

World War 1: Using Sources

Sample Question:

Using Source B, and your own knowledge, explain why there were also large casualties due to illness in the trench warfare of WWI.

SOURCE B

...Many of the soldiers in the trenches were also infected with Lice. These small insects would make their homes in the seams of clothing and their eggs were hatched by body heat. Bites left red marks on the skin and could cause a disease called Trench Fever....The soldiers also had to put up with the rodents that thrived on the plentiful supplies of decomposing flesh available on the battle fields. There was so much food available that they were selective, preferring to eat the livers, eyes and tongues and of the dead..... For latrines buckets were used or large pits were dug between the front trench and the barbed wire entanglements of no-mans land...From standing long periods in water in the trenches, some soldiers suffered from Trench Foot, and had to have toes or even their whole foot removed because they had contracted gangrene....In the BEF (British Infantry Forces) there were over 500,000 more deaths due to illness, than were caused by battle casualties...many soldiers were hospitalised for such illnesses as pneumonia, dysentery, frostbite and kidney disease....

(Watson,G. *The Great Battles of World War 1*, Penguin Press, 1978)

An example of a paragraph from a sample essay answer:

Another reason why there were large casualties due to illness during this period of trench warfare, was because of the unhygienic conditions in which the soldiers had to live. As is noted in Source B, the soldiers had to use latrines that were little more than “large pits...dug between the front trench...and no-mans land.” Also from standing for long periods in the dampness and water lying in the bottom of the trenches, the soldiers were prone to Trench Foot, which according to Watson, frequently resulted in some soldiers having their “toes or even their whole foot removed”(Source B). The hygiene conditions were so poor that the soldiers constantly had to battle with lice in their clothing that caused trench Fever. As noted in Source B, large rats were made fat on the “plentiful supply of decomposing corpses”. These rats also contributed to the spreading of disease, as they also at times made their own ‘raids’ into the soldiers food supplies and sleeping areas for warmth. Therefore the poor hygienic living conditions in the trenches, contributed to causing the high numbers of casualties due to disease and illness.

1. As an exercise, highlight in SOURCE B, the words that were quoted in the sample paragraph above.

SOURCE C

Passing along this with a 'windy' feeling we came to the Front Line itself -- at last. I had been a long while getting there and come thousands of miles and crossed oceans, seas, deserts and all sorts of things and here I was -- Nor can I say I was very taken with it either. A long mound of sandbags -- in parts the sandbags had rotted and left a bluish muddy coloured earth. A mound 7 or 8 feet high and many feet thick on its front side -- running in a crooked irregular line. The men camped in 'dugouts' or 'possies', three or four in each -- in this wall and the rear protected by a 'parados' or rear wall of sandbags two or three feet thick. There were 'bays' or inlets all along with a fire step about two or three feet off the ground. A mist fog hung over the place as we came there -- the sun hadn't got up: A greyish light was about. All seemed very quiet and still.

Source: Australian War Memorial, *Australians at War 1885-1972*, page 101.



2. Using Source C and your own knowledge, describe the main features of trench warfare during WWI.