

The First World War

The First World War, also known by other names such as The Great War or World War One, was a truly terrible event in our world's history. The conflict lasted four years, three months and fourteen days from 28th July 1914 until 11th November 1918. It is estimated that a total of over seventeen million **civilians** and military personnel died as a result of the war.

Trench Warfare

The First World War was different from previous wars. There were new tactical advances in technology and industry which changed the future of war. For example, this was the first large-scale use of aeroplanes and tanks in warfare.



We remember the war for its **trench warfare**, where the Western Front stretched for hundreds of miles in a continuous line of trenches from the English Channel to the Swiss border. Soldiers spent much time in these trenches and, when ordered to, would climb out and charge towards the other side and the enemy troops. This was known as going 'over the top'.

The Christmas Truce

Whilst the First World War was a war of destruction and disaster, there were stories of hope and humanity. One such story was that of the Christmas **truce**, a famous and mythologised tale of a ceasefire between enemies.

Propaganda from home promised that the war would be over by Christmas 1914. However, by December, the stalemate continued. Both sides had lost many casualties and were weary of war. It was late on Christmas Eve when the faint sound of carol singing could be heard from the German side of the trenches. The British troops could also see small fir trees and brightly-lit lanterns decorating the German trenches.

The following day, soldiers met in No Man's Land to shake hands, exchange Christmas gifts and take photographs. They even played impromptu games of football. Alas, due to the generals' disapproval, the **truce** was called to an end.



Women took on work in many areas previously reserved for men, although controversially they received less pay for doing the same job! They worked in:

- Farming
- Engineering
- Police
- Railways
- **Espionage**



The Changing Roles of Women on the Home Front

The First World War had a significant impact on the changing roles of women at home in Britain. Prior to the war, some women had low-paid jobs in domestic service as servants for example, but it was more common for married women to stay at home, taking care of the family and the housework. However, once the men had gone to war, huge numbers of women were recruited into all sorts of areas of work.

When the need for munitions, such as bombs, missiles, bullets and shells, intensified as the war went on, large numbers of women were brought in to work in munitions factories. The work was dangerous because women worked with toxic chemicals on a daily basis. One chemical, TNT, was used in bombs and working with this would turn the skin a

yellow colour. This is how these women earned the nickname 'The Canary Girls'. By 1918, over a million women were employed in some aspect of munition work.

Land Girls was the name given to the women who worked on farms. They were part of the Women's Land Army (WLA). These roles were essential to make sure there was adequate food. By the end of 1917, there were 23 000 women working in the WLA. In addition, there were over 250 000 female farm labourers.

It is important to remember that in addition to paid employment, women were also running the household. This involved sewing new clothes, gardening for home-grown food and looking after their children.



Poppies and Remembrance

Each November, we **commemorate** the lives of the casualties of war by holding a two-minute silence on Armistice Day, also known as Remembrance Day or Poppy Day. The war ended on 11th November 1918. In 2018, 11th November marks the centenary of the end of the First World War.

Did You Know...?

- The poppy is a symbol of remembrance and was inspired by a war poem by John McCrae called 'In Flanders' Fields'.
- After the war ended, wild poppies grew all across the battlefields.



Glossary

civilian – A person not in the armed forces.

commemorate – To recall and show respect for.

espionage – The practice of using spies to obtain information.

trench warfare – A type of combat where enemies fight from long, narrow ditches.

truce – An agreement to stop fighting for a period of time.

Questions

1. Which word is most similar in meaning to conflict? Tick **one**.

- ☐ terrible
- ☐ technology
- ☐ war
- ☐ history

2. Which new equipment was used for the first time in the First World War? Tick **two**.

- ☐ tanks
- ☐ stalemate
- ☐ trenches
- ☐ aeroplanes

3. What does the phrase 'over the top' mean?

4. Fill in the missing words.

The British troops could also see small _____ and _____
decorating the German trenches.

5. **Alas, due to the generals' disapproval, the truce was called to an end.** What does the word **disapproval** mean in this sentence?

6. Describe how women's work roles during the First World War were different from prior to the war.

7. Explain why some munitions workers were known by the nickname, 'The Canary Girls'.

8. Explain the significance of 11th November 2018.

Answers

1. Which word is most similar in meaning to conflict? Tick **one**.

- ☐ terrible
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- ☐ history

2. Which new equipment was used for the first time in the First World War? Tick **two**.

- ☒ **tanks**
- ☐ stalemate
- ☐ trenches
- ☒ **aeroplanes**

3. What does the phrase 'over the top' mean?

It describes how, when ordered to, soldiers would climb up and out of the trenches and charge towards the other side.

4. Fill in the missing words.

The British troops could also see small **fir trees** and **lanterns** decorating the German trenches.

5. **Alas, due to the generals' disapproval, the truce was called to an end.** What does the word **disapproval** mean in this sentence?

It means the generals did not like, or agree with, the truce.

6. Describe how women's work roles during the First World War were different from prior to the war.

Pupils' own responses describing how before the war, women had low-paid jobs in domestic service and during the war they worked in many different areas which had been previously reserved for men such as farming and engineering.

7. Explain why some munitions workers were known by the nickname 'The Canary Girls'.

Pupils' own responses explaining how munitions workers worked with a toxic chemical, TNT, which would turn the skin a yellow colour.

8. Explain the significance of 11th November 2018.

Pupils' own responses that show an understanding of the date being one hundred years after the end of the First World War and that we hold a two-minute silence to remember the lives of the casualties of war.