

Shellshock: By 1914 army doctors noticed patients suffering from "shellshock". It was thought it was caused by the noise and effects of the bombs that exploded 24 hours a day, for weeks, months and years on end. Another cause may have been the horrible things that soldiers saw during their time in the trenches.



Getting 'ushy' (sent home). A Scottish bloke (man) wanted a 'cushy' bad so he puts his finger over the top (of the trench) and gets his trigger finger shot off. "I'm off to bonny Scotland!" he says laughing. But on the way out of the trenches, he forgets to keep his head down where an old sniper is working. He gets it (shot) through the head." **Robert Graves.**

Most soldiers in the trenches hated the food they were given. Most of what they ate was 'bully beef' (canned corned beef), bread and biscuits. By 1916 there was very little flour left so bread was being made with dried ground turnips. They also ate soup made pieces of horsemeat and even the rats.



Whilst asleep during the night, we were often awakened by rats running over us. I would lie on my back and wait for a rat to jump on my legs; then kick my legs upwards, throwing the rat into the air. Occasionally, I would hear a shout when the rat landed on a fellow victim (another soldier)." **R L Venables.**

Another soldier wrote: "The rats were huge. They were so big they would eat a wounded man if he couldn't defend himself." These rats became very bold and would attempt to take food from the pockets of sleeping men. Rats would always be found on a dead body. They usually went for the eyes first and then they ate their way right into it. One soldier described finding a group of dead bodies while on night patrol: My heart pounded as we edged towards one of the bodies. His helmet had rolled off. The dead face, stripped of flesh; the skull bare, the eyes eaten and from the open mouth jumped a rat."



Fixing the trench wall, "The ground was full of dead soldiers and they became part of the trench walls. I was fixing the trench when I fell and put my arm through the stomach of a long dead French soldier. It felt soft like cheese. It was days before I got the smell out of my fingernails." **British soldier, 1915**

"If a soldier wouldn't climb the ladder when ordered to go over the top an officer would come down and shoot them for being a coward. The man was no more of a coward than you or I. He just could not move. That's shell shock."

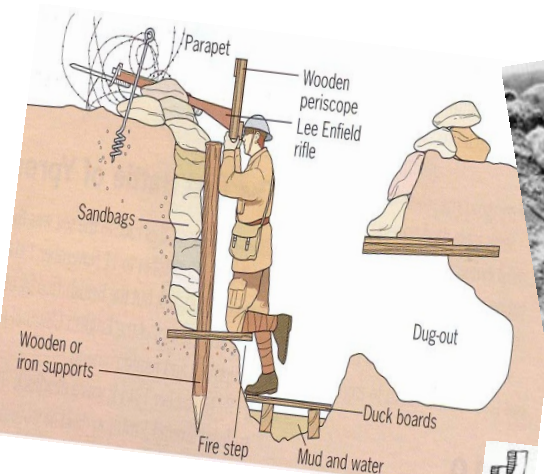
The Last Tommy, Harry Patch.

Trench foot was caused by cold, wet and dirty conditions in the trenches. Men had to stand for hours in mud and water without being able to take off wet socks or boots. To stop trench foot soldiers were ordered to dry their feet and change their socks two times a times a day and rub whale oil into their feet.

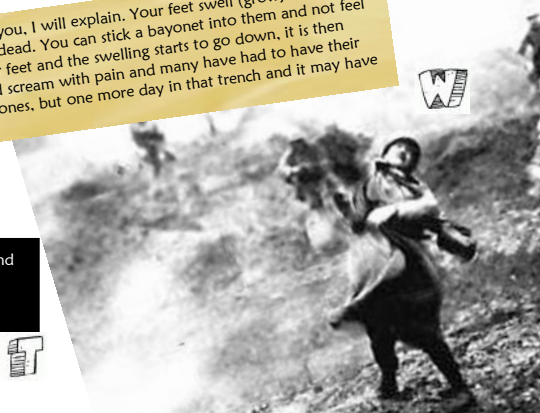
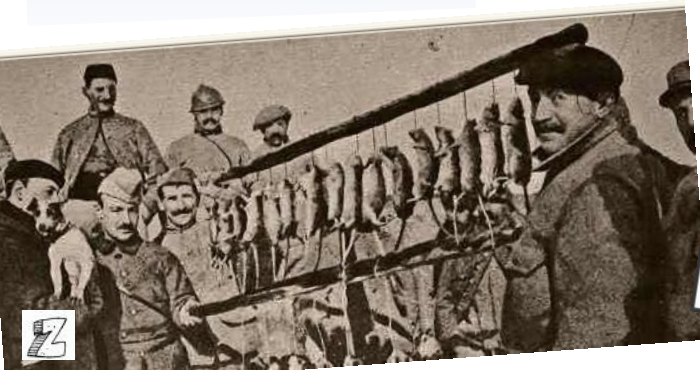
There were millions of rats in the trenches. There were two types, the brown and the black rat. The brown rat was vey bad. They ate the dead soldiers, especially their eyes. They grew very large and some soldiers said they were as big as cats. Soldiers were afraid of these rats because they would run across their faces in the dark. The soldiers tried to kill them with gunfire, with the bayonet, by clubbing (hitting) them with sticks and using dogs. No matter how many rats they killed more came. A female rat could produce 800 offspring in a year.

S "If you have never had trench foot described to you, I will explain. Your feet swell (grow) two to three times their normal size and go completely dead. You can stick a bayonet into them and not feel a thing. If you are lucky enough not to lose your feet and the swelling starts to go down, it is then that the most awful pain begins. I have heard men cry and scream with pain and many have had to have their feet and legs amputated (cut off) . I was one of the lucky ones, but one more day in that trench and it may have been too late." **Harry Roberts.**

Stand to: Every morning each man would be expected to stand on the trench fire step, rifle loaded, bayonet fixed. This was because most enemy attacks happened at dawn (sun up) or shortly after dusk (sun down). Once given the 'all clear' soldiers would make their breakfast.



Night Patrols: During the night soldiers would be sent out into no man's land. Small teams would set up listening posts to find out what was being said in the German trenches. Another job was to look for and bring back wounded soldiers who had been left in no man's land.



A Letter From The Trenches.



Explore: the conditions and experiences of a British soldier living in the trenches.

The date is June 30th, 1916. You are a British soldier living in the trenches. Tomorrow you will go 'over the top' to attack the Germans at the Somme. You are going to write a letter to a loved one, describing the conditions and your experiences living in the trenches. This letter will probably be the last one you ever write so make it a good one!

Use the sources, pictures and key words provided to help you.

My Dear.... (create a name)

I am writing to you tonight because I know it may be the last chance I get. I want to tell you about what it has been like living in these dreadful trenches.

1: Morning. Describe your routine in the morning, how you cook and what you eat for breakfast.

Use sources N, D and T to help you.

Key words: Wake up, stand to, dawn, dusk, wait, attack, enemy, all clear, breakfast, bully beef, hot tea, dry biscuits, flour, bread, hungry, meat.

2: The trench. Describe the trench. What is it like, how deep is it, is it comfortable, where do you sleep?

Use sources J and K to help you.

Key words: Parapet, fire step, dug-out, barbed wire, sandbag, duckboard, water, mud.

3: Looking after your feet. Do you have trench foot or have you seen anyone else with it?

Use sources P, K, L and S to help you.

Key Words: Trench foot, wet, mud, filth, socks, dry, pain, whale oil, amputate.

4: The rats. What are they like, what do they do, how do you feel about them?

Use sources C, O, X and Z to help you.

Key Words: Rats, brown, black, huge, eyes, dead, sleep, kill, hate, shoot, stab. reproduce.

5: Your duties. Describe some of the work you have to do.

Use sources B and E to help you.

Key Words: Fix, walls, damaged, dead body, smell, sick, night patrol, listen.

6: Shell shock. Explain what caused shell shock and how it affected a soldier.

Use sources A, H, I, R and P to help you.

Key Words: Shell shock, crazy, artillery, shell, explosions.

7: Night time. Can you sleep with the rats and bombs, do you have dreams of home or nightmares about war?

Use source X to help you.

Key Words: Tired, rats, noise, bombs, scared, tin cans, dreams, and nightmares.

8: A 'story' from the trenches. Share a story about something you have seen in the trenches, funny, scary or sad.

Use source F as an example.

Key Words: ?

9: How do you feel about? Describe your feelings towards, your own officers, your friends, the Germans.

Use source R to help you.

Key Words: Hate, love, brothers, enemy, Hun.

10: Tomorrow. Describe how you feel about going 'over the top' the next day.

Use sources R, M and W to help you.

Key Words: Fear, coward, duty, brave, pray, machine guns, no man's land, dead, injured, rats.

Write a last goodbye,

And sign your name x