

Knowledge Book – Trench Project homework

Please see below key information required to complete on going trench project homework. This information will be used in your presentation at the end of January. **Nevertheless, we do expect you to add depth and detail, therefore we encourage you to carry out extra research.**

Look forward to seeing your trenches and presentations.

World War I

Trench Warfare

Trench warfare is a type of fighting where both sides build deep trenches as a defense against the enemy. These trenches can stretch for many miles and make it nearly impossible for one side to advance.

During World War I, the western front in France was fought using trench warfare. By the end of 1914, both sides had built a series of trenches that went from the North Sea and through Belgium and France. As a result, neither side gained much ground for three and a half years from October 1914 to March of 1918.

How were the trenches built?

The trenches were dug by soldiers. Sometimes the soldiers just dug the trenches straight into the ground. This method was called entrenching. It was fast, but left the soldiers open to enemy fire while they were digging. Sometimes they would build the trenches by extending a trench on one end. This method was called sapping. It was safer, but took longer. The most secret way to build a trench was to make a tunnel and then remove the roof when the tunnel was complete. Tunneling was the safest method, but also the most difficult.

No Man's Land

The land between the two enemy trench lines was called "No Man's Land." This land was sometimes covered with barbed wire and land mines. The enemy trenches were generally around 50 to 250 yards apart.

What were the trenches like?

The typical trench was dug around twelve feet deep into the ground. There was often an embankment at the top of the trench and a barbed wire fence. Some trenches were reinforced with wood beams or sandbags. The bottom of the trench was usually covered with wooden boards called duckboards. The duckboards were meant to keep the soldiers' feet above the water that would collect at the bottom of the trench.

The trenches weren't dug in one long straight line, but were built as more of a system of trenches. They were dug in a zigzag pattern and there were many levels of trenches along the lines with paths dug so soldiers could travel between the levels.

Life in the Trenches

Soldiers generally rotated through three stages of the front. They would spend some time in the front line trenches, some time in the support trenches, and some time resting. They almost always had some sort of job to do whether it was repairing the trenches, guard duty, moving supplies, undergoing inspections, or cleaning their weapons.

- **Conditions in the Trenches**

The trenches were not nice, clean places. They were actually quite disgusting. There were all sorts of pests living in the trenches including rats, lice, and frogs. The rats were everywhere and got into the soldiers' food and ate just about everything, including sleeping soldiers. The lice were also a major problem. They made the soldiers' itch horribly and caused a disease called Trench Fever.

The weather also contributed to rough conditions in the trenches. Rain caused the trenches to flood and get muddy. Mud could clog up weapons and make it hard to move in battle. Also, the constant moisture could cause an infection called Trench Foot that, if untreated, could become so bad that a soldier's feet would have to be amputated. Cold weather was dangerous, too. Soldiers often lost fingers or toes to frostbite and some died from exposure in the cold.

Interesting Facts about Trench Warfare It is estimated that if all the trenches built along the western front were laid end-to-end they would total over 25,000 miles long.

- The trenches needed constant repair or they would erode from the weather and from enemy bombs.
- The British said it took 450 men 6 hours to build about 250 meters of a trench system.
- Most of the raids took place at night when soldiers could sneak across the "No Mans Land" in the dark.
- Each morning the soldiers would all "stand to." This meant that they would stand up and prepare for an attack as most attacks took place first thing in the morning.
- The typical soldier in the trenches was armed with a rifle, bayonet, and a hand grenade.



