

Station 1: What was a trench system?

The trench system was used by both the **Allies** (Britain, France, Russia, and, from 1915, Italy) and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria–Hungary, and Turkey). It was not just one trench but a whole network of trenches where soldiers fought and lived. Largely, the trench system hid the soldiers and made it difficult for the enemy to find a clear target with its weapons.

These weapons included **artillery**, machine guns, and poison gas. A mortar could fire 20 bombs per minute and had a range of 1,100 metres. Mines, tanks, and aircraft were also used.

Trenches were also used to launch attacks, when large numbers of soldiers would go 'over the top' and try to capture the enemy's trenches. This is called '**trench warfare**'.



Soldiers going 'over the top'

Match the key word to its definition.

Trench

An over 400-mile-long trench system from North Sea to Switzerland.

Western Front

Artillery, machine guns, field guns, mortars, tanks, mines, and poisonous gases.

Weapons

A ditch that hid soldiers from their enemies.

Station 2: What was a trench system?

Trenches were long and narrow, and just deep enough to allow soldiers to stand in them without being seen. They were guarded by barbed wire across the top. Sandbags were filled with mud and stacked on top of one another to line the walls and protect the soldiers. There were observation points to spy on the enemy.

In summer, the trenches were hot and smelly. In winter, they were cold, muddy, and waterlogged.

This meant medical problems like trench foot (damage to the feet caused by the cold and water), which caused serious discomfort and infection.

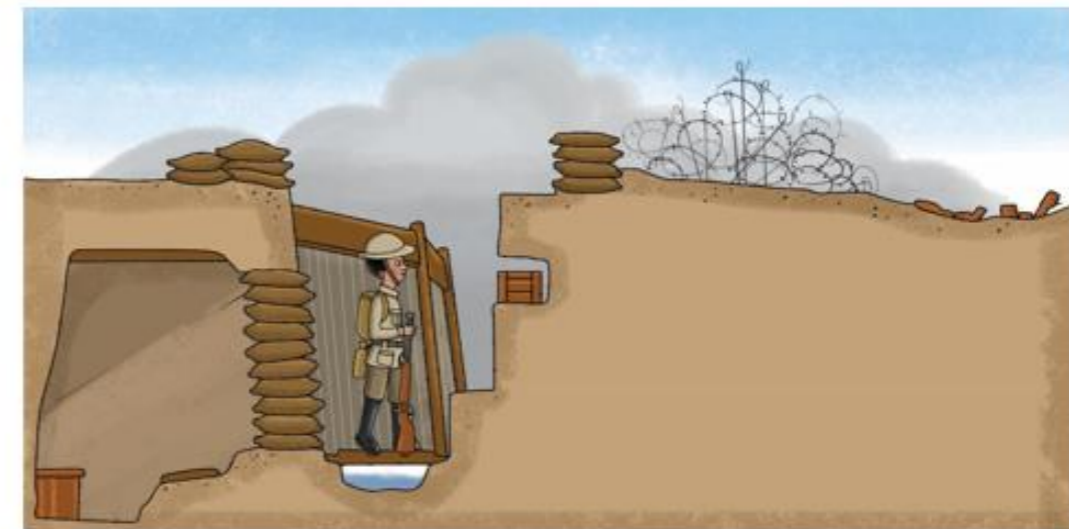
At the bottom of the trenches were duckboards. These were wooden boards with planks of wood spaced apart. These helped to drain water away, but men had to be careful not to slip or trip. There were also rats that gnawed through food and spread disease.

A dugout was a hole in the side of the trench. They were used for planning attacks and were places for the men to rest or sleep. As the war went on, dugouts became larger.



No Man's Land was a stretch of territory between the trenches that was not controlled by either side.

Label the diagram with words from the list (DON'T WRITE ON THE SHEET).



sandbags

frontline trench

No Man's Land

dugout

duckboards

barbed wire

Station 3: What was No Man's Land?

No Man's Land continued all across the Western Front, though the distance between the trenches varied. At Zonnebeke, British and German soldiers were only about 6.5 metres apart! No Man's Land was covered with barbed wire, water-filled shell holes, bodies, and military equipment that had broken or been abandoned.

When soldiers crossed No Man's Land, they relied on soldiers left in the trenches to protect them by attacking the enemy. Sometimes the barbed wire was not cut properly, and soldiers struggled to get through. This made them an easy target for snipers. Yet most of the wounds that soldiers suffered were caused by exploding bombs.

Soldiers would sleep for short times in the day. They had to stay awake at night. Small patrols were often sent out at night to spy on the enemy. They would crawl into No Man's Land using shell holes for cover. They would try to find out where new enemy trenches had been dug and any other information about weapons to help aid their effort.

Do you know what these images show?

Match the images to the labels?



No Man's Land



Dugout



Trench

Station 4: What was life like for soldiers on the Western Front?

Soldiers actually spent very little time in the frontline trenches—often only three days a month—unless there was a major attack happening. They would spend more time in the reserve trenches where conditions were much better. Over half of the time, soldiers would live away from the trenches altogether where they could rest and recover.

When they were in the trenches there were long periods of time where nothing would happen. However, there was a constant threat of random shelling and gunfire on both sides. Soldiers would spend their days repairing trenches or digging new ones. Other daily duties included cleaning their weapons, transporting supplies, and emptying the latrines (trench toilets).

When soldiers were not fighting or working in the trenches, they ate their ration of meat and vegetables each day.

In the free time they had, they would write letters home or play games such as cards. Writing and receiving letters became a lifeline for many soldiers as they would go months without seeing their families. Many soldiers kept diaries and journals to record their experiences and feelings about the war.

Read the letter extracts. Add below what can we learn from them.

We can learn...

