

What was life like in the trenches?

AIM:

To understand what the soldiers in the trenches had to live with.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqlhpYlhZKQ>

Watch this clip and make a list of reasons WHY the trenches had to be built



Trenches were first dug by the British and French Armies in Northern France during the race to the sea.

The aim of trenches was to act as a barrier against the rapid advance of the German army from which a counter attack could be made. At first they were quickly and easily constructed using few materials other than sandbags and a shovel. They were meant to be temporary and everyone expected a war of movement in 1915.

The trenches became where most of the war was fought, because of the *stalemate*. It was so dangerous to come out of the trench. As the trenches got more complex and weapons such as gas, tanks and aeroplanes improved, it became harder to break through.

3 Main battles: Germans attempted to break through at Verdun in 1916, British at the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and Passchendale in 1917.

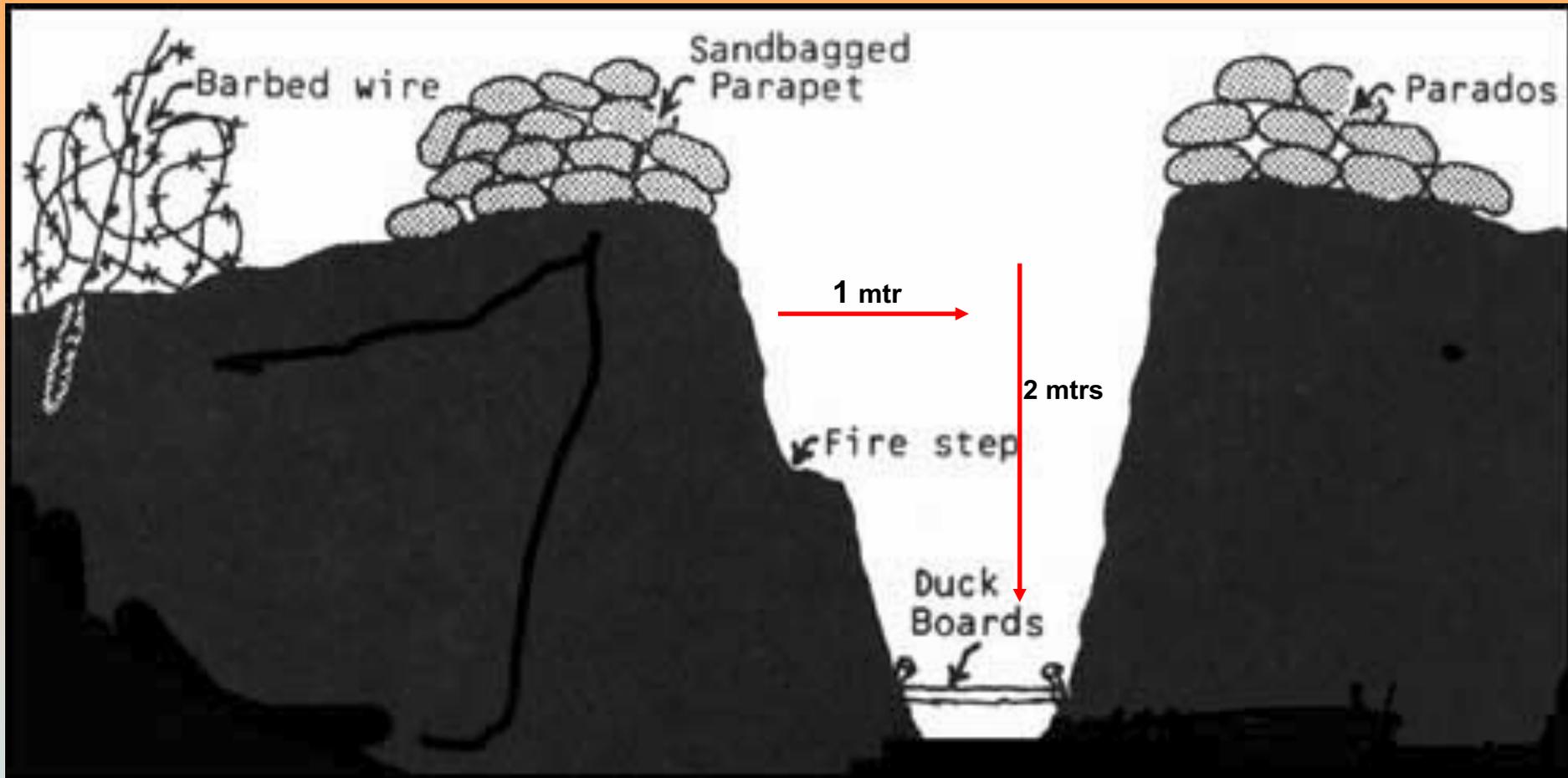
Advantages:

- easy to make,
- easy to defend,
- cheap to build,
- didn't need lots of men to defend them.

Disadvantages:

- Wet and cold
- hard to get in and out of without being seen by the enemy.
- Trenches were very dirty and unhygienic as there was no running water or flushing toilets.

The Trench:

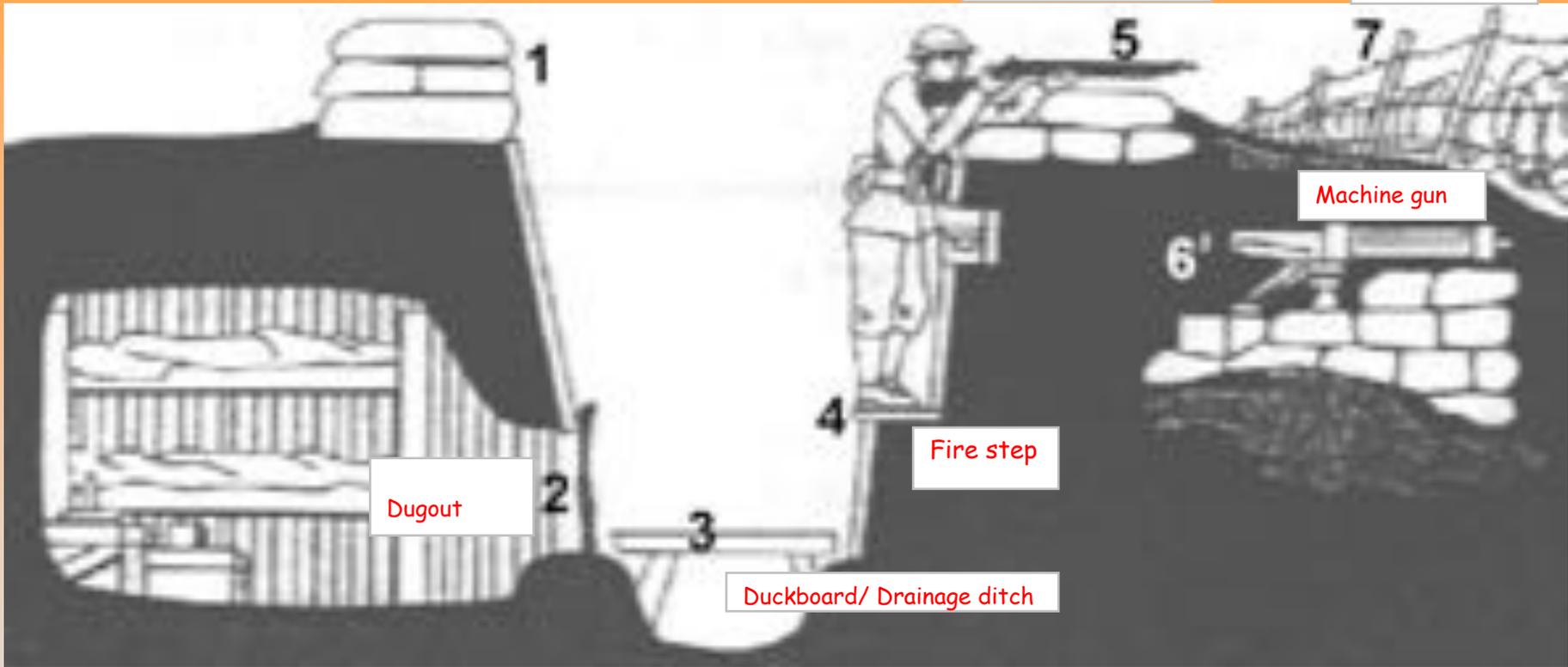


Describe how the Trench was set up and why.

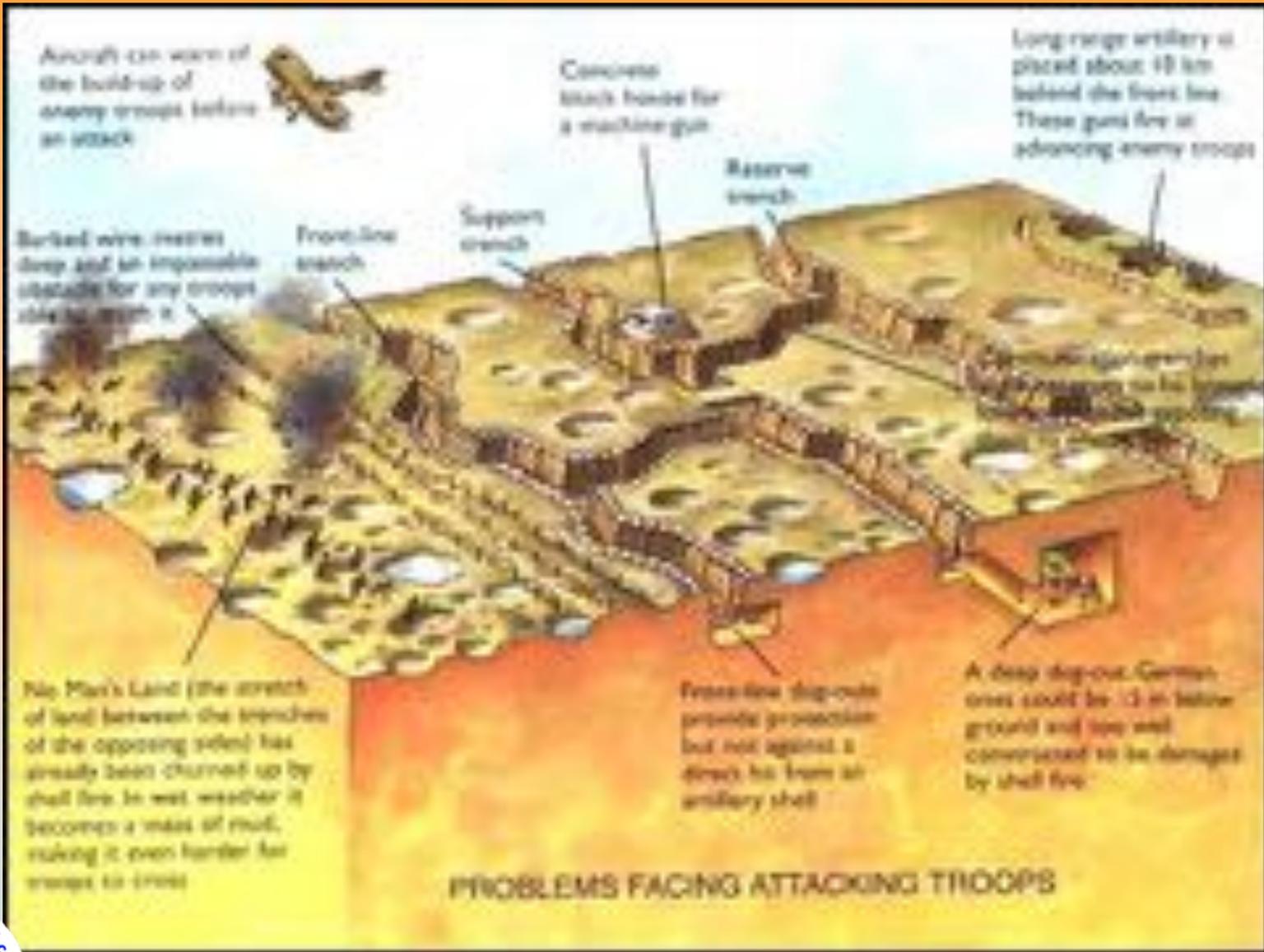
Sandbags

Parapet to protect against enemy fire

Barbed wire



Explain what these key features of a trench were for



Aircraft can warn of the build-up of enemy troops before an attack



Concrete block house for a machine gun

Long range artillery is placed about 40 km behind the front line. These guns fire at advancing enemy troops

Buried wire creates deep and an impassable obstacle for any troops able to reach it

Front-line trench

Support trench

Reserve trench

No Man's Land (the stretch of land between the trenches of the opposing sides) has already been churned up by shell fire. In wet weather it becomes a mass of mud, making it even harder for troops to cross

Front-line dig-outs provide protection but not against a direct hit from an artillery shell

A deep dug-out, German ones could be 13 m below ground and too well constructed to be damaged by shell fire

PROBLEMS FACING ATTACKING TROOPS

And so begun Trench Warfare...



Why is WWI a WORLD WAR?

- What does this Horrible Histories clip suggest about nationalities in WWI?

▼ **SOURCE D** A First World War recruitment poster, sent out to the British colonies. By autumn 1914 one in every three soldiers fighting for Britain in France was from India.



The British Empire provided Britain with 2.5 million soldiers in the First World War.

One third of all the soldiers fighting for Britain on the Western Front in 1914 was from India.

Soldiers

The British Empire provided huge amounts of food to Britain and the war effort. Canada alone provided 1 million bags of flour, 2 million kilograms of cheese and over a million tins of salmon.

Food

What did the British Empire provide Britain during the War?

Money

Taxes from the people in the empire helped Britain pay for the war. The West Indies handed over £2million while India gave the British government around £150million.

Who were the ANZACS

Australia & New Zealand Army Corps

▼ **SOURCE E** An Australian recruitment poster. The Australians and New Zealanders (collectively known as **Anzacs**) fought in some of the toughest fighting of the war, against Ottoman forces in Gallipoli, for example.



Going 'Over The Top'

- One of the most famous tactics used in WWI Trench Warfare was 'Going over the top' or 'Creeping Barrage'.

While you are watching the clip I would like you to think

- What would the soldiers be feeling?
- Who would the soldiers be worried about?



Somme my boy Jack clip in folder

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0V1yRrjMmM&t=2s>

CONDITIONS in the Trenches:



Trench Foot:

This was an infection of the feet caused by cold, wet and filthy conditions. In the trenches men stood for hours on end in waterlogged trenches without being able to remove wet socks or boots. The feet would gradually go numb and the skin would turn red or blue. If untreated, trench foot could turn gangrenous and result in amputation.

During the winter of 1914-15 over 20,000 men in the British Army were treated for trench foot.

The only remedy for trench foot was for the soldiers to dry their feet and change their socks several times a day. Soldiers in the trenches had to have three pairs of socks with them and were under orders to change their socks at least twice a day.



Sergeant Harry Roberts, Lancashire Fusiliers, interviewed after the war.

- “If you have never had trench feet described to you. I will tell you. Your feet swell to two or three times their normal size and go completely dead. You could stick a bayonet into them and not feel a thing. If you are fortunate enough not to lose your feet and the swelling begins to go down. It is then that the intolerable, indescribable agony begins. I have heard men cry and even scream with the pain and many had to have their feet and legs amputated”.



http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/greatwar/popupmovie/video04_adsl.htm

“Interview” with a soldier



RATS



“Rats as big as cats!”

Many men were killed in the trenches and buried almost where they fell. This along with food scraps attracted the rats. One pair of rats could produce 880 babies a year.

CAN YOU IMAGINE how the trenches after 2 years would be?

“...a new officer joined the company and was given a dug-out containing a spring-bed. When he went to bed that night he heard a scuffling, shone his torch on the bed, and found two rats on his blanket tussling for the possession of a severed hand.”

Robert Graves.

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.

Rats. There are millions!! Some are huge fellows, nearly as big as cats. Several of our men were awakened to find a rat snuggling down under the blanket alongside them!

**Major Walter Vignoles,
Lancashire Fusiliers,
interviewed after the war.**



- And without further ado...



THE LICE!!



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.

"The things lay in the seams of trousers. 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."

George Coppard

One night, as we lay in bed my friend Jock said 'damn this, I cannot stand it any longer!' He took off his tunic - we slept in these - then he took off his jersey, then his shirt. He put his shirt in the middle of the dug-out floor and put his jersey and tunic on again. As we sat up in bed watching the shirt he had taken off and put it on the floor it actually lifted; it was swarming with lice.

Henry Gregory of 119th Machine Gun company was interviewed after the war about life in the trenches.

Literacy Task!

Using your notes and what we have talked about....

Write a diary entry or letter home describing what it is like in the trench.

Make your work as **FACTUAL** as possible

Remember you're writing in the 1st person!



TRENCH FOOT	RABBITS	LICE	BITTEN
BODIES	NO MANS LAND	SCHLIEFFEN PLAN	ARCHDUKE FRANZ FERDINAND
OVER THE TOP	GANGRENE	AMPUTATED	CHRISTMAS DAY PEACE
TANKS	DUCK BOARDS	FIRE STEP	TREATY OF VERSAILLES