

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## THE GREAT WAR

Both the Allied Forces and the Central Powers expected the conflict that became World War I to end quickly. Neither side understood how technology made a long, terrible war possible. Prior to the nineteenth century, most guns shot a single load. The invention of the machine gun and rapid-fire artillery made warfare more deadly. Consequently, both sides were forced to defend their territory by fighting from deep trenches.



The trenches were terrifying. Machine gun fire erupted whenever a soldier allowed his head or weapon to appear above the trench. Even more frightening were the large artillery guns that launched shells from behind the trenches. One soldier described the shelling as being inside a thunderclap. He said it was the only noise you felt with your entire body. The soldiers had more to fear than bullets and shells. The Great War marked the beginning of the use of chemical weapons. Tear gas caused blindness, while chlorine gas suffocated the soldiers. Mustard gas was an oily, sticky substance that left its victims blinded, blistered, and struggling for every breath.

Heavy rain was an additional hazard in the trenches. Thousands of soldiers drowned; many more were wounded as they fell in the mud. It was not uncommon for a soldier to stand many days in parasite-filled water as high as his chest. One result of this was a disease called trench foot. Many soldiers had to have their feet or legs amputated because of standing in the water-filled trenches.

In previous wars, soldiers met on a battlefield and carried off their dead after the fighting ended, but trench warfare in the Great War was different. Wounded soldiers often could not be rescued. Dead bodies from both sides of the conflict became part of

the landscape. The decomposing bodies attracted rats, which sometimes grew to the size of small dogs. Soldiers were often afraid to sleep at night, fearing an attack of rats. As one soldier said, "If ever there is a true hell on earth, it is here in the trenches."

High above the trenches another even more deadly war took place in the skies. The airplane was another new addition to warfare. The average life expectancy of a new pilot was between three and six weeks, but American recruiters managed to build an air force of more than 200,000 men.

There were several reasons why many young men risked their lives as pilots in the Great War. The pilots had more control over their lives than regular soldiers. A soldier in the trenches might be killed by a bullet or shell without warning, but an agile flying "ace" might have a good chance of staying alive if he was careful. Air battles were quick and decisive, unlike life in the muddy trenches. After their missions, they returned to their air bases far from the enemy lines. As one American soldier wrote from the trenches, "The glamour boys are sleeping on real beds with pillows and sheets, while we wallow in the lice and vermin. I don't begrudge them their due—I'm simply jealous as hell."

Worst of all, the conflict that most Europeans thought would be brief turned into a deadly world war that dragged on longer anyone expected.



\*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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**Fill in the Blanks**

T\_c\_n\_l\_g\_c\_l advances made war more deadly in the t\_\_\_\_\_ century. The i\_\_\_\_\_ of the m\_\_\_\_\_ gun and rapid-fire a\_\_\_\_\_ forced armies to fight from deep t\_\_\_\_\_ dug into the e\_\_\_\_\_. Thousands of s\_\_\_\_\_ drowned in the m\_\_\_\_\_ trenches. Others died from \*d\_\_\_\_\_ such as trench foot. Soldiers in the t\_\_\_\_\_ also had to fear c\_\_\_\_\_ weapons such as m\_\_\_\_\_ gas.

The battlefield moved to the s\_\_\_\_\_ in the Great War. A p\_l\_t was far more likely to be k\_\_\_\_\_ than a s\_\_\_\_\_, but there was never a \*s\_\_\_\_\_ of \*v\_l\_n\_e\_rs to join the \*a\_\_\_\_\_ war. A pilot controlled his destiny in q\_\_\_\_\_ and d\_\_\_\_\_ battles, while the s\_\_\_\_\_ below faced a horrendous existence among the lice and vermin in the m\_\_\_\_\_ trenches.

**Answer in complete sentences**

\*1. Why were the armies fighting in the Great War forced to dig trenches instead of fighting on a battlefield?

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\*2. Write a paragraph that explains why many young men risked their lives as pilots in the Great War.

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\*3. Many of the soldiers left young families behind. If you could make a choice, would you have chosen to be a soldier or a pilot? Would your family want you to make the same choice? Defend both decisions.

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