

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN: THE LAST HUNDRED DAYS

Activity #6 Worksheet

Use this worksheet to support Activity 6 of *Think Like a Historian: The Last Hundred Days* Education Guide.

In pairs, read the article from 1919 and the editorial from 2018 (below). Identify the reasons why each author argued that the Last Hundred Days was a historically significant event.

Using a Venn Diagram, identify similarities and differences in how the significance of the Last Hundred Days is described in the 1919 article and in the 2018 editorial. Are the articles more similar or different in how they describe the significance of the campaign?

Last 100 Days of War Reviewed by Sir Arthur Currie

Article in *The Gazette*, Montreal, 20 August 1919, p. 6.

The last hundred days of the war, in which the Canadian Corps struck many heavy blows which finally brought about the collapse of the German military machine, came after the decision of the Supreme Allied War Council that only one more battle should be fought in 1918, Sir Arthur W. Currie, commander of the Canadian Corps and now inspector of Canadian forces, told an audience of 700 persons at today's Canadian Club luncheon in the Chateau Laurier.

"On August 1st, 1918," said General Currie, "the War Council had decided we would fight only one more battle, which was to be an effort to free the Paris-Amiens railway and gain the Amiens defence line. Then all the Allied forces in the west front would make their positions secure and wait until this spring for the American army to get there in strength. Then it was planned that we would finish the war."

However, said Sir Arthur, the attack on the Amiens line had resulted so splendidly that it was decided to push ahead, and the result was the collapse of the German defence system and the signing of the armistice on November 11.

Previous to the delivery of the great hammer blows planned by Marshal Foch, the Canadians had been held in reserve, and had held 35 miles of front, which was one-fifth of the entire British front and included ground than which there was no more tempting bait for the Boche, part of the great coal fields being within the ground held by the Canadian Corps.

ORGANIZATION AND SECRECY

Careful organization and great secrecy were among the factors vital to the Canadians' success, said the commander. So carefully had the movement of the Canadians in the first days of August, 1918, been covered up, that the King of the Belgians protested to Marshal Foch that the Canadians were about to deliver an attack in his country and he had not been advised of the fact. At the same time the British War Office was receiving complaints that the Canadian force was being divided up, some being sent to Belgium for an attack, while others went to another front.

The movements of the Canadian troops were so well covered that the Germans had no idea they were in the neighbourhood when the attack was launched, and so well were the enemy positions noted that the Canadian gunners opened fire creating a perfect barrage over the enemy trenches, without having to lose any time in registering the Boche positions. [...]

There were days previous to August, 1918, said Sir Arthur in his address, when it was nothing but the rugged determination and will to win that carried officers and men through, but with the breach of the Hindenburg line at the hinge with the Quéant-Drocourt switch, things had changed and people in the Allied countries began to get new heart for the struggle. [...]

ARTILLERY'S SPLENDID WORK

The Canadian artillery, said General Currie, had done its share during the final days. In the last three months of war the Canadians had fired 25 per cent of all the ammunition fired by the entire British army.

General Currie referred to the growth of respect of the Canadian forces from their arrival in France until the end of war. When the enemy had first used poisoning gas, General Smith-Dorrien had said to him that, knowing of the enemy tactics and the retirement of the troops to the left and right of the Canadians, he (General Smith-Dorrien) had foreseen the worst disaster in the annals of the British army.

When the news came back that the Canadians were holding, he could not believe it and had sent up again and again for news. The reputation made for doggedness was more than borne out by the Canadians in later years until in the end the Canadian Corps had come to be recognized as the hardest hitting force on the whole Allied front.

The different organization method, which made it possible to choose certain divisions for such work and the placing of the engineers and artillery of the corps had given the Canadians an advantage, said General Currie, and this factor was largely responsible for their success later. "I am glad to say," said the speaker, "that our citizen army fought against the greatest military machine the world ever produced, yet never lost a gun in four years; in the last two years never failed to take an objective, and there were some of our divisions which never allowed a hostile foot to enter their trenches. We never lost an inch of ground that we had once consolidated."

THE LAST HUNDRED DAYS

The hundred days from August 8, 1918 had seen remarkable successes, and General Currie said he would urge the Government to educate the people more in what that period meant to Canada. The Canadians had previously been held on Haig's reserve, ready to move wherever the Boche struck "and," said General Currie, "it was only a question then of how many more blows we could withstand."

Haig had said that in all the dark days, his remaining comfort was that he had the Canadians to fall back upon. The Canadian force had been used as the spearhead in the Amiens drive. We made the plan, set the time and the pace. The secrecy had been perfect, and the objective, the old Amiens line, was taken the first night. "That day we penetrated eight miles, the greatest penetration by any army in the war, and our victory had a wonderful effect. By August 13 we had penetrated 14,000 yards and reached the old Somme battlefield, which the Boche had left in 1916. The wire and machine gun emplacements were still there, and the ground was filled with enemy reserves."

General Currie said he had then advised that the Canadian be moved to assist the Third British Army driving from Bapaume, and after that army had later struck, the Canadians were called upon, and were the first to break the Hindenburg line. During the eight days the battle lasted, they pierced five systems of German trenches. He then told of Foch's hammer blow which resulted in the Canadians going in at Canal du Nord, Bourslon Wood and Cambrai and compared the battles there with Vimy. The Canadians in the last one hundred days had faced forty-seven different Boche divisions or more than a quarter of the enemy's forces on the western front. No force in the world, said General Currie, had played a greater part in finally ending the struggle and bringing the Boche to his knees.

TROOPS' WONDERFUL SPIRIT

The spirit of the troops even to the last had been such that the gunners and stretcher bearers worked through gas attacks without masks in order to give their comrades better support and assistance. Of the sixty-four Victoria Crosses won by Canadians during the war, thirty had been awarded for the last one hundred days. There was nothing they would not do to win. Of the men who lie buried in Flanders, Canada can best cherish their memory by doing her duty to those who were their dependents as the men had done their duty for Canada. [...]



On this day 100 years ago, Canadian troops led the First World War's final charge

J.L. Granatstein, *Maclean's*, 7 August 2018.

“Every gun shot together,” wrote Gunner Bertie Cox, “and the thing was off. I never heard anything like it in my life... We fired our first shot at 4:20 a.m. at 800 yards and in three hours, the enemy was out of our range (6,500 yards).”

It was the first of Canada's Hundred Days that ended the Great War. The attack at Amiens, France, set the Allies on the road to victory, and the Canadian Corps, led by Lt.-Gen. Sir Arthur Currie, was in the vanguard.

The Canadians had established a record as “shock troops” at Vimy Ridge, Hill 70 and Passchendaele and, whenever the Germans knew Currie was going to attack, they prepared for the worst. Getting the Corps to Amiens had to be accomplished in secret, and this was no simple task. From their positions near Arras, 65 km to the north, the 100,000 Canadians and all their equipment, trucks, guns, horses, food and ammunition had to be moved quietly at night by road, rail and on foot. Soldiers were ordered, “Keep your mouth shut!” Disinformation tactics were aimed to persuade the Germans that the Canadians would attack on the Arras front. The staff officers planning the Amiens attack had to draft their orders in a hurry.

Flanked by Australian and French formations, the Canadians went into action in the early morning, the infantry, accompanied by tanks, following the heavy artillery barrage closely, keeping pace as the gunfire moved ahead in one-kilometre increments.

The tanks, “creeping down the slope like huge great beetles,” as Padre F.G. Scott wrote, played a critical role, shooting up German machine-gun posts. “Fortunately for us,” Lance Cpl. Ken Foster of the 2nd Battalion said, “the tanks soon put them out of action, provided of course, that an anti-tank shell did not get them first. Without the tanks, I'm afraid it would have been a hopeless task.”

The Germans, stunned by the artillery barrage and the tanks, initially offered little resistance as the infantry advanced. Maj. Ian Sinclair of the 13th Battalion wrote that his unit cleared a wood but then faced heavy fire from a trench where “a large party of Huns held out, using rifle grenades and bombs effectively.” Two Canadian mortars “assisted in quickly reducing the garrison, who put up white flags.” By noon, John Scratcherd, a young artillery officer said, “it had developed into the kind of war that I have always dreamt about. Open country with no trenches or barbed wire, and no artillery fire; cavalry dashing all over the place rounding up the parties of Hun and armoured cars rushing about.”

For the Allied soldiers who had fought the war in the trenches, open warfare really must have seemed like a dream. The hard slogging for small patches of shell-torn ground won at a very high cost had been replaced by rapid advances and combined arms warfare—infantry, artillery, armour, engineers rapidly bridging streams, good communications and the Royal Air Force overhead strafing enemy positions.

Open warfare did not mean fewer casualties—fighting in the face of machine guns inevitably took a heavy toll—but at least there were genuine gains. So much so that Gen. Erich Ludendorff, the Germans' chief strategist, called Aug. 8 “the black day.” The Germans had launched huge attacks against the Allies between March and June, but now, after Amiens, there was no longer hope of resuming the offensive. The enemy now knew the war must be terminated.

Not yet, however. The Canadians continued the attack for the next several days, but German reinforcements of men and aircraft had been poured in, the Allied supply chain began to break down, and the costs for every metre of ground increased. Currie and the Australian Corps' Sir John Monash urged the British Expeditionary Force commander, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, to halt the advance. Haig agreed, telling Currie that Amiens was “the finest operation of the war.” The Canadian Corps soon returned to the Arras front to recuperate and ready for the next assault.

The attack at Amiens had been an extraordinary success, the Canadians going forward 13 km on the first day and gaining an additional 10 km before the attack came to a halt. But the toll had been heavy: 11,822 officers and men killed, wounded or taken prisoner. There were no easy victories in the First World War.



2018

1919

