

# WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

## To Volunteer or Not to Volunteer?

### WORDS TO KNOW

- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| prolong       | obligation  |
| peril         | blokes      |
| discord       | incubation  |
| dominions     | imperialism |
| entail        | allegiance  |
| shrink        | Boches      |
| abide         | anglicizers |
| endurance     | implemented |
| conscription  | imperial    |
| perturbations | exemption   |

If you were a young man in 1914, what would influence your decision to join, or not join, the Canadian military for overseas service? If you were a young woman, what would encourage you to volunteer, or not volunteer, as a nurse or ambulance driver for overseas service?

BEFORE READING

### Support for the War

When war broke out on August 4, 1914, it received almost universal support across Canada. The Montreal newspaper *La Patrie* wrote "There are no longer French Canadians and English Canadians. Only one race now exists, united ... in a common cause."

Evidence 1.4

Posters such as these are a snapshot of the time in which they were produced.

If you were newly arrived in Canada, what would these posters suggest to you about your new country? Suppose you were a young Canadian in 1914. How would these posters affect your attitude toward volunteering?

Be the next man to put the "I" in

**FIGHT**  
and join the



AFFILIATED WITH  
MCGILL UNIVERSITY CONTINGENT  
CANADIAN OFFICERS'  
TRAINING CORPS

Headquarters  
197 PEEL ST.  
MONTREAL.  
A. A. MAGEE LT. COL.

**CANADIENS FRANCAIS**  
VENEZ AVEC NOUS DANS LE  
**150<sup>ieme</sup> BATAILLON C.M.R.**  
AIDER A LA VICTOIRE DU COQ GAULOIS SUR  
L'AIGLE PRUSSIEN



Lt. Col. H. Barré  
de la légion d'honneur

Arsenal du 65<sup>ieme</sup> Ave des Pins  
Salle d'exercice Rue Craig

One of the first issues the Canadian government faced was to decide what Canada's contribution to the war effort would be.

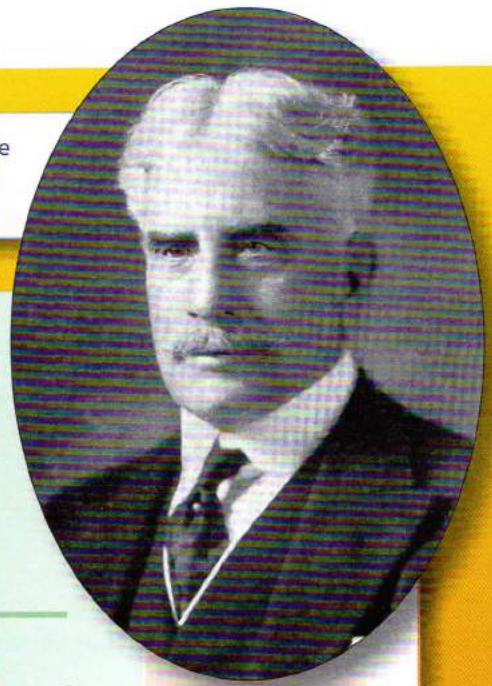
1. Prepare an organizer like the one below for the two points of view in Evidence 1.5 and 1.6.

Source	Position/role	View of why Canada is at war	View of what Canada should do to help the war and why

2. How are the two views the same? How are they different?

**Evidence 1.5**

Sir Robert Borden, leader of the Conservative party and prime minister of Canada.



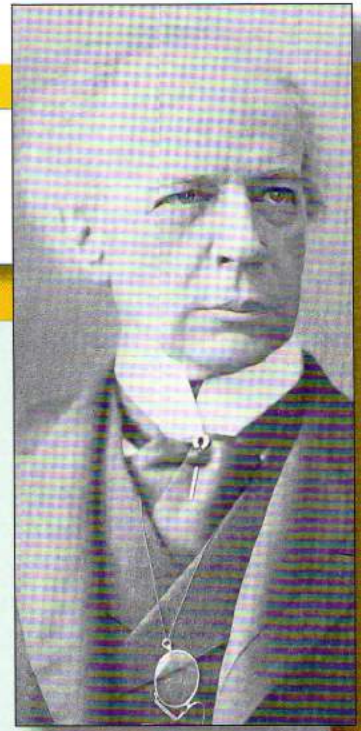
On August 19, 1914, during a debate in the House of Commons on what role Canada should play in the war, Prime Minister Borden declared his intentions.

“It is not fitting that I should prolong this debate. In the awful dawn of the greatest war the world has ever known, in the hour when peril confronts us such as this Empire has not faced for a hundred years, every vain or unnecessary word seems a discord. As to our duty, all are agreed: we stand shoulder to shoulder with Britain and the other British dominions in this quarrel. And that duty we shall not fail to fulfill as the honour of Canada demands. Not for love of battle, not for lust of conquest, not for greed of possessions, but for the cause of honour, to maintain solemn pledges, to uphold principles of liberty, to withstand forces that would convert the world into an armed camp; yea, in the very name of the peace that we sought at any cost save that of dishonour, we have entered into this war; and, while gravely conscious of the tremendous issues involved and of all the sacrifices that they may entail, we do not shrink from them, but with firm hearts we abide the event.”

- Read the first three sentences. What does Borden think Canada should do? Why?
- For what reasons does Borden say Canada is not going to war? Do you agree?
- Refer to the last sentence. What does Borden imply when he says “of all the sacrifices that they may entail [require], we do not shrink from them”?

**Evidence 1.6**

Sir Wilfrid Laurier, leader of the Liberal party, former prime minister, and leader of the Opposition.



In the same debate on Canada's role, Laurier declared his position.

“We are British subjects, and today we are face to face with the consequences which are involved in that proud fact. Long we have enjoyed the benefits of our British citizenship; today it is our duty to accept its responsibilities and its sacrifices. We have long said that when Great Britain is at war, we are at war; to-day we realize that Great Britain is at war and that Canada is at war also. ...

If my words can be heard beyond the walls of this House in the province from which I come, among the men whose blood [from] which I come, among the men whose blood flows in my own veins, I should like them to remember that, in taking their place today in the ranks of the Canadian army to fight for the cause of the allied nations, a double honour rests upon them. The very cause for which they are called upon to fight is to them doubly sacred.”

- Read the first sentence. What does Laurier mean?
- Read the first paragraph. What reasons does Laurier give for his view?
- Read the first sentence in the second paragraph. Who are “among the men whose blood [from] which I come”? Consider where Laurier is from.
- Read the rest of this paragraph. What is Laurier suggesting?

The government decided to send a military force to help the British. When the war began, this army consisted of barely 3000 men. But volunteers soon added to this number, and the army quickly grew to 30 000. Most of these volunteers had been born in Britain.

Evidence 1.7

Evidence 1.7a

“England has protected our [French Canadian] liberties and our faith. Under her flag we have found peace, and now in appreciation of what England has done you go as French Canadians to do your utmost to keep the Union Jack flying in honour.”

— Archbishop Bruchesi of Montreal, August 1914

Evidence 1.7b

**The French Canadian nationalist Henri Bourassa stated that it was Canada's duty**

“to contribute within the bounds of her strength and by means which are proper to herself, to the triumph, and especially to the endurance, of the combined efforts of France and England.”

— Henri Bourassa, 1914

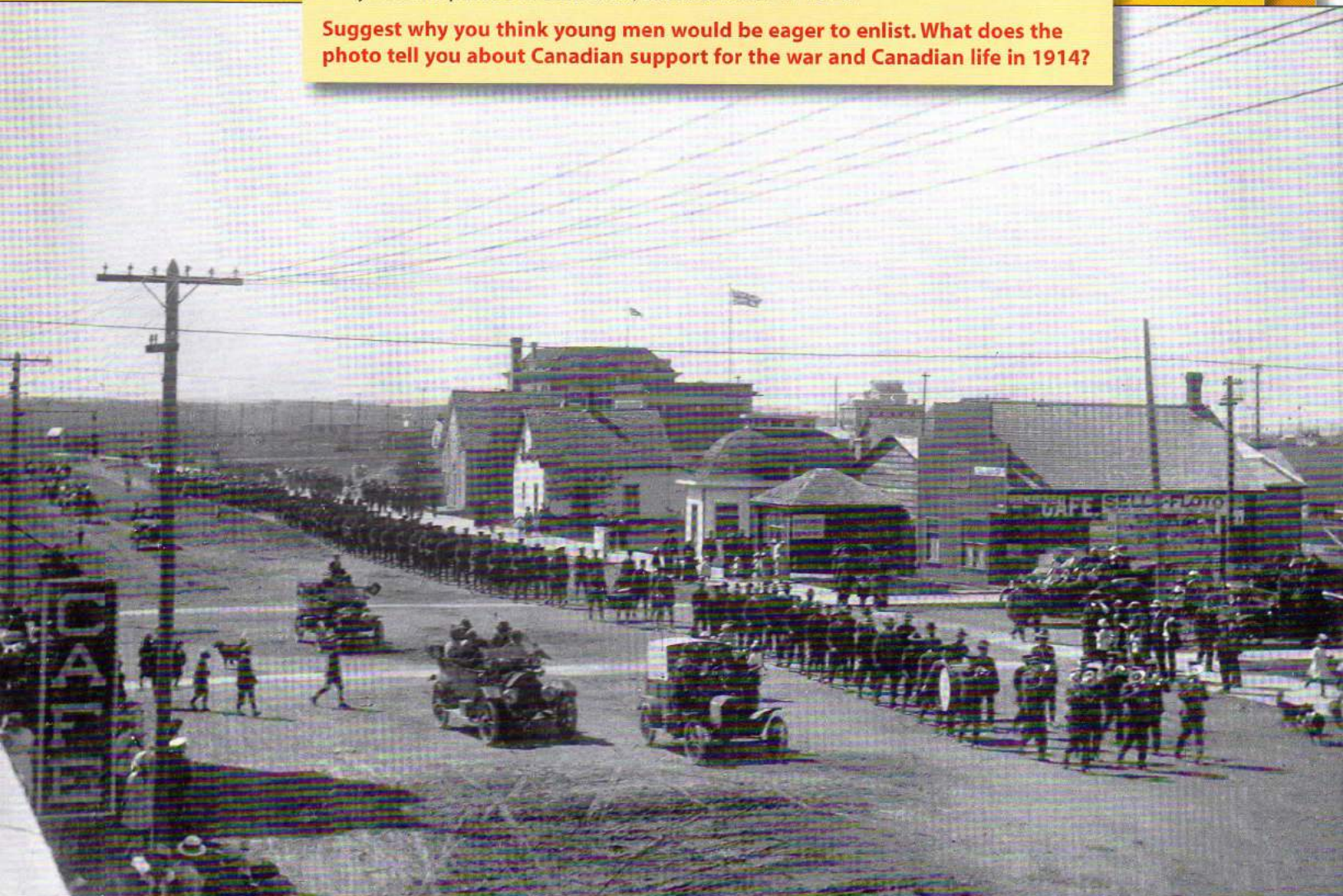
Most Canadians thought the war would be over by Christmas. No one imagined how long the war would actually last or how many Canadians would die on faraway battlefields. Nor did Canadians foresee conscription (forced service in the armed forces) for overseas service.

**How do you think this knowledge would have affected support for the war had Canadians been able to see into the future?**

Evidence 1.7c

Individual Canadians, too, had to decide what role they would like to play. Here, army recruits parade in Battleford, Saskatchewan in 1914.

**Suggest why you think young men would be eager to enlist. What does the photo tell you about Canadian support for the war and Canadian life in 1914?**



# Support for the War Weakens, and Conscription

By 1916, support for the war was weakening, especially in Quebec.

As you examine the evidence in this section, put yourself in the role of each of the people/groups discussed. What would *you* do in that particular person's/group's position and why? Use an organizer such as the one below to help track your answers.

Source	Point of view	My response and reason

DURING READING

## Evidence 1.8

Henri Bourassa, French Canadian nationalist publisher of *Le Devoir*.

**In an editorial on August 2, 1916, Bourassa outlined his arguments against continuing participation in the war.**

“There is among the French Canadians a larger proportion of farmers, fathers of large families, than among any other ethnic element in Canada. Above all, the French Canadians are the only group exclusively Canadian. ... They look upon the perturbations [disturbances] of Europe, even those of England or France, as foreign events. Their sympathies naturally go to France against Germany; but they do not think they have an obligation to fight for France, no more than the French of Europe would hold themselves bound to fight for Canada against the United States. ...

English Canada, not counting the blokes, contains a considerable proportion of people still in the first period of national incubation [development]. Under the sway of imperialism, a fair number have not yet decided whether their allegiance is to Canada or to the Empire, whether the United Kingdom or the Canadian Confederacy is their country.”



## Evidence 1.9

“The enemies of the French language, of French civilization in Canada are not the Boches [the Germans] ... but the English-Canadian anglicizers ...”

— Henri Bourassa in 1915, referring to the Ontario government's refusal, despite outraged calls for change from French Canadians all across Canada, to change Regulation 17. This regulation, which Ontario had implemented in 1912, limited the use of the French language in schools, even where there was a large French-speaking population.

As early as 1915, Bourassa had concluded that the war was serving Britain's imperial interests, not Canada's interests.

- Read the first sentence. What does Bourassa suggest about French Canadians? How does Bourassa think French Canadians are different from other Canadians?
- Read further in this paragraph. What is Bourassa saying about the role of French Canadians in the war?
- Read the second paragraph. What is Bourassa saying about English Canada?
- What conclusion does Bourassa draw about Canada's role in the war?

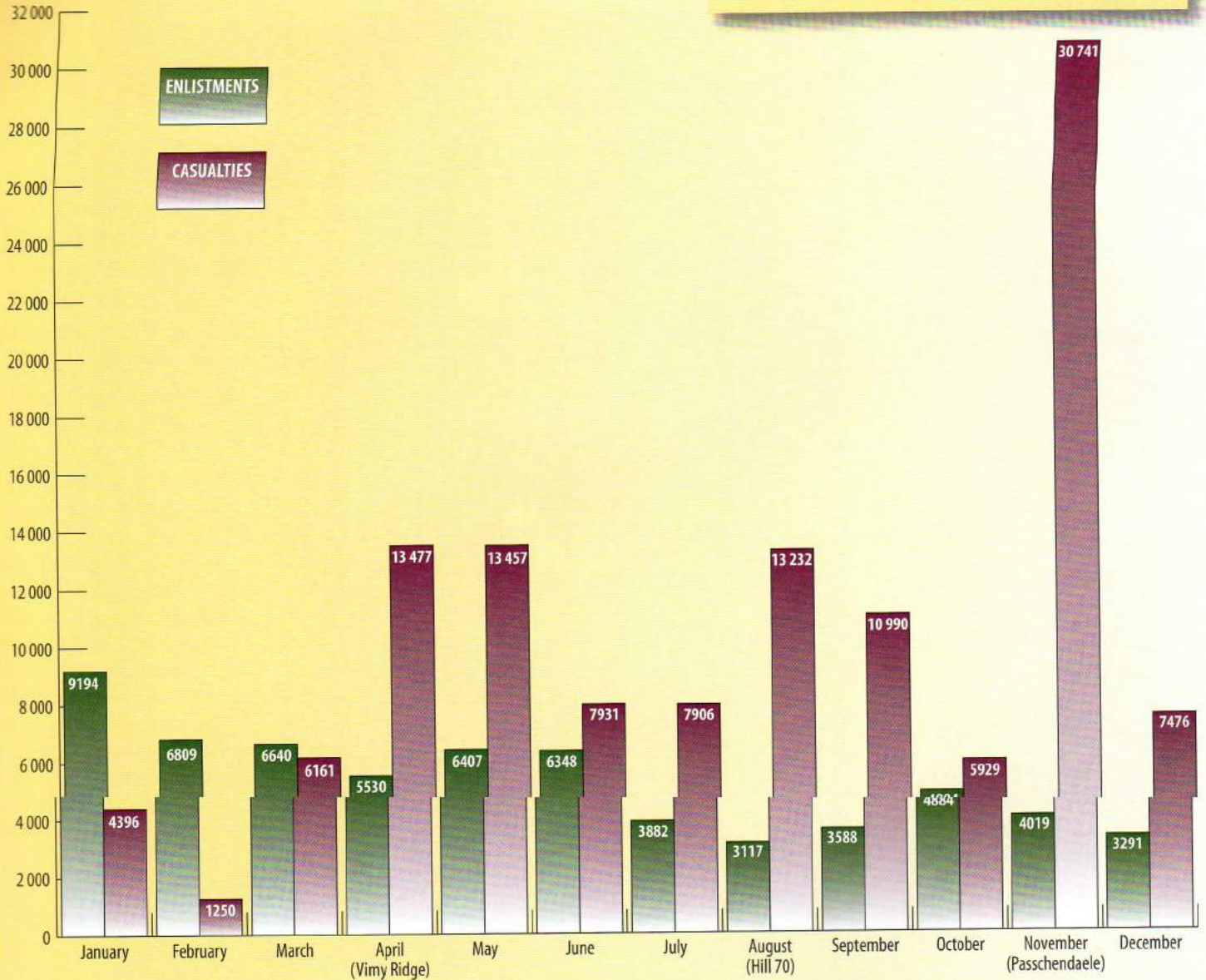


In December 1914, Prime Minister Borden had told the Canadian people that “there has not been, there will not be, compulsion or conscription.” However, by 1916, Canadian forces in Europe needed 75 000 men annually just to replace losses. By 1917, enlistments were so low that the army often sent wounded soldiers back to the front before they had fully recovered from their wounds.

Enlistments versus casualties, 1917.

**What would you do if you were prime minister and were faced with these statistics? Assume that you, like Borden and other leaders, believed that the war would go on for a long time yet. What would be your stand if you were a French Canadian or a farmer? Explain your position.**

**Evidence 1.10**



Source: Data from Statistics Canada.

On August 28, 1917, the government reluctantly passed the *Military Service Act*, which allowed conscription of single men between the ages of 20 and 35 if necessary. In November 1917, Borden and a new Union party, made up of the Conservative Party and English-speaking Liberals, won the federal election. On January 1, 1918, the new government began to enforce the *Military Service Act*.

French Canadians in particular opposed conscription, sometimes violently. While the strongest and most violent reaction was in Quebec, there were demonstrations else-

where as well. In June 1918, farmers from across Canada staged a massive protest in Ottawa. They complained that the exemptions from military service given to their sons at the beginning of the war were being taken away—at a time when their sons were desperately needed at home. Labour leaders, too, opposed conscription and considered calling a general strike in protest.

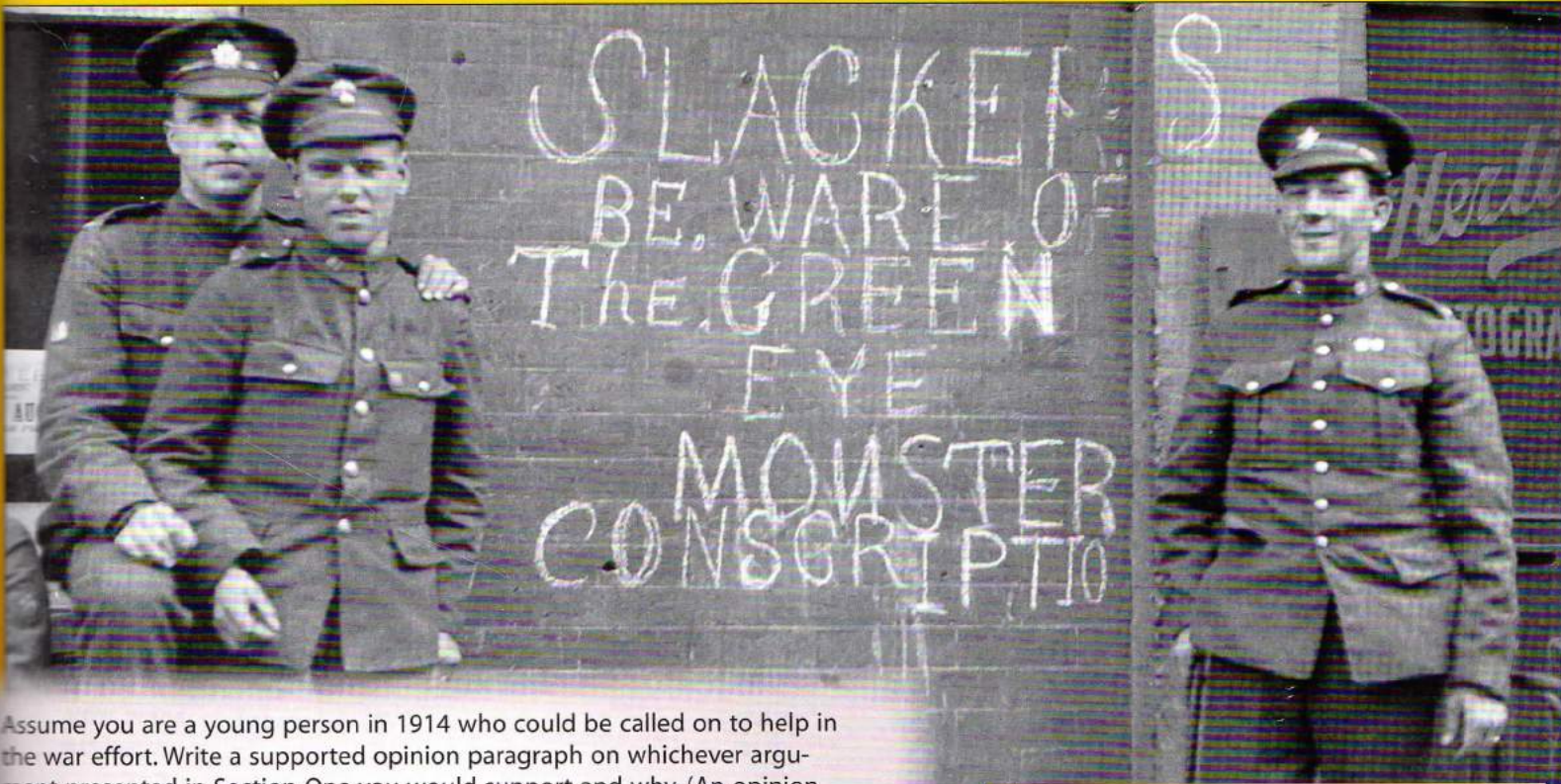
Conscription raised about 120 000 soldiers, of whom 47 000 men went overseas. However, the war ended before most of these men faced combat.

## SOME STATISTICS TO THINK ABOUT

- When war was declared, only 10 percent of the population of Canada was British-born. Yet of the 33 000 troops that went to Britain in October 1914, two-thirds had been born in the British Isles and had immigrated to Canada in the 15 years before 1914.
- By the end of the war in 1918, of English-Canadian volunteers, 70 percent were recent immigrants from Britain.
- One thousand French Canadian volunteers were in the first contingent to go to Britain.
- French Canadians who volunteered for overseas service did not, at the outset of the war, have any regiments of their own. They were scattered throughout the army, serving under English-speaking officers. Instruction manuals were in English. French-Canadian soldiers, no matter how worthy, were generally not promoted to high officer positions. Even after a French regiment was formed, many French volunteers continued to be scattered throughout English-speaking companies.
- In Quebec, most recruitment was carried out by Protestant, often English-speaking, clergy.
- Most Canadian-born men of military age, regardless of language, did not volunteer. Included among these Canadians were farmers; immigrants from European countries other than Britain and France; labourers; and married men. Farmers and labourers argued that they and their families, including service-aged sons, were needed to carry out the work of growing food and manufacturing supplies for the war effort. As well, Doukhobors, Mennonites, and Hutterites, along with many other Canadians, were pacifists and resisted going to war.

Source: Adapted from Dr. Serge Durflinger, *Military History: Dispatches: Backgrounders in Canadian Military History* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, May 6, 2005).

## Evidence 1.12



### AFTER READING

From 1916 on, and especially during the conscription crisis, in English Canada there were often efforts to shame men into enlisting. Here, soldiers stand by a sign denouncing men who did not sign up for the war. Members of the women's organization Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire (IODE) and others pinned a white chicken feather on men who were not in the services to expose them as "cowards."

**What impact would this action have on the men who had not enlisted? What would you have done in response, and why?**