

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

A virtual museum by
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Welcome to a museum of the First World War

In this museum, you will learn about the myths, the truths, and the hidden stories of the devastating war that tore the world apart. Before you can continue, you must know the backstory...

World War One began in 1914 after the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand (by a Serbian nationalist) and lasted until 1918. During the conflict, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire (the Central Powers) fought against Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Romania, Japan and the United States (the Allied Powers). Thanks to new military technologies and the horrors of trench warfare, WW1 saw unprecedented levels of carnage and destruction. By the time the war was over and the Allied Powers claimed victory, more than 16 million people- soldiers and civilians alike- were dead.

Who fought- the hidden stories.

Although most of the fighting took place in Europe (especially in France and Belgium) 4 million non white, non European soldiers were recruited but you don't always hear about them because their place in WW1 history is sometimes forgotten.

2 million Africans were dragged into fighting for the French as they thought that they felt less pain and were naturally more aggressive. This- and racial prejudice- is the reason that they put the Africans in the front line and in the most dangerous battles. Because black lives were regarded as less precious, Africans were 3x more likely to die in battle than white soldiers. Death rates were higher among non-British soldiers and non-European soldiers and approximately 23% of the Black West-African troops who served in the French army died compared to roughly 16% of white French soldiers. The death toll of the 1 million carrier corps- black Africans recruited to transport the army's equipment was at least 10,000 (10%) died and the true figure may be much higher. They weren't even recruited to fight. In 1917, it was estimated that at least 1 in 20 of the entire population of Africa had died in the war despite the fact that Africa was not regarded as a major theatre of the war and is largely overlooked today.

The 1.5 million Indians were ill equipped for the war but nevertheless, they frantically rushed them to France to hold off the German advance. The 1 million Indians that they shipped overseas made up a third of the British army and they went to war still in their tropical uniforms. Manta Singh, an Indian soldier, made friend with his comrade- Captain Henderson- and when he got shot in both thighs, he carried him in a wheelbarrow through open fire even getting fatally shot in the leg which led to his death. His friend and comrade was eternally grateful to Singh for saving his life so he made sure his son was cared for and had everything he needed. Even now, the legacy is carried on as both Henderson's and Singh's grandsons are still friends to this day. As there were Muslim and Hindu soldiers from India, the British Army respected religious rules and imported different meats such as goat for them to eat.

The Chinese are probably the most overlooked as they did have vital jobs. For example, in 1916, the British recruited thousands of Chinese civilians to replace those slaughtered in the months before. At first they were given basic jobs like digging trenches and burying the dead but then they fell into more skilled jobs like mechanics in charge of tanks. Even after the war, some stayed on filling trenches, digging cemeteries and carving headstones.

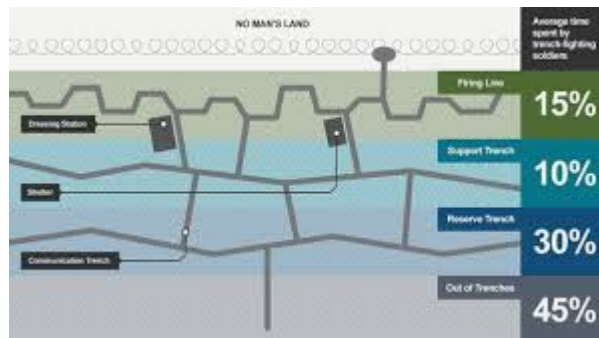


Trenches

They were narrow (wider trenches made the soldiers more vulnerable) ditches dug for a soldier's protection during battle and they were built because there were Allies on one side and Germans on the other and it was too dangerous to get across open land without getting shot, you couldn't accurately drop bombs from planes and you couldn't dig tunnels for fear of meeting a German and blowing up underground. Trenches were the only option.

The trench conditions were horrible in WW1 as they were muddy, wet, stagnant and rat infested. Many soldiers contracted diseases and a common one was trench foot. If you didn't take off your wet shoes and socks and clean your feet each night you would develop trench foot which could lead to gangrene and then amputation! For this reason, you would have a partner to look your feet and make sure you cleaned them each night even if you were too exhausted. You had a wash kit with you in the trench that had all your essentials and it was just as important as your rifle. For example it would include a toothbrush, shaving brush, shaving soap, toilet paper (anything they could get whether it was newspaper or a page of a bible), a comb and maybe some more things but we don't know as we don't have enough evidence.

There were many different parts to the lattice of trenches stretching for miles along the Western Front. First was the firing trench- a 7ft ditch for the most exposed troops. It was dug in zig zag sections to minimise damage if it was bombed. Next was the support trench which was 200-500 yards behind the firing trench. It was a valuable second line of defence. Several hundred yards behind that, is the reserve trench which stored supplies and offered a little more comfort to the troops. The communication trenches connect the entire network which enable the soldiers to travel quickly and keeping the army, its supplies, its reinforcements and its casualties on the move. The average time spent in the firing trench each month was 15%, in the support- 10%, reserve- 30% and out of trenches- 45%. When the soldiers were out of trenches, they played football and other sports, held concerts and socialised. If they were on leave, some were able to go sightseeing in France. The soldiers received regular letters and parcels from home which kept their morale high. They also received luxuries such as cigarettes, chocolate and alcohol.



Caring for the wounded

In WW1, there were many injuries, mental and physical. One of the most common mental illnesses was shellshock, also known as combat stress and now known as PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). It's used to refer to the psychological effect of the war on soldiers. Early in the war, it was attributed to being under heavy fire by artillery shells. There is a whole range of symptoms and types of breakdown including: headaches, nightmares, hallucinations, distressing and intrusive memories, paralysis and amnesia. Around 325,000 out of 8 million over the course of the war suffered from shellshock. Doctors at the time recognised it but didn't understand how to treat it. By the end of the war many doctors believed that there was a link between the physical and psychological effects of war. They found it difficult to find a cure or treatment. Rest, diet, some medication, hypnosis and electric shock treatment were used, the latter very unpleasant and dangerous. There were some suspicions that soldiers were faking it. Also, some of the small numbers of soldiers shot for desertion were probably suffering from psychological collapse.

Caring for the physically wounded in WW1 was surprisingly good. They used sterile tubes and silk to stitch wounds, slings and bandages, things to stop bleeding a lot of which we still use today. They still had x-rays to find shrapnel and the medics risked their lives by going out into the line of fire to save the wounded soldiers. There is evidence that they had portable stretchers if the wounded needed it to get to the field hospital. If the soldiers could not be sent home, they were taken away to peace and quiet. People were operating on the wounded wherever they could as even a small delay was the difference between life and death. The doctors and nurses were very good at treating physical injuries but not so good at the mental aspect.



Weapons and danger

There were many weapons in world war one including:

Rifle- this was the main weapon of World War One. it can be fired rapidly and accurately over long distances making it deadly as you can shoot a soldier and kill him but he might not know where you are which gives you the advantage.

Machine guns- they were recent and lethal as they could fire 450-600 rounds of bullets every minute. They were very effective but not the deadliest weapon of WW1.

Artillerys- they were big guns that fired large explosive shells over long distances. They were positioned behind the soldiers and fired over their heads to the enemy lines. Artillery bombardments were used to destroy enemy defences before the soldiers attacked. The artillery was responsible for over 50% of casualties in WW1.

Soldiers also used grenades, pistols, flame-throwers, poison gas and later, tanks.planes were used for reconaissance (seeing where the enemy was) but by the end of the war they sometimes had machine guns on board. They were not used to drop bombs in WW1.

In 1914, there was approximately 9.8 million households in Britain and statistically one family in 14 lost a member. 7% of the population served in the armed forces during the war, including the army, the navy and the airforce. One in 12 of those who served was killed. In France it was one in 7. Officers were particularly vulnerable. Between 1914 and 1918, 12% of other ranks in the army and 17% of them officers. The death toll in the navy was much lower in the navy as there was little fighting at sea. A further 9% of those who served survived but were disabled as a result of wounds or disease suffered during the war. Death rates were higher among non-British and non-European soldiers in other armies as racial prejudice meant that black lives were regarded as less precious.



The battle of the Somme

The battle of the Somme is one of the most famous battles in history, fought by the Allies against the Germans taking place near the river Somme in France. It started on 1st July 1916 and ended on 18th November 1916. The first day was the worst day in British military history as they suffered 57,470 casualties which 19,240 were killed. Overall, there were 420,000 British casualties and out of them 125,000 died. There were also 200,000 French casualties and 500,000 German casualties. It turned out to be a failure.

The British planned carefully by recruiting and training many soldiers, and getting lots of weapons, hoping that they would destroy the German defences and barbed wire, explode their defensive positions and forts and then destroy their artillery and attempt to take over the German's land.



The German's already knew about it so this was already a fatal flaw in the plan as they just sat and waited for the artillery shells to stop. The British just walked over no-man's land expecting no resistance. However, the Germans fought back which was not expected. When it ended, 1 million people from each side had been killed or injured. The battle of the Somme didn't go as the Allies had wanted it to as many commonwealth soldiers were either killed or announced missing in action.

My families stories

Walter Richardson- my great grandad

Walter joined the war in early 1917 as he had just turned 18 and he got called on. He was a private in the army and he also played the mouth organ while they marched. He got wounded and went to hospital and he always said it saved his life as while he was in the hospital he avoided a really nasty battle that he could have been killed in. after he came out of the hospital, he went to Palestine with General Alanby. Before the war, he worked in a shoe factory and after he trained and became a baptist minister. When he was going over the trenches one time he saw a dead German soldier and in his pocket was a crusifix with mother of pearl in it and he took it home and my grandma still remembers it being in her house when she was younger.

Hugh Stewart- my great grandfather

He was born in 1896 and joined up when he was 19 in 1915. He was in the army and was a motorcycle dispatch rider. He was in the Royal Scots Susiliers and his number was 17362. He sailed to Cardiff to Africa and did things in Africa. He survived the war but I don't know if he was wounded. Before the war, he went to Glasgow High School and after he trained as a doctor.

William Anderson- my great great great uncle

He was a lieutenant in the Gordon Highlanders and I don't know how old he was when he joined up as he may have lied about his age. He died when he was 19. My granny has a letter written in pencil (as they didn't have ink in the trenches) to his sister asking for cigarettes for his men. His 2 brothers (Francis and Joseph) went to war with him and they both survived. Francis went to India and Joseph got Mustard gassed in the war, survived but his lungs were so damaged he couldn't work inside afterwards. After the war, William was meant to go to uni.

Basil Craig- my great great uncle.

He was a private in the army in the Manchester Regiment. He joined up when he was 18 and when he was 19 he fought in the battle of the Somme. Unfortunately, he was killed at the battle of the Somme.



Who contributed to the war effort (not soldiers)

Conscientious objectors were people that refused to fight because of moral or religious beliefs. However they still helped during the war by taking up other vital jobs like ambulance drivers, hospital workers and stretcher bearers. These jobs were still dangerous- you had to get the wounded under fire. Some people objected to even these jobs! Those sort of people were imprisoned.



Women contributed to war a huge amount. For example, they were trained nurses and some even doubled up as soldiers behind the front line. Some saw trenches first hand and some were killed. They even went out to no man's land to rescue the wounded. The women at home took up the men's jobs to free them up to fight but getting equal pay was out of the question. The Aristocracy Society sent women to drive ambulances and the Women's Volunteer Reserve (TWVR) sent women off to fight. It was mostly middle class women as you had to pay for your own uniform- £2 a whole fortune back then. Eventually women started to do industrial work as well.



Conscription was created in 1916 to make sure everyone in society participated equally towards the war effort- so they made it a law. They did it so they could send back other people to do jobs to help keep the country going. The country was desperate for more soldiers.

Turning points

The United States joined the war because Germany kept sinking their submarines and killing Americans. They then asked Mexico to join the war on Germany's side and this was enough for America so they joined the Allied Powers. The American soldiers were eager to go to war and their optimism encouraged the British and French troops as well. The vast number of American soldiers was important in tipping the scales in the Allies favour. They played a vital part in the big Allied attacks that brought the war to an end. In the summer of 1918, American troops were flooding onto the Western front in overwhelming numbers- at a rate of 300,000 a month and by the end of the war, 2.1 million soldiers had been deployed in Europe. This could be considered a turning point as the arrival of the American troops lifted the Allied spirits and the numbers overpowered the Germans and pushed the war in the Allies favour which led to victory.

The Ludendorff offensive was an extremely well thought out attack by the Germans against the Allies. They brought in their best men and lots of new weapons and used new tactics. During the attack Germany retook almost all of the areas they had lost in 1916/17. They almost succeeded but didn't which gave the Allies a chance as Germany had lost 700,000 of their best men, lots of ammunition and they were exhausted. They also gave the Allies lots of new tactics to use in their next attack. This can be considered a turning point because the failure gave the Allies an advantage which they used in the 100 days offensive which ended the war.



The 100 days offensive is the name for the well coordinated and carefully planned attack made by the Allies along the Western front starting in August 1918 with the battle of Amiens. The 100 days reversed the German gains of earlier in the year and led to the defeat of the German army and the end of the war in November 1918. Success during the 100 days offensive was partly the result of the allies learning how to combine the use of infantry, tanks and aircraft in a coordinated "all arms" attack. They used over 2000 guns, 450 tanks and 1900 aeroplanes. This attack was the first time the Allies had succeeded in breaking through the German lines. By the summer of 1918, the German army was in a desperate situation. On 29th September 29th, British, American and Australian troops broke through one of the most heavily defended sections of the line. The German army was too exhausted to defend it. The success of the 100 days offensive was the product of close cooperation between the Allied powers the arrival of American troops and new tactics. This can be considered a turning point as it ended the war.



In my opinion, I think that there were three major turning points- the arrival of American troops, the Ludendorff Offensive and the 100 days Offensive. I think this because the Allies probably wouldn't have succeeded in the 100 days offensive if it wasn't for the vast numbers of American troops to overpower the Germans. However, they also would have come out victorious if the Germans weren't exhausted. The reason they were exhausted was because of the failure of the Ludendorff offensive. These three things link together to create the reason World War One ended.

Fun fact!

An explosion on a battlefield in France was heard in England!!!!!!

Fun fact!

The youngest British soldier in WW1 was just 12 years old!!!!

Thank you for coming to my virtual museum!

Fun fact!

Walter Tull was the first black officer!!!!!!

Fun fact!

Alhaji Grunshi was the first British soldier to fire a shot in ww1!!!!!!