

Year 8: What was it like to be a soldier of the First World War?

The first part of our new unit in History will focus on: **Conflict: The causes of the First World War and the events of the First World War.** This will involve analysing why the war happened and the experiences of an ordinary soldier.

Key words and definitions

Militarism	Building up supplies of weapons and ammunition.
Alliances	An agreement between countries to help and support each other.
Imperialism	Building empires e.g. The British Empire.
Nationalism	Believing strongly that your country is the best.
Conscription	Forcing people to join the army.
Great powers	Countries which have great influence and military strength.
Kaiser	German word for emperor.
mobilise	Prepare and organise troops for fighting.
munitions	Things needed for war: shells, bullets, guns.
patriotism	Love for your own country.
Propaganda	Communications like posters and films designed to mislead people.
The Balkans	An area in south-east Europe
Western Front	Trench line from the English Channel to Switzerland
trench	Long, deep ditches used as a line of defence
No Man's Land	Area between two trench systems
Total war	War which affects civilians at home as well as the military overseas.

Causes of WWI

The First World War began in August 1914. The majority of people were very surprised that the major powers of Europe went to war with each other. However, there had been a build-up of tension over many years.

Militarism caused WW1:

1. All the nations of Europe were militaristic, but the governments of Germany and Austria-Hungary were especially so.
2. All the countries of Europe built up their armies and navies. .
3. Germany and Britain clashed over the size of their navies.

Alliances caused WW1:

The Triple Entente alarmed Germany, which felt itself surrounded by the France-Russia alliance. The countries of Europe thought that the alliance system would act as a deterrent to war; in fact it tied the countries together so that, when one country went to war then the others would follow.

Imperialism caused WW1:

Countries who believed that they were superior thought it was alright to conquer and rule others – particularly if they were inhabited by races they thought were inferior. It led to HUGE tension when Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany decided that HE wanted some colonies too!

Nationalism caused WW1:

EVERYONE was nationalist in those days, and this helped cause war in two ways: (a) It made the people of countries like Britain, Germany and France more bellicose (warlike) People were enraged when someone insulted their country. (b) It made the races ruled by Turkey and by Austria-Hungary (such as the Serbs) want to be free to rule themselves. 1914 a Bosnia Serb assassinated the Archduke of Austria.

What was life like for a soldier of WWI?

Recruitment:

Germany used conscription to ensure there were lots of men in her army. She was able to call up 3.8 million men in 1914.

Britain relied on volunteers at first; introducing conscription in 1916. In 1914, Britain could call upon 700,000 men.

Around 3 million men from the colonies of the British Empire would end up fighting in WWI.

Methods to encourage volunteers included propaganda, Pals Battalions and Patriotism.

Did the Allies make a good peace?

The Treaty of Versailles:

The Treaty of Versailles was the name of the Peace Treaty that punished Germany at the end of WWI. There were 5 main terms:

GUILT: Germany had to accept the blame for WWI. They had to sign the War Guilt Clause, otherwise known as Article 231.

ARMY: The Germany military was reduced so that they couldn't cause another war in the future. They were restricted to 100,000 men, no tanks or air force and 6 battleships.

REPARATIONS: Germany had to pay for the damage caused in WWI. The total cost was 6.6 billion. This caused huge financial complications in Germany, including Hyperinflation.

LAND LOSSES: Germany lost parts of their Empire. For example, land was given to Poland to give them access to the sea. The Saar Coalfields were given to France to control for 15 years.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS: After WWI, a peace keeping organisation called the League of Nations was set up to help countries work together to prevent another war in the future. Germany were not allowed to join.

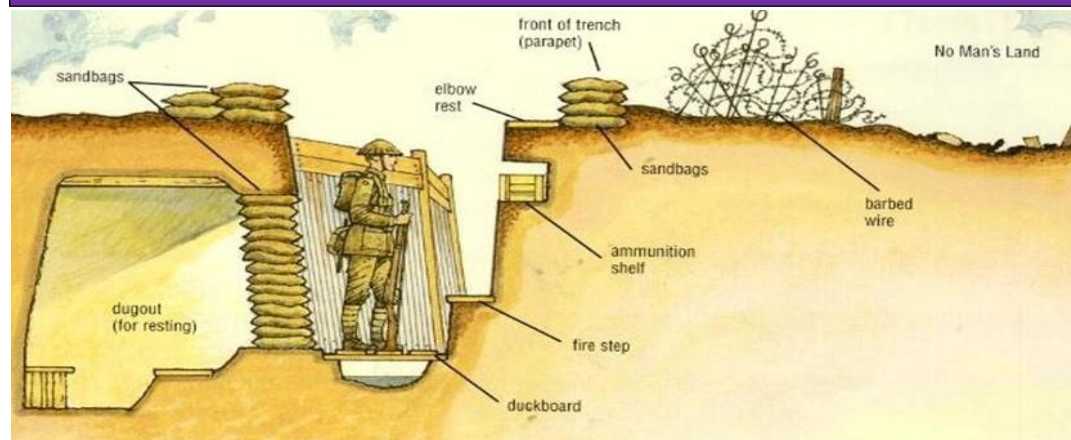
Trench Warfare:

On the Western Front, both sides used Trench Warfare in what became a war of attrition.

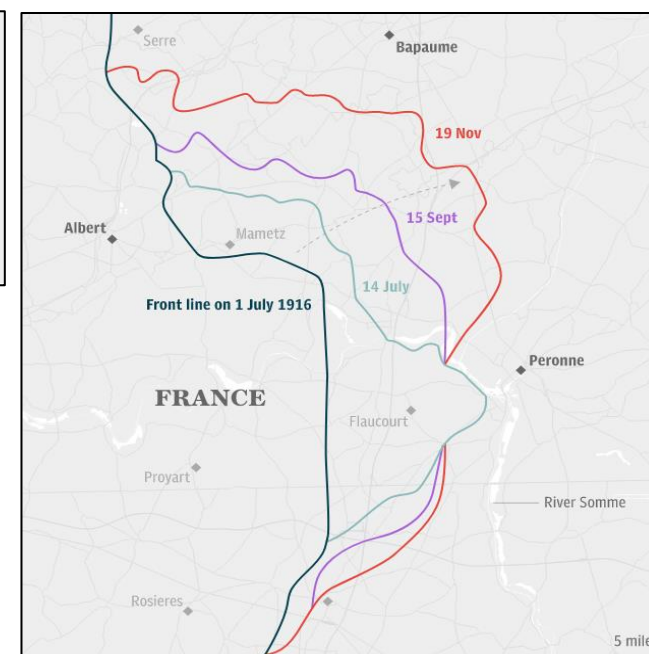
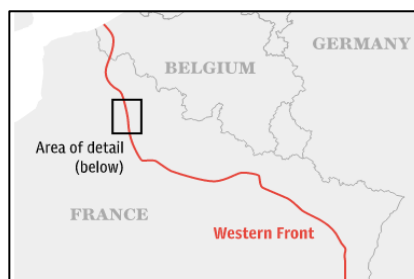
German Trenches were better built than the allied ones. They generally occupied higher ground and had more sophisticated defences.

Allied Trenches were often in lower ground and suffered floods, they lacked key defences that the Germans had.

Cross section of a typical First World War British trench



The Battle of the Somme



- The battle began on 1. July 1916
- British soldiers were told to walk towards the German trenches.
- 20,000 were killed on Day 1.
- General Haig was in command of the British army.
- 90% of casualties were caused by machine gun fire.