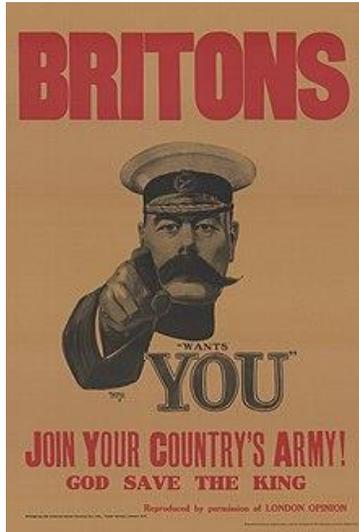


Year 9 History: Topic 2

First World War: Life in the trenches



Why did men "sign up"

The British army had 80,000 regular soldiers at the start of 1914; by September 750,000 had "signed up" to fight. By 1918 over 5 million men had "fought for King and country"

Some made the decision based on patriotism (love of their country); others felt pressured because they did not want to be accused of being cowards.

The government published many propaganda posters encouraging men to join the fight: some posters were designed to make people proud of Britain, while others presented the enemy negatively.

Pals Battalions

By 1915 vast numbers of soldiers had been killed. The government needed to come up with ways to encourage men to sign up.

Pals Battalions were groups of soldiers who all came from a similar area who signed up to fight together. Some represented towns or factories. There was even a Pals Battalion of fans of West Ham United Football Club. This meant that men served and fought alongside people who they knew. However, it was particularly tragic when failed attacks meant that huge numbers of men from a town or village died on the same day.



Battle of the Somme

+1.7m shells fired in preparation to weaken German defence ... but Germans had been protected in deep trenches

200,000 British soldiers attacked along a line 25 miles long.

First day of the battle, 1 July 1916, was the greatest loss of British lives in a single day in history, +58,000 died. Battle continued for 5 months during which 500,000 German, 420,000 British and 200,000 French lives lost. British advanced by 5 miles.

British attack led by Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig.

Weapons

Artillery – big guns used to fire large bombs (shells) up to 8 miles

Barbed wire – huge amounts of barbed wire made it difficult to cross no man's land

Gas – poison gas was used by both sides; it caused blindness, choking and potentially death

Machine gun – soldiers hid in trenches because the machine gun was such a devastating weapon

Tank – designed to deal with tough muddy conditions. First models were very unreliable and slow

Difficulties in the trenches

Life in the trenches was incredibly tough, soldiers had to put up with

Boredom – there was little to do, though many men wrote letters home which give an insight into their experiences

Fear – constantly worrying about enemy attack

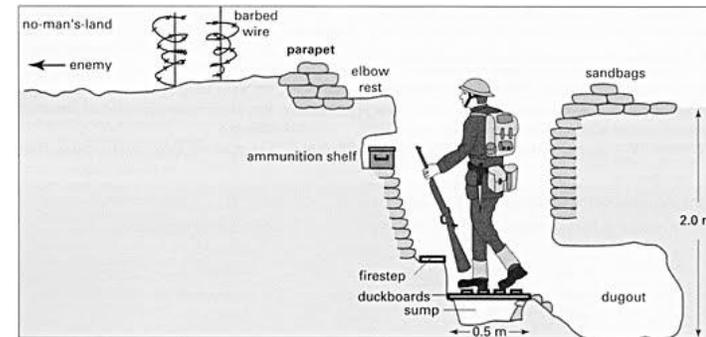
Lice – biting fleas living on men's uniform, difficult to get rid of because the chance to wash was rare

Mud – the ground became incredibly muddy and hard to walk in

Rats – feasted on the bodies of the dead and reproduced rapidly

Shell shock – constant explosions resulted in many men facing severe mental health issues and during and after the war

Trench foot – constantly standing in the wet mud meant that men's feet would rot



Key Vocabulary

Artillery – space between two front line trenches

Barrage – space

Cowardice – space

No man's land – space

Over the top – space

Western Front – space