



FIRST WORLD WAR WOODS WORKERS FOR THE WARS

1: Excluded and Alone (REFLECTION)

Have you ever been left out of a group activity? Maybe you couldn't join your friends on an outing, were not chosen for a sports team, or were left out of a group chat. How did you feel?

At the start of the First World War, many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians—especially those who lived in coastal fishing villages—thought they would contribute to the war effort at sea, by serving in the navy—but the greatest need was for young men to serve in the army. What might they have felt at this limitation? How might that have affected their sense of self? Brainstorm your ideas using an idea web or graphic organizer.

2: Conflicted? (WORD WALL)

The news of war and, later, of the terrible losses suffered at the Battle of the Somme were felt throughout the Dominion of Newfoundland and in the United Kingdom. This may have led men who had not volunteered to go overseas feel conflicted. They were thankful they were out of harm's way but may also have felt guilty for not "doing their bit." Many men were also torn between their obligations to family and their desire to serve. What might being in that situation feel like? Create a word wall that captures these emotions.

3: Patriotism or Propaganda? (WRITING)

Posters were widely used during the First World War to directly encourage men to enlist—or to nudge people to do so with their friends and family. These posters often appealed to people's sense of patriotism, to their loyalty to their country. Sometimes



they used “propaganda.” That is, they manipulated information to create a strong emotional response in the viewer (fear, prejudice, or pride, for example) and thus influence their thoughts and actions.

Create a series of tag lines you think could be used in a simple recruitment poster that has text but no graphics. You may wish to collaborate with another person to create a second version of one of your posters that includes artwork. (See Activity 8.)

4: “Now I Belong” (WRITING)

The notion of a military unit that would serve away from the front, harvesting timber in United Kingdom forests, did not emerge until 1917, nearly two years into the war effort. By this point, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador were acutely aware of the true cost of the war. So many Newfoundland Regiment casualties had occurred, especially in such key battles as:

- Beaumont-Hamel (July 1, 1916: 710 casualties; 324 dead and 386 wounded)
- Gueudecourt (October 10 –13, 1916: 239 casualties; 120 dead and 119 wounded)
- Monchy le Preux (April 11, 1917: 307 casualties; 166 dead and 141 wounded)

In this context, how might people have received a call for foresters to enlist in a service to be performed largely away from the fighting? Consider the men who did not meet the physical standards to enlist in the Regiment, or were too old, or who were too afraid to serve at the front.

Brainstorm your ideas using an idea web. Consider the range of emotions experienced by someone who may have felt marginalized earlier in the war because they hadn’t enlisted, but who could now see themselves as “belonging” and “contributing” in a meaningful way (today, we might say they felt “validated”). Use your idea web to help you craft a fictional narrative set in that time, such as a journal entry.

5: Love (DRAMA/SCULPTURE/VISUAL ART)

What feelings might acceptance into the Newfoundland Forestry Companies have engendered as the new recruits reflected on leaving the people they loved? Consider the different dynamics of the many relationships that would be affected by their leaving, such as their age, marital status, family members (parents, siblings, children). Might it have affected “hidden” relationships (an extra-marital affair or a relationship that was unsafe to share publicly, such as a same-sex relationship). Historical research has shown that queer men who served were punished when their sexual orientation was discovered.

Craft a short one-act play or create a visual artwork that captures the feelings shared by two loved ones who are being separated.



6: A Forest of Faces (POETRY)

Examine the faces of the woodsmen in this image, which was taken in early twentieth-century Newfoundland. Men such as these would have volunteered to serve in the NFC. What do you notice and what stands out to you?

Create a word list. Using these words, write a free-verse poem.

7: A Man Among Men (SONG)

Music is a powerful way to communicate and express oneself. Historically, people often took an existing melody and wrote lyrics for it that reflected a local or personal perspective or experience. There are several examples of this mode of expression on this website, including “A Soldier’s Farewell” and “The Forester.”

Take a moment and reflect on how the following text would have resonated with readers.

The members of the Forestry Companies will be well fed, well clothed and well treated and their dependents will be taken care of during their absence. They will be given the chance of their lives to see a bit of the world, but above all they will be doing their bit in this great struggle; each member of the Forestry Companies will feel himself to be a man among men, doing his duty and helping his brother in arms. Every man enlisting for the Forestry Companies relieves a man for the firing line.

Written in 1917, this appeal was carefully crafted to speak not only to the men who might enlist in the Newfoundland Forestry Companies but also to the loved ones they would leave behind.

Assume the voice of one of the following people, pick a moving song, and craft new lyrics for it to capture a situation you find yourself in:

- Mother / Father
- Lover
- Wife
- Sister / Brother
- Daughter / Son

8: Brave Others – A Tribute to Mr. Thistle (REFLECTION)

Some people who enlisted in the NFC were older men with significant family responsibilities. Consider David J. Thistle (NFC #0-181). He was 52, married, and had eight children (three of whom were already serving overseas with Canadian or Newfoundland forces).



From your vantage point, what do you make of Mr. Thistle's decision to enlist? What might have motivated him? In his situation, what would you have done?

Of course, the answers to these questions will be highly speculative. But our attempts to form an answer force us to confront the extreme difficulties people close to war were facing. And remember: they did not know how the conflict would end or who would win the war.

Unfortunately, such dilemmas are not found only in the past. Wars are happening today in many places around the world. Many people from the United Kingdom and Canada—perhaps even your own family members—serve to help bring about peace.

Express your thoughts in a journal entry or using another medium.