

## THE SUICIDE BATTALION AND CANADA'S ROLE IN WORLD WAR ONE

### Objectives:

#### Foundational:

- Know that the actions and policies of other nations influence the well-being of the Canadian people and nation.
- Know that the conduct of Canadian foreign policy has generated, and continues to generate debate within the Canadian community.

#### Knowledge:

- Know that by the end of the First World War, 600 000 Canadians had served in an army of four divisions. More than 60 000 Canadian military personnel were killed in the War.

### A. Background

The 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion was formed in Moose Jaw in Feb., 1915, and would end up playing a role in every major battle in which the Canadians took part from August 1916 until the Armistice. With a 91.5% casualty rate (3,484 wounded and 1,433 killed, including Victoria Cross winner and Saskatchewan hero Hugh Cairns), the 46<sup>th</sup> became known as the Suicide Battalion. James L. McWilliams and R. James Steel used this term as the title for their book describing the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion's history and war experiences. (Recordings of dozens of interviews conducted by McWilliams and Steel with many Suicide Battalion veterans are housed at the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, Regina.)

Source: [http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/46th\\_canadian\\_infantry\\_battalion\\_cef.html](http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/46th_canadian_infantry_battalion_cef.html)

### ***Learning Activity:***

Using the Attestation Papers (available online from Library and Archives Canada using the links below) from the following Suicide Battalion soldiers as evidence, what inferences can we make about who these men were prior to signing up for the war? (**Using Primary Sources**)

[Ernie "Jinx" Jenner](#)

[Jim Butterworth](#)

[E.D. McDonald](#)

**B. Introduce the Inquiry Question**

WWI is commonly accepted as a turning point in history for both Canada and the world, yet we don't often get the chance to hear about the experiences of the war from the men that were there in the trenches. Using the audio interviews from three 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion soldiers, have the students examine the following question:

***What can we learn about Canada's role in WWI through the experiences of the Suicide Battalion soldiers?***

**C. Background Research**

Divide the class into 5 groups and assign one of the audio recordings to each group. Have the students conduct some preliminary research about the focus of their recording (Trench Warfare, Raiding Parties, The Somme, Passchendaele, Amiens) by answer the 5 W's. *Note: This is not meant to be an extensive research activity, but an opportunity for students to develop some background knowledge before they listen to the interviews.*

**D. Primary Source Analysis**

Have the students listen to their assigned audio recording while making inferences about the soldier's experiences in war based on what they have heard. Have the students use the Suicide Battalion Inference Chart as a place to record trace Evidence (What Happened?) from the recording and Inferences (Why is this important? What can we learn from this?) that they have made. The students may need to stop the recording at certain points to discuss/reflect upon what is being said, or they may wish to listen to it more than once. **(Historical Perspectives, Using Primary Sources)**

The audio recordings are available on the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan website at [www.saskarchives.com/Suicide Battalion](http://www.saskarchives.com/Suicide_Battalion).

Trench Warfare – Jim Butterworth (5:50 minutes)

Raiding Parties – Jim Butterworth (9:50 minutes)

Regina Trench & The Somme – Jim Butterworth (9:09 minutes)

Passchendaele – Ernie 'Jinx' Jenner (8:02 minutes)

Amiens – E.D. (Eric Douglas) McDonald (9:48 minutes)

***Alternative: Have the students listen to all of the recordings to give them a more comprehensive understanding of the war.***

**E. Determining Big Ideas**

Have the students analyze the inferences they have made looking for 3-5 possible Big Ideas about the war and their soldier's experiences. What WWI knowledge can be created/affirmed by the soldier's accounts of the war? (*Historical Significance*)

**F. Sharing Insights**

Have each of the groups describe/summarize their interview to the class and share the inferences and Big Ideas that they have created. As a class, compile the list of Big Ideas that they have generated to provide a visible representation of what they have learned from the activity.

**G. Assessment**

As a reflection on what they have learned and the connections they have made, have the students refer back to the original Inquiry Question - *What can we learn about Canada's role in WWI through the experiences of the Suicide Battalion soldiers?* This can be done in as a formative assessment (Group discussion, Quickwrite, etc) or as a summative assessment (essay, project, artwork, etc).

**Appendix A**

**List of Primary Sources for Use with Suicide Battalion Lesson**

Attestation Papers from Library and Archives Canada (online):

Ernie 'Jinx' Jenner:

<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=479712>

Jim Butterworth:

<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=80041>

E.D. (Eric Douglas) McDonald:

<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=145910>

Audio Recording Excerpts from Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, The 46<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion (South Saskatchewan) "The Suicide Battalion" Oral History Project by James L. McWilliams and R. James Steel, 1975-1977.

Trench Warfare – Jim Butterworth: Tape R-1075

Raiding Parties – Jim Butterworth: Tape R-1075

The Somme – Jim Butterworth: Tape R-1075

Passchendaele – Ernie 'Jinx' Jenner: Tape R-1059

Amiens – E.D. (Eric Douglas) McDonald: Tape R-1078

Suicide Battalion Lesson

| <b>Suicide Battalion Inference Chart</b> |   |
|--|---|
| Event:                                   | Soldier:  |
| Evidence (What Happened?):               | Inferences (Why is it Important? What Can We Learn From This?): |
|  |   |
| Possible Big Ideas:                      |   |