



# PASSCHENDAELE

EDUCATION GUIDE

## A MESSAGE TO TEACHERS

**T**his innovative Education Guide accompanies the highly acclaimed Canadian production of *Passchendaele*. Its purpose is to enhance your students’ learning and appreciation of the pivotal role that this 1917 battle played within Canadian history. The questions and activities of the Guide also aim to have students examine issues and situations from both an individual, humanistic point of view as well as from a macro perspective. Structured around five primary sources from the First World War, this Guide asks students to think, and to empathize as they analyze and deconstruct those pieces of evidence. This generic approach allows teachers to select those sources, those questions, and those activities that are most appropriate to their students and to the constraints of time. We sincerely believe that whether students respond to a single question or answer all of them, their comprehension and understanding of the Battle of Passchendaele specifically, and of First World War generally, will be greatly expanded.

Photo: Farah Nosh



*“I stood up and looked over the front of my hole. There was a dreary waste of mud and water, no relic of civilization, only shell holes... And everywhere there were bodies, English and German, in all stages of decomposition.”*

LIEUTENANT EDWIN  
CAMPION VAUGHAN

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# FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

Photo: Farah Nosh



## MESSAGE FROM PAUL GROSS

As a proud Canadian, it has long been my ambition to bring to the world this powerful period in Canada's history. My mission began many years ago, listening to stories my grandfather told me about his involvement in the war. The war was the formative event in his life, and he believed, as I do, that our notion of what it means to be Canadian was forged in the crucible of the Western Front.

The Battle of Passchendaele was an extraordinary achievement for a young nation – only fifty years after Confederation – with a population of seven million. Canada sent more than 600,000 men to the Western Front, and their sacrifice shaped what it meant to be Canadian. Proud. Strong. Resolute. In fact, of all the Allied armies, the Canadians were the most feared. British Prime Minister Lloyd George summed it up when he said “Whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into the line, they prepared for the worst.”

Over the years, the battle of Passchendaele has become synonymous with the horrors of the First World War. The soldiers fought in cold and drizzle on terrain so ghastly that, as one soldier said: “If hell is anything like Passchendaele, I would not wish it on my worst enemy.”

Canada's victory at Passchendaele is an astounding tale of determination, commitment and triumph. Sadly, with each passing year, the memory of our nation's courage is fading. With *Passchendaele* the film, the novel, website and Education Guide, we are determined to rectify this.

I am convinced we can re-ignite interest and pride in Canada's distinguished military history and highlight the exceptional role our soldiers played in the War to End All Wars.

### PROJECT PARTNERS



Butterfield & Robinson

Special thanks to Nick Brune,  
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## WAYS TO GET INVOLVED



The *Passchendaele* movie website [[www.passchendaelethemovie.com](http://www.passchendaelethemovie.com)] is a multimedia guide to the Great War, battle-by-battle. You'll find maps, archival photos, historical context, behind-the-scenes movie footage and letters from the front.



Teachers: book a movie screening for your class! Visit [www.cineplex.com](http://www.cineplex.com) or call 1.800.313.4461 to find out how.



Order an illustrated history for schools, *Passchendaele: Canada's Triumph and Tragedy on the Fields of Flanders* from Coteau Books. See [www.coteaubooks.com](http://www.coteaubooks.com) for details



Order *Passchendaele - The Novel*, based on the screenplay of the epic Canadian motion picture written by Paul Gross. *Passchendaele* immortalizes the story of a horrific battle and an Allied victory made possible by Canadian soldiers. Visit [www.harpercollins.ca](http://www.harpercollins.ca).



To purchase *Passchendaele* on DVD in Spring 2009, please contact the National Film Board of Canada by visiting [www.nfb.ca](http://www.nfb.ca) or call 1.800.267.7710.



## CANADA AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR



*The 3rd University Company (Alberta) at Shorncliff, England, equipped with Canadian Ross rifles and kit*  
(courtesy of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry archives)

**W**ithout a doubt, Canada made many significant contributions to the outcome of the First World War and in the process came of age and was internationally recognized. When Britain declared war on Germany in August of 1914, Canada, like all the other Dominions within the British Empire, was automatically at war. Canadian contributions and sacrifices were disproportionately high. Canada had a population in 1914 of barely 7 million and yet it suffered 67,000 deaths and 173,000 wounded on the battlefields of Europe. Nevertheless, Canadian troops, fighting for the first time under a Canadian-born commander, gained a reputation as a crack fighting force. Battles such as Vimy Ridge, Ypres, the Somme, and Passchendaele went down in Canada's sterling military history.

While Canada had an important impact on the outcome of the war, the war also changed Canada in several important and irrevocable ways. The French-English clash over conscription, culminating in the post-1917 Khaki election riots, deeply divided the country and brought

*Canada had a population in 1914 of barely 7 million and yet it suffered 67,000 deaths and 173,000 wounded on the battlefields of Europe*

back memories of the trauma of Louis Riel. For the first time in Canada's history, women became actively involved in the conduct of the war. While they did not actively fight on the front lines, they were involved as nurses, drivers, volunteers, and in taking over the breadwinner role of their absent spouses on farms and in factories. Not surprisingly, the First World War became the trigger for the successful conclusion of the fight for female voting rights in Canada. As many as ten percent of Canadian Aboriginals fought on the European battlefields even while they were regarded as less than full citizens back

home. Between three to four thousand Canadian Aboriginals, including Patrick Riel, a descendant of Louis Riel, voluntarily enlisted and more than 300 died.

So while the Great War as it was then known profoundly altered the course of world events with the German defeat, the Russian Revolution, and the end of significant empires, a redrawn map of Europe, and the millions of casualties, it had no less a significant effect on Canada. In many ways, it was Canada's coming-of-age. Being able to sign the Versailles Peace Treaty separate from Britain was an important step in the country's growing international reputation as well as its increasing independence. In short, the First World War was a defining moment for both Canada and the world.



*By September 1914, the Germans had pushed through Belgium and northern France to within 50 kilometres of Paris. The Western Front would not move more than 40 kilometres until the end of the war.*

## The Battle they called Passchendaele

*"I died in hell. They called it Passchendaele"*  
- Siegfried Sassoon, First World War Poet

Passchendaele is a tiny Belgium village that has become the compelling metaphor for the futility of war. Much in the same way as Picasso's "Guernica" became the artistic representation of the brutality of twentieth century war, the Third Battle of Ypres, better known as Passchendaele, has entered the lexicon to convey the horrendous nature of modern warfare. For slightly over one hundred days, beginning on the last day of July 1917, Canadian and Allied troops engaged the German forces in the West Flanders region. The bombs and shrapnel fell amid appalling conditions as soldiers fought knee-deep in mud. They drowned in craters. Rain fell on corpses that lay strewn in the sea of mud. Upon witnessing the horrific scene for the first time, a visiting British general broke into tears and cried, "Good God! Did we really send our men through that?"

## FIRST WORLD WAR – A CHRONOLOGY

**JUNE 28, 1914**

Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife, Sophia, are assassinated in Sarajevo

**AUGUST 4, 1914**

Germany declares war on neutral Belgium after Belgium refused Germany’s request to march troops through Belgian territory to implement the Schlieffen Plan. As a result, Britain declares war on Germany.

The Canadian government immediately offers Britain troops for overseas service, although Ottawa controls the level of Canada’s military participation.



**AUGUST 26-30, 1914**

Led by Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg, the German army achieves its greatest victory on the Eastern front against Russia at the Battle of Tennenberg.

**SEPTEMBER 5-10, 1914**

First Battle of the Marne stops German invasion in France.

**DECEMBER 25, 1915**

“Christmas in the Trenches” – unofficial truce declared by soldiers in the trenches along the Western front.

**JANUARY 1915**

First World War becomes “total war” with German Zeppelin air raids on England.

**MAY 7, 1915**

German U-boat sinks the “Lusitania” causing 1,198 civilian deaths, including 128 Americans.

**SEPTEMBER 5, 1915**

Tsar Nicolas II takes over direct command of the Russian armies.

**FEBRUARY 21 –  
DECEMBER 18, 1915**

The longest battle of First World War, Verdun, is fought to a draw with one million casualties.

**MAY 31 –  
JUNE 1, 1916**

The Battle of Jutland, the only major naval engagement, is fought to a draw.

**JULY 1 –  
NOVEMBER 18, 1916**

The Battle of the Somme results in about one million casualties. The British introduce the tank but there are too few at the Somme to make a significant difference.

**APRIL 6, 1917**

U.S. President Woodrow Wilson asks Congress for a declaration of war against Germany.

**APRIL 9, 1917**

Canadian troops take Vimy Ridge at a cost of 3,598 Canadian lives and 10,602 casualties.





**JULY 31 –  
NOVEMBER 10, 1917**

The Third Battle of Ypres, known as Passchendaele, results in minor gains, but no major Allied breakthrough on the Western front. Almost three-quarters of a million soldiers on both sides die.

**NOVEMBER 7, 1917**

Lenin and his Bolsheviks overthrow Kerensky's Provisional Government in Russia, establishing the world's first communist regime.

**MARCH 21 –  
JUNE, 1917**

Germany launches the first of five major offensives to win the war before the arrival of American troops. The last one is stopped in late June.

**DECEMBER 3, 1917**

Russia pulls out of the war after signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

**APRIL 25, 1918**

Allies stop the German advance at Amiens.

**AUGUST 8, 1918**

Allied counter-offensives on the Somme force the Germans to retreat.

**SEPTEMBER 27, 1918**

Allied troops break through the German fortifications at the Hindenberg Line.

**NOVEMBER 9, 1918**

Kaiser Wilhelm abdicates.

**NOVEMBER 11, 1918**

At the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the First World War officially ends as Germany and the Allies sign an Armistice.

**JUNE 28, 1919**

Versailles Peace Treaty is signed.



## TIMELINE QUESTIONS

- 1 Was there a point at which the outbreak of the First World War became inevitable? If so, identify that date and explain why it made the war inevitable. If not, explain why the First World War was not inevitable.
- 2 From the timeline, determine which nation made the biggest error that brought on the war? Explain your choice.
- 3 What occurred in the year 1917 that has led many historians to regard it as “the decisive year” of the war?
- 4 What was “the Last 100 Days?”

*“It was no longer life at all. It was mere unspeakable suffering. And through this world of mud the attackers dragged themselves, slowly, but steadily, and in dense masses.”*

GENERAL ERICH LUDENDORFF



To view the original document, visit [www.dominion.ca/passchendaele](http://www.dominion.ca/passchendaele)

## WORKING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES

**P** rimary sources are the crucial tools that historians use to study, analyze, and learn from the past. A primary source is one that is recorded at the time that the event was recorded. Conversely, with a secondary source there is the passage of time between the event and its recording. Primary sources include diaries, artifacts, treaties, photographs, contemporary videotapes, interviews, and newspapers of the time. The two most common examples of secondary sources are textbooks and encyclopaedias. The Internet, depending on the exact nature of the actual source, may be either primary or secondary.

Your students are going to see, manipulate, and analyze different primary sources from the First World War. As you work through these examples, think about what each source reveals about the event and the people who fought in it and those whose lives were caught up in it.

### A FAMILY TREASURE

The teddy bear given to Lawrence Browning Rogers by his 10-year old daughter, Aileen. It was returned to the family along with Mr. Rogers' possessions after his death at Passchendaele.

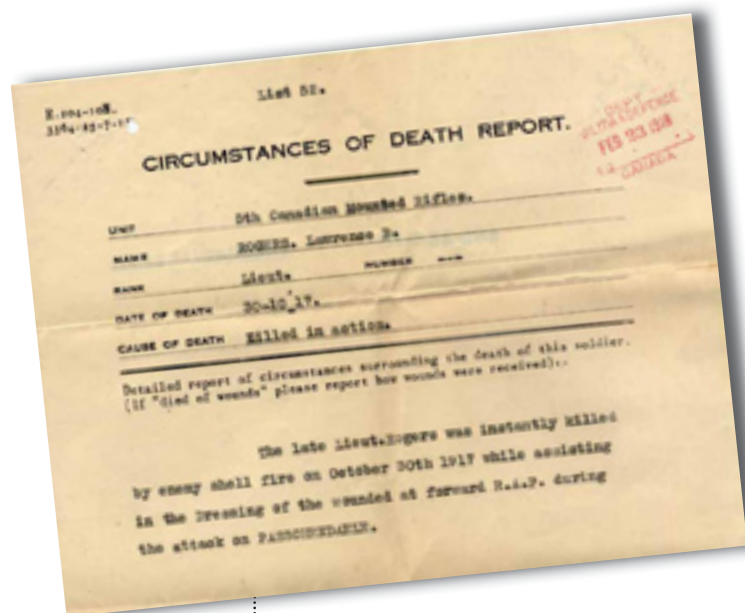
#### Discussion Questions

- 1 In your own words, describe this primary source. What condition does it appear to be in? Can you suggest reasons for its condition?
- 2 Imagine that you are the child who sent this teddy bear to your father fighting overseas at Passchendaele. What are the thoughts going through your mind as you are mailing the bear off?
- 3 Now imagine that you are the soldier-father as you open up the package containing the teddy bear. Describe the thoughts that are going through your mind as you see what your daughter has sent you.
- 4 How effective is this teddy bear as a primary source? (What are its strengths as a primary source? What are its weaknesses?)
- 5 Describe the daughter's emotions when she received the teddy bear back as part of the personal effects of Lawrence Browning Rogers.
- 6 This teddy bear won a Globe and Mail First World War artifact contest in 2003. Why do you think that was the case? Write a brief press release that explaining the choice to award the artifact first place.
- 7 If you had a parent fighting overseas today, what personally meaningful article might you send him/her as Aileen did to her father in the First World War?



# FIRST WORLD WAR DEATH NOTICE

The 'Circumstances of Death Report' details the circumstances around the death of Lieutenant Lawrence Rogers, Canadian soldier, killed instantly at the Battle of Passchendaele on October 30, 1917.



## Discussion Questions

- 1 In your own words, describe this primary source.
- 2 What valuable pieces of information does this source contain?
- 3 Account for the seeming time delay in the two dates contained in the document. (Rogers was listed as killed on October 30, 1917. The Department of Militia & Defence stamp is from February 23, 1918.)
- 4 Describe the possible circumstances under which such a document might have been delivered. How many different pairs of hands and eyes would you estimate that this document might have passed through?
- 5 What is the connection between this primary source and primary source #1 (the teddy bear). Does that connection in any way alter your view of either primary source? Explain.
- 6 Why do you think the writer included the word "instantly" before "killed? What is the difference in the mind of the reader between "instantly killed" and simply "killed?"
- 7 As a research assignment, find out approximately how many such notices went out on a daily basis. See if you can discover what was the single worst day for Canadian casualties during the First World War.
- 8 See if you can discover how the present-day Department of National Defence informs family members of a death of a soldier fighting overseas.
- 9 What are the strengths of this "Circumstances of Death Report" as a primary source? What invaluable pieces of information and detail does it provide? What limitations, if any, does it have as a primary source?
- 10 Are there any ways, or any language, that might make the receipt of such a notice less shattering?

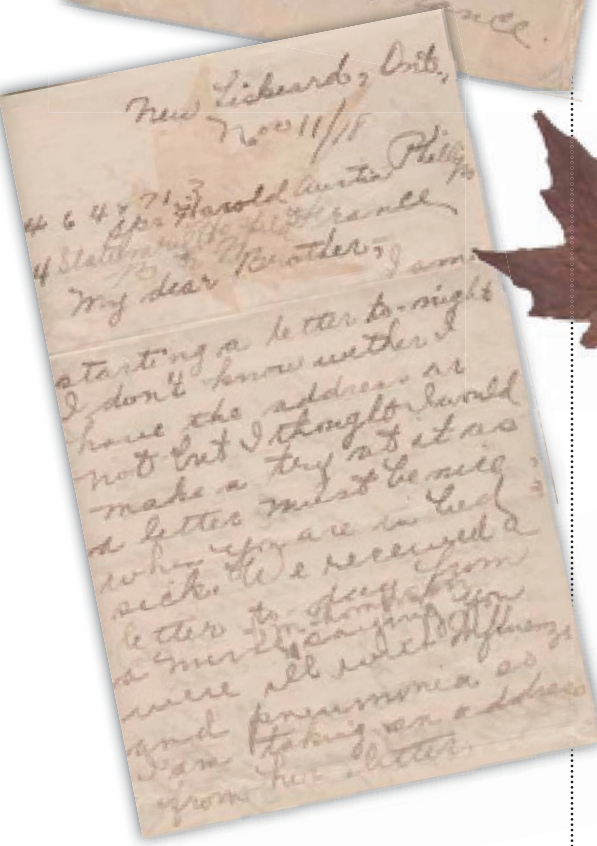
### Transcription:

#### CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH REPORT

Unit - 89th Canadian Mounted Rifles  
Name - ROGERS, Lawrence B.  
Rank - Lieut. Number ---  
Date of Death - 30-10-17.  
Cause of Death - Killed in action.

Detailed report of the circumstances surrounding the death of this soldier. (If "died of wounds" please report how wounds were received):  
The late Lieut. Rogers was instantly killed by enemy shell fire on October 30th 1917 while assisting in the Dressing of the wounded at forward R.A.P. during the attack on PASSCHENDAELE.

To view the original document, visit [www.dominion.ca/passchendaele](http://www.dominion.ca/passchendaele)



## GREAT WAR LETTER

Harold Philips survived the war but fell victim to the Influenza epidemic and died on November 14, 1918 while still overseas. This letter was sent to Harold Philips by his sister. She included a red maple leaf in an attempt to lift his spirits while he was in hospital; he died before he received it.

### Discussion Questions

- 1 What is significant about the date of this primary source? Is the writer aware of that significance? Explain.
- 2 Working in pairs, identify as many features of this letter that make it authentic.
- 3 What worldwide global pandemic that would kill between 20 and 40 million people does the writer of the letter briefly foreshadow?
- 4 What do you think her purpose in writing the letter was?
- 5 In the realm of speculation, describe the conditions – place, position, weather, etc. – under which the sister wrote the letter. (Depending on the age and grade, students might draw the sister actually writing the letter.)
- 6 What makes this letter a particularly valuable primary source? Can you think of any limitations and/or weaknesses of the letter as a primary source?
- 7 If you had have been an army censor, is there anything in the letter that you would have blacked out? If so, what would that have been? Why?
- 8 What is the significance of the maple leaf enclosed in the letter?
- 9 Look carefully at what is written in red on the envelope on the right-hand side. What does it say? How does that make this letter all the more poignant?
- 10 Account for the seeming paradox in that the sister wrote this letter on November 11, 1918, which is the day First World War officially ended, and yet he is noted as having died three days later.

**Transcription:**

NEW LISKEARD, ONT,  
NOV 11/18

*My dear Brother,  
I am starting a letter tonight. I don't know whether I have the address or not but I thought I would make a try at it as a letter must be nice when you are in the bed sick. We received a letter to day from a nurse saying you were ill with influenza and pneumonia so I am taking an address from her letter.*

To view the original document, visit [www.dominion.ca/passchendaele](http://www.dominion.ca/passchendaele)

## PASSCHENDAELE TRENCH

Canadian soldiers at Passchendaele pausing for rest and a meal of bully beef in a shell crater. Fixed bayonets on their rifles indicate that they are fully prepared to attack.



### Discussion Questions

#### 1 Observational questions:

- Describe the scene in your own words.
- What do they appear to be doing?
- What is the location in which the soldiers find themselves?
- What is the soldier on the far right-hand side doing?
- What is the soldier, fully depicted, in the centre of the photograph, doing?
- What is different about the soldier who is least visible? Why do you think that is the case?
- How would you describe the terrain?

#### 2 Speculative questions:

- What do you think has occurred immediately before the photograph was taken? Why?
- What do you think occurred shortly after the photograph was taken? Why?
- Where do you think the scene pictured is in relation to the front line?
- In what way(s), if any, do you think an enemy crater scene might be different?
- What do you think the mood of the soldiers is? Why?

#### 3 Working in groups of three, list all the things that this photo reveals about the fighting conditions during the First World War.

#### 4 Compose a newspaper headline that captures the essence of this scene.

#### 5 Divide yourself into groups of six and each take on the role of one of the soldiers depicted. Allow each group to write a realistic five-minute sketch and then to rehearse it. The following day, each group will perform their scene to the rest of the class. As the class observes each production, you should take notes about what you have learned about the battle of Passchendaele in particular and about the fighting in the First World War in general. Time permitting, there might be a class discussion centred on the theme of Passchendaele as a symbol of the futility and brutality of war.

To view the original document, visit [www.dominion.ca/passchendaele](http://www.dominion.ca/passchendaele)

*“Passchendaele was just a terrible, terrible, terrible, terrible, terrible, terrible place.... If a man was hit and wounded and fell off [the duckboards] he could easily drown in the mud and never be seen again.”*

PRIVATE RICHARD W. MERCER





To view the original document, visit [www.dominion.ca/passchendaele](http://www.dominion.ca/passchendaele)

*“I fell in a trench. There was a fella there. He must have been about our age. He was ripped shoulder to waist with shrapnel. I held his hand for the last 60 seconds of his life. He only said one word: ‘Mother.’ ... He passed from this life into the next, and it felt as if I was in God’s presence. I’ve never got over it. Never.”*

HARRY PATCH  
(LAST LIVING SURVIVOR  
OF PASSCHENDAELE,  
12/07/2007)

## THE BATTLEFIELD

Plank roads were the only means of moving troops rapidly across the mud of Passchendaele. German artillery targeted the boardwalks, making travel on them very hazardous.

### Discussion Questions

- 1 Describe what you see in this primary source.
- 2 Put yourself into the picture and describe what you feel by being in this location.
- 3 What time of year do you think it is in the photograph? Why? What time of day? Why?
- 4 Write your own caption for the photograph.
- 5 It was scenes such as this one that inspired some of the great First World War anti-war poets, such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Research one of the well-known anti-war poets and make a presentation to the class.
- 6 What conclusions can you draw about the fighting conditions of many of the battles from this photograph?
- 7 What impact do you think photographs such as this one would have had on Canadians back home generally, particularly those contemplating volunteering?
- 8 What words would immediately come into your mind the first time you saw such a scene?
- 9 Imagine that it is ten or twenty or even thirty years ago and you are a veteran who fought on this site pictured. You are returning for a final visit. What thoughts run through your mind?
- 10 Do you think the photograph is made more or less effective by not having any soldiers in it? Explain your answer.
- 11 Do you think Canadian war censors would have let photographs such as this one to be published as is? Why or why not?
- 12 Photographs such as this, and many others, seared into the public and historical consciousness and made Passchendaele the symbol of the futility and barbarism of twentieth century war. Why do you think that was the case?

## MEDIA LITERACY

Literacy comes in many varied forms beyond the original concept of reading and writing. Mathematical, scientific, and computer literacy are all recognized today as being important. So too is media literacy. The latter is more than simply being knowledgeable about different forms of media, such as television, radio, music, film, print, and the internet. Media literacy is the ability to critically analyze and assess the messages that are communicated through the media. Given the pervasive and powerful influence – and its growing impact throughout society today – it is an increasingly important type of literacy to possess. Below are questions and activities related specifically to the movie *Passchendaele*.

### Discussion Questions

- 1 Describe the opening scene of the movie. What makes it a powerful and engaging way in which to begin the film?
- 2 A number of scenes, images, and symbols reappear several times throughout the film. Working with a partner, identify as many of them that you can. After having identified them, try to recall where in the movie each of them appeared. Finally, what makes their use powerfully moving? (You might want to record your information in chart form.)
- 3 In your own words, provide a one-to-two paragraph plot summary of *Passchendaele*.
- 4 Write a one paragraph sketch of either Michael Dunne or Sarah Mann.
- 5 Much of the relationship between Michael and Sarah is moved through their rich letters. They paint pictures with their words. Put yourself in one of their positions and write a credible letter that they might have written.
- 6 The cinematography of *Passchendaele* is rich, varied, and moving. Select the three most moving scenes for you. Describe each of them and then explain why it left such a powerful impression on you.
- 7 How does the music enhance the mood and feeling of the film?
- 8 Explain why in your view the three main characters, Michael, Sarah, and David are believable and realistic or romanticized and ‘Hollywoodized’.

*continued page 13*



*“You know, they got a name for us, the enemy, they call us stormtroopers”*

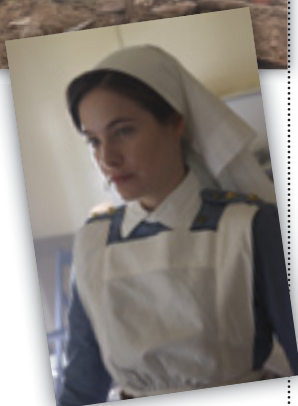
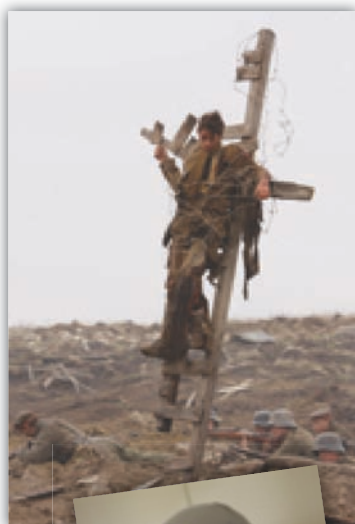
COLONEL ORMAND  
(PLAYED BY ADAM HARRINGTON)  
SPEAKING TO MICHAEL DUNNE

*Passchendaele* opens in theatres on October 17, 2008. The film is rated 14A.



Tune in to Global TV on Saturday October 11th, 2008 at 8:00pm, for the world premiere of **THE ROAD TO PASSCHENDAELE**, an exclusive behind-the-scenes look into the making-of this epic motion picture event. Visit <http://www.globaltv.com/>

For more information on how to incorporate **Passchendaele** in the Classroom in your school, please visit [www.dominion.ca/passchendaele](http://www.dominion.ca/passchendaele)



To view more images from the film, visit [www.passchendaelethemovie.com](http://www.passchendaelethemovie.com)

- 9 Identify what Michael Dunne believes is the single greatest challenge on the battlefield. How is his view initially received? He explains his feeling later in the movie. Is he being equally serious (or humorous) in both instances? Why or why not?
- 10 In what ways is Sarah representative of women of her time? In what ways is she not representative?
- 11 Working in groups of three, select five different scenes from the movie and write a headline for each one.
- 12 Imagine yourself as a war correspondent at the Battle of Passchendaele. Try to put into words what the scene looks like before your eyes.
- 13 A crucifix appears both at the beginning and the end of the film. Describe how precisely in both cases it appears and comment on both scenes' effectiveness.
- 14 Postscript – “Canadian Expeditionary Force entered Battle of Passchendaele October, 1917. After a week of heavy fighting, they captured the ruined village. In the process, they lost 5,000 lives and suffered 16,000 casualties. The entire offensive claimed over 600,000 casualties on both sides. The captured ground was lost in three days to the German offensive the following spring.” Explain why this postscript underscores the concept of Passchendaele as the futility of war.
- 15 Design and draw a poster promoting “Passchendaele”.
- 16 Write a movie review.