

Conditions in the trenches, source pack

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“Burial was impossible. There were thousands of bodies, not just ours but Germans as well. And where we fought several times over the same ground, bodies became part of the material of the trenches themselves. In one place we had to dig through corpses of Frenchmen who had been buried two years earlier. The bodies were rotten. I once put my hand straight through the belly of a man...”

Stuart Cloete, writer.



“The familiar trench smell still haunts my nostrils: a mixture of mud, toilet buckets, half-buried corpses, rotting sandbags and stale human sweat.”

Robert Graves, poet.

“We come out of the trenches for a rest tomorrow... I shall be glad. I haven’t had my boots or clothing off for five days and nights and had no bath for a fortnight.”

Arthur Borton, soldier.



“In one part of the trench we found, piled on one on top of another, Welsh soldiers... Headless and armless, they lay with the sickly-grey-white look of death...”

Glynn Roberts, 38th R.W.F.

“The dead were everywhere... grim disfigured corpses, rotting in the sun, so horrible in their discolour that it called for good imaginations to believe that these were once young men, sent to their (deaths) by fellow men.”

Captain Wyn Griffiths.



“There was a danger of trench feet and the men had to rub a sort of fat or whale oil on their feet to prevent it. Lots of blighters avoided doing that because they knew that if they got trench feet they would be sent back down the line.”

Sergeant J. Haddock.

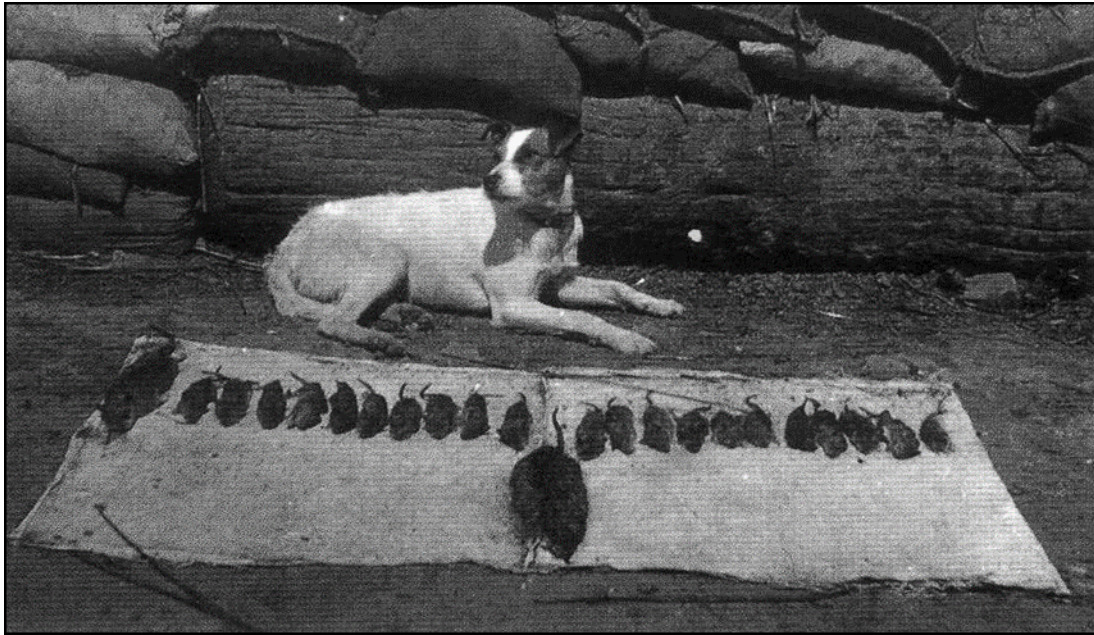
“Your feet swell up two or three times their size and go completely dead. I have heard grown men cry and scream with pain... many have had to have their feet and legs amputated.”

George Coppard, British machine-gunner.



“If anyone had asked they would have been told that every soldier got half a load of bread each day. We never got this once. Many, many times we had only a single slice for breakfast and hard biscuits for tea. They were so hard that I’ve held one in my hand and hit the sharp corner on a brick wall and only hurt my hand.”

William Pressey, soldier.



“The area was infested with rats. They grew fat on the food that they stole from us and were bloated and terrible to look at. One night a rat ran across my face. Unfortunately my mouth happened to be open and hind legs of the filthy little beast went right it.”

Stuart Dolden, writer.

“To add to the general discomfort, trenches were alive with rats. The knowledge that the gigantic trench rats had grown fat through feeding on the dead bodies in no man’s land made the soldiers hate them more fiercely than almost anything else.”

S. Case, historian.

It was at about 8 o'clock in the morning, as I came back to headquarters past the "dug out" I saw a man lying near the trench. I went over and found there was a coat over the man's face. I lifted it off and saw it was the BODY OF COLONEL LOVEBAND. He had, as far as I could make out, been shot through the lip, just at the bottom of the nose. I looked at the wound and saw the bullet had gone through the back of his head. He came out of the trench and was evidently got by a sniper. When I got to hospital I was like a ragman - my clothes flittered by bullets.

Private James Rogers

One of our men came stumbling back through our lines. An officer of ours held him up with levelled revolver, "What's the matter, you bloody lot of cowards?" says he. The man was frothing at the mouth, his eyes started (bulged and came loose) from their sockets, and he fell writhing at the officer's feet.

Anthony R. Hossack; soldier describing a poison gas attack

Quotes from 'Mud, Blood and Poppycock' by Gordon Corrigan a Revisionist Historian

Despite the tales of rats, lice and general filth, cleanliness in the trenches were strictly enforced. The army paid a great deal of attention to its latrines, as indeed it had to. By now the army was well aware that if human waste was not disposed of properly, unnecessary casualties would follow.

Good discipline got rid of rubbish and edible scraps, and rats were rarely a problem in the trenches, although lice, inevitable when men cannot wash properly, sometimes were. On coming out of the line troops had their uniforms fumigated, laundered and ironed, and if necessary exchanged to reduce the risk of infestation.

The so called horrors of the trenches were very short lived indeed, and it is unusual to find any battalion spending more four or five days a month in the firing line. Out of the line there was much to do.....men were relatively safe and comfortable.

Men visited independent prostitutes or enthusiastic amateurs. Altogether the army medical services treated 153,531 cases of VD on the Western Front.

Daily intake of calories was 4,111. It was a healthy and balanced diet. Nevertheless whilst not haute cuisine, this was a far better diet than many been accustomed to at home, where in poorer households meat was eaten once or twice a week.

It has generally been considered that one indicator of morale and discipline in a unit is its sick rate: that is, the percentage of men reporting sick with ailments due to causes other than enemy action. Throughout the war on the Western Front the sick rate was well below acceptable peacetime rates, and not much higher than actual pre war levels (0.30 was considered acceptable):

1913 0.12%

1914 0.26%

1915 0.13%

1916 0.15%

As for blood, there was much less of it about than is portrayed. Stories of men wading through blood and the ground being red with blood are, sadly for Hollywood film makers, just that stories.