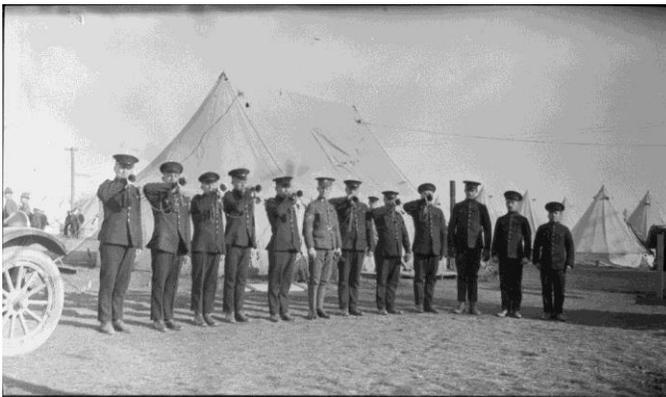


War Memories across Canada Conversation Kit:

Training Polish Soldiers Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario



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PA-071287

In 1917, 22,000 Polish volunteers came to Niagara-on-the-Lake in Ontario to train for the First World War. Although the men were destined to join the French army once in Europe, Canada's role was to prepare them for battle.

The Polish soldiers were known as the *Blue Army* and were driven by nationalism and the rebirth of their homeland, which had not existed for 125 years.

In 1918-1919, twenty Polish volunteers died as a result of the Spanish influenza pandemic. They are buried at the Polish Military Cemetery and remembered every June during a pilgrimage to the site on Polish Sunday.

Discussion Questions:

The painting, *Polish Army Bathing at Niagara Camp*, shows a lighter side of life during the war. Why do you think the artist chose to depict this scene? Is it important to remember moments like these during war?

What was the role of war artists during the First World War?

Why were Polish soldiers called the *Blue Army*? Considering the history of Poland, why do you think Polish immigrants were motivated to fight with the French during World War One?

What impact did the flu epidemic of 1918-1919 have on Canada's post-war recovery effort? How many Canadians – soldiers and civilians - died of influenza? Globally, how many people died from influenza and from the First World War?

Activities:

Consider the painting, *Polish Army Bathing at Niagara Camp*, by Canadian war artist C. W. Jefferys. What does this painting evoke in you? Think about the tradition of nudity in art and why Jefferys chose to depict the Polish soldiers engaged in the daily ritual of bathing rather than training for battle. What does this reveal about the humanity of these men?

Research other Canadian war artists and compare their works, artistic styles and the mediums they use to capture the history of war. Can you find examples of modern war artists today?

Visit the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa to see paintings, sketches and photographs by war artists.

Visit the Polish Military Cemetery in Niagara-on-the-Lake and participate in Polish Sunday, the annual pilgrimage to remember the Blue Army. Polish Sunday takes place on the second Sunday of June.



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Resources:

Websites

C.W. Jefferys - Polish Army Bathing at Niagara Camp
<http://www.cwj Jefferys.ca/polish-army-bathing-at-niagara-camp>

Canadian War Memorials Fund (CWMF)
<http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=1032769>
CWMF commissioned works by various Canadian artists to document the First World War.

War Art and War Posters – Veterans Affairs Canada
<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/artwork>

War Paintings in the Senate Chamber – Parliament of Canada
<http://lop.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/WarPaintings/index-e.asp>

Influenza, 1918-1919 -Canada and the First World War (CWM)
<http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/like-at-home-during-the-war/wartime-tragedies/influenza-1918-1919/>

Haller's Army
<http://www.hallersarmy.com/>

Haller's "Blue Army" Cemetery
http://www.polishheritage.ca/news_detail.aspx?catid=14&page_id=31&news_id=47

General Jozef Haller was the leader of the Polish Blue Army.

Books & articles

Haller's Polish Army in France, by Paul S. Valasek.
Whitehall Printing, 2006.

"The Daily Life of Polish Niagara Camp," from the newspaper columns of Elizabeth Ascher, St. Catherine's Standard, 1917- 1919.
www.niagarahistorical.museum/media/Standard1917-1919Draft2-StanSkreszewski.pdf

The Horror at Home: The Canadian Military and the 'Great' Influenza Pandemic of 1818, by Mark Osborne Humphries (Journal of the Canadian Historical Association, 2005).
<http://erudit.org/revue/jcha/2005/v16/n1/015733ar.pdf>

Training for Armageddon: Niagara Camp in the Great War, 1914-1919, by Richard D. Merritt.
Friesen Press, 2015.

The history of the *Niagara Camp as a training base* for Canadian and Polish soldiers.

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