

Great War Simulation Activity

By T. Anderson

Grade Level : Secondary (Gr. 10 – 12)

Province/Territory: All

Time Period: 20th Century – present

Time Allowance: 2 – 3 periods depending on follow-up activities

Overview

Groups of students are faced with the difficulties of logistics through prioritizing supplies needed to sustain soldiers after a devastating raid on their trench during the Great War. Students must think critically to decide between the competing needs of their soldiers. A discussion of the realities faced by decision-makers will lead to a better understanding of the requirements of modern industrial warfare.

Aims

- To familiarize students with some of the equipment and supplies needed to fight battles in the Great War.
- To enhance students' understanding of the conditions and difficulties involved in the trench warfare of the Great War, and their recognition of the difficult choices faced by commanders.
- To involve students in researching primary sources about the Great War.
- To further develop students' critical thinking skills by requiring them to create criteria before making judgements.

Resources

- Conrad, Lieutenant-Colonel John D., 'Canadian Corps Logistics During the Last Hundred Days, August-November 1918' Canadian Army Journal Vol. 8.2 (Summer 2005), 86 – 98.
- Canadian War Museum's website
- Canadian War Diaries website

Background

Logistics has become a crucial component of modern industrial warfare. We can look at the operations during the Hundred Days campaign as perhaps the greatest example of this during the Great War. Some people have suggested that the Canadians involved in the execution of this campaign were uniquely suited to finding innovative solutions to the requirements of this period in the conflict. Some of the lessons learned can be seen in the preparations for D-Day to the supply chain currently in place in Afghanistan.

Activity

Introduction

1. As a class you may read an article such as "Canadian Corps Logistics During the Last Hundred Days, August – November 1918" available at

http://www.army.forces.gc.ca/caj/documents/vol_08/iss_2/CAJ_vol8.2_10_e.pdf or have students explore the excellent information regarding the equipment, rations, medical treatment and trench life of the Great War at the Canadian War Museum's website at <http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/guerre/history-fww-e.aspx>

2. Define and discuss the concept of logistics as it relates to supplying the needs of a modern industrial army. Brainstorm as a class to generate a list of all the supplies necessary to sustain the fighting and life between battles. Students should recognize that numerous items are required and creating an exhaustive list would be very difficult.

Learning Activities

1. Break the class into small groups of two to four students.
2. Distribute copies of the *What would you do?* exercise. See attachments below.
3. Read through the background and task for the exercise. Leave students to complete reading of the descriptions of the available supplies and then to discuss what priority they would give to each. When they have completed the exercise they should have a list making up the manifest for the first wagon trip to the supply depot. The list must have no more than 100 units of supplies.
4. If time permits students could create a graphic, slide or typed list to project when they present their lists to the class. Otherwise, have students create their list on poster paper.
5. Have several groups present their lists to the class, including the rationale for why certain supplies were prioritized higher than others. Unless you have a great deal of time, it is not necessary that all groups present to the class as it will likely become repetitive.
6. After presentations are complete, discuss the following questions:
 - a. What criteria did you use to decide which supplies had a higher priority?
 - b. What choices were easy to make? Difficult?
 - c. In the longer term what further supplies would become necessary?
 - d. What possible conditions would make the choices more difficult? What might you have to do if the supply depot had also been hit?
 - e. What difficulties caused problems further back in the supply chain?
 - f. How do you think these decisions compare to those made before D-Day.
 - g. Are the same problems being faced by Canadian troops in Afghanistan? In what ways has more modern warfare caused or solved problems in the supply chain?
 - h. What role should private contractors have in supplying Canadian troops?

Follow-Up and Extension Activities

1. Have students research specific information about one of the categories of supplies such as what was included in "iron rations" or what was included in a medical kit. Much of this information including photographs can be found at the Canadian War Museum website.
2. Have students research the logistics of supplying the front including the industrial production in Canada, shipping convoys, heavy and light railways.

3. Students could examine primary sources related to logistics from the Canadian War Diaries. Using the search term “Quartermaster” in the database search tool at http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html will bring up several documents recording numbers of men and horses that required rations, and numbers of artillery shells needed on a daily basis.
4. Research logistics in other conflicts or the issue of private contractors.

Evaluation

1. Have students write a paper in which they present and defend the criteria they used in choosing the supplies.

Attachments

What Would You Do?

Background Information

Your group has just become the new officer of a small group of 20 Canadian soldiers due to a devastating artillery barrage on your position in the trenches near Ypres, Belgium during the First World War. The shelling killed the former officers and wiped out all of your stockpiled supplies. Although each remaining soldier has their rifle and a few bullets, there are no other weapons, ammunition, food, water or medical kits. You have only one wagon and two horses which can be sent to the closest supply depot over five miles away through heavy mud. For now, you can expect the wagon to be able to make one return trip, and due to the grim condition of the “road” it will be able to carry a maximum of 25 units of supplies on this trip. Good decision-making is of the utmost importance as a trench raid by the Germans can be expected at any time. You may or may not be able to send the wagon tomorrow.

Your task

As a group you must discuss, debate and decide on what supplies will be loaded onto the wagon for the trip from the supply depot to your position. The total supplies must not exceed 25 units. You must consider all the important needs of your group – defence, nutrition, health, morale and comfort.

Supplies Available at the Depot

Food rations

As your group is in the field, ration kits contain preserved meat, dry biscuits, tea, jam and sugar. Each kit will sustain one soldier for one day. Without food soldiers will become weak and unable to fight off a potential attack. The soldiers will also need water which is not included in the kit. Each ration kit is worth 1 unit.

Medical kit

Although there are currently no wounded soldiers in your group, in the case of an attack, having a medical kit could make the difference whether a wounded soldier lives or dies. Simple first aid would increase his chances of making his way back to a dressing station. This kit contains bandages, simple medications, a stretcher and crutches. Each kit is worth 4 units.

Water

Water is available for hauling to your position. Once there it will be stored in a large canvas container which is currently full of holes and leaking. It must be repaired prior to use. You are in desperate need of water as life will not go on without it. You should have one unit of water per day for each soldier.

Fodder for horses

Although you have only two horses to feed, they are critically important to your survival. Without their help it will be virtually impossible for you to resupply your troops. It will take many men to carry the same amount of supplies, leaving your position vulnerable. Each horse will require 1 unit of fodder per day as well as 1 unit of water. Remember you have 2 horses right now.

Sapper's kit

As your position has suffered a great deal of damage, your men are holding the line in craters rather than trenches. It is important you get a repair kit containing shovels that allow you to dig simple trenches as well as materials to repair the leaks to your water storage container. You also may need the kit to perform repairs to the communication kit in any future attack. Each repair kit is worth 3 units.

Communication kit

At the present you are isolated from commanders in the rear who provide critical orders and information. Although the risk that communications will be cut once again due to the fragile nature of the wires connecting you with the headquarters, it is vital that you attempt to replace the equipment. Each kit allowing you to reconnect with headquarters is worth 2 units.

Mortars and mortar bombs

As your men are armed only with rifles and bayonets, it is crucial to your fighting ability to rearm with trench mortars including mortar bombs. These simple guns fire in an arc and can reach the enemy positions, greatly enhancing your chances of defending against an attack. Having these weapons will improve the morale of the troops, however the weight of the weapons and bombs will limit what else can be carried on the wagon. Enough weapons and bombs to hold the line against the expected attack will cost you 10 units.

Comfort kit

Important to the overall morale of your troops, comfort kits put together by the Red Cross are available at the supply depot. Although none of the contents are critical to survival, emotional health can make a great difference in any future fighting. These kits contain Bibles, cigarettes and matches, chocolate, writing paper and pens, newspapers, as well as mail and care packages from home. It will cost you 4 units for this kit.

Hygiene kit

Life at the front line during the Great War is particularly unsanitary. Shortages of water, primitive toilet facilities, the close proximity of the men, diseases, rats and lice all take away from the health and stamina of your troops. This important kit contains soap, toilet paper, a pump to remove water from the trench, dry footwear, and shaving kits. This kit will take up 3 units of space on