

Historica Canada Education Portal

The Great War Simulation Activity

Overview

Groups of students are faced with the difficulties of logistics through prioritizing supplies needed to sustain soldiers after a devastating raid on their trench during the Great War. Students must think critically to decide between the competing needs of their soldiers. A discussion of the realities faced by decision-makers will lead to a better understanding of the requirements of modern industrial warfare.

Aims

- To familiarize students with some of the equipment and supplies needed to fight battles in the Great War.
- To enhance students' understanding of the conditions and difficulties involved in the trench warfare of the Great War, and their recognition of the difficult choices faced by commanders.
- To involve students in researching primary sources about the Great War.
- To further develop students' critical thinking skills by requiring them to create criteria before making judgements.

Background

Logistics has become a crucial component of modern industrial warfare. We can look at the operations during the Hundred Days campaign as perhaps the greatest example of this during the Great War. Some people have suggested that the Canadians involved in the execution of this campaign were uniquely suited to finding innovative solutions to the requirements of this period in the conflict. Some of the lessons learned can be seen in more recent military engagements, from the preparations for D-Day to the supply chain used in Afghanistan.

Activities

Introduction

1. Have students explore the excellent information regarding the equipment, rations, medical treatment and trench life of the Great War at the Canadian War Museum's website at

<http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/guerre/history-fww-e.aspx>

2. Define and discuss the concept of logistics as it relates to supplying the needs of a modern industrial army. Brainstorm as a class to generate a list of all the supplies necessary to sustain the fighting and life between battles. Students should recognize that numerous items are required and creating an exhaustive list would be very difficult.

Learning Activities

- Break the class into small groups of two to four students.

- Distribute copies of the [What would you do?](#) exercise.
- Read through the background and task for the exercise. Leave students to complete reading of the descriptions of the available supplies and then to discuss what priority they would give to each. When they have completed the exercise they should have a list making up the manifest for the first wagon trip to the supply depot. The list must have no more than 100 units of supplies.
- If time permits, students could create a graphic or typed list to project when they present their lists to the class. Otherwise, have students create their list on poster paper.
- Have several groups present their lists to the class, including the rationale for why certain supplies were prioritized higher than others. Unless you have a great deal of time, it is not necessary that all groups present to the class as it will likely become repetitive.
- After presentations are complete, discuss the following questions:
 - What criteria did you use to decide which supplies had a higher priority?
 - What choices were easy to make? Difficult?
 - In the longer term what further supplies would become necessary?
 - What possible conditions would make the choices more difficult? What might you have to do if the supply depot had also been hit?
 - What difficulties caused problems further back in the supply chain?
 - How do you think these decisions compare to those made before D-Day.

- Are the same problems being faced by Canadian troops in Afghanistan? In what ways has more modern warfare caused or solved problems in the supply chain?
- What role should private contractors have in supplying Canadian troops?

Follow-Up and Extension Activities

- Have students research specific information about one of the categories of supplies such as what was included in “iron rations” or what was included in a medical kit. Much of this information including photographs can be found at the Canadian War Museum website.
- Have students research the logistics of supplying the front including the industrial production in Canada, shipping convoys, heavy and light railways.
- Students could examine primary sources related to logistics from the Canadian War Diaries. Using the search term “Quartermaster” in the database search tool at http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html will bring up several documents recording numbers of men and horses that required rations, and numbers of artillery shells needed on a daily basis.
- Research logistics in other conflicts or the issue of private contractors.

Evaluation

Have students write a paper in which they present and defend the criteria

they used in choosing the supplies.

Resources

[First World War – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[The Memory Project](#)

[First World War Timeline – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Canadian Expeditionary Force – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Battle of the Somme – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[First World War Collection – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Heritage Minutes – Military](#)