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## 8:3 A Soldier's Life in World War I

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### **Mobilization**

- Europe had not seen a major war in fifty years so people were excited by the prospect of a new war
- It was believed that the war would be over by Christmas, young men rushed to join the army

### **Destruction**

- When the soldiers started fighting, the glamour of the war disappeared
- New weapons caused destruction on a level that no one had ever seen before
- Machine guns, long range cannons, poison gas, and the hand grenade changed warfare



- As many as 300,000 died in the battles fought in the first year – generals used soldiers as pawns, throwing them into machine gun fire
- After initial gains early in the war, it turned into a defensive war
- Massive trench systems were built on both sides

### Conditions in the Trenches

- Deafening noises and sudden flashes from a sometimes constant enemy artillery
- Soldiers suffered through extreme cold and little sleep
- 1915 and 1916 were two of the wettest years Europe had seen -water and mud everywhere
- Trench foot

Feet submerged in water for long periods of time resulted in the skin peeling off the feet  
1000s have feet amputated

Dry socks became just as important as ammunition

- Rats were everywhere – soldiers could not leave anything edible out
- Lice infested hair and clothing while on the front
- Horrid sanitation, especially during the rains

### “Over the top”

- Term used to describe soldiers climbing out of trenches to attack
- To get to enemy trenches, soldiers had to run through *no man's land* – a portion of land filled with barbed wires, bodies, craters, and other debris
- Often times, generals ordered soldiers to run directly into machine gun fire



### Shellshock

- “War neurosis” or “Combat Stress” or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Symptoms include tiredness, irritability, lack of concentration, headaches - mental breakdown often occurred
- Came from conditions, heavy artillery
- Treatment not helpful – main goal was to get soldiers back in the trenches
- Generals saw this as cowardice



### Military Executions

- If surviving the enemy was not bad enough, over 1000 soldiers executed by their own armies.
- Number Killed by Nation:  
Germany – 48, France – 600, Britain – 346, Italy - 500+,
- Soldiers killed for insubordination, desertion, refusing to fight, and sometimes shellshock
- Leaders assumed it would help discipline and morale

### Injury and Death



- 65,038,000 soldiers mobilized in Europe
- 21,333,000 injured
- 9,000,000 killed
- 2,000,000 civilians killed directly or by disease and starvation