WWI Air, Sea, Land

War in the Air

Canadians in the Air:

- Wright Brothers airplane in 1903
- WWI was the first use of airplanes in combat
- Canada had no air force so Canadians had to join the British Corps to fly
  - By 1918, 40% of the British air force pilots were Canadians
- Young men joined the air force because there was more glory associated with it compared to trench warfare
- Germany had a greater number of planes

Development of Air Fighting Techniques:

- First airplanes were used as scouts/ for reconnaissance
- **Dogfights**: aerial duels between pilots
  - Planes try to get the better position by getting behind the enemy
  - No parachutes yet
- First machine guns on planes were timed to fire between the propeller blades
  - Machine gun is attached to the cam of the propeller engine
  - Started with pilots carrying rifles
- Bombing began as pilots carried bombs on their laps and threw them over the open cockpit
  - Not a major part of WWI

Role of the pilot:

- Pilots built a reputation based on their abilities to manoeuvre in the air
- **Ace**: a pilot who destroyed 5+ enemies
  - **Victoria Cross**: British award for military bravery and courage
- Many pilot casualties were due to mechanical failure
1916, the average life of a pilot was 3 weeks

Billy Bishop:
- Canada’s top ace
- Shot down 72 enemy planes
- Awarded Victoria Cross
- Fought the Red Baron and survived
- WWII he would recruit and train pilots

The Red Baron (Manfred von Richthofen)
- Commander of the German Flying Circus - made of top pilots
- Shot down about 80 Allied planes
- Shot down April 21st, 1918

Roy Brown
- Started in 1917
- Stricken with illness a number of times
- Accredited for shooting down Von Richthofen
- Put on leave after shooting down Von Richthofen
- After the war he becomes an accountant

War At Sea

U-Boats
- **German submarines that were highly effective at destroying British supply ships**
- First U-boats were used to ram enemy supply ships – then came the development of torpedoes
- Torpedoes were saved because they were rare still so the strategy was to surface and then fire
  - Therefore they were most effective against defenceless supply ships
- **British counter by sending convoys with the supply ships**
Sinking of the Lusitania:

- American supply ship headed for Liverpool from New York, disguised as a passenger ship
- Germany had declared an all out sea war against Britain, not the US
- 1915, a German U-boat launches a torpedo and sinks the Lusitania
- On board were British, Canadian and American passengers
  - It was found out *afterwards* that it was also carrying ammunition
- Germans didn’t feel ready to take on US and Britain at the same time so they gave into American demands to suspend their U-boat operations
- Full sea war against Britain and neutrals (USA) around Britain resumed in 1917
- One reason for Americans to want to enter the war in 1917

Canadians at Sea – Halifax:

- Becomes the Allied refuelling base for battleships because of its protected harbour
- Major port for shipping troops over to Britain/France
- **Halifax Explosion** Dec 6, 1917
- **Mont Blanc** carrying:
  - 2300 tons of wet and dry picric acid
  - 200 tons of TNT
  - 35 tons of benzol (stored on the open decks)
  - 10 tons of gun cotton
- *Imo* is on the wrong course and turns into the *Mont Blanc*
- one of the *Mont Blanc*’s guns flew over 3.5 miles to Dartmouth
- An anchor, weighing 1140lbs. Landed 2 miles away at Armdale
- **Halifax Explosion**
  - 1600 men, women and children killed
  - 9000 people were injured
  - 25,000 buildings spread over 325 acres destroyed
The War on Land - Trench Warfare

- New to wars
  - previously wars were fought with cavalry and infantry and depended on close combat
- New advances in machine guns and rifles meant that soldiers didn't need to be up close anymore, therefore trenches were built
- The war becomes a battle of attrition (stalemate)
  - Trenches were good defence against enemy fire
  - But the dead were left to rot in the trenches
    - Rats, lice, disease
  - You couldn't advance because if you left the trench ("going over the top") you would get shot.
  - If you didn't get shot, there was No Man's Land between the two trenches which were filled with mines and barbed wire.
  - If you made it past No Man’s Land, trenches were built in zigzag formations so you couldn't just go in and start shooting
  - You could also die from grenades, snipers, shrapnel, gas attacks (supposed to be outlawed)

Assignment

- You will get a letter from a relative/friend back home.
- Respond to the letter. Your response should include:
  - Your thoughts on the war
    - Respond to what’s going on in Canada from the letter you received
  - Conditions on the war front (land, sea, air)
  - Events of ONE battle (Ypres, Somme, Vimy, Passchendaele)