

# GENERALS DIE IN BED

by Charles Yale Harrison

**Genre:** Fiction, novel

**Themes:** Choices affecting others  
Class differences  
Coming of age/loss of innocence  
Courage/bravery  
Death/loss  
Fiction vs reality  
Friendship  
War and peace

**Suitable for:** Grades 9+

## Generals Die in Bed

Drawing on his own experiences in the First World War, Charles Yale Harrison tells a stark and poignant story of a young man sent to fight on the Western Front. It is an unimaginably harrowing journey, especially for one not yet old enough to vote.

In sparse but gripping prose, Harrison conveys a sense of the horrors of life in the trenches. Here is where soldiers fight and die, entombed in mud, surrounded by rats and lice, forced to survive on insufficient rations.

*Generals Die in Bed* brings to life a period of history through the eyes of a twenty-year-old narrator, who reminds us that there is neither glamour nor glory in war.

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## TRENCH WARFARE, WEAPONS, AND TECHNIQUES

It took only four elements to produce the trench deadlock: barbed wire, machine guns, trenches, and artillery. Barbed wire and the machine gun were relatively new inventions, having been developed over the previous fifty years, while the combination of trenches and artillery (cannons) had been used in siege warfare for several centuries. By November 1914 there was a continuous line of trenches from the French border with Switzerland to the North Sea. The opposing front-line trenches were sometimes as close as twenty to thirty yards (18–27 m) from each other while in other sectors they could be as far apart as half a mile (0.8 km). Usually they were two to three hundred yards (185–275 m) apart. The trench system was not a single trench, but a system of front-line trenches, support trenches, and reserve trenches (see Reserves in glossary). Often there were several of these defense systems, one behind the other. Furthermore, the density of soldiers and artillery per mile of front line was such that there was no weak spot anywhere. In past wars, armies had avoided frontal attacks by moving around the flanks of the defender, threatening to cut off supplies or the route of retreat, or, even worse, surrounding them. This was no longer possible.

Trench warfare had many similarities to siege warfare. Trenches gave shelter from artillery fire and small arms fire (rifles and machine guns), while barbed wire presented a barrier that was slow and difficult for a soldier to get through. Machine guns, which could fire up to 300 bullets a minute, could and did wound and kill soldiers in large numbers. Artillery could throw shells filled with explosive charges distances up to six miles (10 km). In an attack, artillery shells were used to destroy barbed wire, machine guns, and soldiers sheltering in the trenches. In defense, artillery fired shrapnel shells (see glossary entry), set with a time fuse, into any area where the attacking troops were above ground, such as the assembly areas in the attackers' trenches or the no man's land between the trenches.

This combination of wire, machine guns, and artillery made any frontal attack very difficult and costly. The conventional World War I solution was to mass a large number of artillery pieces and a huge quantity of shells (enough for two to three weeks of steady firing), and then to bombard the enemy's wire, trenches, and artillery. When the defenses had been badly damaged or obliterated, the infantry would attack. In theory, the infantry could advance through the "gap," creating two inside flanks, and the defender would be forced to retreat. This process usually did not work very well. The advances were very small and the casualties large. Why? A five- to seven-day bombardment turned dry land into a moonscape of craters and loose dirt. Everything green disappeared. Bombardments during times of rain created massive swamps. The attacker could not advance easily or quickly through this desolate landscape. At Passchendaele the ground became so swampy that

wooden pathways—duckboards—had to be laid for men and mules to walk on, and wooden roads built to move guns. Even the dry ground of the Somme battlefield was like a deeply plowed field. In these circumstances the defender could bring in soldiers by train to build new trench lines before the attacker could advance with his artillery to repeat the shelling process. Hence most battles were drawn out and gained very little new ground.

Each side tried a technological solution to this problem. The Germans were first. They decided to obliterate the defenders by flooding them with poison gas. In the beginning the gas was released from canisters and carried by the wind over the opposing front lines. Later, artillery shells were filled with gas and detonated in the opposing trench system. With the defenders dead or incapacitated, and the ground intact, soldiers could break through the opposing lines with ease. Poison gas became ineffective, however, when each side quickly developed gas masks.

The British came up with a bulletproof, self-propelled vehicle, called a tank. It ran on caterpillar tracks and could move over chewed-up ground, shell holes, and trenches, and through barbed wire. Tanks were equipped with two small artillery guns, and were large, very slow, and mechanically unreliable. To keep them secret, the first ones sent to France were covered in tarps and called water tanks. The response to tanks was the development of artillery to disable them.

## **THE CANADIAN ARMY IN WORLD WAR I**

At the outbreak of World War I the Canadian army was very small, about 3,000 regular soldiers and approximately 60,000 in militia units. A call for volunteers in August 1914 brought forth 33,000 recruits. After initial training, they, the First Contingent (see glossary entry), went to Britain in one large convoy in October 1914. After further training they were organized into the 1st Canadian Division and went to the front in France, in early 1915. The Canadian government insisted that the Canadian soldiers fight as all-Canadian units rather than be distributed as reinforcements among British units. This was the result of growing Canadian nationalism. However, few Canadians were trained as higher-level officers (generals) or as staff officers, and so for the first three years of the war the Canadian army borrowed officers from the British army. The Canadian soldiers participated in many of the important battles and were present at many of the historic “firsts” of the First World War.

The trench stalemate had solidified by November 1914 with the failure of the Germans to capture the city of Ypres (First Battle of Ypres). In April 1915 the 1st Division took over a section of the front line in the Ypres salient, only days before the Second Battle of Ypres began. This battle, on April 22, 1915, marked the first major use of poison gas on the Western Front by the Germans as a means of breaking the trench deadlock. Chlorine gas was used on the French divisions and on their neighbors, the Canadians. The 1st Division stood firm in the midst of the disaster. After a week of grim fighting, the British and French high commands were forced to admit defeat, and the front

line moved back several miles to the outskirts of Ypres.

Although Canadians took part in many small attacks, they participated in no major battles in 1915. The early spring of 1916 saw the 2nd Division arrive in France, and several months later the 3rd Division arrived. In 1916 the major military campaign for the forces of the British Empire was the Battle of the Somme, from July 1 to mid-November. The Canadians' turn came in September. The attempt by the Canadians and the British to capture the towns of Flers and Courcellette saw the introduction of a new weapon—the tank. There were not many of them (fewer than 50), and they were mechanically unreliable, but they enabled that day's attack to be successful. It took another year to develop tanks into effective weapons of war.

The year 1917 was a big one for the Canadians. There were now four divisions, grouped as a corps (a subdivision of an army) that trained and fought together. After the Battle of the Somme they had been moved to a quiet sector, opposite Vimy Ridge, to rest and recuperate. They were to have an important part in the Battle of Arras, April–May 1917, with the capture of Vimy Ridge (Easter 1917). This was a striking military achievement, as both the French and the British had tried and failed to capture the Ridge in previous years. The Ridge, because of its height above the surrounding flat Plain of Douai, dominated the countryside. As a result of the victory the British commander of the Canadian Corps, General Byng (Governor General of Canada, 1921–26), received a promotion, and a Canadian, Arthur Currie, became the new commander of the Canadian Corps. Almost six months later, on October 13, 1917, the Canadian Corps was brought back to the Ypres salient to finish the Third Battle of Ypres, usually called the Battle of Passchendaele. The battle had started on July 31, and the continual artillery bombardment and heavy, unseasonal rains had turned the low-lying countryside into a vast muddy swamp. Into this the Canadians came, and by November 10 they had captured the town of Passchendaele. This marked the end of the Third Battle of Ypres. As 1917 closed, the Canadian and Australian troops had earned a reputation as the best soldiers in the armies of the British Empire.

In 1918 the Russians left the war, weakened by revolution and defeated by the Germans and Austrians. The Germans were now able to transfer large numbers of soldiers to the Western Front. The same year saw the arrival of roughly 2 million American soldiers in France. They would require months of training before they were ready for battle. In the spring of 1918 the Germans initiated a series of big offensives on the Western Front, five in total, that were supposed to win them the war. The Canadians had the good luck to be spared from attack during these offensives, but in August they were brought to Amiens, the high-tide mark of the biggest and most successful of the German offensives, for one of the first counteroffensives. Fighting alongside the Australian Corps, and with a large number of tanks, they attacked on August 8. The deputy German commander-in-chief, General Ludendorff, later said: "This marked the black day of the German army in the history of the war." For the next hundred days the Canadian Corps was repeatedly brought into the line to lead attacks on the Germans. Forced to retreat on all sides, the Germans finally asked for a ceasefire.

This took effect on November 11, 1918.

Charles Yale Harrison, the author of *Generals Die in Bed*, joined the Canadian army in 1916. He may have fought at Flers–Courcellette, he most certainly fought at Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele, and from his description he fought at Amiens as well. He was wounded about this time and did not see fighting after that. Harrison was not alone: according to one estimate, over 30,000 Americans enlisted in the Canadian army. One battalion, the 97th Overseas, was made up entirely of Americans. Two well-known American authors, Raymond Chandler and William Faulkner, enlisted in the Canadian forces. Chandler served in the trenches, but the war ended before Faulkner, who enlisted in the flying corps, could go overseas.

## **THE AMERICAN ARMY IN WORLD WAR I**

America entered the war in April 1917. The United States had tried to keep aloof from the conflict, but the sinking of American ships by German submarines and the publication of the Zimmerman Telegram led the American government to declare war on Germany in April 1917. The Zimmerman Telegram revealed that the Germans had promised Mexico sections of the southwestern United States if Mexico would attack the U.S. The American army was substantial, but not large by European standards. There was an extensive militia system, the National Guard. It had not fought any major battles since the Civil War, but it had had combat experience in Mexico against Pancho Villa and his bandits as recently as 1916, and had experienced war against Spain a decade and a half earlier.

The first two American divisions arrived in France in June 1917, three more by the end of November 1917, and another seven by the end of May 1918. By November 1918 there was a total of 43 U.S. divisions. They needed much training, and they also had to be equipped with British and French heavy equipment (artillery, planes, etc.), which the Americans lacked. General Pershing was the commander of the American armed forces in France. He insisted that the American soldiers fight as an American army and not be added to existing French or British divisions.

This policy caused controversy when, in the spring of 1918, the Germans launched a series of offensives aimed at driving Britain and/or France out of the war. The Germans first attacked the British armies in the north and then the French armies in the center. In each attack the Germans were successful in breaking through the front lines, and a fighting retreat followed until a new defense line could be established. British and French generals wanted the help of American units. At the end of May 1918 the first American unit, a brigade (one-third of a division) saw action in a successful counterattack at Cantigny. In July and August, American divisions took part in the desperate defense against the German offensives aimed at Paris. At Belleau Wood and Château-Thierry, American divisions helped the French army stem the tide and then took part in the counter-

attacks. In August the experienced and trained American divisions were formed into the First American Army. Their first major offensive was the Battle of the St. Mihiel Salient, September 12–16. This was a success, and an American victory. The Second American Army was formed in October 1918 and took part in the Battle of the Meuse-Argonne, an offensive that lasted up to the ceasefire on November 11, 1918.

## RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

### FILM:

***Fields of Sacrifice***, National Film Board of Canada. 40 minutes.

A tour of the Canadian war cemeteries of the two world wars, this film uses available newsreel footage to show the original battle, juxtaposes it with footage of the present (the 1960s), and includes a brief commentary about the battle or cemetery. The first time I showed this film in class, the period ended before the film did and the class refused to leave. They sent the most persuasive student to apologize and beg forgiveness of the teacher for their next class. The film ends with a visit to Vimy Ridge, culminating in a zoom up to the Vimy Ridge Memorial. Stunning! I used it in my classes for years to mark November 11, until the school decided to feature it in the Remembrance Day assembly.

### BOOKS: NON-FICTION

#### RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SLAUGHTER

For eighty-five years there has been debate about who or what was responsible for the horrendous casualty tolls and general horrors of the war. Initially, several influential military writers (B.H. Liddell-Hart and J.F.C. Fuller in the 1920s and 1930s) put the blame on stupid and callous generals. This viewpoint tends to see the trench stalemate as a static situation, whereas in reality the defense reacted to changes in the tactics and technology of the attackers. For most of the war the defense adapted more quickly than the offense. In the last twenty years there has been much research by military historians, and a more balanced view is beginning to emerge.

Alan Clark, ***The Donkeys*** (London: Hutchinson, 1961).

This is an example of the traditional view written by an established military historian. It is highly readable, although one-sided.

Robin Neillands, ***The Great War Generals on the Western Front 1914–18*** (London: Robinson, 1999).

This is a revisionist view, attempting to show how each general reacted to the changing situation. It is a long book, so I would suggest looking at the following pages: chapter 1, pp. 1–20; chapter 14, pp. 309–311; chapter 19, pp. 409–38, on the first large-scale use of tanks—the Battle of Cambrai; pp. 487–96 for the Battle of Amiens; and chapter 23, pp. 507–26, for a summary.

## LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

John Ellis, *Eye-Deep in Hell: Life in the Trenches, 1914–1918* (London: Croom Helm, 1976). A British military historian, Ellis focuses on the life and routines of ordinary soldiers in World War I. An honest and brutally realistic description of war in the trenches, it puts the emphasis squarely on the hell of war.

Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993).

A Canadian military historian, Morton takes a wider view of his topic, exploring the process from recruitment, training, fighting, and being taken prisoner, to returning to Canada after the war's end.

## OVERVIEW OF CANADA IN THE WAR

Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War, 1914–1919* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989).

There are literally thousands of histories of the Great War. This summarizes the Canadian war contribution both in the trenches and at home.

## AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

L. Stallings, *The Doughboys: The AEF in France* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963). This shows the war from the point of view of the American soldier. It is an anecdotal description of the fighting and the battles rather than a description of everyday life in the trenches.

## POETRY

I.M. Parsons, ed. *Men Who March Away: Poems of the First World War* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968).

This is my favorite collection of First World War poetry.

## GLOSSARY

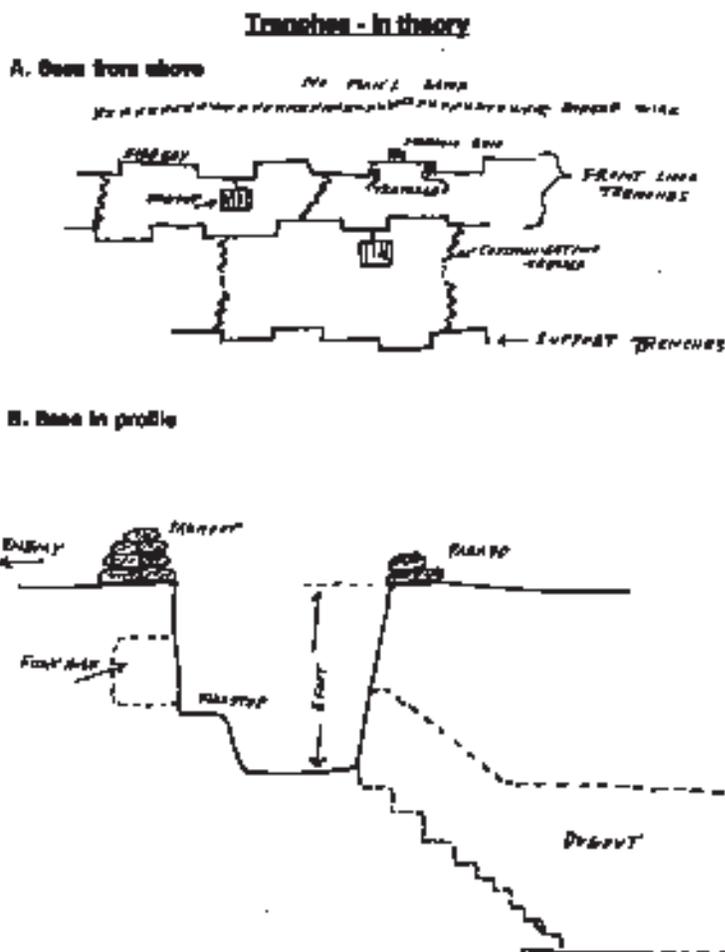
**Blighty:** A non-fatal wound that would take the soldier out of the front lines permanently. With luck, the wound would not cause permanent disfigurement or disability.

**Dugout:** An underground living and sleeping space built into the trench system. There were usually several feet of earth and sandbags above the roof to give protection from anything but a direct hit by a large-caliber shell. See the diagram at the end of the glossary.

**Estaminet:** An eating and drinking place well behind the lines, where soldiers out of the front lines could go to buy food, drink, and sometimes entertainment. It was somewhat similar to a modern bistro or pub.

**Fatigues:** A military term for work parties of soldiers. The work could involve repairing trenches, digging new trenches, installing barbed wire, or carrying supplies and ammunition up to the trenches.

**Firing-step:** In theory, a trench was deep enough for a soldier to walk upright and still have his head below ground level. In order for a soldier to be high enough to see over the top of the parapet and fire a rifle, there was a step or ledge partway up the forward wall of the trench that he could stand on.



**First Contingent:** The first group of Canadians who came overseas (October 1914) to fight in France or Flanders.

**Funk-hole:** A hole or cavity dug out of the side of the trench that was large enough for a soldier to lie in and/or sleep in. It gave protection from the weather and, most important, from shrapnel bursts. See the diagram at the end of the glossary, and the entry for Shrapnel.

**Lewis gun:** A portable submachine gun, it weighed just under 30 pounds (13.5 kg) and its pans of ammunition held 47 bullets. Troops carried this gun into battle because it could be easily set up, particularly for the defense of captured trenches.

**Minenwerfer:** Sometimes called a minnie—a German trench mortar. These short-range weapons could lob explosives in a high arc, over parapets or obstructions, into opposing trenches. Much of the other artillery fired shells in a straight line, and the shell's speed made a whining sound that warned soldiers of its approach. Veteran soldiers could even tell from the sound if the shell was short, over, or about to hit their position. A minenwerfer, by contrast, gave little warning as it did not travel fast enough to make a sound—until it exploded.

**Parado:** Similar to the parapet, but on the back side of the trench. See the diagram at the end of the glossary.

**Parapet:** The sandbag or earthen wall above the top of the trench on the enemy side, which gave protection from bullets. See the diagram at the end of the glossary.

**Reserves, supports, trenches:** These terms refer to a soldier's place of duty in the trench system. *Trenches* means in the front-line trench or trench system. *Supports* refers to the second-line system of trenches, which could be from one hundred yards (90 m) to four hundred yards (365 m) to the rear. Soldiers in trenches or supports would be involved in any raid on their trenches or on the enemy trenches. *Reserves* usually meant a half-mile (0.8 km) to a mile and half (2.4 km) behind the lines. Soldiers in reserves provided immediate reinforcements for counterattacks, replacing casualties and the like.

**Shrapnel:** An artillery shell that, when exploded, threw a large volume of small metal shards in all directions. These shards would wound a soldier unless there was overhead protection. Shrapnel shells could be fused to explode in the air or on contact. Artillery fire, particularly shrapnel, caused about two-thirds of the casualties in the First World War.

**Wiring, sapping, and carrying parties:** Terms for different kinds of fatigues. Wiring parties repaired barbed wire or laid new wire. Sapping was the digging of shallow trenches out into no man's land, sometimes in preparation for an attack or raid, sometimes to provide an observation or sniping position. A carrying party backpacked supplies up to and into the front-line trenches. All of these tasks were usually done at night, to avoid being shot at, machine-gunned, or shelled.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

### THE HISTORY CLASSROOM

There are many ways of using this novel in a history or social studies class. An ideal situation would have the class stay together for both the English and history/social studies classes. The novel would then be studied in both classes simultaneously, with history mining the story for the historical content, while the character, plot, setting, and so on would be explored in English.

The reality is that *Generals Die in Bed* will usually be used in one subject area only, and I have a number of suggestions for learning activities in the history class. The experiences described by the author should arouse a powerful curiosity in the students about how people could live in such conditions. They should also wonder how warfare could produce a situation such as this. Beginning activities should start them thinking in these areas. Many of these activities will, coincidentally, be used to develop discussion and writing skills, through small-group discussions and writing of journal entries (keeping a log). I found that getting a short written or verbal summary from each group was most enlightening. It gave me a strong feel for the students' level of knowledge and the nature of their misconceptions. I was often surprised, sometimes dismayed, and occasionally astounded. As a result of my discoveries, I frequently changed the emphasis of what I taught and how I taught it.

One method increasingly used in schools is having students keep journals, or logs, of their learning experiences. This should lead to reflection by the students on the process of learning. One suggestion is to have students, at the end of the unit on the Great War, reread their journals and write a short summary of the changes in their knowledge and attitudes towards soldiers and war.

One possibility is to use *Generals Die in Bed* as an introduction to the First World War. The class should already have "done" the causes and events leading to the outbreak of the war. Another possibility is to read the novel at the end of the unit on World War I. Having learned how the war was fought, and the important battles and events, the students now get a soldier's-eye view of it. *Generals Die in Bed* will show the overwhelming emotional and psychological impact of the conditions in which men lived and fought.

Many of the following activities are open-ended and definitely not "right-answer" oriented. They offer a series of suggestions to choose from.

## BEFORE STARTING THE BOOK:

Activities to build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and to establish prior knowledge and interest and develop predictions of what the text will be about.

Introduce the students to the glossary terms and the diagrams of the trench system. The author assumes that the reader understands these terms.

A1. This activity focuses on the nature of World War I. The ideas of many students are based on current media, particularly Hollywood and made-for-TV war movies. This should not be a long exercise and is probably best done in small groups. Students should make a written summary of their answers to share with the class and as a record for themselves. It might be interesting to look at these writings again after the class has finished studying World War I.

—What do you think would be:

—the worst difficulties faced by a soldier?

—a soldier's most memorable wartime experiences?

—How would soldiers live and survive for a week in the presence of the enemy?

## WHILE READING THE BOOK

Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

B1. This activity focuses on the emotions produced by Harrison's novel. Class discussion or small-group discussion may be used, or this could be the topic for a short writing exercise.

—What feelings or emotions does the novel arouse in you? Why? Give some examples from the text of particularly emotional passages.

—Do you identify with any particular person or group? Why?

—By the end of the novel, what attitude or attitudes do you have towards soldiers of the First World War?

—Will this influence how you treat veterans? How? Why?

B2. This activity focuses on the author's view of war. It may be done in small groups or as individual work. Students should summarize their answers in their notes and journals. The journal should also record the student's reaction to the author's viewpoint.

—What is the author's view of the war? Choose some passages or specific images from the text to support your view.

—Has his point of view changed from the beginning of the novel to the end?

Choose some passages or specific images from the text to support your view.

**OR**

—What incidents, scenes, or topics does the author choose to describe?

—How do they show his view of war?

B3. These activities focus on narrow, practical facts of history. They are perhaps best done in small groups. Have students make a summary of their answers for you and the class, and write it in their journal.

Ask students to list and describe the weapons available to the armies of 1914.

—How was the war fought? i.e., How would these weapons be used?

**OR**

Ask students to list the personal equipment needed by each soldier to live and fight on a battlefield for a week, i.e., to camp out on a firing range but hide behind the targets. Stress the practical aspects, such as:

—How much would it all weigh?

—How did a soldier avoid losing his equipment?

Note: Students will need help with the second activity, as there is not enough detail in the novel. There are pictures of a soldier's kit and an equipment list for a typical soldier in World War I on pp. 33–36 of Ellis, *Eye-Deep in Hell*.

## **AFTER READING THE BOOK**

Activities to inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.

C1. This is a quick exercise to shift the student's focus from the novelist's perception to the actual history.

—On the basis of the scenes in the novel, where do you think the average soldier spent most of his time during the war?

This information should now be given to the students:

C.E. Carrington, a British infantry officer who served in World War I, wrote of his experiences long after the war (1965). Using his diary, he described his war in 1916. In the entire year he was “in action” (fighting) on only four occasions, and this included the Battle of the Somme. There was one attack, two trench raids, and one defense against a counterattack. He also accounted for his activities for the year as follows:

- 65 days in front-line trenches (12 separate tours)
- 36 days in support trenches
- 120 days in reserve
- 73 days resting
- 10 days in hospital (illness—not wounded)
- 21 days on training courses
- 17 days on leave
- 14 days traveling (he was moved 80 times)
- 9 days at base

*Quoted in Robin Neillands, The Great War Generals, p. 446*

Compare C.E. Carrington’s wartime experience to that of the novelist.

- What dominates Harrison’s memory after the war?

C2. Focus on deeper issues regarding duty and morality. An important part of this is developing students’ ability to identify moral issues to clarify their own understanding of the issues, and to defend their view. Equally important is developing their capacity and willingness to listen to all views, agreeable or disagreeable.

—Is a soldier justified, when living and fighting in the conditions described by Harrison, in refusing to fight? Why?

—Is this a practical matter or a moral issue? Explain and defend your point of view.

—Consider the story of the sinking of the *Llandovery Castle*. Is the moral case changed if your government is lying to you? Why?

At the end, give students time to enter their thoughts in their journals.

Note : One book reviewer said the story in the novel is false: the *Llandovery Castle* was not carrying munitions but was sunk by a German submarine. Whether true or false, however, the story presents an incident on which the moral issue can be examined.

C3. Focus on this novelist's viewpoint versus that of the news and entertainment industry. Many war movies, both Hollywood and made-for-TV, present a very patriotic and glorious view of war and fighting. This is certainly true of many movies about World Wars I and II.

—The entertainment industry makes war movies that differ sharply in viewpoint from that expressed by Harrison in *Generals Die in Bed*. Why?

—Pick a particular war movie. What is the point of view of the producer/director/writer? Identify specific scenes that illustrate your opinion.

**OR**

Choose some TV news coverage of a warlike incident somewhere in the world. Coverage should not be just a single news broadcast, but should include the story from beginning to end.

—What is the news system's view of the conflict?

—Does it support one side over the other side?

—Does it glorify the incident?

## THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

### BEFORE STARTING THE BOOK:

Activities to build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and to establish prior knowledge and interest and develop predictions of what the text will be about.

- A1. In groups of three or four, identify some of the wars that are taking place in the world today.
- Who is involved in each war?
  - Why are they fighting?
  - To what extent do these wars affect you? Explain.

If you were to join the military, in which branch would you prefer to serve? Why? Which tasks would be most difficult and dangerous? Explain.

### WHILE READING THE BOOK

Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

- B1. Keep a log in which you:
- Identify one key event from each chapter and briefly describe your reaction to it.
  - Copy out at least one sentence from each chapter that made a strong impression on you, and, in a sentence for each, explain why.
  - List any words that are new to you, with their meanings.
  - Record, in three or four sentences, your feelings at the end of each chapter.

### AFTER READING THE BOOK

Activities to inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.

The following assignments may be done individually or in small groups.

- C1. SETTING (time and place)

The primary setting of the novel is the trenches of the Western Front during the First World War.

- What other locations serve as settings in the novel?
- Write one paragraph in which you describe in your own words the primary setting, and a second paragraph in which you describe one of the other settings.

## C2. PLOT

A plot is composed of a series of interrelated events that lead to a major crisis or turning point in the fortunes of the main character. The plot also builds to a climax, the point of highest emotional intensity for the reader. Sometimes the major crisis and the climax occur at the same time.

- Select five key events in the novel, including the major crisis and the climax.
- Explain the importance of each event.
- Justify your choice of major crisis and climax.

## C3. CHARACTER

A character sketch includes both physical details and personality traits.

Write character sketches for the main character and two other characters of your choice.

- In the opening sentence of each sketch, identify the character.
- In the second sentence, state three dominant characteristics.
- In the next six to nine sentences, illustrate these characteristics with specific reference to the novel in the form of examples and/or quotations.
- Finally, write a concluding sentence that sums up your overall impression of the character.

## C4. POINT OF VIEW

Sometimes an author tells a story in the third person. At other times the author has a character tell the story in the first person, that is from his or her own point of view. In this case the reader sees the world through that character's eyes, and tends to sympathize with him or her. Other characters may view events differently from the one telling the story.

Pretend you are one of the following characters: Captain Clark; the captured German soldier (Karl's brother); Anderson (the preacher); Gladys (the woman in London).

- Write a page in which you describe a key event from your point of view as that character.

## C5. LANGUAGE

Some words are particular to a time and place, and have little meaning for people years later.

—Define the following words that were familiar to soldiers at the time of the First World War:

swagger stick (p.#16)  
dugout (p.#43)  
sapping party (p.#65)  
No Man's Land (p.#21)  
parados (p.#43)  
shock troops (p.#70)  
firing-step (p.#21)  
communication trench (p.#43)  
MC (p.#71)  
Lewis gun (p.##23)  
puttee (p.43)  
Very light (p.#73)  
Minnies (p.#24)  
rations (p.#45)  
barrage (p.#74)  
parapet (p.#24)  
the front (p.#47)  
greatcoat (p.#84)  
Blighty (p.#29)  
field dressing station (p.#51)  
MO (p.#86)  
batman (p.#32)  
billet (p.#51)  
MM (p.#86)  
estaminet (p.#39)  
latrine (p.#55)  
jumping-off ladder (p.#121)  
enfilade fire (p.#42)  
fatigues (p.#65)  
infiltration (p.#158)

—Identify ten words in common use today that might have little meaning to people fifty years from now.

The author uses comparisons to make his scenes vivid to the reader. He uses similes, for example, “Whips snap like revolver shots over the heads of the struggling beasts” (p.#50). He also uses metaphors, for example, “The road is an inferno” (p.#51). Thirdly, he uses personification: “The trench rocks and sways. Mud and earth leap into the air” (p.#24).

—Choose five striking comparative images and explain why they create a strong sensory impression on the reader.

## C6. THEME

There are recurrent themes in literature. These include war, loss of innocence, class differences, friendship, and betrayal.

—What statement is Harrison making about these particular themes in his novel?

—What other themes does he address?

C7. Plan and write an essay of about 500 words on one of the following topics. Create a thesis from the topic you have chosen or that has been assigned. Determine three to five arguments that you would use to support the thesis. For each argument, select three or four examples and/or quotations to illustrate your point.

—Experiences in war dehumanize people. Agree or disagree.

—No matter which side he is on, winning or losing, the common soldier is always a victim. Agree or disagree.

—“Difficult experiences often cause people to become stronger.”

To what extent does this statement apply to the main character of the novel?

—The novel *Generals Die in Bed* is relevant to today’s reader. Agree or disagree.

C8. Choose one of the following ideas or create your own:

—Interview someone who is currently serving in the military, has previously served in the military, or has experienced war as a civilian. Plan your questions carefully before the interview, but be flexible during it. You may wish to tape it.

—With a partner acting as a news anchor, pretend you are a news correspondent reporting from a war zone.

—Write a poem about war.

—Create a collage that shows either the horror of war or the appeal of military life.

He was born in Philadelphia and raised in Montreal. At age 16, started working for the Montreal Star but his newspaper career was interrupted by the First World War. He enlisted in the army and was sent to France where he participated in the Battle of Amiens in 1918. He was wounded in the foot and spent the rest of the war in hospital. He returned home where he ended up in New York City continuing his literary work as a novelist, journalist, and public relations consultant. In 1930 he published his best known book, an anti-war novel, "General Die in Bed". He wrote another anti-war novel Generals die in Bed by Charles Yale Harrison is a novel where a young Canadian soldier tells of his first hand account of the harsh and inhumane conditions in the trenches on the Western Front during World War I. Through his observations and experiences the Narrator shows the effects of war on ordinary people and how they manage in extraordinarily horrific situations. ...The Horror of war on the Soldier in Charles Yale Harrison's Generals Die in Bed Eng 22 PB 963 Words Some people say that war can change a man. What exactly do they mean by this phrase? What are some possible things that a soldier could experience in war? What are some things a soldier has experienced enough of that can fundamentally change his life? Generals Die in Bed is an anti-war novella by the Canadian writer Charles Yale Harrison. Based on the author's own experiences in combat, it tells the story of a young soldier fighting in the trenches of World War I. It was first published in 1930 by William Morrow. This Canadian World War I narrative starts in Montreal, where an unnamed soldier of 18 years old is among those Canadian soldiers preparing to deploy confront the Germans on European soil, mainly in France and Belgium. Though the story