World War I began with the murder of one man. On June 28, 1914, the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by Gavrilo Princip in the city of Sarajevo [sahr-AYH-voh]. Princip was a Serbian who wanted his people’s independence from Austria-Hungary. Franz Ferdinand was heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. With just one shot, Princip started a war in which 20 million people would die.

For a hundred years, the nations of Europe had been at peace. However, old rivalries were still there. By 1914, tensions were very high. All the nations of Europe were getting ready for war. Pre-war Europe was a powder keg. In other words, Europe was like a barrel containing gunpowder that needed only a tiny spark to set it off. Franz Ferdinand’s assassination was that spark.

Within a month, Serbia and Austria-Hungary had declared war on each other. A system of alliances drew other nations into the war. Russia and France were on the side of Serbia. Germany was allied with Austria-Hungary. To attack France, Germany first had to invade through neighbouring Belgium. Belgium’s ally was Great Britain. Suddenly, the entire British Empire was at war. This included Canada.

Across the Atlantic, Canadians found it hard to believe they were at war. Many had never heard of Serbia or Franz Ferdinand. Still, when the war was announced, huge crowds of people met in town squares and city centres to...
celebrate the news. People cheered. They waved banners and sang patriotic songs. Tens of thousands of men rushed to join the army. They were afraid that the war would be over before they got the chance to fight. Fathers and sons enlisted together. Men who were too old to serve claimed that they were younger. Boys who were too young swore that they were older. Desperate for soldiers, the tiny Canadian army took them all.

Today, it is hard to imagine celebrating the outbreak of war. But in 1914, most English-speaking Canadians were very proud of Canada’s ties to Britain. Many Canadians were from Britain. They believed that Britain’s war was their war. Most French-Canadians did not share such feelings. However, they were angered by Germany’s attack on Belgium and France.

Hardly anyone knew how terrible the war would be. People expected a short, glamorous war from which the soldiers would return as heroes. When a regiment of soldiers from the University of Toronto left for the war, their principal told them, “You will not regret this. When you return your romance will not vanish with your youth. You will have fought in the Great War, you will have joined in the liberation of the world.” Yet the war turned out to be very different from what anyone had predicted.

**DID YOU KNOW?** In 1914, Canada was still a colony of Great Britain. That meant that when Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914, Canada was also at war.

*Figure 7.2 Europe, 1914. In August 1914, the small war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia dragged in all of Europe because of the alliance system.*

*Figure 7.3 Troops leave Union Station in Winnipeg, 1915. From ports in eastern Canada, they travelled to the battlefields of World War I. When this photo was taken, no one knew what the war would really be like.*
Trench Warfare

At seven-thirty on the morning of July 1, 1916, one of the worst battles in the history of the world began. One hundred thousand British soldiers left the protection of their trenches and dashed toward the German lines along the Somme River in eastern France. For a week before the attack, British artillery had bombarded the German defences. British soldiers hoped that any surviving Germans would surrender to them. The British were grim-faced and ready. Their rifles were loaded. They kept away from the muddy shell craters and found paths through the enemy barbed wire. Then something terrible happened.

Machine-gun fire roared from the German trenches. Hundreds of British soldiers fell, struck by bullets. Unknown to the British, the Germans had built dugouts strong enough and deep enough to protect themselves from the artillery bombardment. Too many shells had missed their target or failed to explode. When the British stopped firing, the Germans came out of their dugouts and manned the machine guns. As the British attacked, the Germans mowed them down with a wave of bullets.

Near a tiny village named Beaumont Hamel, a regiment of soldiers from Newfoundland, was almost totally destroyed that morning. Just 68 of its 800 men survived unharmed. In all, the British Army suffered 60,000 dead and wounded on July 1. But the Battle of the Somme was not over. The fighting went on for another five months. Through it all, the Germans held their position.

The Battle of the Somme was fought almost two years after the First World War began. It was just one of dozens of similar battles of the war. When the war began in August 1914, most Canadians believed it would be over.

Living in the Trenches

Life in a front-line trench was filthy, cold, and wet. Soldiers had to put up with horrible smells. At the front, no one could bathe. The bodies of fallen soldiers were often left in no-man’s land, because no one could reach them. Soldiers grew used to the smells, but they never got used to the rats and lice that tormented them day and night. Frozen winters in the open trenches were worst of all. Still, the trenches kept soldiers safe from bullets and exploding shells. Trenches were also very difficult for the enemy to capture. In battle after battle, soldiers in the trenches defeated waves of attackers.

Figure 7.4 Canadian soldiers in the trenches, 1916. Life in a trench was dirty and cold but it kept soldiers safe from bullets.
Christmas. They thought there would be few deaths. By 1917, they started to think that it would never end. No one had imagined that the war would so terrible. What made it like that?

The answer is technology. During the 20th century, technology had advanced greatly. For instance, a soldier in the War of 1812 travelled on foot or horseback. He was armed with a musket that he could fire only twice per minute. In the First World War, steamships and trains carried soldiers to the front. Airplanes soared overhead. An army’s orders arrived by telegraph. Weapons were much more deadly. One machine gun could fire 600 shots per minute.

To protect their soldiers in the open fields, both sides dug trenches that spread out for hundreds of kilometres. The space separating the trenches of the two sides was called no-man’s land, because neither side could control it. Over the four years of the war, millions of soldiers would live and fight and, sometimes, die in the trenches. Nearly half a million of them were Canadians.

Figure 7.6 Artillery churned up the earth, and rain turned it to mud. In some places, the mud was so thick that men and horses drowned in it. Here are some Canadian soldiers in the mud at Passchendaele, Belgium, 1917.
Canada's Military Effort

The First World War ended in November 1918. British prime minister David Lloyd George wrote:

The Canadians played a part of such distinction that ... they were brought along to head the assault in one great battle after another. Whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into the line, they prepared for the worst.

Lloyd George’s comment was very high praise. In 1914, no one could have thought that Canada, a country of just eight million people, would play such a big role in the war. When war broke out, Canada’s armed forces were not ready. The army had just 3000 officers and men. Canada’s militia had 60,000 poorly trained men. Many did not have rifles or even uniforms. Canada’s navy had only two large ships. By comparison, Germany’s army had nearly three million well-trained soldiers when the war began. Its navy had hundreds of warships.

Sir Robert Borden (1854–1937)

Robert Borden was born in Grand Pré, Nova Scotia. Borden never attended university. However, he was an intelligent and well-read man who became a successful lawyer. Borden entered politics in 1896. Five years later, he became the leader of the Conservative Party. He led the Conservatives to victory over Wilfrid Laurier’s Liberals in the federal election of 1911.

Borden was prime minister when World War I broke out in August 1914. Today, he is remembered as a man who led Canada through some of its most difficult years. He supported Britain. However, he also worked to give Canada a greater voice of its own in the world. He resigned as prime minister in 1920.

Figure 7.7 Sir Robert Borden

With the declaration of war came a flood of recruits. The Canadian Army grew very quickly. By December 1914, a force of 30,000 soldiers was ready to go overseas. During the war, 400,000 more followed them. They were known as the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF).

Canada’s army was known for being tough, brave, and skilled. At the 2nd Battle of Ypres in April 1915, the Canadians fought on while other Allied forces ran from a new German weapon: poison gas. In late 1916, the Canadian Army’s most famous victory came in April 1917 at the German stronghold of Vimy Ridge.

Vimy Ridge was a rocky hill in eastern France. The Germans had captured the ridge early in the war. The British and French armies had tried several times to take it back. However, they always failed. In April 1917, the Canadians seized Vimy Ridge after a fierce battle. At Vimy, all four divisions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force fought together for the first time.
Pierre Berton, a Canadian writer, once wrote, “Canada became a nation at Vimy Ridge.” What Berton meant is that the Battle of Vimy Ridge was the first time that Canadians from across the country had accomplished a great task by working together. It was something in which all Canadians could take pride. Yet the cost of Vimy Ridge had been very high. Nearly 11,000 Canadian soldiers were killed or wounded.

**War at Sea and in the Air**

Canada’s navy was just three years old when the war broke out in 1914. It had only a few warships. These included the *Rainbow* and the *Niobe* and two submarines. The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) remained very small during the war. However, Canadians played a big role in a new service the British had created: the Royal Flying Corps (RFC).

Airplanes had been invented in 1903, only 11 years before the war began. At the time, airplanes were slow and dangerous to fly. Pilots sat in open cockpits and did not have parachutes. When the war began, airplanes were used mainly to spy on the enemy. Later, they were armed with machine guns. The fighter plane was born. Every country involved in the war had pilots known as *aces*. An ace was a pilot who shot down five or more enemy planes.

Since Canada did not yet have its own air force, Canadians who wanted to be pilots during the war had to join one of two British services. They could join the RFC or the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS). Many of the most famous aces were Canadians, including Billy Bishop, Raymond Collishaw, and William Barker.

More than 650,000 Canadians served in the armed forces during the war. As well, hundreds of thousands of Canadian civilians served in other ways on the *home front*. Some Canadians, like the flying aces, are remembered in books and films. Many others have been forgotten.

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1. It was renamed the Royal Air Force in April 1918.

**William “Billy” Barker, VC (1894–1930)**

Billy Barker was born in 1894 in the town of Dauphin, Manitoba. When war began, Barker enlisted in the Canadian army. After a year in the trenches, he transferred to the RFC. Barker shot down 50 enemy aircraft and was one of the war’s top aces. In 1918, he was awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain’s highest medal for bravery, after downing four planes in a single battle.

**Sir Arthur Currie (1875–1933)**

In June 1917, Arthur Currie was given command of the CEF. He was the first Canadian general to lead the force. Currie was considered one of the best generals of the war. In one famous battle in September 1918, he sent his forces on a daring nighttime mission across a canal near Cambrai, France. In the morning, the Canadians surprised the Germans and won the battle. After the war, Currie became the president of McGill University in Montreal.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Canada created its own air force, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), in 1924.
The youngest hero

Alan Arnett MacLeod was only 15 when World War I began. As a boy in Stonewall, Manitoba, he dreamed of a job in the military. He tried to enlist many times. It was not until after his 18th birthday in April 1917 that he joined the Royal Flying Corps. Soon he began flying missions over France.

On March 27, 1918, MacLeod and gunner A.W. Hammond were attacked by eight German planes. An enemy bullet struck their plane’s fuel tank. It set the plane on fire. MacLeod was wounded, but he climbed out on the wing of the plane to avoid the flames. From there, he continued to maneuver the plane so that Hammond could keep firing on the enemy. The pair shot down three enemy planes before crashing. Despite his injuries, MacLeod dragged Hammond to safety. MacLeod was shot again, then passed out from his injuries.

On September 4, 1918, at Buckingham Palace in London, MacLeod was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award for bravery in the British Commonwealth. He was the youngest of 70 Canadians fighting in World War I to receive the award. Soon after, MacLeod returned to Manitoba to recover from his wounds. He died from the Spanish flu just two months later. He was 19.

Figure 7.11 Alan Arnett MacLeod

Forgotten Heroes

World War I was the first total war. Total war means that all of a country’s strength is devoted to the war effort. Millions of Canadians dedicated themselves to winning the war. Some did so by joining the armed forces. Others worked on the home front. Not all Canadians who took part in the war are remembered as they deserve to be.

Canada’s nursing sisters

Women were not allowed to fight in the First World War. However, more than 3000 Canadian women served as nursing sisters. They saved the lives of many wounded soldiers. Many nurses served in emergency hospitals very close to the front lines. Working so close to the battles, the nurses were exposed to danger. In all, 46 nursing sisters died during the war.

Women war workers on the home front

With hundreds of thousands of men in the armed forces, there were serious shortages of workers back in Canada. Factories and shipyards began to hire large numbers of women for the first time.

Figure 7.12 Soldiers nicknamed nursing sisters bluebirds because of their blue uniforms.
Figure 7.3 This painting by Henrietta Mabel May shows women in a factory making artillery shells. Women were paid less than men even though they were just as good at their jobs.

By 1916, more than 30,000 women were working in factories, helping to build weapons and make supplies. Thousands of women took other jobs once thought to be for men only. Women drove streetcars in Ontario. They worked on farms on the Prairies. Across the country, they helped the war effort through volunteer work. Women knitted socks, sweaters, and scarves for the soldiers fighting overseas. They set up rallies to sell Victory Bonds (see p. 100). However, when a group of women tried to start a women’s home guard to defend Canada from attack, the government stopped them. The idea of women handling rifles was too much for the men of the time!

The No. 2 Construction Battalion

The Canadian Army needed all the soldiers it could get in 1914. However, recruiting officers still turned away African-Canadians who wanted to join the CEF. Eventually the army decided to create a unit of African Canadians. The members of this unit, the No. 2 Construction Battalion, were not allowed to fight. Instead, they went overseas to clear forests, dig trenches, and build railway lines. It was important work, and they did it well.

The battalion was based in Pictou, Nova Scotia. It accepted African-Canadian recruits from across the country. The battalion’s officers were all European-Canadian. However, there was one exception: Captain William White, the battalion’s chaplain. He was the only African-Canadian officer in the entire British Empire during the First World War.

DID YOU KNOW? Leo Clarke, Frederick William Hall, and Robert Shankland all lived on Pine Street in Winnipeg. They all fought in World War I, and received the Victoria Cross for acts of bravery. Only Shankland survived the war. The City of Winnipeg later changed the name of Pine Street to Valour Road in honour of the three brave soldiers who had lived there. The words For Valour are written on the Victoria Cross.
Aboriginal Volunteers

As many as 7500 Aboriginal Canadians served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. In some First Nations, all of the young men went overseas. Many came from far-off regions of the country where there was no pressure on them to join the struggle. Still, they joined.

Some Aboriginal Canadians went to war for adventure. Others went for the promise of steady jobs. Some went for the sake of tradition. First Nations had fought with the British in the Seven Years’ War, the American Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812. Others hoped that by being in the war, the Canadian government would start to treat Aboriginal peoples more fairly. Whatever the reasons, they fought with bravery and skill. More than 300 Aboriginal soldiers never came back from the war.

First Nations women also served. In 1917, Edith Anderson was a nurse from the Six

Aboriginal heroes

Tom Longboat (1887–1949) was a member of the Onondaga First Nation. He was born on the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario. In 1907, he won the Boston Marathon with a record-breaking time. He became one of the most famous athletes in the world. During the First World War, Longboat served as a dispatch runner on the front lines of battles. Telephones and radios were not reliable, so armies used runners to carry important messages. It was dangerous work. Longboat was wounded twice. Once he was wounded so badly that he was declared dead by mistake.

Henry Louis Norwest (1884–1918) was a Métis from Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta. He became an inspiration to the entire CEF. Henry was a former rodeo performer and an excellent shot with a rifle. He earned some of Canada's highest military honours for bravery. A fellow soldier said of him, “Henry Norwest carried out his terrible duty superbly because he believed his special skill gave him no choice but to fulfill his indispensable mission.” Sadly, this expert soldier was killed in action three months before the war ended.

Figure 7.14 Tom Longboat, right, buys a newspaper in France, 1917.

Figure 7.15 Henry Louis Norwest
Nations Reserve in Ontario. She served with the American army in Vittel, France, treating wounded soldiers. “We would walk right over where there had been fighting. It was an awful sight – buildings in rubble, trees burnt, spent shells all over the place, whole towns blown up.” After the war, Anderson went back to Six Nations. There she married and raised a family. She kept nursing until 1955.

Many Aboriginal soldiers were awarded for bravery. Francis Pegahmagabow, of Parry Island First Nation, was decorated three times for bravery in action. Brothers Alexander George Smith and Charles Smith, from the Haadenosaunee (Iroquois) Six Nations Reserve, each received the Military Cross. Many Aboriginal soldiers came home as heroes. However, they were still not allowed to vote in the country they fought for during the war.

**After the war**

During the First World War, Aboriginal soldiers had been treated equally and fairly. However, when they came back to Canada after the war, they did not have the same benefits that non-Aboriginal veterans had. In some cases, First Nations reserve lands were actually taken by the government and offered to non-Aboriginal veterans as land grants.

Aboriginal veterans questioned their unfair treatment. They had fought bravely for their country during the war. Frederick Loft, a Kanienkehaka [gah-nah-geh-HA-gah] (Mohawk) veteran from the Six Nations Reserve, argued that Aboriginal

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**Figure 7.16** Frederick Loft, above, founded the League of Indians of Canada in 1919. It was the first Aboriginal political organization in the country.

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**Figure 7.17** The Aboriginal War Veterans Monument in Ottawa is a tribute to Aboriginal soldiers who served in Canada's armed forces. The monument shows Aboriginal contributions to Canada's war and peacekeeping efforts. The statue includes spirit guides. The thunderbird at the top symbolizes the spirit of Aboriginal peoples.

The peoples’ sacrifices during the war entitled them to equal rights:

As peaceable and law-abiding citizens in the past, and even in the late war, we have performed dutiful service to our King, Country and Empire, and we have the right to claim and demand more justice and fair play as a recompense.
The Home Front

Getting a country ready for war is called mobilization. Canada had never mobilized for war before. There were many problems that no one expected.

Industry

Britain wanted to buy weapons from Canada. However, when the war began, Canada had only a few factories able to make weapons. One Canadian factory, for instance, made only 75 artillery shells a day. In battle, soldiers might use as many as 100,000 shells in just a few hours.

It took time for the Canadian government to build more factories. However, by 1917 there were more than 600. When the war ended, Canadian factories had made nearly 25 million artillery shells. This was about one-third of all the shells used by British gunners during the war.

Victory Bonds

The Canadian government sold Victory Bonds to raise money to help pay for the cost of the war. People who bought the bonds could cash them in after the war. The government would give back the money paid for the bond. It would also pay an extra amount of money known as interest. Millions of dollars worth of Victory Bonds were sold.

Figure 7.18 Poster promoting Victory Bonds

The conscription crisis

Canada's army used volunteers at first. However, by 1915 and 1916, the army had lost many men. Prime Minister Borden believed in conscription to replace them. Conscription was an emotional issue. Many French-Canadians did not like the idea of being forced by law to fight for Britain. Many farmers worried that their crops would fail if more farm workers had to join the army.

Borden's government won the election of December 1917. Then it brought in conscription. In Quebec, people had once cheered the war. Now they protested in the streets. They shouted, "Down with Borden!" Some Quebeckers began to think about separation from Canada.

The war ended before many of the conscripted soldiers could be sent overseas. Only 25,000 actually served in the trenches. Despite this, the conscription crisis put national unity in danger. It was a lesson that future Canadian prime ministers would not forget.
Fear and prejudice on the home front

After the war began, many Canadians did not trust other Canadians who had come from Germany or from countries that were Germany's allies. Many thought that German-Canadians might be spies. Canadians grew so fearful that they wanted nothing to do with German-related things. Schools stopped teaching the German language and German literature. Orchestras stopped playing music by German composers such as Beethoven and Mozart.

Another clue to the way many Canadians felt about Germany could be found in the city of Berlin, Ontario. Berlin was also the name of the capital of Germany. In 1916, people living in the Ontario city did not want to look like they were against their own country. They decided to change the city's name.

The Halifax Disaster

There were several disasters in Canada during the war. In February 1916, a fire destroyed most of the Parliament buildings in Ottawa. Seven people died. In September 1916, 11 people were killed when the Quebec Bridge suddenly collapsed into the St. Lawrence River.

The worst disaster of all, however, took place in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Halifax was the gateway to Europe during the war. Most Canadian troops and supplies left from its busy harbour. On December 6, 1917, at 9:00 am, a French ship, Mont Blanc, accidentally hit another ship, the Imo, in Halifax harbour. The Mont Blanc caught fire. A crowd gathered to watch the burning ship. No one knew that it was filled with explosives. Suddenly, a huge explosion sent a fireball more than a kilometre into the air. The Mont Blanc was gone.

The explosion shattered whole buildings. It uprooted trees. It blasted the ship's anchor two kilometres inland. Much of Halifax was destroyed, and more than 2000 people were killed.

Each of these tragedies was later shown to be an accident. However, at the time, many people thought that German spies were to blame.
The End of the War

In April 1917, three years after Canada entered World War I, the United States declared war on Germany. In the spring of 1918, Germany made a desperate attempt to defeat the Allies before the Americans arrived. The Germans failed, and the Allies counterattacked. The Allies scored a series of hard-fought victories. Canadians took the lead in many of these attacks. Exhausted, the Germans and their allies asked for peace. World War I ended on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month—11:00 AM on November 11, 1918. Ever since, November 11 has been marked as a day to remember the war—Remembrance Day.

After the war

The war brought many changes to Canada. It sped up industrialization. It changed the way that people thought about women’s rights. It gave Canada a greater voice in world affairs. The price of the war had been very high. Thousands of men had gone cheerfully to war in 1914. Few returned unharmed. More than 60,000 Canadians died fighting the First World War. Most families lost a father or son. In some

DID YOU KNOW? Not only did Berlin, Ontario, change its name to Kitchener in World War I. Did you know that Britain’s Royal Family changed its name, too? In 1917, their German-sounding surname Saxe-Coburg was changed to the name still used today: Windsor.
small towns, nearly all of the young men had been killed overseas.

Many soldiers returned to Canada badly wounded. Thousands lost their arms or legs. Others had been terribly burned or blinded. The government built veterans’ hospitals for those soldiers who needed constant medical attention. In addition, many veterans suffered what people called shell shock. Shell shock was a form of mental breakdown caused by witnessing the horrors of war. Today, the condition is known as post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Because of all the death, some people grew very gloomy about life. Many Canadians believed that the war had been a terrible mistake. Others felt great pride in the role Canada had played in the war. They believed that Canada had helped to defend freedom. They also felt that the war had made Canada a real nation, ready for full independence. But not everyone agreed that the war brought Canadians together. Many French-speaking Canadians felt betrayed by conscription.

**Remembrance Day**

In Remembrance Day ceremonies, Canadians take time to remember those who died fighting for Canada. Remembering does not mean that war is a good thing. Rather, Remembrance Day services are held once a year to remember and honour soldiers who served in the wars. What will happen to Remembrance Day when so much time has passed that no one remembers those soldiers? It is up to all of us to keep the memory of the past alive. That way we can avoid the mistakes that led to the wars in the first place.

**Conclusion**

Some people called the First World War “the war to end all wars.” They believed that the nations of the world would never fight again, now that they knew how terrible modern war really was. At the end of 1918, Canadians looked toward the future with hope.