



SUPPLY
LINE

Artifact Backgrounder

Posters



DEFINITION

Throughout the First World War, the Canadian government and other agencies produced thousands of different **posters** to recruit volunteers for overseas service, to promote certain types of behaviour among the public, and to solicit financial support for the war effort.

DID YOU KNOW?

The print runs for posters varied widely according to their purpose. Posters for local recruiting efforts might be printed in quantities of only a few hundred, while those that supported the Victory Loan campaign were printed in much larger quantities, up to 75,000.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although the newspaper was the most important form of mass communication in Canada leading up to the First World War, **posters** were also

widely used for advertising. During the war, artistic designers and printers turned their attention to **posters** with military themes.

EVOLUTION/DEVELOPMENT

Upon the outbreak of the First World War, there was no single Canadian government agency responsible for the design or production of war **posters**. Rather, many early **posters** were produced and printed by private citizens and companies on their own initiative. These **posters** typically encouraged people to join local battalions, and often included specific local references.

Military recruiters also produced **posters**, in English and French, throughout much of the war. These were often designed with the assumption that Canadians would enlist based on appeals to their cultural heritage, with English-language **posters** using British imperial themes, and French-language **posters** referencing France and the French army. These approaches were not equally effective, however, as many French Canadians felt little connection to France at the time.

Some recruiting **posters** were aimed at particular professions and trades, rather than

cultural groups. For example, **posters** were designed to encourage Canadians to join forestry and railway construction battalions. Recruiting **posters** for such battalions showed men working in these trades, sometimes without any obvious military context. Other **posters**, aimed at tradesmen, emphasized special rates of pay that they might receive in the army.

In 1916, the federal government established the Poster War Service, with a mandate to produce posters for national fundraising campaigns, recycling drives, and other similar efforts. Unlike earlier recruiting **posters** which targeted specific communities, the Poster War Service delivered messages to all Canadians. These official **posters** were printed in both English and French.

In 1917, the Canadian Ministry of Finance launched a campaign to sell war bonds to the public. The Victory Loan Dominion Publicity Committee was organized to develop **posters** specifically for that purpose.

VOCABULARY LIST

Battalion:

During the First World War, a *battalion* was a military unit consisting of approximately 1,000 infantry soldiers. Normally organized into four equally-sized companies of soldiers, battalions were the key elements that commanders used to attack the enemy, or to defend positions against enemy attacks. In the British and Canadian forces, four battalions were grouped together to form a brigade, and three brigades formed a division.

War bonds:

In addition to donations, taxes, and foreign loans, the Canadian government financed the country's involvement in the First World War by borrowing money directly from Canadians. By purchasing war bonds, Canadians were, in effect, lending money to the government to help finance the war effort. In return, the government paid interest on the bonds.