

Warmer – picture discussion

Your teacher will give you some pictures of soldiers in the First World War to discuss.

Task 1 – discussion: daily life in the trenches

Look at the activities in the box. Discuss the questions with your partner.

1. What do you think soldiers did every day in the trenches?
2. Roughly how long do you think they spent on each activity?
3. What else do you think they did?

fighting	cleaning
sleeping	cooking
relaxing	doing chores
writing letters and diaries	

Below – Trench mortars on the Balkan front. © IWM Q55562



Below – German trenches at Nieuport, Belgium. ©IWM Q55182



Above – A German soldier in Belgium cleaning his feet. ©IWM Q53538



Above – Australian Imperial Force cooking in their trench on the western front. ©IWM Q583

Task 2 – listening

a. You're going to listen to two old soldiers recalling their daily lives in the trenches.

Before you listen, try and complete the sentences – what do you think the soldiers will say?

1. The average day in the ordinary bit of the trenches was just by the way _____.
2. Our life was this: from the beginning of the day until the night, we were _____.
3. Sometimes we received a few _____.

b. Now listen to the two soldiers speaking and check your answers.

Podcast: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/voices-of-the-first-world-war-trench-life>

Extract: 09:17 minutes to 10:29 minutes

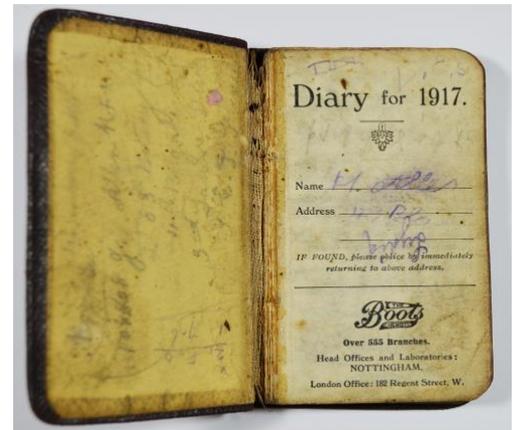
Task 3 – discussion

Work in pairs and discuss the questions.

1. Are you surprised by what the soldiers said?
2. Why?

Task 4 – reading a soldier's diary

- a. Read the diary entry of a soldier describing a day in the trenches. Is his description of life in the trenches similar to what you heard in Task 2? Why?/Why not?
- b. Put the activities in the correct order (1–10).



Pamela Jean Allen, *Europeana*

stand to (x2)	rifle inspection	rum ration	evening chores	morning hate
feet inspection	breakfast	daily chores	free time	

- | | | |
|---|--------------|----|
| 1 | | 6 |
| 2 | morning hate | 7 |
| 3 | | 8 |
| 4 | | 9 |
| 5 | | 10 |

The Somme, Northern France. August 3rd 1917

Well, this is not what I thought life would be like when I was sent to the front. Some of it is what I expected – the constant danger, the noise, the terrible smell and the rats. What I didn't expect, though, was that it would be so boring to be in the trenches.

I thought I'd spend my days risking my life fighting the Germans. But instead, our days are spent doing very little apart from chores.

Mornings start before dawn, when the commander wakes us up for the stand to, when we have to defend the trench against an attack from the enemy. Attacks are common at the beginning and end of the day, even though everybody expects them to happen. The morning hate comes next – when we fire at the Germans, with machine guns and *shells*. It helps get rid of some of our stress before the day starts. After stand to, we're all given a ration of *rum*. It's a good warming drink, especially when the water isn't always safe to drink. Before breakfast, we have to clean our rifles and other equipment and have them inspected by the commander.

Breakfast is usually the only quiet part of the day – we have an unofficial *ceasefire* with the other side – we all want to eat our breakfast in peace and so no one fires on each other. This doesn't usually last for long though. As soon as the commander finds out about the ceasefire, he tells us to start shooting again!

Another inspection comes after breakfast – this time it's the men who are inspected. The platoon commander checks our feet to make sure we don't have trench foot, which is a painful foot disease caused by the dirty wet conditions in the trench. During inspection, the commander gives out the chores for the day. Most of these are day-to-day trench maintenance, like refilling sandbags, draining out the water in the bottom of the trench or repairing the *duckboards*. If you're really unlucky, you get given one of the really nasty jobs that no one wants, like cleaning the toilets or burying bodies.

After we've finished doing chores, we have free time. Some of the lads like to spend their time playing cards and reading or making meals. We all use the time to try and catch up on some sleep, though it's never easy to get much sleep with the sound of the shells. I prefer to write this diary though, or write letters to my family.

Night time is always the busiest time, because it's only after it gets dark that we're safe from the German *snipers*. Just before it gets dark, we repeat the stand to, then get more chores to do. A lot of them are outside the trench. More maintenance needs doing, on the trench and outside in No Man's Land. Sometimes I get sent out on patrol in No Man's Land – this is the worst job. You always have to hope you don't meet an enemy patrol. Other night time jobs include fetching more rations and water and standing at the listening post, trying to hear information about what the enemy are doing. The most difficult job, though, is standing at the Sentry Post, keeping guard. Men only stay there for two hours, otherwise they might fall asleep. The punishment for sleeping on sentry duty is death by firing squad, so it's really important to stay awake!

At night there's time for a little more sleep and then we wake up the next day and everything is the same again. At least we're only in the trenches for one or two weeks at a time.

Glossary:

shell – a large weapon which is fired from a gun and explodes

rum – a strong alcoholic drink that is made from sugar cane

ceasefire – an agreement to stop fighting (usually for a short time)

duckboards – wooden boards which are put down on wet or muddy ground

sniper – a soldier who shoots people from a hidden position

Task 5 – reactions to the text

Look back at your ideas for Task 1. Discuss the questions with your partner.

1. Were your ideas about how soldiers spent their time in the trenches correct? How?
2. What has surprised you about the daily routine of soldiers in the trenches?

Task 6 – gerund and infinitive

Look at the sentences from the diary. Match them to the verb patterns.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. verb + -ing | a. The punishment <u>for sleeping</u> on duty is death. |
| 2. verb + to + infinitive | b. It <u>helps us get</u> rid of some stress. |
| 3. verb + sb + to + infinitive | c. The water isn't always <u>safe to drink</u> . |
| 4. verb + sb + infinitive (without <i>to</i>) | d. I <u>prefer to write</u> this diary. |
| 5. adjective + to + infinitive | e. He <u>tells us to start</u> again. |
| 6. preposition + -ing | f. More maintenance <u>needs doing</u> on the trench. |



French soldiers preparing a trench, 1914. © IWM (Q 53490)

Task 7 – complete the diary extracts

Look at some more extracts from the soldier's diary.

Complete them with infinitive with 'to' or -ing.

Examples:

I'm afraid of dying here.

I've got to clean the trench this morning.



A soldier writing in Mesen, Belgium, 1917, *gahetna.nl*

1. I'm very tired. The noise of the guns is so loud that I'm too scared _____. (sleep)
2. I can't wait _____ the trenches. (leave)
3. I hate _____ so far from my family. (be)
4. The commander wants us _____ more. (work)
5. We're all afraid of _____ shot. (get)
6. The commander only allows us _____ when all our jobs are done. (rest)

Task 8 – discussion

Work in pairs and discuss the questions.

1. What have you learnt about life in the trenches?
2. How do you think the soldiers felt? Why?
3. What do you think was the most difficult part of their day? Explain why.