

The First World War

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Life on the front line

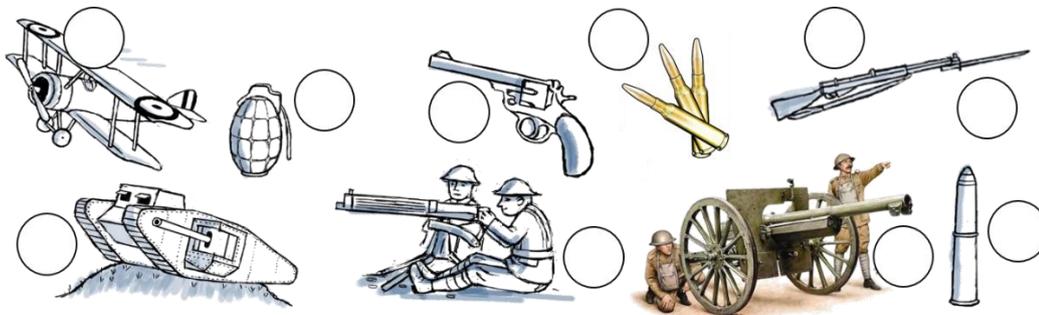
On the Western Front, the war was fought in trenches, where soldiers lived all day and night. In the middle was No Man's Land, so-called because it did not belong to either army. Soldiers crossed No Man's Land when they wanted to attack the enemy. The trenches were dirty, muddy and smelly. There were many dead bodies buried nearby. Millions of rats infested the trenches. There was also a big problem with lice that tormented the soldiers every day. As a result of wet conditions and poor hygiene, some soldiers suffered from "trench foot". Match the words with the pictures.



1. trench foot
2. lice
3. muddy
4. smelly
5. buried

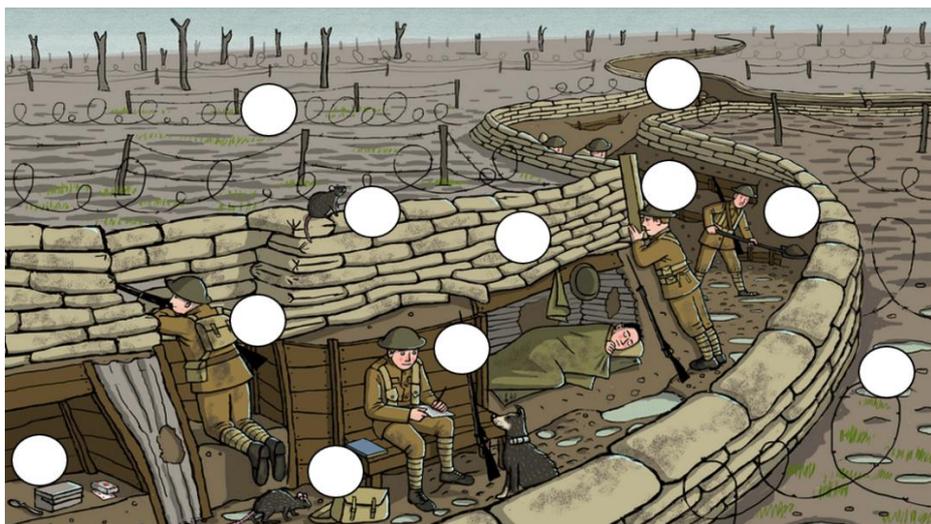
Weapons

Every soldier had his own rifle*. It could fire fifteen rounds in under a minute and hit someone over a thousand metres away. A bayonet* was fixed to rifles and used in one-on-one fighting. Grenades* were thrown into enemy trenches. Officers had their pistols*. Machine guns* fired up to 600 bullets in a minute. Artillery field guns* could fire shells* as far as 6 km.



1. a tank
2. an aeroplane
3. an artillery field gun
4. a machine gun
5. a pistol
6. a rifle
7. bullets
8. a grenade
9. a shell
10. a bayonet

Daily life in the trenches



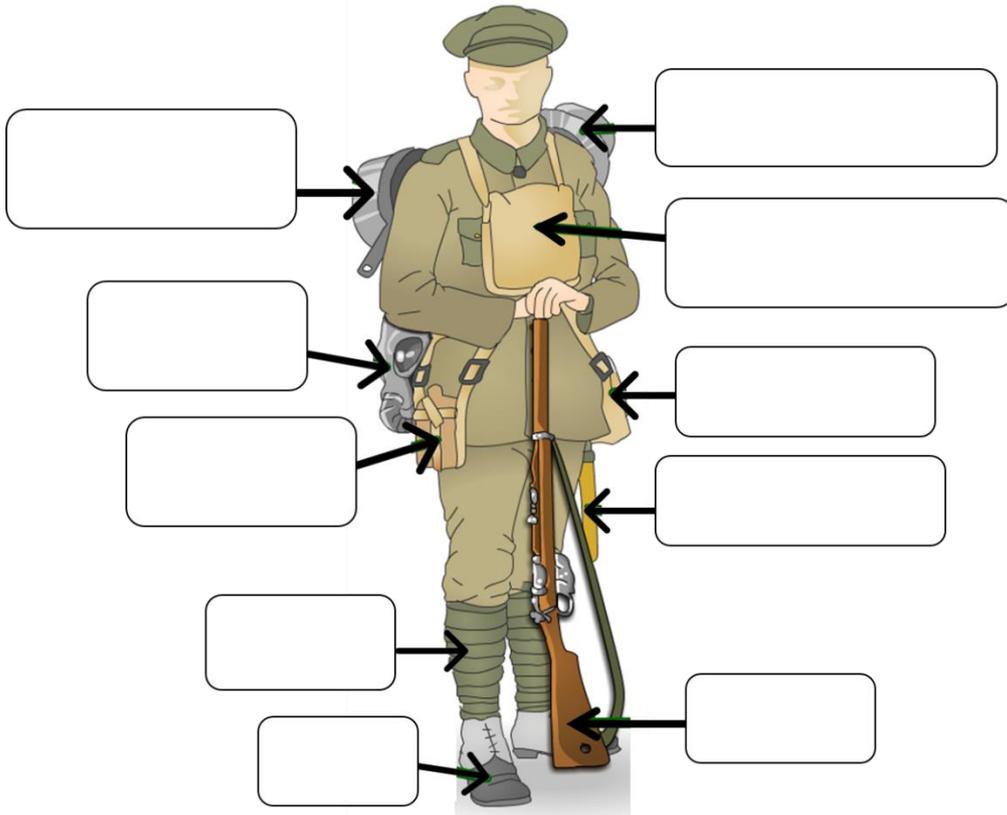
1. the trench
2. No Man's Land
3. sandbags
4. barbed wire
5. periscope
6. soldier on watch
7. metal tin
8. haversack and kit
9. trench duty
10. rat
11. letters and diary

Soldiers usually had tea, biscuits and tinned beef for dinner. Daily life involved the Stand-To-Arms, meaning to be on high-alert for enemy attack. Soldiers had to clean and inspect their weapons, fill up sandbags, dig trenches, consolidate the trench floor and the walls, fix communication cables, put up barbed wire, transfer supplies, food rations and new equipment, observe enemy activities and movements, go patrolling, remove the dead bodies and the wounded from the trenches and from no man's land. They had to live with the constant danger of enemy attacks, shrapnel shells and snipers, the sound of artillery bombardments which sometimes resulted in soldiers suffering from a breakdown (mental collapse) known as "shell shock", the death or injury of close friends and the dangers of poison gas attacks. Men had to rest and sleep during the day, they enjoyed playing card games and they wrote letters or postcards to their families.

The British Soldier

Label the pictures with the words in the box.

boots / grenades / rifle / steel helmet / ammunition pouch /
water bottle / cooking equipment / gas mask / puttees / bayonet



Over the top

In order to attack the enemy, men had to climb over the parapet of the trenches and they had to cross No Man's Land. On July 1st, 1916, the French and British military forces launched an attack on the German army in the Somme. It was disastrous. On the first day alone, the British lost 60,000 men. The battle ended on November 14th. Over 1.3 million men were killed and the Allies just won 6 miles of territory. This is how one officer described "going over the top" with his soldiers at the Somme: *"You try to calm everybody ① and try not to show how terrified you are. Then you start the countdown: ten, nine, eight... You blow the whistle ②. You climb out of the trench ③ and through the hole in the barbed wire ④. You lie there for everyone to get out ⑤. Some of them are already dead ⑥ or wounded ⑦. Then you stand up and start running ⑧, across No Man's Land ⑨, towards a line of machine guns, with artillery firing all around."*

"Over the top"

Number the pictures in the order they are mentioned in the text.

