

RAP- Trench Warfare

Explain the following:

1. Over the top-
2. No man's land -
3. Shell Shock -
4. Trench Foot -
5. In your opinion, what would be worse, trench warfare (combat) or living in the trenches (trench life)? Explain in 4-5 sentences.

Trench Warfare

Life in the Trenches- Trench warfare consisted of massed charges by infantrymen preceded by long artillery bombardments. Soldiers fixed bayonets to the end of their rifles and waited for the orders to go “over the top,” which meant charging out of the trench and racing toward the enemy lines. To overtake the rival trenches, soldiers had to cross “no man’s land,” a stretch of bombed-out territory between the trench lines that was crossed by tons of barbed wire and dotted with land mines. The average width of “no man’s land” was 250 yards, but in some places trenches were so close that a soldier could cross bayonets with the enemy in his trench. Few soldiers ever made it into the opposite side’s trenches, but when they did the fighting was fierce. Machine guns, flamethrowers, and hand grenades made short work of all but the luckiest men. Even with these horrible conditions, soldiers were hard-pressed to pick which was worse: trench warfare or life in the trenches.

Life in the trenches was dangerous, boring, and terrifying. Snipers and light artillery gunners kept constant watch for heads peaking up over the top of trenches. Artillery lobbed explosives and gasses into the trenches and in the latter parts of the war, planes dropped bombs into the enemy lines. For long periods of time, neither side would mount an attack. Soldiers had nowhere to go and would wait anxiously for the next offensive while bombs fell constantly around them. Boredom caused some soldiers to go stir crazy, while others suffered from “shell shock,” which is marked by often-hysterical disorders of the mind and emotions caused by the trauma of modern warfare.

Living conditions in the trenches were horrible. Soldiers lived in rear trenches in dugouts, tiny rooms sunk into the earth. Water collected in the trenches, turning soil into treacherous mud. Many soldiers died by drowning when trenches filled with water. The wet conditions favored disease, especially trench foot, which one contracted by not being able to keep one’s feet dry. This condition called “trench foot” rotted away the skin and usually led to amputation (foot was cut off). Lice infested the trenches and rats invaded the dank and cramped living quarters at night, feasting by day on the dead bodies that lay outside the trenches. Thick clouds of flies always marked the spot of a rotting comrade, whose corpse could not be rescued because of the danger from enemy fire.