

# Stalemate

## Learning objectives

- Students will learn about trench warfare and what it would have been like if trenches had been built on Canadian soil.
- Students will gain firsthand knowledge of the types of victories and defeats for Canadian troops during the First World War.
- Students will become familiar with using a scale on a map.

## Time required

60-70 minutes

## Grades

7-12

## Materials

- tiled map: *A Nation Takes Shape*
- map of Europe (Appendix 5)
- letter from the trenches (Appendix 5)
- images from the trenches (Appendix 5)
- string or pencils with rulers
- July/August 2014 issue of *Canadian Geographic* (optional)

## Set-up

Determine the best example for students to understand the distances provided below, such as the length of a hallway, schoolyard, etc. This will help your students establish a frame of reference. Google Earth and Google Maps both have scales and measurement tools that you can use to plan this out in advance.

- **200 metres:** average distance between trenches on the Western Front
- **500 metres:** longest advance at Beaumont-Hamel
- **3 kilometres:** ground gained by the Germans on April 22, 1915, after their gas attack at Ypres
- **1,500 metres:** ground gained by Canadian Forces at Passchendaele from October 27 to November 7, 1917
- **10 kilometres:** longest gain of the Somme Offensive

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## Introduction

Explain to students that during the First World War enormous battles were fought over relatively small areas, with neither side gaining significant ground. This can be described as a stalemate. Show students the map of Europe (provided). Highlight some of the main battles on the map and describe the role of stalemate in each battle using the information below. For each battle, see if your students are able to estimate how many casualties there were per kilometre or metre gained using the map of Europe.

**Ypres:** This battle, which occurred from April 22 to May 25, 1915, was both one of the first combat experiences for Canadian troops and one of the first times Germans used poison gas against Allied Forces. The Germans gained 3 kilometres in a single day. Over 2,000 Canadians died defending against further advances until British reinforcements arrived to help reclaim the territory.

**Beaumont-Hamel:** This battle happened on the first day of the Somme Offensive (July 1, 1916). Five hundred metres was the farthest distance that Canadian soldiers were able to reach during the battle and the majority of that territory was not held. For Newfoundland, which didn't join Canada until 1949, it was a devastating battle. More than 700 Newfoundlanders were killed or wounded, effectively wiping out the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.

**Passchendaele:** Canadian troops gained 1.5 kilometres from Oct. 27 to Nov. 7, 1917. This was the conclusion of a long battle fought on extremely muddy territory between July and November 1917. More than 4,000 Canadians died during the course of this battle.

**The Somme:** Allied Forces gained 10 kilometres in this battle, the most in the Somme Offensive. This was one of the bloodiest battles in history — more than 1,000,000 men were killed or wounded between the two sides. The battle lasted from July 1 to Nov. 18, 1916.

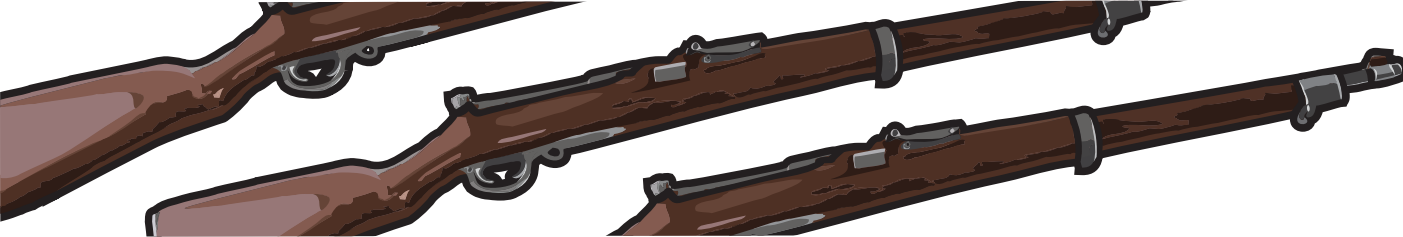
## Development

Ask students to list things they have heard about the trenches in the First World War. Give students time to read a letter from a soldier living in the trenches (provided). Have a class discussion about what it would be like to participate in trench warfare, focusing on the conditions. Explain to students that the trenches symbolized a stalemate because once the trenches were dug, soldiers were immobile. By the end of the war, each side had dug at least 19,000 kilometres of trenches.

Assemble the tiled map and identify major city locations, training centres, naval stations and railways. Ask students to hypothesize ideal locations of where trenches would be located if the First World War had occurred on Canadian soil. How would Canada's unique geography influence the location and development of trenches? Have students use the scale provided on the map to measure and mark 19,000 kilometres.

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**Links to Canadian National Standards for Geography****Essential element 1:****The world in spatial terms**

- major countries of the world
- map projections
- mental maps and spatial relationships

**Essential element 2:****Places and regions**

- factors that influence people's perceptions of places and regions
- world political regions
- changes in places and regions over time
- political and historical characteristics of regions

**Essential element 6:****The uses of geography**

- effects of physical and human geographic factors on major historic events
- influences of geographic features on the evolution of significant events and movements

Next, have students find a location on the tiled map where trenches could be created. Remind students to consider the location of major city hubs, transportation lines and the physical landscape of Canada. This activity may be done as a class or in small groups. If students are divided into small groups, have each group focus on a different part of Canada then share their thoughts with the class.

## Conclusion

Have students imagine that they are a soldier living in the trenches they just placed in Canada. Ask them to write a letter to a loved one identifying where they are, what the landscape is like and their overall experience in the war. Have students share their letters with the class and use the map of Canada to identify where they were when they wrote the letter.

## Extend your geographic thinking

Examine the trench images (provided). Have students select one image and describe what it would be like to experience it as a soldier in the war. Have students research key items soldiers required when living in the trenches, and have them research the physical geography of the region where trenches were situated.

Based on this research, have students create a packing list of necessary items soldiers would have needed based on this resource and rank them in order of importance.

Netley Hospital  
England

Feb 22, 1915

My Dear Mother,

At last I have got a decent chance to drop you a line. Now I'll tell you what has happened to me during the past four weeks. In fact it is the only thing I can tell you. First as you know by my other letter I was hit with 2 others getting into the trenches. The bullet hit me just over the left ear and travelled upward for about 2 inches. Luckily it didn't hit me square for I had my head turned, evidently, so instead of going through into the brain it just made a fracture of the skull. They have an X-Ray photo of the skull showing the crack in the skull as the whole thing as plainly as if it was a flower pot standing out into front of you. Well to continue. A piece of the skull bone was broken in and this pressed upon the nerve inside causing the paralysis of the right arm and partial paralysis of the right leg. Well, of course when I was hit I dropped like a log never knew what hit me, right into the mud of the field we were in. And believe me it was some mud, nearly to the knees actually. All the country here is low, what as you probably have read of as the Low Countries. The man with me, he himself since wounded I see by the papers dragged me through this mud for 50 yards to safety, he himself unable of course to get on his feet for fear of getting one from the same place.

(Abridged)

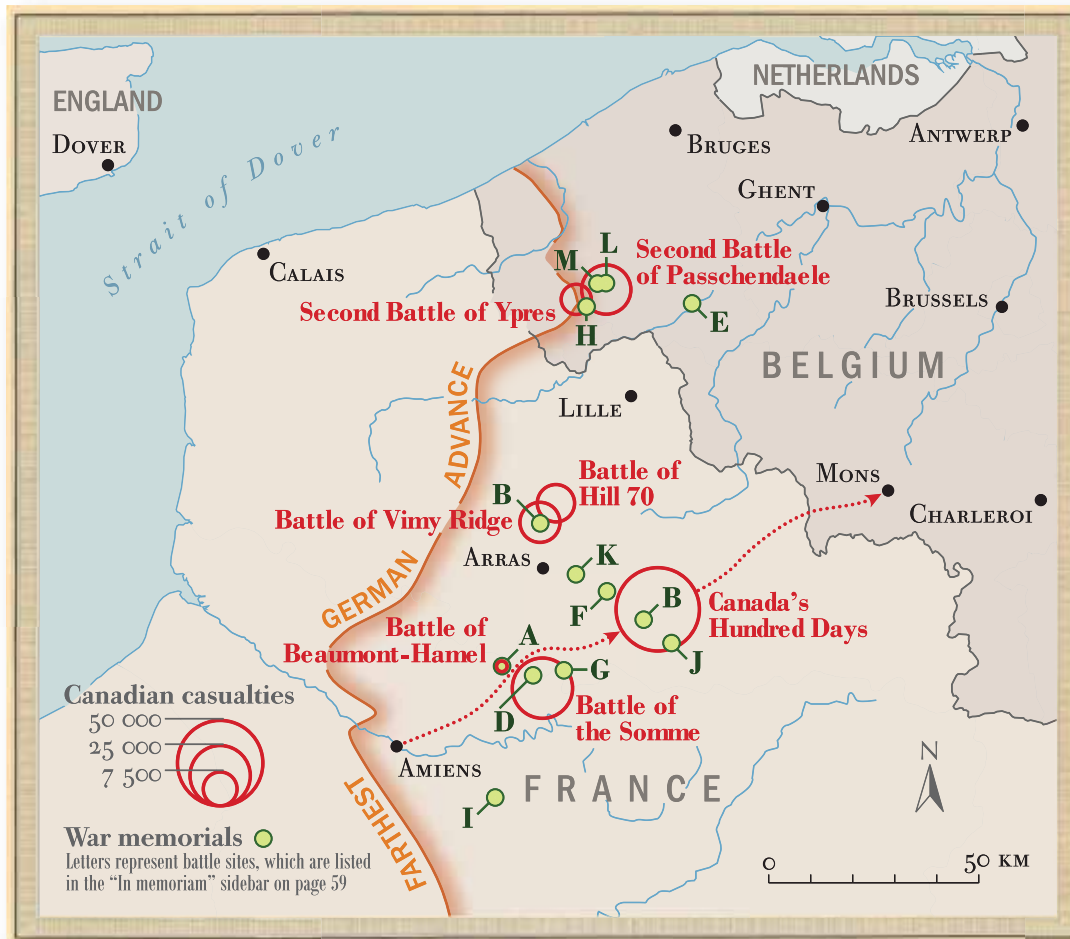
Now just a word to the war. It is absolutely worse than the people ever imagine. The weather is not as cold as Canada of course but it rains or sleet every day nearly. Raw and miserable and the trenches are a terror. Actually water over

the knees have I stood in for 2 days and nights and kept my back humped up and my head down below the trenches all the time. And then when we come out had to cut my boots off my feet. they were so swollen. This is what the papers don't tell and are not allowed to tell, so don't show this letter around. And Belgium, village after village, and they are only a matter of a few miles apart here absolutely blown to pieces. And the people where they are, goodness only knows. And France isn't much better a country of old, young and cripples If people only realized what a war such as this meant to the country, where it was waged it would mean that the world would turn to socialism in no time.

Thank goodness you live in North America. However don't despair about the progress of the war, its only a question of the weather when we will shift them out of the trenches. You've no idea what the mud is like over there. The whole trouble was, the Germans get ready before they declared war and before the French and English were sure that it meant war sure, the "Boshes" were half way across France and nearly to Paris.. However, I'm cheerful as a lark these past few days again and when they send me back the weather will be better. Of course I expect to get a week or two off to myself before I go back, so I guess I'll go to London again. Now drop Roy & Hulu a card when you get this and tell them I'll write in a few days when my arm gets stronger. This has taken me 5 hours to write. Now then I haven't had a letter since January 12th from anywhere, so expect one of your letters is travelling around France. Now as soon (the day) you get this write me because I may not be here and put "(Return if not delivered in 5 days" on the outside of envelope with your address.

With best love to you all from your son "Harry 1753"  
P.P.C.L.I.

This is the address "G" Ward  
Welsh Hospital  
Netley, England



CHRIS BRACKLEY/CANADIAN GEOGRAPHIC

# Appendix 5

## Image gallery 1



LUNCH IN THE TRENCHES, GEORGE METCALF ARCHIVAL COLLECTION, CWM 19920044-058256



FUNK HOLE, GEORGE METCALF ARCHIVAL COLLECTION, CWM 19920044-616256



DRAINING TRENCHES, GEORGE METCALF ARCHIVAL COLLECTION, CWM 19920044-256