



HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Canada and the First World War

August 4, 1914–November 11, 1918

Historical Overview

After years of tension and rivalry, Europe's Great Powers went to war in 1914. What began as an armed conflict between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Serbia quickly grew into a global war that lasted four years. Fighting as a dominion within the British Empire, Canada's contribution led to growing autonomy and international recognition, but at great cost. The war was one of the most far-reaching and traumatic events in Canadian history.

About the War

Canada's military forces fought primarily on the Western Front. The armies of citizen-soldiers used mass-produced weapons and ammunition in battles that lasted weeks or months and killed or wounded hundreds of thousands. Canada entered the war on the Allied side, alongside France, Belgium, Russia and Britain. They fought the Central Powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire.

More than 600,000 Canadian men enlisted or were conscripted, along with 2,800 women who served as nurses. Newfoundland, then a separate British dominion and not yet a province of Canada, contributed 12,000 military personnel out of a pre-war population of 242,000.

Of those who served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the war, approximately 424,000 did so overseas. The Canadian Corps, the nation's primary fighting force, fought in key battles in Flanders, on the Somme, at Vimy, and during the Hundred Days campaign. It achieved significant victories and suffered devastating losses before an armistice ended hostilities in 1918. The war killed more than 66,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders. Some 550,000 who served survived and began new lives as veterans.

The Aftermath of the War

The First World War ended in a complete Allied victory but an unstable peace. This contributed to festering anger and grief, along with setting the conditions that led to fascist dictators and another world war.

Canada was forever changed by the experience, stepping out on the world stage and being recognized for its massive contributions, but also deeply divided over the conscription crisis.

Canadians, and their country, were never the same.