TRENCH WARFARE

Objective: To examine the horrors of trench warfare during WWI.
Why Trench Warfare?

• Germany gained a lot of territory in Belgium and France, but...

• During the Battle of the Marne in September 1914, the Germans were pushed back by Allied forces.

• They "dug in" to avoid losing any more ground.

• The Allies were unable to break through this line of defense, and also began to dig protective trenches.

• What began as a temporary strategy evolved into one of the main features of the war at the Western Front.
What was Trench Warfare?

Trench Warfare was a type of fighting during World War I in which both sides dug trenches that were protected by mines and barbed wire.
What problems faced attacking troops?

- Aircraft can warn of the build-up of enemy troops before an attack.
- Concrete block house for a machine-gun.
- Reserve trench.
- Long-range artillery is placed about 10 km behind the front line. These guns fire at advancing enemy troops.
- Communication trenches allow reserves to be brought forward without exposing them to enemy fire.
- Front-line dug-outs provide protection but not against a direct hit from an artillery shell.
- A deep dug-out. German ones could be 15 m below ground and too well constructed to be damaged by shell fire.

PROBLEMS FACING ATTACKING TROOPS

- Barbed wire: metres deep and an impassable obstacle for any troops able to reach it.
- No Man's Land (the stretch of land between the trenches of the opposing sides) has already been churned up by shell fire. In wet weather it becomes a mass of mud, making it even harder for troops to cross.
How extensive were the trenches?

If laid end-to-end, WWI trenches would stretch some 25,000 miles.

An aerial photograph of the opposing trenches and no-man's land in Artois, France, July 22, 1917.

German trenches are at the right and bottom, British trenches are at the top left. The vertical line to the left of center indicates the location of a pre-war road.
What was life like in the trenches?

- Soldiers were regularly rotated through a basic sequence:
  - fighting in the front line
  - a period of time in the support line
  - a brief rest period
  - begin this cycle again
- Men repaired shell-damaged walls, removed standing water, created new latrines, moved supplies, etc.
- During rest periods men were free to nap, read, or write letters home, etc.
What was life like in the trenches?

British trench, France, July 1916 (during the Battle of the Somme)
What was life like in the trenches?

French soldiers firing over their own dead
What were trench rats?

- Many men killed in the trenches were buried almost where they fell.
- These corpses, as well as the food scraps that littered the trenches, attracted rats.

Quotes from soldiers fighting in the trenches:

"The rats were huge. They were so big they would eat a wounded man if he couldn't defend himself."

"I saw some rats running from under the dead men's greatcoats, enormous rats, fat with human flesh. My heart pounded as we edged towards one of the bodies. His helmet had rolled off. The man displayed a grimacing face, stripped of flesh; the skull bare, the eyes devoured and from the yawning mouth leapt a rat."
What other problems did soldiers face in the trenches?

Officers walking through a flooded communication trench.
What other problems did soldiers face in the trenches?

Trench foot developed as a result of men being forced to stand in water for several hours, even days, without a chance to remove wet boots and socks.
How was poison gas used during WWI?

Soldiers digging trenches while protected against chlorine gas and mustard gas attacks
How was poison gas used during WWI?

'Gassed'. Painting by John Singer Sargent, 1918/1919.
## Poison Gas Deaths: 1914-1918

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Non-Fatal</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
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<td>180,597</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>182,000</td>
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<td>71,345</td>
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<td>191,000</td>
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<td>3,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,205,655</td>
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What other weapons were used during WWI?
Dulce Et Decorum Est, by Wilfred Owen
(Sweet and Fitting It Is)

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks, 
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge, 
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs 
And towards our distant rest began to trudge. 
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots 
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind; 
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots 
Of disappointed shells that dropped behind.

GAS! Gas! Quick, boys!-- An ecstasy of fumbling, 
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time; 
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling 
And floundering like a man in fire or lime.-- 
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light 
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori. ("How fitting and sweet it is to die for one's country.")
How many military casualties resulted from fighting in World War I?

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Casualties</th>
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