Canada: A Journey

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## Second Battle of Ypres

This battle took place from April 22nd to May 25th 1915, on the outskirts of the Belgian city of Ypres, now known as leper. This was the first major battle fought by Canadian troops, during the first world war.

31 000 Candian men were the first to volunteer for the service in WWI. These men travelled to Britain, as part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in October 1914, which consisted of Canadian farmers, lumberjacks, lawyers, factory workers, teachers and doctors. These Canadians were trained for a year, and then in February 1915, they were sent to France to fight at the Ypres salient, as they wanted to protect Ypres, as it offered rail and road links to ports. It was very important to keep this place out of Germany's grasp. It was difficult to keep Ypres safe from enemy takeover, as it was surronded by German soldiers on three different sides. On 22nd April, the Germans used 160 tonnes of chlorine gas, for the first time, as a weapon. This had left the Canadian divison shocked and panicked, as most of the Algerians fleed, because their throats burned and lungs filled with foam and mucus, leading to suffocation. Canadian soldiers although suffered from the gas, they still managed to stop the enemy from reaching within the salient and onto the city of Ypres.1 This event brought reputation for Canadians, as trial-by-fire at Ypres cost 6 000 casualties over the four day battle.2 This war was very important for Canadian history, as it was Canada's first battle, and also they were able to save Ypres and re-establish control. The Canadians were praised for their courage and an influential being named John McCrae, a Canadian Army Medical Corps officer, who was touched by this event, wrote his famous poem, *In Flanders Fields* (May 1915).1

**Profound:** This was the first battle fought by the Canadians in WWI, and hence it had a great importance. Regardless of how well the Canadians fought, this battle will be remembered as Canada's first role in the war effort. The victory of the Canadians makes this more significant.

**Amount Affected:** The amount of people affected by this event is a very great number, as every single Canadian was affected directly or indirectly by Canada entering the war and part taking in their first major battle.

**Long Lasting:** This battle is remembered and is a proud moment for all Canadians. The symbol of this war is the poem, *In Flanders Fields*, which became an icon of patriotism and bravery.

**Emerging Trends:** The Battle of Second Ypres caused many Canadians to become a part of the war and led to many more volunteering to fight from the motivational words of John McCrae in his famous poem.

## Battle of Passchendaele

This battle took place from July 31st to 10th November 1917, on the Passcehndaele ridge of the Belgian city of Ypres. This battle is known to be a bold symbol of mud, and slaughter. Canadians were trusted with this responsiblity, based on their prior victory at Vimy Ridge.

The commander of the British armies in Europe, General Douglas Haig, planned to break the German front lines in Belgium, so that they could advance to the coast and free the ports from the enemy. David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, was very doubtful of Haig's tactics, as the British only had a slight advantage in forces compared to the enemy. Regardless of knowing that there would be heavy losses of life, the military scheme was approved and the battle would follow in July 1917. The Canadian Corps (100 000 men) were first positioned at Lens, France, but Haig had ordered Lieutenant General Arthur Currie, the Canadian Corps' commander to bring all of his divisions to fight around Passchendaele. Though, Currie viewed his plan as a hasty attack, with only loss of more than 16 000 Canadian soldiers with no gain, he still followed and made plans for the assualt. The Canadians Corps moved to the Ypres salient, which they had defended earlier in 1915 as well. Canadians gained about a few hundred metres each day, however they lost soldiers at a faster pace. The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry was fighting so fiercely that they had lost all Junior officers in only one hour. On November 6th, the Canadians had found success in their third attempt, by capturing Passchendaele. The final day of the four-month battle was on November 10th, where the remaining areas were controlled. Even a century later, the Battle of Passchendaele is regarded as one of the horrors of WWI and the sacrifices shall be respected.3 After the ridge was captured, Currie's estimation of 16 000 Canadians deaths was proven to be true, as there were 15 654 Canadians martryed, while fighting for their nation.4 This event shall be remembered and its significance to the Canadian military shall be deemed honurable. Such sacrifices shall be glorified.

**Profound:** This event has had a lot influence, as even though there were so many casualties, the Canadians were proved to be successful. Currie thought that there would be 16 000 deaths and no gain, he was correct about the number of deaths but Canada was victorious. Regardless of the victory, this battle is known as one of the most horrifying battles in the war.

**Amount Affected:** The amount affected by this battle is a great amount, as the families of those who died were greatly impacted. The citizens of the nearby area were also greatly impacted by the Allies regaining control of the land.

**Long Lasting:** This battle was significant for the Allies, as it was a tough fight with 15 654 Canadians casualties. This moment will be remembered forever and shall not forget those who showed dedication and undying patriotism to their nation.

**Emerging Trends:** This battle lead to prove the new Canadian identity, that was founded by their role at Vimy Ridge. This identity showed Canada as a strong, fierce and brave nation.

## Halifax Explosion

This explosion took occurred on December 6th 1917, when two ships collidied at Halifax harbour. This explosion was one of the largest human-made explosions, before the ignition of the first atomic bombs in 1945. Canadians were affected by this explosion, as the north of Halifax was completely devasted, due to the blast and the tsunami that followed.

Halifax was a wartime port city, during the first world war, and though Canadians were facing injury, death and tough times, there was prosperity in Halifax. This city was a big part of Canada's war effort and was one of the most accessible and ice-free harbours of North America. At the beginning of December, one of the largest merchant ships, was the Norwegian vessel *IMO*, which was heading to New York, for relief supplies. On the other hand, a French munitions ship, known as *Mont-Blanc*, which was filled with benzol (used as fuel), explosive picric acids, TNT and gun cotton. This ship was headed towards Halifax to join a fleet across the waters. Prior to *Mont-Blanc*, no ships carrying munitions or explosives were allowed to enter Halifax harbour.5 The explosion occured around 9:06 am, due to a mis-communication between the ships. There were about 2 000 deaths and more than 9 000 were injured. Halifax was covered under the grasp of ruins and debris.6 The Halifax explosion was the biggest man-made explosion, before the atomic bomb. Canadians helped and stood by each other and provided support to Halifax during such a time. The supplies that *Mont Blanc* was carrying was for the war, hence showing Canada's effort in the war and the struggles it went through for the war.

**Profound:** This event has had great effects, as even though a lot of Canada was not a part of the war, they were still fighting small battles at home. They were overcoming the struggles and injuries that the war inflicted.

**Amount Affected:** This event influenced Canada, even though the explosion only directly affected Halifax. However, indirectly Canadians were sending help to Halifax and trying to provide relief to the disaster.

**Long Lasting:** This event has been classified as a moment of unity for Canada, as though this was not a part of the actual war, it felt like that it was a part of the war. This showed how Canada stood together through tough times and showed the world, that whether it was the war or any other event, Canadians were always there.

**Emerging Trends:** The technolgy advanced, so that future crashes and collisions could be avoided. The communication between ships was improved, so that there are no miscommunications, similar to the misinterpretation that happened in Halifax.

1. Foot, R., & Roy, R. (n.d.). Second Battle of Ypres. Retrieved from http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/battle-of-ypres/

2. Land Battles - Second Ypres. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/battles-and-fighting/land-battles/second-ypres/

3. Foot, R., & Roy, R. (n.d.). Canada and the Battle of Passchendaele. Retrieved from http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/battle-of-passchendaele/

4. http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/battles-and-fighting/land-battles/passchendaele/

5. Foot, Richard, and Lois Kernaghan. “Halifax Explosion.” The Canadian Encyclopedia, thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/halifax-explosion/.

6. Halifax Explosion. (2017, December 07). Retrieved from https://maritimemuseum.novascotia.ca/what-see-do/halifax-explosion

By: Aadar Gupta