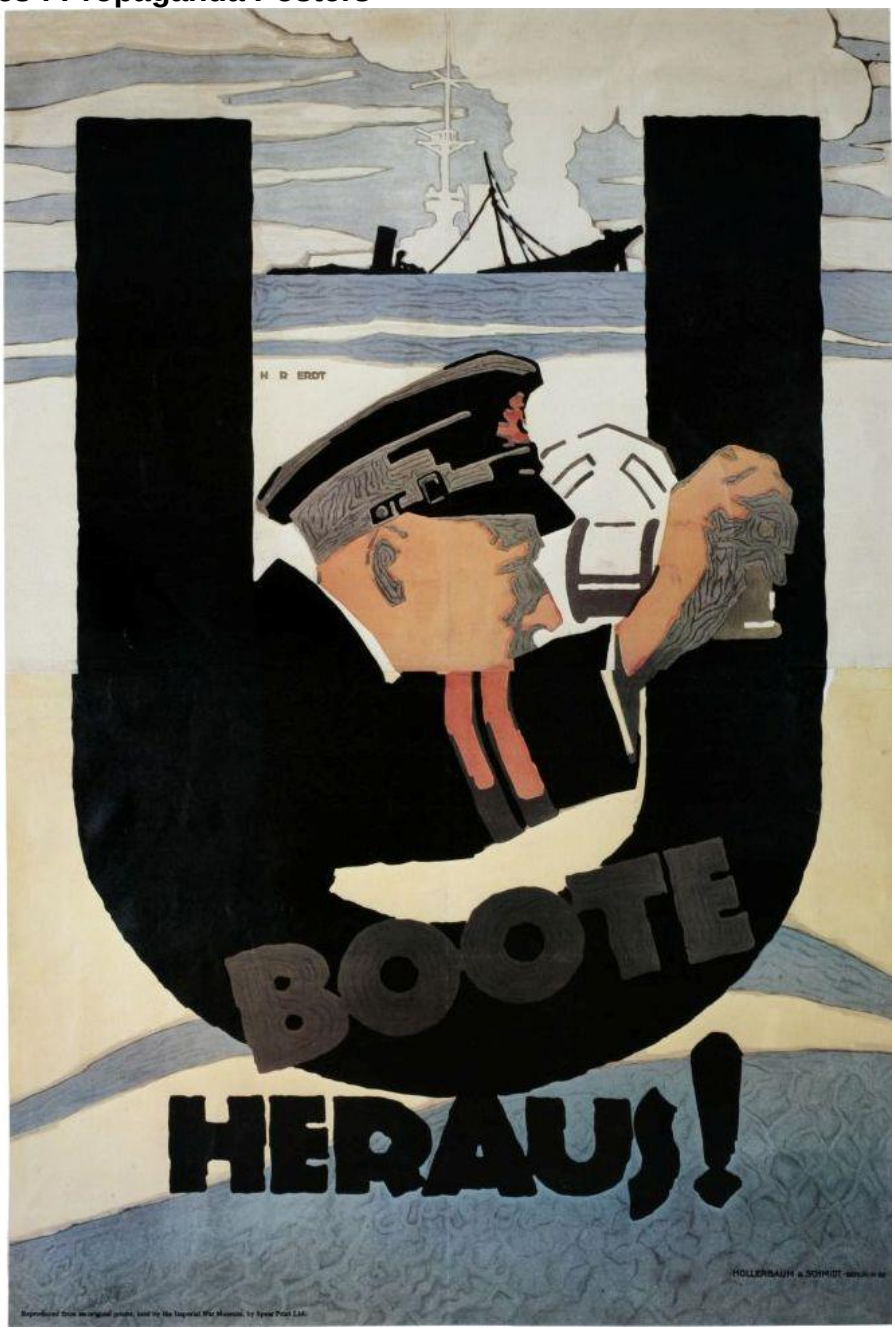
The U-Boat campaign in 1917 brought increased shortages to Britain as hundreds of merchant ships carrying food and ammunition were sunk. Shortages and inflation led to high food prices and unfair distribution of food. In early 1918, sugar, meat, and fat were rationed as a fair way to allocate food and other scarce resources amongst the population.

Propaganda Poster CWM 19720121-074

Canada

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

Resources : Propaganda Posters



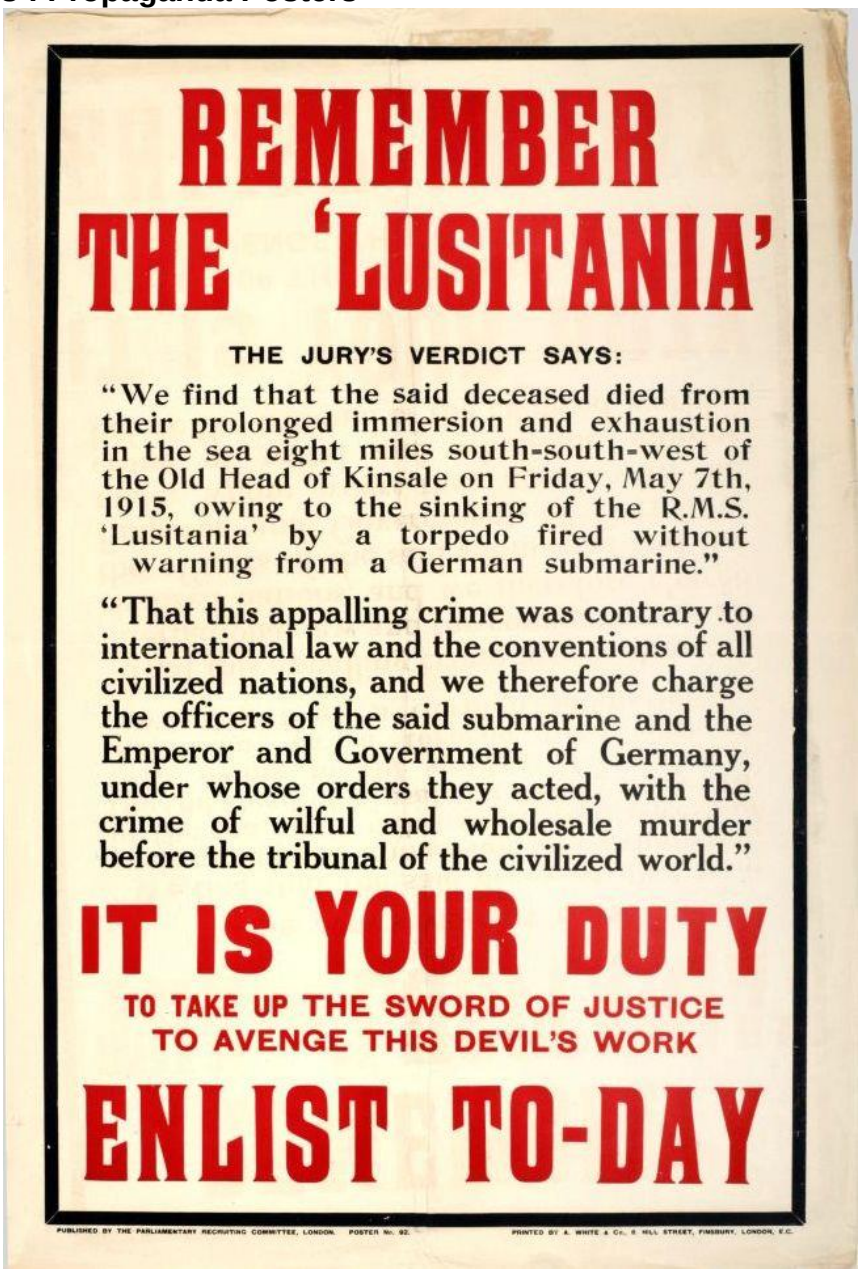
U Boote Heraus! **(U-Boats Launch!)**

This German poster depicts a U-Boat officer looking through a periscope. In the background, a torpedoed ship is sinking.

Propaganda Poster CWM 19920143-007

Canada

Resources : Propaganda Posters



Remember the 'Lusitania'

The British transformed the sinking of the passenger ship *Lusitania* by a German U-Boat on 7 May 1915 into a wide spread propaganda campaign. It incited hatred against Germany and, as the poster shows, encouraged recruitment "to avenge this devil's work."

Wartime Recruitment Poster CWM 19670086-007

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

Resources : Propaganda Posters

***Canadiens-Francais, Enrolez Vous!* (French Canadians, Enlist!)**
This recruitment poster for the 163rd Battalion depicts a Canadian infantry soldier standing shoulder to shoulder with a French soldier. This image, made an appeal to French-Canadians' illustrious military history with specific references to famous soldiers, including the Marquis de Montcalm, who had died in 1759 attempting to defend Quebec against British attack. It also highlights the links that existed between Canada and France, and asks French-speaking Quebecers, in an oblique reference to the Quebec Act passed in 1774, if they would prefer Prussian (German) institutions to their own. The unit is named after Charles-Michel d'Irumberry de Salaberry, who raised and commanded a French militia unit during the War of 1812, and successfully defeated a stronger American force at the Battle of Chateauguay in 1813.
Wartime Recruiting Poster CWM 19750046-009

Canada

Resources : Propaganda Posters

150ième Carabiniers **(150th Battalion)**
A uniformed soldier of the 150th Battalion urges enlistment in this French-Canadian recruitment poster. Because this battalion was unable to meet its authorized strength, it was broken up, its troops sent as reinforcements to the 22nd Battalion, the only French-Canadian infantry battalion that served at the front.
Wartime Recruiting Poster CWM 19820376-009

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

Resources : Propaganda Posters

Help the Boys

Shells explode and German soldiers flee in panic, in this colourful recruitment poster for the 245th Battalion, Canadian Grenadier Guards. Raised in Montreal, the 245th sailed to England in 1917 where the battalion was broken up and absorbed by the 23rd Reserve Battalion. The soldiers were subsequently sent to the front as reinforcements for numerous other front line battalions.

Wartime Recruiting Poster CWM 19820376-004

Canada

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

Resources : Propaganda Posters

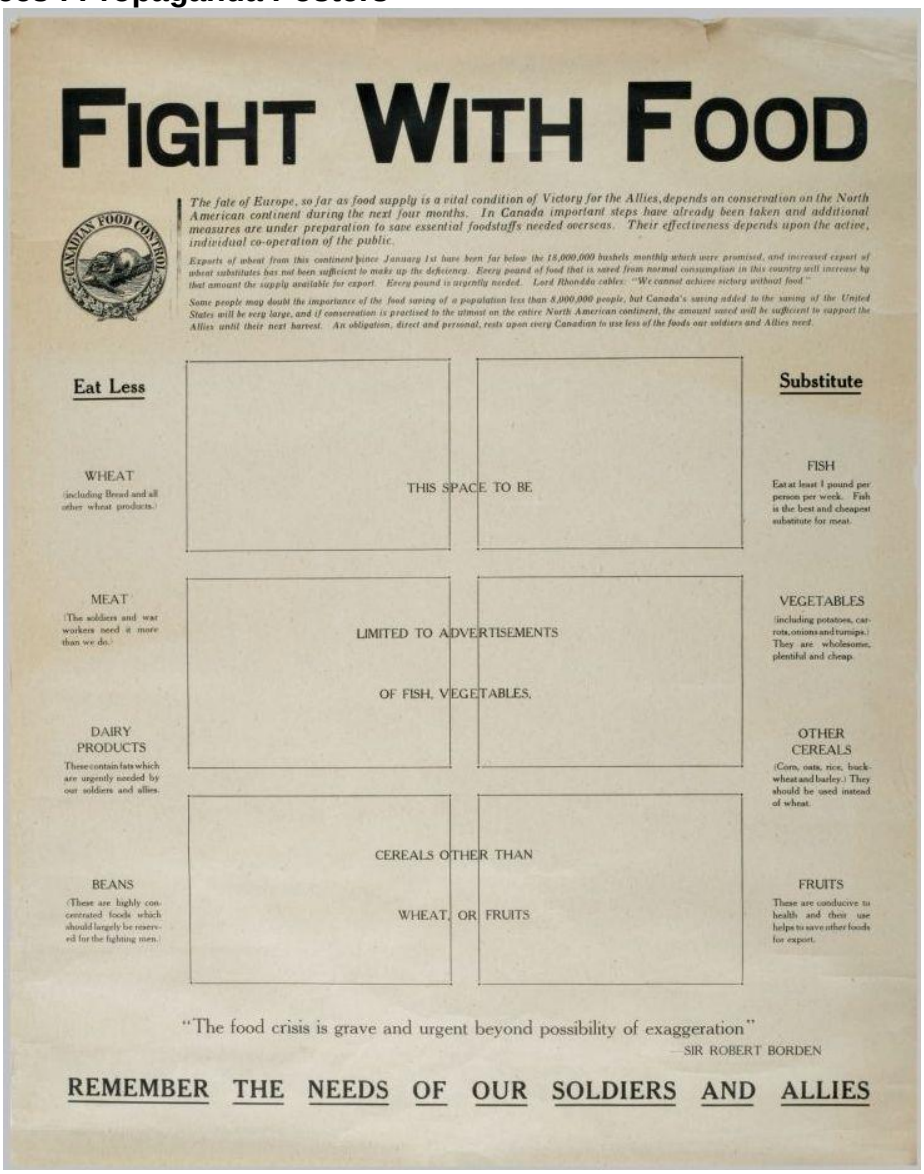
***Souscrivez a l'Emprunt de la Victoire* (Subscribe to the Victory Loan)**

Canada created the War Poster Service in 1916 to produce posters in both official languages. As the war progressed and the need for money and soldiers became more pressing, posters became more graphic and direct in their messages. In this poster, a Canadian soldier pointedly asks members of the public to buy war bonds in support of the war effort. The design was based loosely on the popular and mass-produced 1914 poster of Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War, exhorting Britons to join the British Army.

Fund-Raising Poster CWM 19920166-186

Canada

Resources : Propaganda Posters



Fight with Food

Poster urging all Canadians on the home front to eat less wheat, meat, diary products, and beans so that these foods could be sent overseas. Canadians were also directed to eat more fish, vegetables, fruits, and other grains. Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden is quoted at the bottom, “The food crisis is grave and urgent beyond the possibility of exaggeration.”

Food Coservation Poster CWM 20070104-108

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE LA GUERRE

Resources : Propaganda Posters

"Once a German – Always a German!"

An outrageous anti-German propaganda poster that draws upon stories of the atrocities committed by Germans during the war, from the occupation of Belgium, the bayoneting of a baby, the execution of civilians, the murder of Nurse Edith Cavell, and unrestricted submarine warfare that targeted innocent civilian ships. This British poster encouraged citizens not to hire Germans or buy German goods.

Propaganda Poster CWM 19720121-086

Canada