

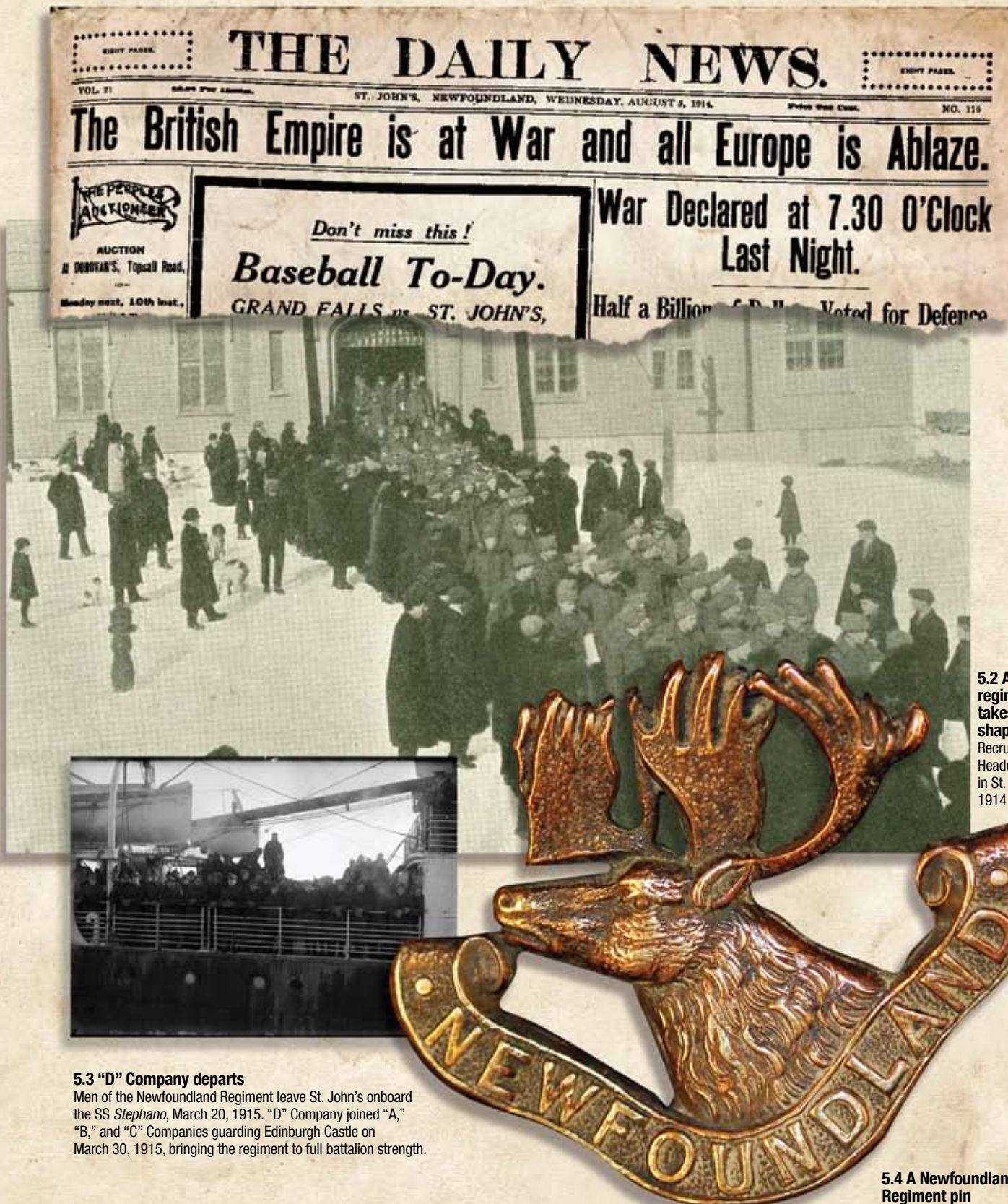
## TOPIC 5.1

# The Great War

What are some of the costs of war?

Under what circumstances would you agree to go to war?

5.1



**THE DAILY NEWS.**  
VOL. 21 ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5, 1914. NO. 119

**The British Empire is at War and all Europe is Ablaze.**

**War Declared at 7.30 O'Clock Last Night.**

**Half a Billion £ D. Voted for Defence**

**Don't miss this!**  
**Baseball To-Day.**  
GRAND FALLS vs. ST. JOHN'S.

**THE PEOPLE'S AUCTIONEER**  
AUCTION  
H. DUNNAN'S, Topsail Road.  
Monday next, 10th inst.

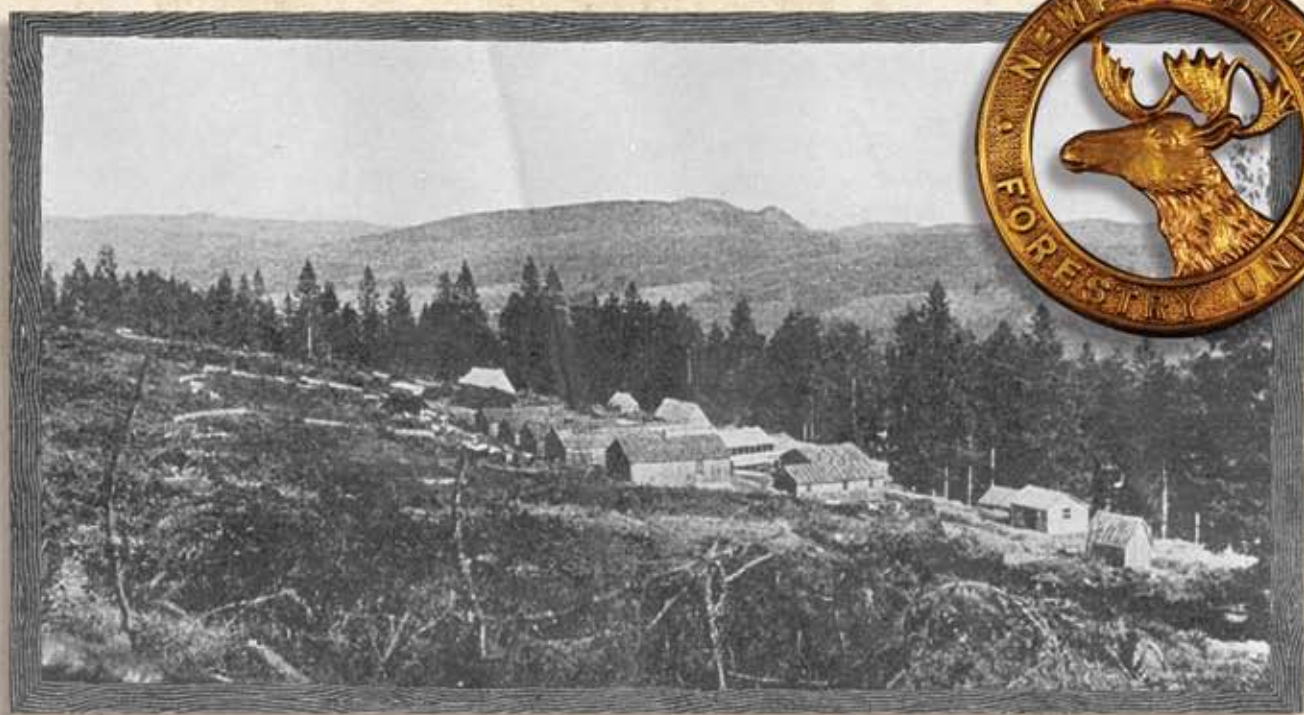
**5.2 A regiment takes shape**  
Recruits at Headquarters in St. John's, 1914

**5.3 "D" Company departs**  
Men of the Newfoundland Regiment leave St. John's onboard the SS *Stephano*, March 20, 1915. "D" Company joined "A," "B," and "C" Companies guarding Edinburgh Castle on March 30, 1915, bringing the regiment to full battalion strength.

**5.4 A Newfoundland Regiment pin**



\*A puttee is the covering for the lower part of the leg. At the outbreak of the First World War, the Newfoundland Regiment lacked regulation khaki broadcloth so their puttees were made from blue broadcloth



### 5.5 The Forestry Corps

Approximately 500 men enlisted in the Newfoundland Forestry Corps and worked at logging camps in Scotland during 1917 and 1918. Forestry Corps pin shown above.

## Dealing with the War

When Great Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914, the entire British Empire was brought into the conflict. This included Newfoundland. For Newfoundland, therefore, the decision was not whether to enter the war, but how, and to what degree its people would become involved.

The government of Edward Morris quickly decided to raise and equip a regiment for service in Europe. It established the Newfoundland Patriotic Association (NPA) to direct recruiting efforts and to manage the war effort in general. The NPA was a non-partisan **extra-parliamentary** body, chaired by Governor Sir Walter Davidson. It was a unique response to the imperial war effort. Incredibly, within two months of its formation, the NPA had the **First Five Hundred** (actually 537 soldiers), also known as the Blue Puttees,\* recruited, partially trained, and ready to head overseas. On

October 3, 1914, the soldiers marched from their training camp to board the SS *Florizel*, a steamer converted into a troopship, which would take them overseas.

Under the NPA's direction, volunteers continued to be recruited, trained, equipped, and shipped to Europe until a Department of Militia was formed by the National Government in July 1917. In addition to the many men who served in the **Newfoundland Regiment**, significant numbers enlisted in the Royal Naval Reserve and in Canadian and other armed forces. Others joined the unarmed forces, which included the Merchant Marines and the Forestry Corps.\*\* About 175 women also served overseas as **Volunteer Aid Detachment Nurses**. Known as VADs, these women worked in European military hospitals as nurses, ambulance drivers, cooks, clerks, and maids.

\*\*The first members of the Forestry Corps were shipped to Scotland in 1917. Loggers worked long hours to satisfy Britain's wartime demand for lumber.



5.6 Blue Puttees at Pleasantville, St. John's, September 1914



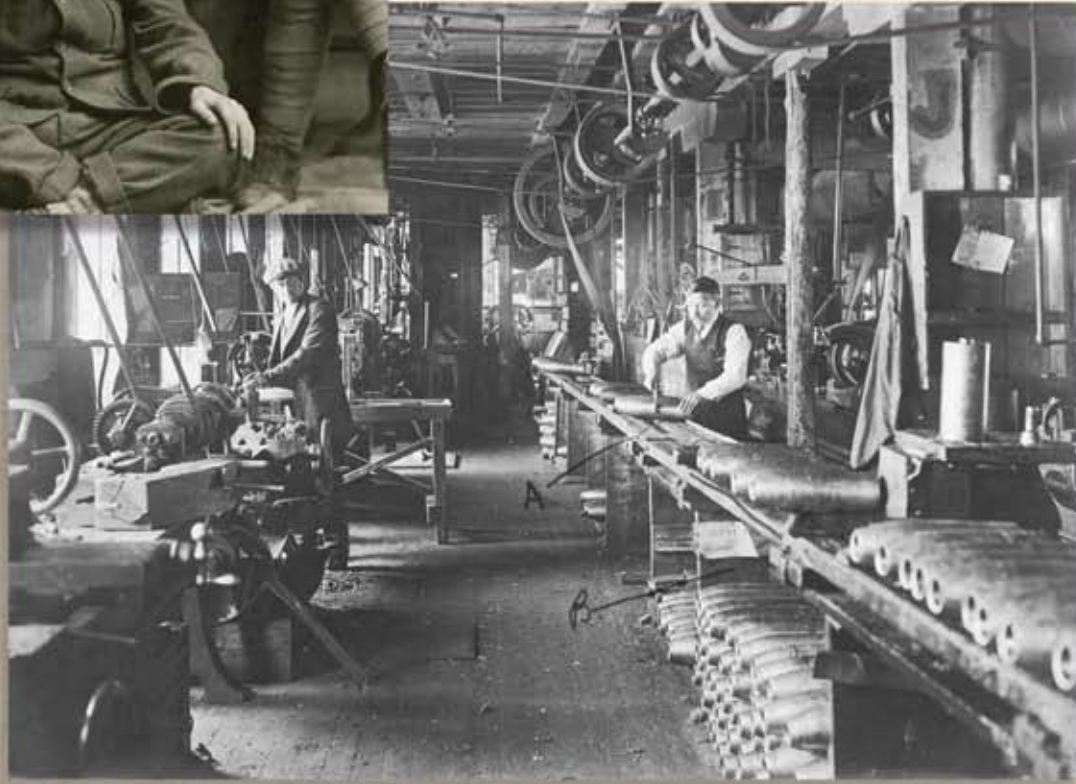


### 5.7 John Shiwak

At least 15 men of Inuit and Metis descent joined the Newfoundland Regiment. Many used their skills in sealing, hunting, and trapping to become expert snipers and scouts. Some were promoted for their bravery and others were decorated by the United Kingdom and Canada. John Shiwak, an Inuk hunter and trapper from Rigolet, distinguished himself as an expert sniper and scout during the war. He was promoted to lance-corporal on April 16, 1917, but died seven months later during the Battle of Cambrai in northern France.

### 5.8 Manufacturing shells in Newfoundland

The Newfoundland Shell Company opened at St. John's in 1915 to manufacture munitions. It employed over 100 workers in two-and-a-half years.



Newfoundland experienced rapid social, political, and economic changes. Young men from all over the island and Labrador came to St. John's to train and then to leave for battle overseas. Political parties united in support of the war effort, and the local economy boomed.

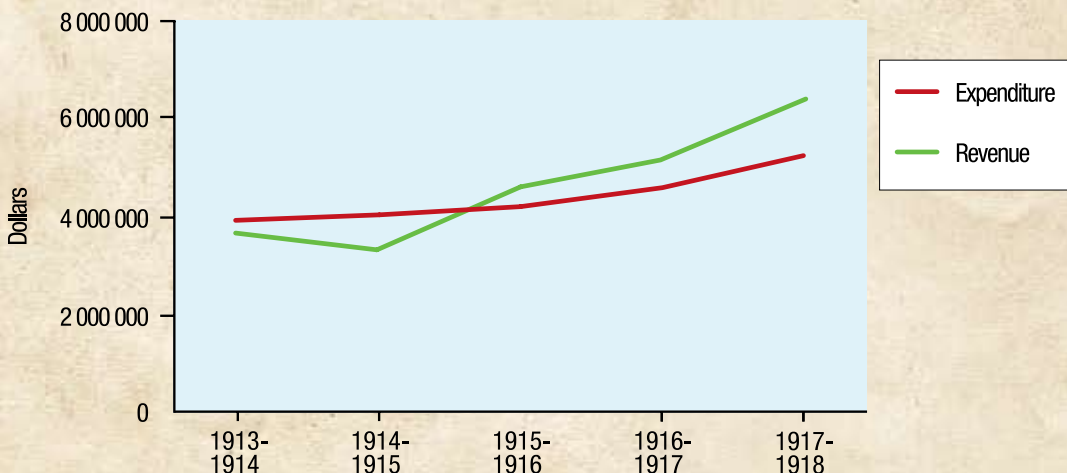
As Europe's demand for fish rose and some countries temporarily withdrew from the cod fishery, fish from Newfoundland began to dominate the marketplace. Forest and mining industries also benefited from wartime demand for lumber and iron ore. Although wartime inflation increased the cost of some imports, such as coal

and flour, rising wages helped to offset these expenses. For the year ending June 1918, the colony's revenue was \$6.5 million. This left the government with a surplus of over \$1.1 million – at that time, the largest surplus in Newfoundland's history.

However, with the signing of an **armistice** on November 11, 1918, hostilities ended and Newfoundland faced postwar problems. Slowly,\* those who served began to return home and face the task of re-adjusting to civilian life. The wartime economic boom came to an end, leading to many domestic problems.

*\*The Royal Newfoundland Regiment maintained an active role with the British Army after the armistice. The men continued across Belgium into Germany, where they remained as part of the occupation force until February 1919.*

5.9 Government revenues 1913-1918





Counter No. M4

# NEWFOUNDLAND POSTAL TELEGRAPHS.

**Cable Connection with all the World**

**All Messages Sent are Subject to the Following Conditions:**

The Management may decline to forward the Message, though it has been received for transmission; but in case of so doing shall refund to the Sender the amount paid for its transmission.  
In case the Message shall never reach its destination by reason of any neglect or default of the N. P. T. or its Servants, whilst the Message remains under the control of the N. P. T., they will refund the amount paid by the Sender for such Message.  
The N. P. T. shall not be liable to make compensation beyond the amount refunded as above for any loss, injury, or damage arising or resulting from the non-transmission or non-delivery of the Message, or delay or error in the transmission or delivery thereof, however such transmission, non-delivery, delay, or error shall have occurred.  
The control of the N. P. T. over the Message shall be deemed to have strictly ceased for the purposes of these Conditions at any point where, in the course of the transit of the Message to its destination, it may be entrusted by the N. P. T. (and the N. P. T. shall have full power so to entrust the Message) for further transmission by or through any system, service, or line of Telegraph belonging to or worked by any administration or authority not controlled by the N. P. T. exclusively, although worked as part of or in connection with the Telegraphic system or service of the N. P. T.  
I request that the following Telegram may be transmitted according to the foregoing Conditions, by which I agree to abide.

**(NOT TRANSMITTED)**

Signature of Sender: *J. R. P. Bennett* Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Line Number	Not	By	Sent	By	Check

**Dated** October 12, 1915.

**To** Rev. Walter W. Cotton,  
Bay of Islands.

Regret to inform you that Record Office, London, today wires that No. 902 Private Hugh Walter McWhirter, son of Henry McWhirter, Humbermouth, has been reported killed in action. Will you please immediately notify parents.

*J. R. P. Bennett*  
COLONIAL SECRETARY.

## 5.10 Telegraph

(top) Most soldiers' files contain at least a few postal telegraphs, usually telegraphs sent to the next of kin indicating a soldier's illness, wound, or death. When a telegram was sent informing of a death, it was supposed to be preceded by a telegram to the family's local clergyman (or in his absence the local school teacher). The telegram to the next of kin typically contained a note to the telegraph operator that it was not to be delivered before the one advising the clergyman.

## 5.11 A brief stay in Turkey

(bottom) Men of the Newfoundland Regiment's "B" Company rest in a front line trench at Suvla Bay, Turkey in late 1915. During two major Allied withdrawals from the Gallipoli Peninsula, the rearguard of the Newfoundland Regiment was among the very last to leave.

# OUR MEN AT THE FRONT

Shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, members of the Newfoundland Regiment left St. John's to train in Scotland and England. From there they were deployed to Gallipoli, Turkey, where on September 22, 1915, Private Hugh Walter McWhirter became the first member of the Newfoundland Regiment to lose his life in conflict. Before war's end, another 1304 Regiment members are known to have died in service. From Gallipoli, the Regiment went to Egypt and then the Western Front in Europe.

For many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Beaumont-Hamel is the battle of the First World War that stands out. The Newfoundland Regiment's advance at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916 was part of the opening day of the Battle of the Somme. Advancing on heavily fortified German lines, 19 240 soldiers in the British Army were killed within hours. Of these, 233 men were from the Newfoundland Regiment. Another 386 soldiers from the Regiment were wounded, and 91 were reported missing (and later assumed dead). Only 110 men from the Regiment remained unscathed after the battle.

The Regiment's sacrifice at Beaumont-Hamel was noted by Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces, Sir Douglas Haig. He said: "Newfoundland may well feel proud of her sons. The heroism and devotion to duty they displayed on 1st July has never been surpassed." However, Beaumont-Hamel is not the only place where Newfoundlanders and Labradorians lost their lives. The following table indicates selected battles on the Western Front in which the Newfoundland Regiment participated.

5.12 Casualties of selected battles

Battle	Date	Casualties
Somme Offensive - Beaumont-Hamel	July 1916	324 killed, 386 wounded
Somme Offensive - Gueudecourt	October 1916	120 killed, 119 wounded
Battle of Arras - Monchy-le-Preux	April 1917	166 killed, 141 wounded
Battle of Cambrai	November 1917	110 killed, 352 wounded





5.14

#### Service vs. Fatal Casualties of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in the First World War

Branch of Service	Number Who Served Overseas	Fatal Casualties
Royal Newfoundland Regiment	5391	1305
Royal Naval Reserve	2053	179
Newfoundland Forestry Corps	500	3
Merchant Marines	Estimated 500	155
Canadian and Other Forces	3200	Unknown
<b>Total</b>	<b>Estimated 11 644</b>	<b>1642 known</b>

#### 5.13 A nation remembers

The National War Memorial at St. John's was unveiled on July 1, 1924.

## Social Effects of the War

The First World War brought rapid and far-reaching social changes to Newfoundland and Labrador. Nearly 12 000 men left their homes to fight or to serve in other ways overseas. This was more than one-fifth of the colony's population and about 35 per cent of men aged 19 to 35. Many were away for years; some men returned physically injured or shell-shocked, while others had been killed and did not return at all.

The loss of so many young people created difficulties for those left behind. For the families of men who did volunteer, there was the tremendous emotional stress of separation, as well as numerous practical concerns. With the absence of their male relatives, women, children, and the elderly sometimes had to take on additional work, such as chopping firewood or digging vegetable gardens.

In addition, wartime fatalities left some children fatherless and deprived some elderly parents of the support they normally would have received from adult sons.

Many of the soldiers who did return home from war faced difficulties re-adjusting to civilian life. Some returned to fishing, logging, and other jobs, but many were unable to find work. This was particularly a problem for young men who enlisted when they were still in school or for soldiers who returned home with injuries. To help ease the transition from military to civilian life, the government created the Civil Re-Establishment Committee in June 1918. The committee had three goals: (i) to help restore injured men to the best possible state of health; (ii) to provide men with vocational training if needed; and (iii) to place them in suitable jobs.



# INVISIBLE WOUNDS

Even when physical injuries healed, many veterans had to deal with shell shock and other psychological problems. Some recovered in a relatively short period of time, but others felt the effects for years. Many veterans were reluctant to talk about their experiences and may not have received the proper medical help. Military historian Richard Gabriel has said: "Psychiatric breakdown remains one of the most costly items of war when expressed in human terms. In fact, in the First World War there was a greater probability of becoming a psychiatric casualty than of being killed by enemy fire."



## 5.15 Missing in action

Hundreds of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who took part in the First World War have no known grave (591 members of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, 114 Royal Naval Reservists, and 115 Merchant Mariners). On July 1, 2009, at Bowring Park in St. John's, three plaques were unveiled bearing their names. The plaques are exact replicas of those at Newfoundland Memorial Park in Beaumont-Hamel, France.

III. To D.A.G., 3RD ECHELON, G.H.Q. (8).

The above case has been classified Shell Shock (W.)

Disposal (9) u y. 30. 26. 9. 14.

Date 25. 8. 17 for O.C. No. 62 C.C.S. W. Johnson Capt. C.M.C. (Special Hospital).

20. 9. 14.

ARMY PRINTING AND STATIONERY SERVICES A-6/17-81641-3,000

60 The O.C. Special Hospital will be responsible that any points which appear to require investigation are brought to the notice of the Army Headquarters before this form is finally disposed of.

61 Discharged to duty on (date) or Transferred to Base by No. Ambulance Train on (date).

## 5.16 An excerpt from a medical report of a soldier suffering from shell shock

The report also noted: "... when advancing [soldier] was buried by shell + again when object was reached logs of wood + some clay falling on him almost took breath away. Pain in head + chest, very shaky + nervous."



## Excerpts from *Soldier's Heart* by David French (2002)

Set in Bay Roberts in 1924, *Soldier's Heart* tells the story of a father, Esau Mercer, trying to readjust to civilian life and reconnect with his son years after returning from the Great War. As Esau's son, Jacob, tries to reach out to his father, he learns his father is haunted by a hidden secret from his war days.



5.17 A performance of *Soldier's Heart*  
Victoria Loyal Orange Lodge #3 Museum and Playhouse, Bay Roberts, 2009



5.18 A poster advertising a performance of *Soldier's Heart*

**“It’s a waste of time ... T’ings happen in war that can never be forgotten ... never be forgiven. T’ings that a man just has to live with. It’s his punishment.”**

— Esau Mercer in *Soldier's Heart* by David French

5.19

**JACOB:** It’s you who hardly speaks, not me!

**ESAU:** Watch your tongue, you! I’m still your father! Speak to me in that tone of voice and I’ll—

(Jim gets up from the table. He climbs his ladder at the back of the stage and begins to nail a board as if to make a new window frame. He is interrupted by an audio announcement.)

**JACOB:** (cutting in) What?

**BERT:** He’s 16 years old, Esau. He wants to know what we did overseas. It’s only natural ... Remember that British recruiting poster? ‘Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?’

**ESAU:** What is it you tells him? How we sailed off in 1914 to save the world? You, me, and Will?

**BERT:** Some saviours.



**ESAU:** (recites bitterly)  
'Why did we j'in the Army, b'ys?  
Why did we j'in the Army?  
Why did we come to France to fight?  
We must have been bloody well barmy.'

**BERT:** The world was different then.

**JACOB:** Don't forget, Father. Most believed the War would be over by Christmas.

**ESAU:** Yes, Will wanted to go to Boston that fall with young Ruby Parsons.  
It was me who talked him out of it. 'It'll be a lark,' I said. 'We'll  
box the Kaiser's ears. Make ourselves a few dollars ...'

**JACOB:** Funny, we've talked more tonight than in all the past six years.  
We've even talked about the War. But we still haven't mentioned the  
most important part of all: July 1st. And why it is you avoids Bert.

**ESAU:** (to Bert) Is that what you told him? That I've been dodging you?

**BERT:** Indeed I didn't! I never said a word, did I, Jacob?

**JACOB:** I'm no fool, Father. And I ain't blind ... Bert would never tell, but I'm  
sure he knows more than he's letting on. That's why you shuns him, ain't  
it? Like that time at Sergeant Kelly's wedding. It's almost as if ...

**ESAU:** What?

**JACOB:** As if you can't bring yourself to look at him ... (A new thought) Or is  
it that you can't bear to have him look at you? Which?

**ESAU:** You tell me.

**JACOB:** It's all connected to Uncle Will, ain't it? Somet'ing happened out  
there in No Man's Land that neither you nor Bert will talk about.

**BERT:** Will died in battle, Jacob. He died and was buried. That's all that  
happened in No Man's Land.

**JACOB:** I don't believe you ... For years, Father you've kept it inside you,  
locked away like a dark secret. Whatever it is, it can't be so bad  
you can't speak about it.

**ESAU:** Can't it?

## Experiencing The Arts

To give you an opportunity to practise your playwriting, your assignment is to select a topic/event/person that is covered in this chapter and then write a scene about that topic/event/person. To begin this process:

- Select a topic/event/person
- Decide what in particular it is about this subject that you want to explore in your scene. You may

need to do some additional research to help you with this.

- Decide what characters will be in the scene. For each character, write a brief character bio that explains his or her background and how it affects his or her motivation in the scene you are about to create.



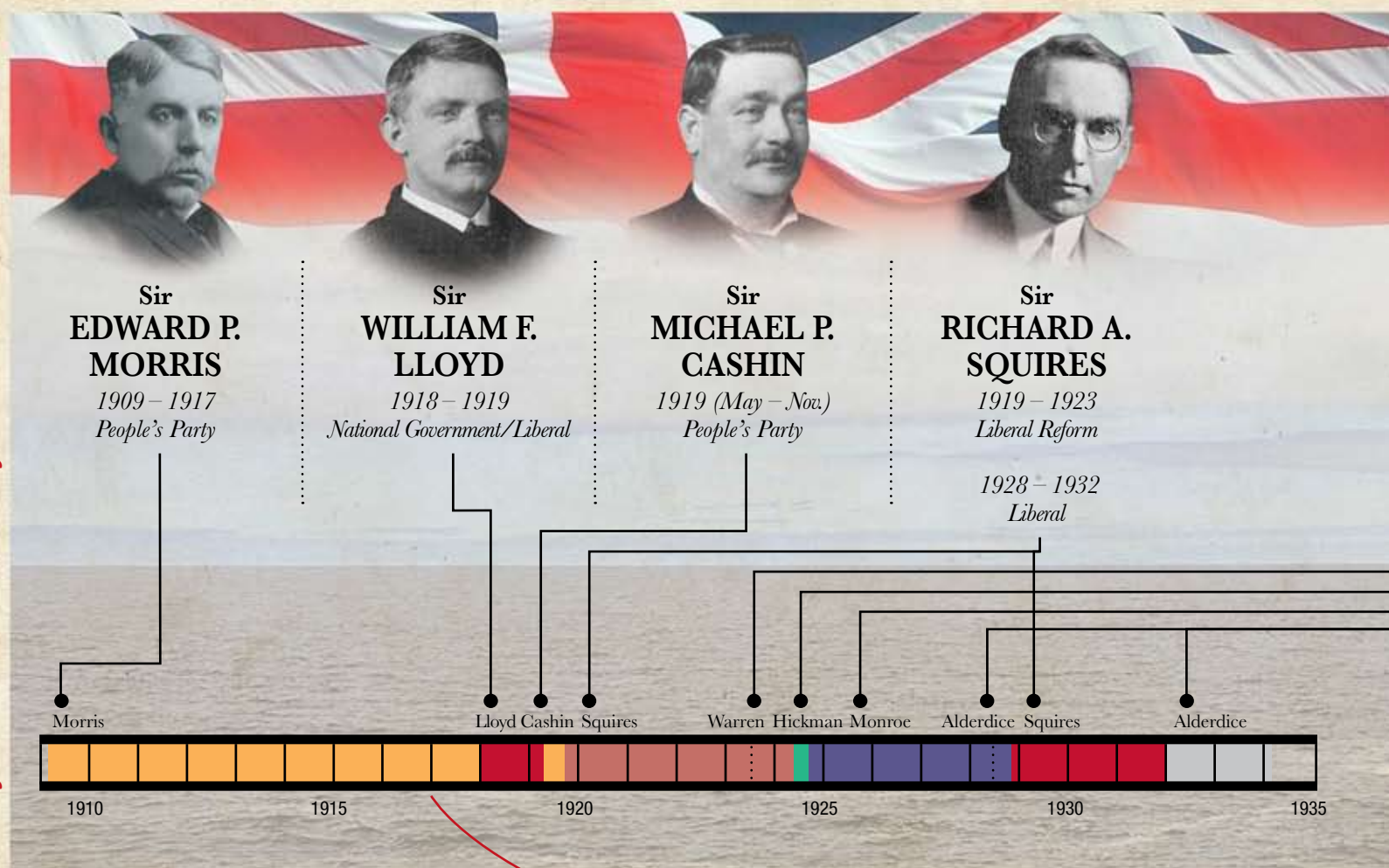
\*After much debate, the National Government brought in conscription by the Military Service Act of May 1918 to maintain the strength of the Newfoundland Regiment. However, none of the conscripts reached the front before the war ended.

## Political Effects of the War

The war also left its mark on politics in Newfoundland and Labrador. Although all political parties supported the war efforts, party differences and other issues led Prime Minister Morris to form a National Government in July 1917 – in effect, a coalition of all parties. The new National Government faced several challenges, including the **conscription** issue\* and Morris's abrupt resignation in December 1917 to accept a peerage. These developments, part of what historian Patrick O'Flaherty has called "a blurring of party distinctions," contributed to the political instability that followed the war.

During the early 1920s, governments were typically short-lived and some lasted only a few weeks or months. Between 1919 and 1924, for example, six different prime ministers held office. Many had to deal with rising public discontent and various political scandals. Political instability encouraged public unrest, largely because it became impossible for politicians to work together to solve the colony's growing economic and financial problems.

### 5.20 Prime Ministers 1909-1934



## Economic Effects

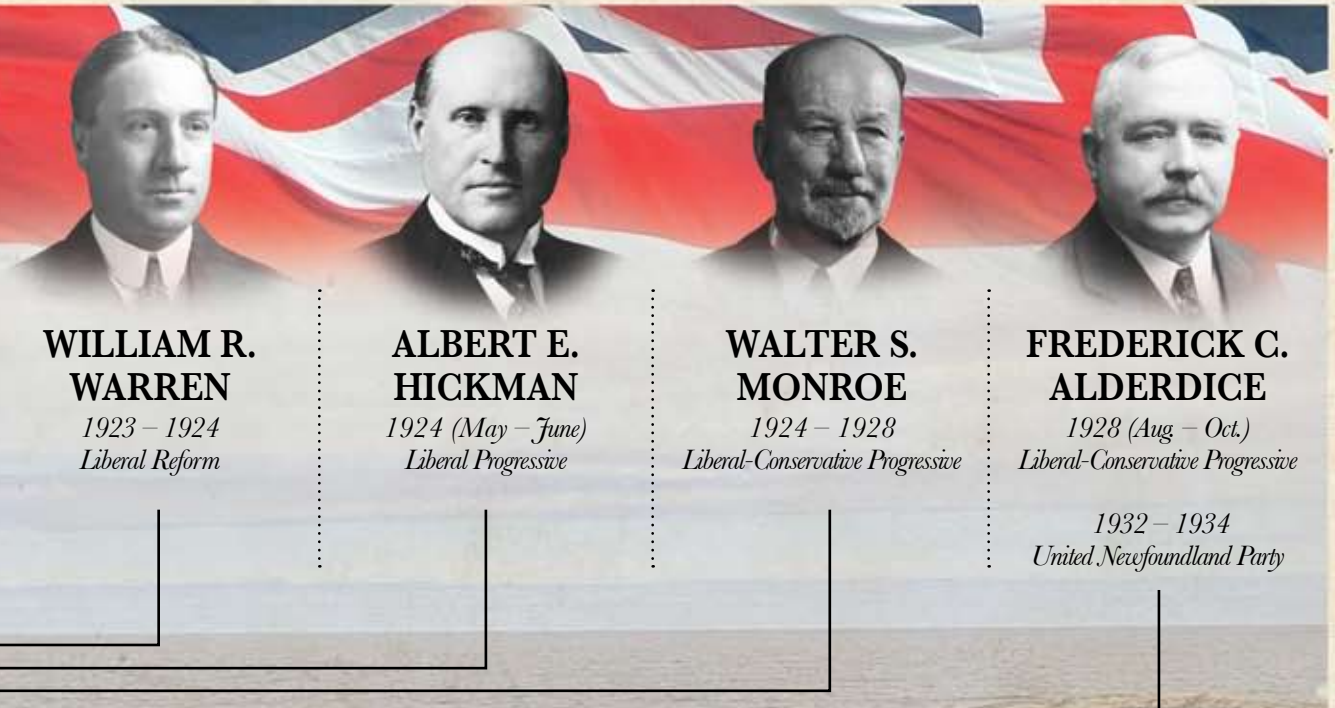
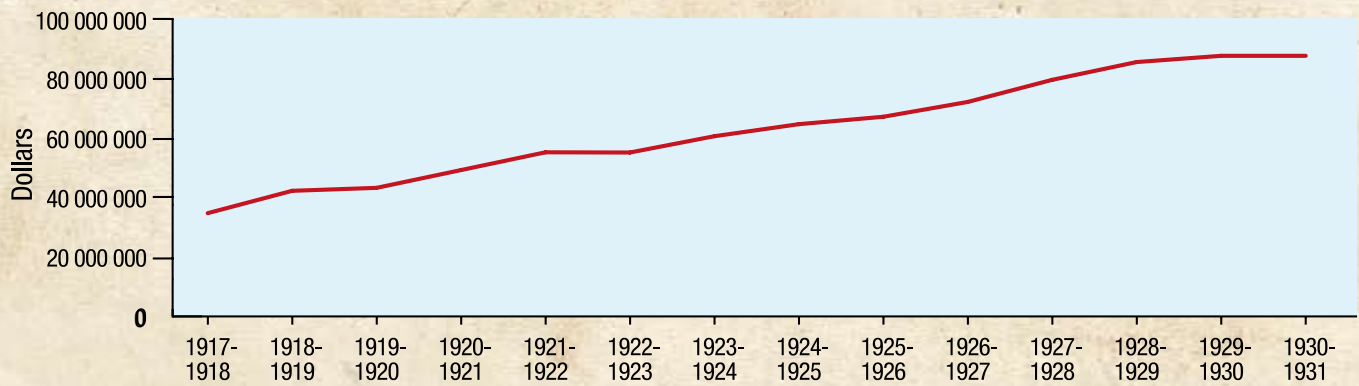
This wartime boom was temporary, and the war in fact brought long-term problems. In 1914, the public debt was \$30.5 million. During the war, the government borrowed \$15 million, increasing the public debt to \$43 million. By 1918, almost a quarter of the colony's revenue was needed to pay the interest. In addition, government now faced the cost of paying pensions to returning servicemen, as well as other rehabilitation services.

By the early 1930s, the Newfoundland government was in serious financial difficulty, and this was compounded by the Great Depression. In 1933, almost \$100 million in debt, the colony turned to Great Britain for help. Thus began a series of events that would lead Newfoundland to the suspension of responsible government, the Commission of Government – and ultimately, Confederation.

National Government is formed.



5.21 Funded public debt



## Questions:

1. More than 5000 men from Newfoundland and Labrador served overseas as part of the Newfoundland Regiment during the Great War. Identify the number of men from your community/area who enlisted. Assess the impact that this participation might have had on your community/area. (It may be helpful to examine some of the files of those soldiers as a source of qualitative data. Visit [www.therooms.ca/regiment](http://www.therooms.ca/regiment) for details.)
2. Identify one event/aspect of the Great War. Create a graphic representation that illustrates the direct and indirect consequences of this event.
3. There are a number of reasons why the Great War was a significant event in our province's history. Identify the three most compelling arguments. Explain.