

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Period \_\_\_\_\_

## 6.2 Battles of WWI, Changes in Weapons and Life in the Trenches Activity Packet

Due Monday 11/21

Complete the following:

Page 2- CURE annotate Life in the Trenches letter- minimum 2 responses

Page 3- Write a friendly letter to a family member from the perspective of a German soldier. Be sure to include a description of the conditions you are living in and how in your job a description of a new WWI weapon technology (choose anyone you would like) that you use as a soldier. This should show an understanding of life in the trenches and how a new weapon was implemented (used) in battle. This should sound authentic and have some emotion in the writing.

Pages 4-5 CURE annotate (minimum 2 responses) article on Trench Rats and answer questions on page 5

Pages 6-7 CURE annotate article on Body Lice (minimum 1 response) and answer questions on page 7

Page 8 CURE annotate article on Trench Foot and answer questions on page 8

### Point Values

Page 2= 20 points-

10 points annotations \_\_\_\_\_/ 10

10 points <sup>Responses</sup> ~~answers~~ \_\_\_\_\_/ 10

Page 3= 40 points-

Living Conditions Described \_\_\_\_\_/ 15

Weapon Described \_\_\_\_\_/ 15

Emotion and Writing \_\_\_\_\_/ 10

Pages 4-5=20 points-

10 points annotations \_\_\_\_\_/ 10

10 points answers \_\_\_\_\_/ 10

Pages 6-7= 10 points

5 points annotations \_\_\_\_\_/ 5

5 points answers \_\_\_\_\_/ 5

Page 8= 10 points

5 points annotations \_\_\_\_\_/ 5

5 points answers \_\_\_\_\_/ 5

Total \_\_\_\_\_/ 100

## Life in the Trenches

Verdun, France  
July 23, 1915

My Dear Claudette,

I have taken advantage of the recent break in the weather to write to you. After stopping the German advance last year, we began digging trenches along the front. The front is now nearly 400 miles long! That is a lot of digging, especially when we must dig an entire series of trenches to accommodate supplies and support staff, reserves, and artillery. As you might well imagine, I never want to lift another shovel again.

Conditions are unbearable. Rain and snow turn the trenches into thick mud. Mud is everywhere. We stand in it, sleep in it, and eat in it; sometimes I even dream about it. Even in winter, the mud doesn't go away; it only becomes cold mud.

The only thing worse than the mud, is the rats. We must be careful to bury our dead quickly or the bodies will seem to move on their own. My only comfort is knowing that the Germans suffer from these same horrible conditions.

I have been careful to avoid trenchfoot. Many have gotten it, but so far I have been lucky. I have also managed to avoid others diseases common in the trenches, such as dysentery and cholera.



With any luck I should be home soon for a short visit. When I get there, perhaps we can discuss the question of marriage you raised earlier.

All my love,  
Jean-Paul

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

Letter

(3)

# Trench Rats

By Mr Huggins  
www.SchoolHistory.co.uk

Many men killed in the trenches were buried almost where they fell. If a trench subsided, or new trenches or dugouts were needed, large numbers of decomposing bodies would be found just below the surface. These corpses, as well as the food scraps that littered the trenches, attracted rats. One pair of rats can produce 880 offspring in a year and so the trenches were soon swarming with them.

Some of these rats grew extremely large. One soldier wrote: "The rats were huge. They were so big they would eat a wounded man if he couldn't defend himself." These rats became very bold and would attempt to take food from the pockets of sleeping men. Two or three rats would always be found on a dead body. They usually went for the eyes first and then they burrowed their way right into the corpse.

One soldier described finding a group of dead bodies while on patrol: "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."

CURE  
Annotate

Source A: Punch, 1916



Source B: Stuart Dolden, 1920

The outstanding feature of the trenches was the extraordinary number of rats. The area was infested with them. It was impossible to keep them out of the dugouts. They grew fat on the food that they pilfered from us, and anything they could pick up in or around the trenches; they were bloated and loathsome to look at. Some were nearly as big as cats. We were filled with an instinctive hatred of them, because however one tried to put the thought of one's mind, one could not help feeling that they fed on the dead.

# Trench Rats

**Source C: George Coppard, *With A Machine Gun to Cambrai* (1969)**

Rats bred by the tens of thousands and lived on the fat of the land. When we were sleeping in bunk holes the things ran over us, played about, copulated and fouled our scraps of food, their young squeaking incessantly. There was no proper system of waste disposal in trench life. Empty tins of all kinds were flung away over the top on both sides of the trench. Millions of tins were thus available for all the rats in France and Belgium in hundreds of miles of trenches. During brief moments of quiet at night, one could hear a continuous rattle of tins moving against each other. The rats were turning them over. What happened to the rats under heavy shell-fire was a mystery, but their powers of survival kept pace with each new weapon, including poison gas.

**Source D: Richard Beasley, interviewed in 1993.**

If you left your food the rats would soon grab it. Those rats were fearless. Sometimes we would shoot the filthy swines. But you would be put on a charge for wasting ammo, if the sergeant caught you.

**Source E: Frank Laird writing after the war.**

Sometimes the men amused themselves by baiting the ends of their rifles with pieces of bacon in order to have a shot at them at close quarters.

## Activities



1. Why were there so many Trench Rats during the First World War?
2. How big could the Trench Rats grow?
3. Which part of the body would the rats eat first?
4. Look at Source C. How could you tell if there were rats nearby at night?
5. How did the soldiers try to get rid of the Trench Rats?

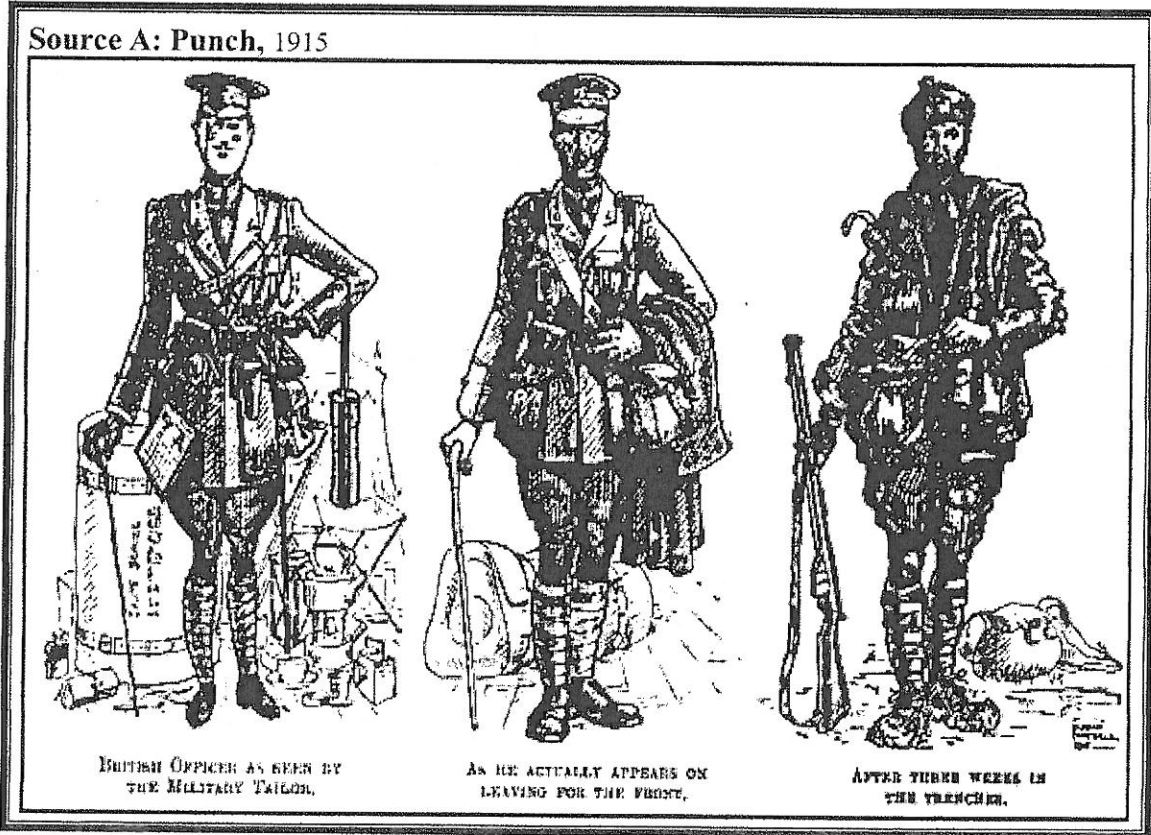
# Body Lice

By Mr Huggins  
www.SchoolHistory.co.uk

CURE  
Annotate

Men in the trenches suffered from lice. One soldier writing after the war described them as "pale fawn in colour, and they left blotchy red bite marks all over the body." They also created a sour, stale smell. Various methods were used to remove the lice. A lighted candle was fairly effective but the skill of burning the lice without burning your clothes was only learnt with practice. Where possible the army arranged for the men to have baths in huge vats of hot water while their clothes were being put through delousing machines. Unfortunately, this rarely worked. A fair proportion of the eggs remained in the clothes and within two or three hours of the clothes being put on again a man's body heat had hatched them out.

As well as causing frenzied scratching, lice also carried disease. This was known as pyrexia or trench fever. The first symptoms were shooting pains in the shins and was followed by a very high fever. Although the disease did not kill, it did stop soldiers from fighting and accounted for about 15% of all cases of sickness in the British Army.





# Body Lice

**Source B: Private George Coppard, *With A Machine Gun to Cambrai* (1969)**

A full day's rest allowed us to clean up a bit, and to launch a full scale attack on lice. I sat in a quiet corner of a barn for two hours delousing myself as best I could. We were all at it, for none of us escaped their vile attentions. The things lay in the seams of trousers, in the deep furrows of long thick woolly pants, and seemed impregnable in their deep entrenchments. A lighted candle applied where they were thickest made them pop like Chinese crackers. After a session of this, my face would be covered with small blood spots from extra big fellows which had popped too vigorously. Lice hunting was called 'chatting'. In parcels from home it was usual to receive a tin of supposedly death-dealing powder or pomade, but the lice thrived on the stuff.

**Source C: Private Stuart Dolden wrote about his experiences in the trenches after the war.**

We had to sleep fully dressed, of course, this was very uncomfortable with the pressure of ammunition on one's chest restricted breathing; furthermore, when a little warmth was obtained the vermin used to get busy, and for some unexplained reason they always seemed to get lively in the portion of one's back, that lay underneath the belt and was the most inaccessible spot. The only way to obtain relief was to get out of the dugout, put a rifle barrel between the belt and rub up and down like a donkey at a gatepost. This stopped it for a bit, but as soon as one got back into the dugout, and was getting reasonably warm so would the little brutes get going again.

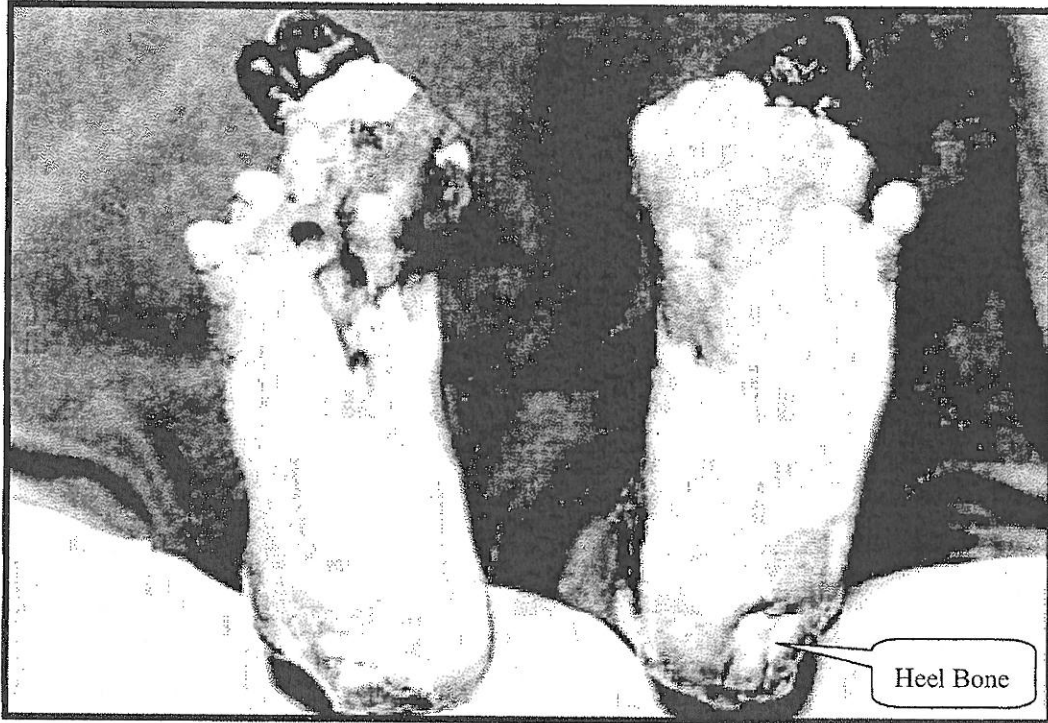


## Activities

1. Why were body lice such a problem for the soldiers in the trenches?
2. What did the army do to try and stop the soldiers getting lice? Did it work?
3. Look at Sources B & C. What steps did the soldiers take to try and stop the lice causing them discomfort?
4. Look at Source A. Explain why the cartoon of the British Officer before he set off for the front was so different to cartoon of him after three weeks in the trenches.

By Mr Huggins  
www.SchoolHistory.co.uk

# Trench Foot



(1) After the war, Captain G. H. Impey, 7th Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment, wrote about his experiences of trench life.

The trenches were wet and cold and at this time some of them did not have duckboards and dug-outs. The battalion lived in mud and water. Altogether about 200 men were evacuated for trench feet and rheumatism. Gum boots were provided for the troops in the most exposed positions. Trench feet was still a new ailment and the provision of dry socks was vitally important. Part of the trench was reserved for men to go two at a time, at least once a day, and rub each other's feet with grease.

CURE  
Annotate



### Activities:

1. What caused Trench Foot?
2. Describe how you would know if you had Trench Foot.
3. What steps did the army take to make sure soldiers didn't catch Trench Foot?