

First World War Galleries

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Introduction

Introduction to the e-book

This is the large print for our First World War Galleries.

The content appears in order of the sections of the Galleries. To orientate yourself, please reference the table of contents which lists the sections.

Introduction to the First World War Galleries.

These galleries are about the First World War. The 'Great War', as people called it at the time, lasted for over four years and cost millions of lives.

In Britain, everyone was affected by the Great War, whether they were fighting or on the home front.

In these galleries, men, women and children who experienced the war will tell you their stories.

They will help show you:

- Why the world went to war
- Why it lasted so long
- How the war was won
- How it changed the world

They will do this in their own words and through the objects they gave to this museum.

Getting around

The galleries contain 14 story areas. They highlight the breadth and variety of our unique First World War collections.

You are halfway round when you reach the Total War story area, which looks at the 1916 Battle of the Somme.

If you would like a break at any time, please feel free to leave and come back later.

01. Hope and Glory

As the twentieth century dawned, Britain was one of the greatest powers on Earth. This small island nation ruled over a vast global empire. Its shipping dominated world trade. Its navy guarded the seas.

Yet Britain's society was deeply divided. Many of its men, women and children were not able to enjoy the benefits of living in a rich, industrial nation.

Despite its wealth, power and global influence, the British Empire was less secure than it appeared. Other countries were now challenging Britain.

On mainland Europe, old rivalries and new ambitions created tensions. But few people expected these would lead to a world war.

A Maritime Nation

We're **a maritime nation** - we've grown by the sea and live by it; if we lose command of it we starve.

Erskine Childers, author,
The Riddle of the Sands
1903

Britain was a hugely wealthy country.

The sea was Britain's lifeblood. British merchant ships, guarded by the Royal Navy, traded goods across the globe. British industry generated great riches. London was the financial centre of the world.

Did all British people benefit from such wealth?

Only the ruling classes really benefited. Millions lived in poverty. Discontent was growing. Industrial workers downed tools in strikes over poor conditions and low pay.

Barely two-thirds of men and no women had the right to vote.

Suffragettes waged a sometimes violent campaign to change this. British politics was divided over Home Rule for Ireland, which was on the verge of civil war.

By 1914 the United Kingdom looked increasingly disunited.

Display captions

Model of HMS Hercules

The largest model here is a shipbuilder's model of 'Dreadnought' battleship HMS *Hercules*, launched in 1910. The Dreadnoughts marked a revolution in speed, armour and firepower, and symbolised the Royal Navy's determination to rule the waves.

Model of SS Nonsuch

SS *Nonsuch* was a merchant ship. Britain relied on ships such as this to bring in food and raw materials and to export its goods. Almost half of the world's merchant shipping was British.

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Model of SS Gloucester Castle

SS *Gloucester Castle* was a mail ship. Ships such as this enabled families and businesses to keep in touch across vast distances. As well as carrying post, mail ships carried passengers emigrating from Britain to new lives in the Empire and the United States.

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Never greater

'England and the Empire were **never greater** than they are to-day.'

The Times, New Year's Day, 1914

Most Britons were proud of their empire, the greatest the world had ever seen.

Every fourth person on Earth owed allegiance to the British Crown. Many had emigrated from Britain, while millions more, notably in India, lived in lands conquered by the British.

Did all Britons feel pride in the Empire?

Most Britons believed that Britain's empire was a force for good. British emigrants who had sailed for new lives in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa felt pride in both their adopted homelands and the 'mother country'.

Yet doubts about the future of the British Empire were growing. People living in Britain's overseas possessions increasingly demanded greater freedoms to control their own affairs.

Britain's worldwide empire also aroused the envy of its European neighbours.

Clouds in the international sky

'There are always clouds in the international sky.'

David Lloyd George, British Chancellor of the Exchequer, 17 July 1914

For decades Britain had existed peacefully, if not always harmoniously, with its European neighbours.

But, from the beginning of the twentieth century, Germany's aggressive attempts to compete as a world power worried Britain, France and Russia.

Was Europe sliding towards war?

Between 1900 and 1914 several diplomatic crises were triggered by the growing fear and distrust felt by Europe's statesmen. Huge sums of money were spent on armies and navies.

By 1907 Europe had split into two main camps: Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy joined together in one, and France, Russia and Britain in the other. Yet until the summer of 1914, there seemed no immediate reason for war.

Display captions

Summary caption

Germany had been unified in 1871.

Britons admired this new nation for its music, literature, philosophy and science, and initially saw it as a friend.

Any future war seemed likely to be against France, Britain's old enemy, or against Russia, which threatened British India.

By 1900, Germany industry was overtaking Britain's, allowing it to build a formidable army and a rival fleet of warships. Britons now began to see Germany as a threat.

Kaiser Wilhem II's coat

Kaiser Wilhelm II, favourite grandson of Queen Victoria, was the Emperor of Germany.

His cousin, Tsar Nicholas II, gave him this Russian cavalry officer's coat. Wilhelm was intelligent and open-minded in many ways but also restless and insecure.

His love of uniforms reflected Germany itself, where the army strongly influenced politics and society. The Kaiser was born with a withered arm, which explains the shorter sleeve.

Tinplate toy ship

The Kaiser built a navy to show Germany's strength, hoping to unite his politically divided people in 'loyalty to, and love for the Emperor and the Reich'.

Patriotic German parents could show pride in their nation by buying their children a toy battleship or a sailor suit.

For the British people, Germany's navy was a threat to the supremacy of the Royal Navy, and to Britain itself.

Photo caption

Germany's emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, in 1902

02. Why War?

Distant crisis

On 28 June 1914 a Serbian-backed terrorist shot dead Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne.

War in south-east Europe

Austria-Hungary, encouraged by Germany, set out to punish Serbia. It declared war.

Crisis rapidly spreads

This immediate crisis stirred old tensions and anxieties, drawing in allies and supporters on both sides.

A divided continent

Leaders were willing to risk war to defend or extend their own national interests. Germany was determined to

support Austria-Hungary, its only reliable ally. Russia decided to stand up for the Serbs.

Powers prepare

Within weeks Europe's leaders had prepared their armies and navies for war.

Europe at war

Germany believed it could gain an advantage by striking first. It declared war on Russia and then on Russia's ally in the west, France.

Will Britain intervene?

Some Britons did not want to join the fight. The British government, led by Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, agonised over whether to support Russia and France. But it feared German domination of Europe. A victorious and hostile Germany would threaten Britain's security and its position in the world.

Britain declares war

Germany's invasion of Belgium, to get to France, tipped the balance. Britain had long promised to protect Belgium's right to be neutral.

On 4 August 1914 Britain - with its global empire - declared war on Germany.

03. Shock

Seven million men marched off to war in August 1914. A million of them lay dead by the end of the year.

Mainland Europe became a battleground. Both sides wanted to crush their enemies and end the war quickly. In the west, British, French and Belgian troops fought the German invaders. In the east, Germany and Austria-Hungary clashed with Russia and Serbia.

Neither side achieved a decisive victory. The horrific number of casualties caused by modern weapons came as a terrible shock. War crimes against civilians made the horror worse.

The British Expeditionary Force (BEF), the core of Britain's small army, was almost destroyed.

Europe's Hour of Destiny

'Europe's Hour of Destiny.'

German newspaper editorial, 1 August 1914

In 1914 all armies hoped for a swift victory.

On the Western Front Germany planned to defeat France quickly. It would then strike at Russia. The Germans won a series of bloody clashes, but were driven back at the Marne.

Yet they still occupied nearly all of Belgium and much of northern France.

On the Eastern Front, Russia captured much Austro-Hungarian territory, but its invasion of Germany was a disaster. Austria-Hungary failed miserably in fighting Serbia and Russia.

Why was there no quick victory in 1914?

Modern weapons caused enormous numbers of casualties. Endless marching and fighting exhausted men and horses. Generals lacked the communications equipment to control huge armies. On both fronts, the war ground to a halt.

Display captions

Russian uniform

This is the uniform of a Russian artillery officer.

Russia had an enormous population and many millions of men to turn into soldiers. But, with its limited industry, Russia could only arm and feed so many. The country's vast size, coupled with an underdeveloped rail network made it difficult to transport troops to the Front. It also had too few of the mobile guns it really needed.

Summary caption

Most soldiers in the Russian Army were peasants.

With crops to harvest, many marched unwillingly to war. Two million men even rushed to get married so that they could claim to be breadwinners and avoid conscription.

Yet Russia still had the largest army in the world. Though ill-trained and poorly equipped, its soldiers were, early on, intensely loyal to their leaders. While they won a major victory against the Austro-Hungarians, a Russian attempt to invade the German province of East Prussia ended in disaster.

Photo caption

Germany's new heroes, Generals von Hindenburg and Ludendorff (right and left centre)

Poster-map

This poster-map of the Battle of Tannenberg celebrates the German victory over Russia in the province of East Prussia (in present-day Poland).

Tannenberg made national heroes of the victorious, Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff.

Their success deflected public attention away from Germany's failure in the west.

Summary caption

The army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which set out to crush Serbia and fight Russia, was an extraordinary mix of men from 14 nationalities.

It included Bosnians, Croats, Czechs, Italians, Poles, Romanians, Slovaks, Slovenes and Ukrainians.

Between them, they spoke 27 languages and dialects. By the end of 1914, the Austro-Hungarian Army had suffered nearly a million casualties.

Austrian uniform

This is the uniform of a trooper from the Austrian 8th Lancer Regiment.

Many of the men in this regiment came from a Polish-speaking region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The Poles had a proud tradition of fighting on horseback with long lances.

But the cavalryman's lance and sword were no match for modern weapons.

Posters

These posters give a German view of 'Our Enemies in the West', the French, British and Belgians, and 'Our Enemies in the East', the Russians, Serbs and Montenegrins.

The 'East' also includes the Japanese, Britain's allies in the Far East since 1902.

The posters reinforce the idea that Germany was 'encircled' and could only defend itself by going to war.

German medallion

A German patriotic medallion was made in anticipation of a triumphant victory march into Paris.

As soldiers departed for the Front in August, the Kaiser had promised them, 'You will be home before the leaves have fallen from the trees'.

Summary caption

The Battle of the Marne proved that the battle was a thing of the past.

The Marne was a series of connected battles fought over a week, along a 95-mile front. The French commander, General Joseph Joffre, used railways to concentrate his scattered forces. French guns showered German soldiers with shrapnel.

The 'miracle of the Marne' saved France and forced the Germans to retreat. But Germany had not been beaten.

Photo caption

General Joseph Joffre, victor of the Battle of the Marne

German cavalry bugle and lance pennant

This German cavalry bugle and lance pennant were captured during the Battle of the Marne. German cavalry regiments, especially the Uhlan lancers, had a fearsome

reputation in 1914, so trophies like these were highly prized by British and French troops.

Summary caption

The German Army was led by the world's most professional officers.

The soldiers they commanded were conscripts, but many more men volunteered for service after the outbreak of war. The German arms industry which supplied them and the railway system which transported them to war were considered the best in Europe.

But in 1914, on the Western Front alone, 750,000 German troops were killed or wounded.

German uniform

This is the uniform of a German private of the 56th Infantry Regiment.

The field grey uniform was adopted by the German Army in 1910. Most German troops also wore the leather Pickelhaube helmet. The spike was meant to deflect sword blows from cavalry.

Foot soldiers formed the bulk of all armies. German troops invading Belgium and France marched on average 12 miles each day while heavily laden with weapons and equipment.

Display caption

Summary caption

In August 1914 France had an army the same size as Germany's, despite having a much smaller population.

It could only do this by calling up over 80 per cent of men of military age.

French troops hurled themselves at the Germans, often in reckless attacks.

Between August and December 1914, an average of 2,000 French soldiers were killed every day.

French uniform

This is the uniform of a French private of the 5th Infantry Regiment in 1914.

French politicians resisted attempts to update their army's colourful uniforms.

Heroes were expected to dress the part, and their highly visible red trousers were seen as a symbol of French bravery and superiority.

But in practice it made the men easier targets.

Patriotic dolls

France, like Britain, could call upon troops from home and also from its extensive empire.

These patriotic dolls depict an alpine light-infantryman from France, a Spahi cavalryman from Morocco, a

Zouave and an Algerian sharpshooter. Zouaves were recruited from French settlers in Algeria and Tunisia.

A Dastardly Slaughter

‘If war was once a chivalrous duel, it is now **a dastardly slaughter.**’

Artur von Bolfrás, Austrian general, September 1914

For the first time, soldiers were exposed to the deadly power of modern weapons in a war that reached across Europe.

The armies of 1914 counted on a quick and glorious campaign. Some still had colourful uniforms, lances and swords.

But rifle and machine gun bullets and shrapnel balls from massed, modern artillery tore into advancing troops.

Did no-one know how deadly modern war could be?

Generals understood the power of modern weapons. Yet nobody had used them on this scale before. When they studied recent, smaller wars, military leaders drew the lesson that if troops were fast-moving and brave enough, they would triumph. Now they had to think again.

Display captions

Shrapnel shells

Soldiers feared shrapnel shells bursting over their heads. These examples come from the French 75mm field gun and the British 4.5-inch howitzer. French 75s were grouped in batteries of four guns. In a single minute, one battery could rain down 10,000 shrapnel balls over an area one and a half times the size of a football pitch.

Cartridge

When a bullet like the one from this French Model 1886 Cartridge entered a human body, it tore through flesh and shattered bone.

So horrible were the wounds that each side mistakenly believed the other was using explosive bullets forbidden by international law.

Bullets also carried with them debris and dirt from uniforms, causing potentially lethal infections such as tetanus and gas gangrene.

Trumpet horn

The shell that shattered this trumpet horn in 1914 also killed the French soldier carrying it.

A British officer found the bugle on the battlefield and kept it as a souvenir.

German lancer cap and French cavalry helmet

The chief role of cavalry was to spot enemy movements, but they preferred to attack each other.

Many of these mounted troops wore uniforms dating from past eras of military glory, as this German lancer cap and French heavy cavalry helmet show.

Aircraft quickly replaced cavalry as the eyes of the battlefield. This Warren Safety Helmet was worn by British airmen in 1914.

Field gun

The French 75 mm quick firing field gun was a technological wonder.

This particular gun was used by the French 61st Field Artillery Regiment on the Marne and around Ypres. The '75' could fire up to 20 shrapnel shells each minute with devastating accuracy. It caused enormous numbers of casualties. By 1914 all the major armies had similarly destructive weapons. But none had the reputation of the 75, which even had a cocktail named after it.

Photo caption

British and French cavalry pass each other on the road, Belgium, 1914

Photo caption

German postcard showing a bullet wound to a man's arm

Photo caption

A French Henri Farman F.20 reconnaissance plane in British service, 1914

Display captions

Summary caption

For the men of the British Expeditionary Force, the battles of 1914 were a shocking introduction to modern warfare.

By the year's end, the BEF had suffered nearly 90,000 casualties.

Many were experienced professional soldiers who could not easily be replaced.

All available reserves were sent into action, along with some Territorials - part-time soldiers intended for home defence. From the Empire, Indian troops came to take part in the crucial battles around Ypres.

Diary and letter

At Ypres, the British, French, Belgians and Germans were fighting at the limit of their endurance.

Lance Sergeant Thomas Cubbon describes in his diary scenes of panic and the desperate need for reinforcements.

The letter, hastily written on a piece of card by Lieutenant Neville Woodroffe of the 1st Irish Guards,

records the death of most of the officers in his unit. Woodroffe himself was killed three days later.

Flag

This flag was flown from the car of Sir Douglas Haig while commanding British troops at Ypres in 1914.

Haig later described the intensity of the fighting to King George V, saying that some soldiers had ‘thrown everything they could, including their rifles and packs, in order to escape, with a look of absolute terror on their faces, such as I have never before seen on any human being’s face’.

British jacket

This British jacket belonged to Company Sergeant Major William Williams of the 2nd Worcestershire Regiment.

CSM Williams, from Bolton, was 37. He had served in the British Army for 18 years.

He suffered fatal wounds on 31 October 1914 at Gheluvelt, near Ypres.

The Army could not afford to lose experienced soldiers like him.

Orders

Britain’s war minister, Lord Kitchener, issued these orders to Sir John French, commander of the British Expeditionary Force. They put him in a difficult position. Sir John was ordered to support the French Army. At the

same time he was told to act independently if he thought the safety of the BEF was threatened.

Photo caption

Indian troops of 57th Wilde's Rifles at Wytschaete, Belgium, 1914

Photo caption

Indian walking wounded in a Belgian village, 1914

Photo caption

French general Joffre with British generals French and Haig

Photo caption

Men of 2nd Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry resting at Ypres, 1914

Photo caption

The first Territorial infantry to fight, the London Scottish, after action at Messines, Belgium

A very gallant little army

'It is now only a very weak, a very sad and a **very gallant little Army** that holds the line'

Lieutenant Geoffrey Loyd, Scots Guards, 3 November 1914

A small British Expeditionary Force (BEF) fought alongside the much larger French Army.

The BEF was soon thrown into retreat by the Germans, but by September 1914 had recovered to fight in the Battle of the Marne.

In October British soldiers bore the brunt of desperate German attacks around the Belgian town of Ypres. They prevented a German breakthrough. But the core of Britain's army was almost destroyed.

Why did Britain have such a small army?

As an island, Britain relied upon its huge navy for protection. Its army was traditionally a small, professional force.

During 1914 France had 20 times more soldiers on the battlefield than the BEF. Yet Britain could call upon its empire for reinforcements. Indian troops were already fighting. Many more Empire troops would come.

Display captions

Summary caption

By the end of 1914 the exhausted armies had sought safety in trenches.

In opposing front lines, men endured the same wretched conditions, often within earshot of one another.

At Christmas, German and British soldiers emerged to meet in the frozen strip of mud between the trenches.

They sang carols and exchanged presents, from cigarettes and cigars to buttons and badges.

But this seasonal goodwill could not last. Soon the fighting started again.

Uniform button

German soldier Werner Keil scribbled his name and gave this uniform button to 19-year-old Corporal Eric Rowden of the Queen's Westminster Rifles on Christmas Day 1914.

In his diary Rowden wrote, 'I went out and found a German who spoke English a little and we exchanged buttons and cigarettes and I had 2 or 3 cigars given me and we laughed and joked together, having forgotten war altogether'.

Wooden greetings card

At Christmas 1914, not every soldier felt peace and goodwill. British soldier Henry Hulse sent this wooden greetings card to his family in Faversham, Kent.

On it he drew a cartoon of a German being lassoed by a British soldier.

Notification and photo

For many, fighting continued over Christmas.

Sergeant Frank Collins was killed on Christmas Day. His family received this notification. In it his commanding officer wrote to his widow, 'He was shot through the chest and died without suffering any pain whatever'.

Sergeant Collins, shown on the right of the photograph, was a Territorial and had been a postman in peacetime. He left a wife and three children.

Lent by T.F. McGill

Photo Album

Frederick Chandler was a surgeon attached to the British Expeditionary Force.

He took these photographs of 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders on Christmas Day 1914.

In a letter home he wrote, 'an extraordinary thing occurred. Our men and the Germans got out of the trenches and met each other and chatted in great groups. The Germans in fact brought a barrel of beer over'.

Photo caption

Men of the London Rifle Brigade fraternise with German soldiers, Christmas Day 1914

Photo caption

Men of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment with German soldiers, Christmas Day 1914

Photo caption

Officers of the Northumberland Hussars mingle with German officers, Christmas Day 1914

Arsonists! Murderers!

'Bandits! Cowards! Arsonists! Murderers!'

Hippoliet van Bladel, Belgian priest, August 1914

People living in the path of invading armies immediately became victims of war.

The German Army's massacre of over 6,000 Belgian and French civilians, in the heart of 'civilised' Europe, was shocking. German troops also shelled and set fire to famous cultural sites. Where armies advanced, panicking civilians fled before them.

Why were ordinary people targeted?

The Germans needed a quick victory. Their nervous soldiers feared attacks by local people. They murdered them to stamp out possible resistance.

The world was appalled that Germany, once so admired as a nation of great culture, had ignored international agreements intended to prevent such brutality. For Britain and France, this was now a war to defend civilisation itself.

Display captions

Summary caption

'Big Bertha' was the nickname given to a powerful German siege mortar, the world's heaviest gun.

German victory depended on a swift advance through Belgium, but concrete fortresses at Liège and Namur barred the way. Massive siege mortars were used to smash these fortresses.

In Germany, people went wild with enthusiasm over the success of these new 'wonder weapons'. A wide range of souvenirs was produced to celebrate their achievements.

The ruined centre of Louvain photo The German Army's destruction of cultural sites caused international outrage.

This photograph shows the ruined centre of Louvain, Belgium, where panicking German troops, suspecting they had been fired upon by inhabitants of Louvain, beat, bayoneted and shot 248 of the town's citizens. They also burnt down the world-famous university library, destroying irreplaceable medieval books and manuscripts.

Documents

These documents record interviews with Belgian refugees and troops about German atrocities. 'Tales of war crimes committed against civilians by invading armies spread panic. Terrified people took to the roads to escape. Over 1.5 million Belgian refugees crossed into France and the Netherlands to flee the German advance. 200,000 of them went on to find sanctuary in Britain.

Stained glass fragment and watch

This stained glass fragment and watch are souvenirs of the German bombardment of Reims cathedral in France. The cathedral, where France's kings were once crowned, was being used as a makeshift hospital by the French Army. The watch was taken from a German soldier killed in the shelling. He had been treated for his wounds by French medics at the cathedral.

Watch lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Atrocity photographs

These photographs show some of the 262 inhabitants of the Belgian town of Andenne murdered by German soldiers on 21 August 1914.

The town's population was accused of attacking German troops in a 'treacherous fashion'. An eyewitness described, 'The corpses of ...many civilians lying on the ground...In the square, desperate looking men, women and children, more dead than alive, half-clothed ... Everywhere terror and brutality'.

Moneybox, poster and paperknife

The German public celebrated 'Big Berthas' as symbols of military power and technological achievement. This moneybox and poster each depict an image of a 'Big Bertha shell. The paperknife was made from a fragment of a shell fired at a Belgian fort at Namur.

42cm shell

This 42cm shell was the type fired by the huge Big Bertha siege mortars to smash Belgian and French fortresses. Célestin Demblon, a Belgian politician, described the 'frightful explosion' of one being fired, 'The

crowd was flung back, the earth shook like an earthquake and all the window panes in the vicinity were shattered’.

Photo caption

Belgian refugees on the road near Ypres, 1914

Photo caption

Refugees flee the Russian advance in Galicia, Eastern Europe, 1914

Photo caption

The ruins of the Fort de Loncin at Liège after its destruction by German siege mortars

04. Your country needs you

Most people in Britain put aside their differences to support the war effort. They were united by a sense of patriotism, duty and the shock of war.

Hundreds of thousands of men across Britain and the Empire volunteered to fight. Millions of people at home volunteered their time and money to support the troops. They feared what might happen if Germany won. Their fear was expressed in an outpouring of hatred against the enemy.

People not swept away by war fever were in the minority. Most Britons needed little persuading to play their part in their country’s cause.

Display captions

Letter

Lord Kitchener was hero-worshipped by the public and received hundreds of fan letters. People looked to him for reassurance and inspiration.

This letter containing a marriage proposal was addressed to him at the War Office. The sender suggests that Kitchener should signal any interest in the offer by identifying himself as 'Lonely' in the personal columns of the *Daily Mail* newspaper.

Alfie Knight's letter

Children were also caught up in war fever. Many wanted to join the Army.

Nine-year-old Dublin boy Alfie Knight wrote a letter to Lord Kitchener, volunteering his services as a bicycle messenger at the Front.

A reply from the War Office turned down Alfie, who was nine years short of the official age for enlistment.

Summary caption

Field Marshal Herbert Horatio Kitchener, the victor of colonial wars in the Sudan and South Africa, was a national hero.

Kitchener was appointed war minister on 5 August 1914. According to one commentator, 'The nation felt ... that

Lord Kitchener was holding its hand confidently... while with the other he had the whole race of politicians firmly by the scruff'.

Two days later newspapers published his appeal for men 'who have the safety of our Empire at heart' to join the Army.

Recruitment poster

The design for this Kitchener recruitment poster was first seen on 5 September 1914 as a cover for a popular magazine, the 'London Opinion', where it bore the words 'Your Country Needs You'.

The striking image of Kitchener was drawn by illustrator and cartoonist Alfred Leete. We often think of it as the most powerful government recruiting tool of the war. Yet the poster was unofficial and was probably not circulated beyond London.

Recruitment posters

A Parliamentary Recruiting Committee was set up 'to give a powerful impetus to recruiting'. It produced 12.5 million recruiting posters in over 160 different designs appealing for volunteers. Posters were displayed on street hoardings and buildings across the country. Music hall entertainers, catchy popular songs, touring marching bands and church sermons reinforced the campaign's message.

Kitchener souvenirs

Patriotic souvenirs brought Kitchener's reassuring presence into homes, on everything from soap to dolls.

His government colleagues found him less appealing. Kitchener feuded with any politician he thought was trying to interfere with his mission to expand and supply the Army. Prime Minister Herbert Asquith needed Kitchener as a public figurehead, but found his 'bull in a china shop manners and methods' frustrating.

The only thing that is right

You are doing **the only thing that is right**.

Eva Isaacs, writing to her officer husband, 12 August 1914

After the outbreak of war in August 1914, Britain began to raise a huge volunteer citizens' army.

Lord Kitchener, the new war minister, spearheaded an extraordinary public campaign to recruit volunteers into this New Army.

Unlike most people, Kitchener believed this would be a long war. And Britain could no longer just rely on its small, professional army.

Why did men volunteer to fight?

Many men joined Kitchener's Army out of a sense of duty or patriotism, even anger at German atrocities. Some saw the war as a chance to leave dull lives for adventure. Others enlisted to escape hardship and unemployment for a steady wage. In just eight weeks,

over three-quarters of a million men in Britain had joined up. Thousands more would come from Britain's empire.

Display captions

Summary caption

When Britain went to war, so too did its empire. Young men across the globe enlisted to fight for the 'mother country'.

In the self-governing 'white' colonies, such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand, many had been born in Britain or had British ancestry. They saw it as their duty to fight. In the 'non-white' colonies, such as India and the West Indies, some also believed that they might win a greater say in the running of their countries by proving their worth in battle.

Australian recruitment poster

On the outbreak of war the Prime Minister of Australia, Andrew Fisher, pledged that his country would 'stand beside Britain to help and defend her to the last man'.

Overall 416,000 Australians enlisted to fight, more than one in ten of the country's population.

Around twenty per cent of the volunteers who joined the Australian Imperial Force in 1914 had been born in Britain.

South African recruitment poster

In South Africa 136,000 white troops enlisted. 43,000 black South Africans, prohibited from combat service because of their race, served as labourers.

Some of South Africa's Dutch-speaking Boers objected to fighting for Britain, whose troops had conquered them in the Boer War of 1899-1902. Prime Minister Louis Botha had to crush a rebellion by them in October 1914.

Indian Army recruitment poster

War united India. Nearly one million Indian men of all religions and castes enlisted to fight Britain's war, trebling the size of the Indian Army. Indian nationalists believed that by fighting Britain's cause India might show that it was ready for self-government. Mohandas (later Mahatma) Gandhi, an Indian lawyer, proclaimed Indians' 'desire to share the responsibilities of membership of a great Empire, if we would share its privileges'.

West Indian recruitment poster

Despite the king's call to 'men of every class creed and colour', Britain was concerned about recruiting black men to fight white men. Although a British West Indies Regiment was formed from volunteers, the number of black troops from Britain's African and Caribbean colonies could have been higher. But commanders claimed that imperial prestige was best upheld by white troops.

New Zealand recruitment poster

In New Zealand just over half the men eligible for service volunteered: 122,000 in total from a population of just over a million. The country's Maori were divided

over the issue of fighting for a nation which had taken their land in the 1860's. Having volunteered to fight, racial discrimination meant that Maori in the first 'Native Contingent' found themselves working as labourers instead of as front line combat troops.

Canadian recruitment poster

Nearly 1.5 million British men, women and children had emigrated to Canada in the ten years before the war. Of the 458,000 men who joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the war, nearly half were British-born. French-speaking Canadians were not so enthusiastic in their support for the war because of pre-war government attempts to suppress their language and culture.

Come along boys

Come along boys and join the army...our cheery lads need your help.

Recruiting poster, November 1914

The Army was unprepared for the stampede of volunteers wanting to fight for King and Country.

The Kitchener volunteers would fight alongside professional soldiers and the part-time Territorial Army, which now signed up for overseas service.

Cities, towns, professions, businesses and sports clubs set up their own 'Pals' battalions so friends could fight

together. Some men and boys who were unfit or underage managed to join up in the rush

How were men made into soldiers?

The new recruits were given months of basic training in camps all over the country. There they learned the ways of the Army.

Conditions were often rough and ready, and there were few proper rifles or uniforms.

These enthusiastic volunteers would have to wait months before being tested in battle.

Display captions

Photo of Dorothy Lawrence Are you male or female?

Women were not allowed to become soldiers. But would-be journalist Dorothy Lawrence, seen in this photograph, dressed as a soldier and posed as the non-existent 'Private Denis Smith'.

Lawrence worked for ten days with soldiers laying mines in tunnels. But she became increasingly ill in the difficult conditions. She gave herself up to the authorities, who arrested but later released her.

Can you keep a promise?

Every Kitchener volunteer had to make a solemn promise to do his duty.

In a ceremony led by recruiting officers, new soldiers swore an oath of allegiance to the king upon a Bible. But, with so many men eager to join up, the process was often chaotic, with many men having to recite the oath at the same time to speed up things up.

Display captions

Summary caption

Kitchener's first appeal on 7 August 1914 was for 'an addition of 100,000 men' to the Army.

Within eight weeks nearly 750,000 men had enlisted. They pledged to serve as long as the war lasted.

Most volunteers became infantrymen in new battalions, each numbering around a thousand men, which were attached to existing regiments. Many of the new units were 'Pals' battalions, in which friends, workmates or those with some other common bond could fight together.

'Pals' badges

17th Service (1st City and Liverpool Pals) Battalion, King's Liverpool Regiment, was the first 'Pals' battalion.

It was formed on 28 August 1914. Its founder, Lord Derby, declared that, 'friends from the same office will fight shoulder to shoulder for the honour of Britain and the credit of Liverpool'.

Some 'Pals' units represented occupations and trades. The 16th Service (1st City) Battalion, Manchester Regiment, recruited office and warehouse workers.

Shoulder title and collar badge

The '1 RF' shoulder title shown here was worn by the upper- and middle-class men who joined the 23rd Battalion (1st Sportsmen's) Royal Fusiliers at London's Hotel Cecil, where volunteers were quizzed about their sporting achievements.

Lord Rosebery, who raised the 17th Royal Scots, took his family name 'Primrose' as inspiration for their primrose collar badge. It was one of 24 battalions for men under 5 feet 3 inches tall, known as 'Bantams' after the small aggressive chickens.

Tyneside Scottish and Royal Irish Rifles badges

The Tyneside Scottish badge was worn by four 'Pals' battalions of the Northumberland Fusiliers. The clamour to join them stopped traffic in Newcastle. These battalions were open to all men, not just those of Scottish descent. In Ireland, both unionists and nationalists volunteered. This shamrock cap badge with the hand of Ulster was worn by the 14th Royal Irish Rifles, formed from members of the unionist Ulster Volunteer Force.

Display caption

Summary caption

A recruit's transformation from civilian to soldier began in one of the many camps which were set up all over Britain.

Over months of tough training, the volunteers learned discipline, drill and how to fight with rifle and bayonet.

Men from every walk of life, from clerks and teachers to factory and shop workers, were crammed together. For many it was their first time away from home.

**Temporary kit for Britain's 'New Army'.
The Army struggled to supply volunteers with everything on the army uniform and equipment list.**

Many wore the 'Kitchener Blue' uniform – the example here is an approved War Office 'sealed pattern' which manufacturers had to copy - and a cardboard cap badge. Recruits thought these substitute uniforms made them look like postmen.

Weapons were also in short supply. Many volunteers had to use a wooden 'rifle' in drill.

**Message from Lord Kitchener
Troops departing for the Front were waved off by patriotic civilians.**

One family, following an old custom, threw this child's shoe after their soldier relatives to bid them good luck. The first citizen soldiers landed in France in May 1915. For most men in Kitchener's Army, it would be their first time abroad. Each carried this message from Lord Kitchener reminding them of the behaviour expected of British soldiers.

Diary of Sydney Fuller

New recruit Sydney Fuller recorded his thoughts about his training and sub-standard kit in his diary.

New soldiers were pressed to have an inoculation against typhoid before going to the Front. Fuller noted that some men in his unit had refused the injection, which was often painful and was rumoured to cause impotence.

Officer handbook

In a country defined by class, only 'gentlemen' from the upper- and middle-classes were expected to be officers.

This handbook provided advice to young officers on how to control and care for their men while also commanding their respect. The most junior infantry officers, second lieutenants, were often only teenagers. Each had to lead a platoon of around 30 men, many older and from much tougher backgrounds than themselves.

A purpose to help

'...everyone has a purpose to help to the utmost of their powers.'

Lady Annette Matthews, 11 August 1914

In 1914 the war acted as a unifying force. Millions of British men, women and children who could not

fight looked for other ways to support their nation's cause.

People donated money to the thousands of war charities set up across Britain and the Empire. They also provided comforts such as clothing, chocolate and cigarettes for the troops.

What made people believe in this war?

People felt it was their duty to defend their family, their homes, their country, even civilisation itself.

Reports of enemy atrocities led to a widespread hatred of Germany and Germans. People lived in fear. What had happened in France and Belgium might also happen in Britain if Germany won.

Display captions

Summary caption

Hate propaganda against the 'wicked Hun' began as soon as Britain went to war.

The press was full of tales of German atrocities, both real and imagined. In this poisonous atmosphere, angry crowds smashed windows of shops owned by Germans, and British authorities interned German men in camps.

It was, according to a poem by Rudyard Kipling, the most popular British writer of the time, 'When the English began to hate'.

Report of German atrocities

Reports of German atrocities were often lurid and false.

They included stories of mutilated nuns and butchered babies. But people were all too ready to believe them.

In Britain there was a 'cleansing' of all things German or German-sounding. London's Coburg Hotel was renamed the Connaught. German Shepherd dogs became 'Alsations'. German measles became 'Belgian flush'. Orchestras stopped playing Beethoven and Wagner.

Mock treaty and toilet roll

In August 1914 German Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg dismissed the longstanding treaty guaranteeing Belgium's neutrality as a 'scrap of paper'.

The phrase was thrown back at the Germans in British propaganda, as shown in this mock treaty. The novelty toilet roll shows Kaiser Wilhelm II, for most Britons the war's arch villain and the object of contempt and derision.

Postcards, mock Iron Cross and shell fragments

These postcards and mock 'Iron Cross', Germany's most famous medal, commemorate the shelling of Scarborough, Whitby and Hartlepool by German warships in December 1914.

The attack killed 137 men, women and children. It seemed to confirm people's fears of what the Germans might do if they reached Britain. The shell fragments were picked up in Scarborough while still hot after being fired.

Pamphlet

Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George gave his 'Road Hogs of Europe' speech, justifying Britain's entry into the war, on 19 September 1914. Germany had left Belgium, 'flung to the roadside, bleeding and broken; women and children thrust under the wheel of his cruel car... It will be a terrible war. But in the end we shall march through terror to triumph'. Within two months 2.5 million copies of this pamphlet had been distributed.

Cup and badges

Hatred of the British – usually identified as the 'English' - found its way into everyday German life and language.

The cup and the badges shown here, from Germany and Austria-Hungary, bear the slogan 'Gott strafe England', meaning 'May God punish England'. This became a common greeting which people exchanged in the street, replacing the usual 'Guten Tag' or good day.

Manuscript of 'Hymn of Hate'

Hatred of Britain was rife in Germany.

This is the original draft manuscript of the 'Hymn of Hate', the most notorious anti-British piece of German propaganda. Written by Ernst Lissauer, a German poet

and dramatist, the verse contains the lines 'we love as one, we hate as one. We have one foe and one alone – England!' A printed copy was sent to every serving German soldier.

Tankard and cartoons

This tankard commemorates German atrocities in Belgium and France.

Rudyard Kipling popularised the word 'Hun' as an abusive term for Germans. It evoked Attila the Hun's 5th-century destroyers of civilisation. Kipling, like many Britons, believed the Germans were 'barbarians', people from 'the Middle Ages with modern guns'. Prussian Germans were considered the most militaristic, as shown in these cartoons.

Display captions

Summary caption

Some British civilians performed widely reported acts of self-sacrifice in the service of their country.

The executions of Edith Cavell and Charles Fryatt caused anger and turned opinion in neutral countries further against Germany, especially in the United States.

As London diarist Georgina Lee wrote, 'The public feeling is that we will never make terms of peace with Germany's rulers who break every law of civilisation'.

Stethoscope

This stethoscope was used by Dr Elsie Inglis, a pioneering doctor.

In 1914 the War Office rejected her proposal to set up all-women medical teams with the words, 'My good lady, go home and sit still'. So she set up the Scottish Women's Hospitals on the fighting fronts, which were funded by the suffrage movement. Inglis herself went to Serbia to treat the sick and wounded.

Elsie Knocker's diary

Elsie Knocker's diary records how she and fellow motorbike enthusiast Mairi Chisholm set up a first aid post in a cellar near the front line Belgian village of Pervyse.

The two women worked there for over three years, treating hundreds of injured men, sometimes while under fire. The 'Women of Pervyse' became celebrities and this helped secure donations for their work, including a protective steel door for the cellar from Harrods.

Gold watches

Merchant ship captain Charles Fryatt was given gold watches by his grateful employer and the Admiralty for successfully evading German submarine attacks. Later captured by the German navy, he was held responsible for illegally trying to ram one of their submarines on 28 March 1915. Fryatt was shot by a firing squad on 27 July 1916. His execution provoked public outrage in Britain.

Red Cross nurse's cap

This Red Cross nurse's cap belonged to Edith Cavell, matron of a hospital in German-occupied Brussels. On 12 October 1915 she was executed by a German firing squad for helping stranded Allied soldiers escape back to their lines. Her final words were, 'I am glad to die for my country'. Though legal under international law, her execution caused widespread revulsion in both Britain and the neutral United States.

Cigarettes

May Aitken, wife of a wealthy Lancashire cotton merchant, sent 10,000 packets of morale-boosting cigarettes to the Front. They were given out at the port of Le Havre to wounded British and French soldiers after the Battle of the Marne. Cigarettes, known as 'fags', 'gaspers' or 'Woodbines', were not then considered a grave risk to health, but were an essential for many soldiers.

Gifts for Servicemen

A wave of goodwill towards the troops swept through Britain and the Empire. The Christmas pudding, chocolate and tin of sweets here were sent to the men at the Front by organisations in Britain, India and the West Indies. The men in Britain's army were more literate than ever before and people at home wanted to nourish minds as well as bodies, as shown by this book collection notice.

Princess Mary's gift boxes

In October 1914 King George V's 17-year-old daughter, Princess Mary, made a public appeal for money so that a Christmas 'gift from the nation' could be sent to every

British and Empire soldier and sailor. Half a million brass Princess Mary's gift boxes had been delivered by Christmas Day. Smokers received cigarettes, tobacco, a lighter and pipe, and non-smokers a 'bullet' pencil and writing paper. Indian troops' boxes included sweets and spices while nurses received chocolate.

Knitting pattern

During the bitterly cold winter of 1914-1915, thousands of women across Britain knitted balaclavas, scarves, gloves and socks to send to the troops. Guides such as this knitting pattern and sock measure did not prevent inexperienced knitters from producing what one writer to 'The Times' described as 'miserably cut, uncomfortable and irritating garments.'

Collecting boxes, charity pins and stamps

Despite rising prices and increases in taxation to help pay for the war, British people poured money into collecting boxes and bought war charity pins and stamps. These covered all kinds of causes, with care for wounded soldiers being the most popular. Fraudsters tried to exploit this generosity by posing as charity collectors and stealing donations for themselves.

Patriotic ceramics and glassware

War spawned an industry of patriotic ceramics and glassware bearing the flags of Britain, the Empire and its allies. In 1900 few Britons would have believed that they would be proudly showing in their homes the flags of France, the old enemy, or even of Russia.

Patriotic pamphlets

Patriotic pamphlets carried the stirring words of public figures as diverse as Boer War hero Lord Roberts VC, leader of the Mothers Union Beatrix Lyall and Suffragette Christabel Pankhurst. Pankhurst became an active supporter of the fight against 'the German Peril'. In September 1914 she and other Suffragettes suspended their campaign of violent protest aimed at securing votes for women and diverted their energies into supporting the war effort.

Framed scroll

This framed scroll, 'Gifts to the Imperial Government from the Empire in 1914' records official and private donations towards the war effort. These include a million bags of flour and 1,000 gallons of wine for hospitals.

Poster

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and other organisations sought volunteers for work overseas. This poster appeals for men to staff its huts behind the front line. The huts provided food, non-alcoholic drinks and entertainments for soldiers, as well as free writing paper and envelopes so that they could write home.

Dummy rifle

This dummy rifle was used for drill by the Volunteer Training Corps (VTC), a home guard formed in November 1914 to help repel any German invasion of Britain. VTC recruits included men over the age for enlistment or the medically unfit. They were mocked by some soldiers and branded the 'Gorgeous Wrecks' after

the royal cipher GR (Georgius Rex, Latin for King George) on their arm-bands.

05. Deadlock

By late 1914 the war on the Western Front had become deadlocked.

Neither side had achieved victory in northern France and Belgium. They now dug trenches to protect themselves from each other's murderous fire. Soon, vast trench networks snaked from the English Channel to Switzerland.

The German Army had to defend the rich, industrial regions it had seized. Trenches were easier to defend than attack, so the Germans hoped to wear down their enemies by sitting tight.

The British and French had to drive the Germans out. They searched desperately for new weapons and new ideas to do just that.

Display captions

Entrenching tool

Every British infantryman carried an entrenching tool to dig a shallow scrape in the ground as protection from bullets.

But that still left him vulnerable to shrapnel, and from 1914 he had to dig deeper trenches. A 230-metre

section of front line trench took 450 men around six hours to construct. Trenches needed constant repair to fix damage caused by enemy shelling and by bad weather.

Screw picket, barbed wire and gloves

This British screw picket was used to support barbed wire, which was laid in entanglements at least ten metres deep in front of trenches to deter enemy attacks. Pickets could be silently screwed into the ground rather than hammered in. This meant that wiring parties using them were less likely to attract the attention of enemy patrols. British soldiers laid or repaired barbed wire wearing special gloves to protect their hands.

Photo caption

A sentry of the 10th Gordon Highlanders keep watch

Digging, digging, digging

Digging, digging, digging. Always bloody well digging.
Soldiers' song, 1915

Trenches saved lives. They protected soldiers in them from shrapnel and bullets. But trench warfare meant deadlock.

Trenches evolved from simple ditches into complex networks of fortifications. They cut through Belgium and France for over 250 miles, through sand dunes, muddy fields, wooded hills and villages.

The Germans had taken the higher ground. That meant they could better observe and repel any attack. To drive them out, British and French soldiers had to attack across no man's land, the strip of terrain between the two sides.

There had been trench warfare before, but never on this scale.

Display captions

Trench signs

Trench signs helped soldiers to navigate their way around the maze of trenches. Troops coming up to the front line were usually led by an experienced guide. But signboards were still needed. Some trenches were named after places which reminded soldiers of home. Others acted as warnings, alerting soldiers to places regularly targeted by German artillery or snipers.

Display captions

Summary caption

By 1915 commanders on the Western Front were frustrated by the lack of progress and worried about soldiers' morale.

British troops were ordered to launch regular trench raids to, as one officer wrote, 'worry the enemy to death and maintain ... fine fighting spirit'.

Raids, officially known as 'minor enterprises', were a chance for soldiers with clubs, knives and grenades to attack the enemy rather than just endure the trenches.

Trench clubs

The club was used on trench raids and patrols to kill silently.

The clubs above are German, those below and right British. They were made in army workshops or improvised by the soldiers who carried them.

Homemade trench club

This British trench club was used by Private Harold Startin of the 1st Leicestershire Regiment.

Startin was a bomber, whose job was to lob grenades into enemy trenches. He carried the club for self-defence. He made it by fitting an entrenching tool handle with a lead head formed in a clay mould. Its first victim was a German sergeant, killed by Startin in July 1915.

Butcher's knife

Before developing an official-issue fighting knife, the French Army purchased all sorts of knives from private firms, such as this butcher's knife.

200,000 of them were ordered in September 1915. Many were used by teams of 'trench cleaners', who went in after an attack to make sure no German remained alive.

One trench cleaner, Louis Corti, wrote, 'We were armed with a dagger, a revolver or rifle and a bag of grenades...the watchword was "No Mercy".'

Mills bomb

The British Mills bomb grenade was introduced in 1915.

With the pin removed and lever released, it would explode after five seconds, hurling fragments which would strike any soldier within ten metres and often twice as far away.

Crucially, it was far less likely to go off in the thrower's hand than many earlier types of grenade. It has been estimated that 70 million Mills bombs were thrown by British and Empire soldiers during the war.

Knives

The knives above are German, those in the middle French, while the two lowest in the case are British. They were used by soldiers to stab their enemies in self-defence or while hunting down enemy survivors in captured trenches. The French and Germans issued knives to their soldiers. The British Army preferred bayonets. It saw knives as something 'foreign'. That did not stop soldiers from buying them.

Stokes mortar

The Stokes mortar was invented by engineer Wilfred Stokes.

The Stokes was cheap, mobile and threw bombs high in the air to drop into enemy trenches.

Mortar fire usually drew swift retaliation from the enemy. British officer Edward Beddington Behrens described mortar crews as 'the Suicide Club... desperate men, brave as anything – rather nervy though'.

Hand grenades

The hand grenades on the left are German, those on the right British. Until 1915 British soldiers had too few of these 'bombs'. They relied on a variety of improvised grenades often made from old food tins packed with nails. The 'Double Cylinder Hand Grenade' shown here was an official version of these 'jam tin' bombs.

The Leach catapult

The British Leach catapult or 'Bomb Engine' saw a return to an ancient weapon of siege warfare.

These wooden catapults were first issued in March 1915. They were made by Gamage's, a London department store.

Leach catapults lobbed grenades into German trenches. Although silent, which meant they did not give away the weapon's position, catapults were difficult to aim and their range was short.

The cold-blooded science

'The **cold-blooded science** of the business seems to me rather horrid, even if necessary.'

Lieutenant Colonel James Jack, diary entry for 15 July 1917

Artillery now fired high explosive shells to try and blast men from the trenches.

In deafening bombardments, streams of shells tested soldiers' nerves as they crouched down, praying they would not be blown to pieces, mutilated or buried alive.

But artillery was not the only thing to fear.

Armies also returned to using weapons from previous eras, including some of the most primitive.

What kinds of weapons were used?

Grenades and trench mortars were developed to provide high explosive firepower for soldiers in front line trenches.

Knives and clubs were used for hand-to-hand-fighting. In raids on enemy trenches, soldiers would aim to kill, take prisoners and gather information. For those taking part, these raids could be both terrifying and thrilling.

Display captions

German Minenwerfer

The German 'Minenwerfer' terrified Allied soldiers.

It fired heavy bombs which could be seen slowly tumbling from the sky. When they struck, they demolished or buried everything around them.

Lieutenant Colonel James Jack wrote, 'Some of the trenches have again been badly mauled by Minenwerfer fire, three men being blown to bits by one bomb. These heavy trench mortar shells, with their terrific explosion, are intensely disagreeable'.

The possibility of death

One is here confronted almost daily with **the possibility of Death.**'

Lieutenant Eric Lubbock, Army service Corps, 10 November 1915

Trench warfare was a deadly game of hide-and-seek against an almost invisible enemy.

Danger could even lurk undetected below ground. Teams of engineers tunnelled under enemy trenches, laying huge explosive mines. Above ground, snipers were a deadly menace, picking off unwary soldiers.

How did a soldier protect himself?

The new art of camouflage offered ways to see without being seen. Body armour and helmets gave some protection.

But death often came unseen, sometimes unheard. If a soldier was in the wrong place at the wrong time, nothing could protect him.

Display captions

Summary caption

Tunnellers from the Royal Engineers burrowed deep beneath no man's land. They laid tons of high explosive under enemy trenches.

The Germans did the same from the other side. When detonated, these 'mines' could bury alive hundreds of men in an instant.

British and German miners sometimes broke into each other's tunnels and fought to the death in the dark. Where miners were active, soldiers in the trenches lived in terror of this invisible threat beneath their feet.

Geophones

Underground, men wearing geophones listened for German mining activity.

Geophones were a French invention to magnify sound waves in the ground. Using a stethoscope, a compass and two discs containing mercury pressed to the tunnel floor, the listener could work out the location of any underground sound like talking or digging. A period of silence could mean a mine was about to be detonated.

Candles

These candles were used in a tunnel in Hulluch, France.

They were a potentially lethal form of lighting. Explosive charges got larger as the war went on, releasing ever more flammable gases in the narrow tunnels.

The risk of an accidental underground explosion increased. Tunnellers, many of them coal miners in peacetime, had to be issued with safer mining lamps.

Breathing equipment

Although tunnellers took rabbits, mice or canaries with them to test for gas build-ups, many were overcome by carbon monoxide fumes.

The British 'Proto' and German breathing equipment here was used by teams trained to rescue stricken men.

The first symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include giddiness and confusion. Some tunnellers affected by the fumes became argumentative or violent towards their rescuers.

Hawthorn ridge explosion photo

Mines grew more powerful as the war went on.

This photograph shows a British mine exploding under German defences at Hawthorn Ridge on the Somme on 1 July 1916. It left a crater 60 metres wide and 30 metres deep.

On 7 June 1917, at Messines, 19 mines containing nearly 440 tons of explosive killed 10,000 German soldiers. The explosion was felt in London.

Photo caption

An officer uses geophones while his men lay an explosive charge

Photo caption

The Hawthorn Ridge mine, photographed by official war photographer Ernest Brooks

Display captions

Summary caption

Cloth and leather uniforms offered little protection against jagged shell fragments or bullets.

On both sides various forms of body armour were either developed officially or sold privately.

Relatively few wore it. Metal armour was too heavy.

Fabric armour absorbed light impacts, but was useless when soaked by rain. Of far greater importance in saving lives were the modern, yet medieval-looking steel helmets.

Steel loophole and big game cartridge

Observers and snipers peered or fired through steel loopholes.

Some were disguised, like this British 'sandbag'. The other loophole here, a steel plate, is German.

The British experimented with ammunition like this rifle cartridge, normally used for hunting elephants, in unsuccessful attempts to penetrate German loophole plates.

Helmets

In trench warfare, 20 per cent of all wounds were to the head and neck.

By late 1916 most armies wore steel helmets. The German helmet, on the left, has been modified to reveal the ears as the standard version made hearing difficult.

The French 'Adrian' helmet, centre, was named after its inventor, General August Louis Adrian. The Belgian helmet on the right was a near copy of the 'Adrian'.

Body armour

These are examples of body armour worn in the trenches.

German metal body armour was so heavy it could only be worn by men in static roles such as sentries or machine gunners. It was light but not very effective.

The British bombers' neck shield, here worn with body armour, was meant to protect against grenade splinters.

The Dayfield Body Shield was made from metal plates sandwiched between fabric.

British steel helmet

From late 1915, British and Empire soldiers were issued with a steel helmet designed by inventor John Brodie.

It could be pressed from a single sheet of metal which made it particularly strong.

The first helmets were shiny and glinted in light, revealing the wearer's position. On this later type, sand or sawdust was applied before the paint, to give a non-reflective, textured finish.

Brodie's innovation reduced head injuries by 75 per cent.

Photo caption

A German soldier wearing metal body armour

Photo caption

A wounded British soldier holding his steel helmet, which has been pierced by shrapnel

Summary caption

From the cover of the trenches, both sides constantly tried to observe their enemies and read their positions, movements and strength.

German soldiers, normally entrenched on higher ground, had a huge advantage as they could better watch their enemies opposite. Soldier-artists in the British and French armies took camouflage and deception to new levels in an effort to reduce the Germans' advantage.

Trench periscopes

Periscopes enabled soldiers to peer across no man's land from the relatively safety of a trench, without risking a sniper's bullet. Shown here, from left to right, are two German periscopes, one improvised the other stereoscopic, then a privately purchased British 'Lifeguard' periscope, the standard British No. 9 trench periscope and another privately purchased example.

Trench panorama

This large photographic panorama shows a shell exploding in Canadian trenches in Ploegsteert, near Ypres, nicknamed 'Plug Street' by British and Empire troops. The first British camouflage tree observation post was erected in this area on the evening of 11 March 1916 by a team supervised by soldier-artist Lieutenant Colonel Solomon J Solomon.

Camouflage tree

This is a British camouflage tree observation post. A real tree in no man's land, with its branches blasted off, was sketched by a soldier-artist from the Royal Engineers' camouflage unit. A replica tree with a steel core was then made behind the lines. The real tree was removed at night and replaced with the fake one. The observer could then crawl up inside it and watch the German lines.

Sniper rifle

German snipers armed with the converted Gewehr 98 sniper rifle killed thousands of Allied troops. Snipers trained their rifles on dips in trench walls or crossing points, waiting for the careless or curious to show their

heads. Germany's tradition of shooting clubs and hunting with rifles meant that it could call upon plenty of sharpshooters. Its advanced optics industry provided their telescopic sights.

Sniper robe

This British sniper robe was hand-painted by a sniper to help him blend into his lair, usually a pile of earth or rubbish in no man's land. From late 1915 the British set up special sniper schools. Among the first instructors were ghillies, gamekeepers from Scottish estates. They taught marksmanship, stealth and camouflage. British snipers operated in pairs: one to observe, the other to shoot.

Gassed

'... a dozen men – all **gassed** - their colours were black, green and blue, tongues hanging out and eyes staring.'
Lance Sergeant Elmer Cotton, 5th Northumberland Fusiliers, 1915

To break the trench deadlock, the armies on the Western Front tried a new weapon, poison gas.

In April 1915 the Germans released a cloud of chlorine gas on Allied troops at Ypres. The Allies were horrified. Yet in September, at Loos, the British launched their own gas attack.

As the war went on, the use of gas intensified.

Was poison gas effective?

Soldiers feared gas. Chlorine and phosgene choked and suffocated, mustard gas blinded and burned. But gas masks and medical treatment improved. Compared with artillery, gas caused few casualties on the Western Front. Many victims were back in action within weeks.

The armies soon realised that gas was not the war-winning weapon they were looking for.

Display captions

Livens projector and gas bomb

The Livens projector fired poison gas bombs at German lines.

It was invented by Captain William Livens, who mistakenly believed his wife had died in a German submarine attack and wanted revenge.

Introduced in late 1916, Livens projectors could suddenly flood wide areas with concentrated poisonous clouds, catching many German troops by surprise.

Livens called each bomb a 'judgement' on the enemy.

Gas shells

Gas shells like these meant that gas no longer had to be released from cylinders, which relied upon wind direction.

Shells were coded to indicate contents. The British 'CG' shell and German 'C' shell contained phosgene, as could the Stokes gas bomb -shown in section here.

The German Blue Cross shell contained an irritant designed to cause sneezing and vomiting, forcing soldiers to remove their masks and inhale deadly gases.

Display captions

**German gas gong, gas rattle, strombos horn
The German gas gong and British gas rattle
sounded the alarm to alert troops of a gas attack.**

Gas alarms caused a flurry of activity as soldiers scrambled for their masks.

The British Strombos horn, like a ship's horn, warned of major gas attacks. It could be heard nine miles away.

By 1917 British and Empire troops were well-drilled in gas defence, and there were daily equipment checks.

Shrunken glove

This leather glove was shrunk by poison gas. Not only did gas do dreadful things to the lungs, skin and eyes of human beings but soldiers under gas attack also noticed other strange effects. Gas could eat into rifle mechanisms, turn buttons and badges black or green and stop watches.

Display caption

Summary caption

Gas caused horrific injuries.

Inhaling a large amount of chlorine made soldiers choke, turn blue and suffocate. Those poisoned by phosgene threw up litres of yellow liquid in a drowning spasm lasting around 48 hours. Mustard gas caused blisters on the skin that could burn down to the bone.

Despite these agonies, gas was not usually lethal, killing only three per cent of soldiers affected.

**Vermorel sprayer, Ayrton gas fan –
The Vermorel sprayer, used in peacetime for spraying crops, was meant to neutralise lingering chlorine gas.**

The Ayrton gas fan was devised by pioneering electrical engineer Hertha Ayrton to waft away toxic gases. Neither device was effective. One officer described the Ayrton fan as 'worse than useless'. It was better to light a fire, which heated and dispersed gas.

Hypo helmet

The Hypo helmet, officially the British Smoke Helmet, was invented by Captain Cluny Macpherson, a Newfoundland Regiment medical officer.

He found that a flannel hood soaked in sodium hyposulphite could protect the wearer for longer than a pad.

From June 1915 2.5 million Hypo helmets were issued to British and Empire troops. But they were

uncomfortable to wear and the eye-piece fogged and cracked easily.

Tube helmet

The Tube helmet was developed at the Royal Army Medical College in London.

It was impregnated with chemicals to counter phosgene gas. Phosgene was ten times more deadly than chlorine and almost undetectable except for a faint whiff of mouldy hay. It was first used against British troops in December 1915.

The tube helmet was effective, but difficult to see out from. One of its protective chemicals could also burn the skin.

Document ordering attack on Loos

This is an order for the first British gas attack at Loos.

Field Marshal Sir John French hoped that using gas as a weapon would make up for his lack of artillery in this major attack.

At 5.50 am on 25 September 1915, 5,900 cylinders of chlorine gas were released in the direction of the enemy lines. But 30 minutes later, the wind changed. The gas swept back over Allied troops, causing casualties and panic.

Small box respirator

The Small Box Respirator, developed by scientist Bertram Lambert, was standard British Army issue by 1917.

Its box filter contained charcoal granules that neutralised all lethal gases. Every soldier was individually fitted with his mask and then exposed to tear gas in a chamber for five minutes to make sure it worked.

It was the most effective of all the gas masks produced during the war.

Anti-gas goggles and mask

In May 1915, the Germans used a poison gas, chlorine, against Canadian troops.

The Black Veiling pad, worn with goggles, was issued days afterwards. The pad got its name from the gauze covering which was normally used to make women's funeral veils. On smelling chlorine, soldiers soaked the cotton pads in chemical 'hypo' solution, which neutralised the gas. But it gave only short-term protection.

Photo caption

Soldiers using a Vermorel sprayer to disperse gas

Photo caption

Gas and smoke seen in the distance during the British attack at Loos

Photo caption

Soldiers of the Scots Guards wearing a variety of gas masks, December 1915

Photo caption

An Australian Chaplain wearing a Box Respirator

Photo caption

Gas mask drill for horses of the Royal Field Artillery

Photo caption

British soldiers temporarily blinded by tear gas

06. World War

A European war meant a world war. From the very beginning, the overseas empires of the European powers were drawn into the conflict. As the war spread, so did the suffering.

Germany hoped to divert Britain's attention away from the Western Front. It struck at Britain's global empire. Britain struck back. There was fighting in Africa, in Asia and in the Middle East. In these far-flung campaigns, more soldiers and civilians became victims of disease than of shells and bullets.

The seas were also battlegrounds. Both sides tried to starve their enemies. They sank or seized ships carrying vital food and supplies.

Display captions

Winston Churchill figurine

The figurine in the showcase ahead of you depicts navy minister Winston Churchill as Britannia, the personification of British naval power.

The failure of Churchill's risky plan for the Royal Navy to knock Turkey out of the war led to troops landings at Gallipoli and his removal from the government.

The souvenir map of the campaign shown here was given away to readers of the Manchester Guardian.

Sign

German troops placed the sign in the showcase in front of you above one of their trenches in France to demoralise British soldiers.

The 'Interesting War News' is of the surrender of 'English' troops at Kut, Mesopotamia, in April 1916, after a siege lasting four months.

The surrender to the Turks of the sick, starving garrison, mostly Indian soldiers, was a humiliation for the British Empire.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Pig's head

This pig was rescued by British sailors when the German cruiser Dresden was sunk off Chile. One sailor wrote that it was 'a great pet. It is bathed every day, and on Sundays wears an iron cross round its neck'. It was

named Tirpitz after the head of Germany's navy. Tirpitz became something of a celebrity and was later auctioned to raise money for the British Red Cross. The pig's head and trotters were preserved after its death.

Russian Maxim machine gun

The Russian Maxim machine gun beyond the showcase in front of you was captured by the Germans. For Russia, 1915 was the year of the 'Great Retreat', with terrible losses of men and vital equipment. Russia's war industry was not able to replace valuable weapons like this. Converted to take German ammunition and used on the Western Front, this gun was later captured by British troops.

England must at least lose India

...if we are going to shed our blood, **England must at least lose India.**

Kaiser Wilhelm II, July 1914

From the very beginning of the war, Germany tried to distract and weaken its enemies.

In 1914 a handful of German warships prowled the oceans, sinking British shipping and disrupting the transport of troops and supplies. Only in December did the Royal Navy finally rid the seas of them.

From late 1914 Germany hoped to use its new ally, the Ottoman Empire (Turkey), to threaten British India and raise rebellion among fellow Muslims in the Allied empires.

Turkish leaders threw their army into a hopeless campaign in southern Russia, where thousands of their soldiers froze to death.

Germany's main target for 1915 was Russia. If it could force Russia from the war, Britain and France might also break. German forces won victory after victory. But Russia did not crack.

Display captions

Summary caption

Ottoman Turkey's leaders hoped that the support of Germany would restore their failing empire.

Although German military experts had described the Turkish Army as 'a military nonentity', Germany still hoped to use it to strike at Britain's links with India.

Turkey's empire was in a good geographical position to do this, but it did not have a proper railway system to transport troops.

Turkish uniform

This Turkish officer's uniform was worn by Second Lieutenant Abedine Houchemi of the 2nd Infantry Regiment, who fought at Gallipoli.

His uniform was made in Germany, like much Turkish equipment.

Turkey's military chief, Enver Pasha, feared that his army was ill-prepared for war. Although short of modern weapons and equipment, its best troops, recruited from the Anatolian countryside, proved tough fighters.

Rifles

When Turkey entered the war in October 1914, it had 700,000 rifles designed by the German Mauser company.

Turkey was unable to produce much of the equipment needed to fight a modern war, so it relied upon German weapons. During the war, Germany and Austria-Hungary would continue to supply Turkey with weapons and aircraft. They also sent small numbers of troops, particularly specialists such as machine gun and artillery units.

Turkish Army flag

This Turkish Army flag was captured during the battle for the Suez Canal in February 1915. Turkey attacked the Canal to try and cut Britain's vital sea link with India. British and Empire troops fought off the attack, and the Turks were pushed back across the Sinai Desert in Egypt.

Rawhide shoes

The Ottoman Empire stretched from Bulgaria to the borders of Iran, Russia and Arabia. Its soldiers fought in

mountain snows and in desert heat. These rawhide shoes were made for walking on soft sand.

Turkish troops often had to rely on their own initiative to find personal equipment for the climates and terrains in which they fought.

Arabic amulet

This Arabic amulet, inscribed with warlike phrases from the Koran, claims to protect its wearer from the 'oppression of the English'. In November 1914 Sultan Mehmed V of Turkey, who claimed leadership of the Islamic world, called upon Muslims to rise up against Britain and its allies. The Germans hoped this would have the effect of harming the British Empire, especially in Egypt and India.

Other alternatives

Are there not **other alternatives** to sending our armies to chew barbed wire in Flanders?

Winston Churchill, Navy minister, 29 December 1914

Forced to respond to any threats to its empire and trade, Britain also saw opportunities to win the war outside Europe.

In 1914 Britain began to seize Germany's Asian and African colonies. War in Africa saw thousands of Africans die of hunger and disease.

In 1915 British and Empire troops defeated a Turkish attack on the Suez Canal. In Mesopotamia (Iraq), Indian forces protecting oil supplies and the land route to India ended the year besieged by Turkish forces.

Early in 1915 Britain's leaders hoped a knockout blow against Turkey might even win the war itself.

A naval attack failed and British, Empire and French troops had to be landed at Gallipoli. They became locked in savage trench fighting.

By January 1916 the troops had been evacuated. Gallipoli had proved a disaster.

Display captions

Fez

This fez was worn by an Askari, an African soldier serving with German colonial forces in Cameroon.

Thousands of Africans fought for the colonial powers. A million more acted as porters and labourers. Three porters were needed to keep a single soldier supplied.

But, weakened by hunger and overwork and exposed to tropical diseases, one in five porters died.

Display captions

Summary caption

The failure of British-led attacks on Turkey in 1915 was made even worse by the suffering of the troops who fought in them.

British and Empire soldiers had to endure terrible conditions. Alternately baked and frozen by extreme weather, they lived with the constant threat of disease. And they were almost always thirsty. Although there was less artillery to threaten men's lives than on the Western Front, war in the Middle East had plenty of dangers of its own.

Flag

This flag was carried by the 12th Battalion Australian Imperial Force, whose 1,000 soldiers went ashore at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.

A British officer wrote of the battalion, 'The Australians were fine. ... They pulled in singing a song, "Australia will be there!" and I could see them scaling the cliffs'.

Within five days, over half the men of this battalion would be killed or wounded.

Uniform

This uniform was worn by a private of 1st Battalion Australian Imperial Force, part of the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC).

At Gallipoli in April 1915, they had a bloody introduction to modern warfare.

One soldier described the dead as 'long, sad rows of eternally silent figures, their drenched and blood stained khaki drying in the sun'.

Fly whisk and drinking filter **Thirst and flies tormented soldiers fighting in the Middle East.**

This fly whisk was carried by Sir Ian Hamilton, commander of the Allied land forces at Gallipoli, who could find, 'no escape...from the swarms of filthy flies'.

Foul water and insects spread diseases such as dysentery and malaria. But the Indian soldier who carried this drinking filter knew it would do little more than keep sand out of his water and tea.

Indian Army uniform **In campaigns outside Europe, Britain relied heavily upon the Indian Army, which with 1.5 million men was the world's largest volunteer force.**

This is the uniform of a sepoy (private) of 57th Wilde's Rifles, which fought on the Western Front before seeing service in Egypt and then East Africa.

The regiment was made up of Dogras, Pathans, Punjabi Muslims and Sikhs.

Army biscuit

Conditions at Gallipoli were terrible. Summer heat was followed by autumn storms, then freezing winter. With constant gunfire and exposed, rocky terrain, getting

cooked meals to soldiers in the trenches was difficult. So British and Empire troops existed on tinned beef, jam and hard, dry army biscuit. Some thought the tough biscuits made better war souvenirs than food.

Exceedingly dangerous

Blockade work is unspectacular, uninspiring, but **exceedingly dangerous.**

British Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair, 1916

The war at sea was a cruel war of blockade. Each side tried to starve the other out.

Britain's Royal Navy guarded the North Sea. It stopped any ships heading for German ports, seizing war materials and food.

From February 1915 Germany retaliated. German submarines fired without warning on ships bound for Britain, even if they came from countries not at war. The British blockade angered the neutral Americans. The German blockade enraged them.

Neither side wanted to risk losing their great fleets. Only once did British and German battleships clash in a massive sea battle, off Jutland, Denmark, in 1916. Within minutes 14 British and 11 German ships that had taken years to build were sunk. Nearly 9,000 sailors lost their lives. Both sides claimed victory. But Britain still commanded the seas.

Display captions

Jack Cornwall gun

At the Battle of Jutland in May 1916, a salvo of German shells struck HMS Chester.

The crew of this 5.5-inch gun were all killed save one, 16-year-old Jack Cornwell. Badly wounded, he stayed at his post awaiting orders. He died in three days later. In death, Cornwell, a delivery boy from Essex who had joined the Navy against his father's wishes, became a national hero.

He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

Camisole and lifebelt

On 7 May 1915 a German submarine torpedoed the British liner RMS Lusitania.

Passenger Margaret Gwyer was wearing this camisole when she was sucked into one of the sinking ship's funnels before being thrown clear when the engines exploded. Blackened by oil and smoke, Gwyer was rescued.

The lifebelt here was found after the sinking. The loss of Lusitania with 1,195 lives, including 128 Americans, caused international outrage.

Sword

Britain's naval blockade meant stopping ships and sending parties in small boats to inspect their cargo.

The officers who led the inspections were ordered to carry a sword. One officer recorded seeing a boarding-party fall into the water, 'Lieutenant Clarke was under the boat but managed to get hold of her rudder which had come loose. But he had an awful struggle to get at it. He had heavy clothes and was wearing a sword and revolver.'

When the carcass is ready to be cut up

'All these little Powers hate one another cordially, but **when the carcass is ready to be cut up** each wants as big and juicy a slice as it can get...'

Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, letter, 27 December 1914

The Allies and their enemies tried to coax leaders of neutral nations to join the war.

In May 1915 Italy, given a secret offer of Austro-Hungarian territory, joined the Allies. The Italians launched attack after attack along their border with Austria. They suffered enormous losses against determined Austro-Hungarian troops. Fighting in harsh mountainous terrain, soldiers on both sides had to endure bitter cold.

In September Bulgaria joined Austria-Hungary and Germany, hoping for land from its hated rival, Serbia. The following month, with its new allies, Bulgaria invaded and crushed Serbia.

British and French troops landed at Salonika, in neutral Greece, but they could not save Serbia. The Serbian Army, together with thousands of refugees, made a winter retreat through the Albanian mountains. Almost half died of disease, starvation or were killed in enemy attacks.

Display captions

Summary caption

The Italian Army commander, General Luigi Cadorna, dreamed of marching on the Austrian capital, Vienna.

But his men were doomed to fight bloody battles in harsh terrain, such as the rugged Isonzo valley, the stony Carso plateau and even on the peaks of mountains along the Austrian-Italian border.

Serbian troops faced equally terrible conditions. In 1915, with Serbia invaded by three enemies, they retreated across snowbound, gale-swept mountains into Albania. Those who survived were evacuated to Corfu.

Helmet

Italy was ill-prepared to fight a modern war. Guns and shells were too scarce and valuable to be used to cut barbed wire, so the Italian Army created special wire-cutting units. Soldiers in these 'Companies of Death' wore this type of helmet, part of a suit of thick body armour that was supposed to offer protection against bullets.

Italian uniform

This is the uniform of an Italian infantry private. Between May and the end of November 1915, nearly one in four Italian soldiers from its one-million-strong army was killed or wounded while fighting the Austro-Hungarians. One Italian general called it a 'war of madness'.

British souvenir handkerchief

In Britain, France and Russia, people welcomed Italy's entry into the war. This British souvenir handkerchief captures the mood of the time, showing British and Italian soldiers advancing together before the figure of 'Justice'. The picture was drawn by the best-known popular illustrator of the time, Fortunino Matania, an Italian artist living in London.

Uniform and Mauser rifle

The Serbian Army had fought off three Austro-Hungarian invasions in 1914. But by the following autumn, it was severely weakened by disease. Its best units had modern uniform and equipment, but not every Serbian infantryman was lucky enough to have an up-to-date, German-made Mauser rifle like this one.

Explosive bullet

The explosive bullet caused dreadful wounds and its use was illegal under international law. The Austro-Hungarian Army was accused of using such ammunition against Serbian troops. By 1916 the suffering of the Serbs was coming to world attention. During the war, Serbia lost one in six of its population to fighting, disease and famine, a higher proportion than any other nation.

Photo caption

Bulgarian troops on the attack in 1916

Saving France

They know that they are **saving France**, but also that they are going to die on the spot.

French military censor's report, July 1916

The widening of the war still did not bring the victory both sides wanted. By late 1915 they turned again to the Western Front as their best hope.

Germany struck first, with a ferocious attack on the French fortress city of Verdun.

German military leader Erich von Falkenhayn's aim was to force France out of the war. This would leave Britain without a foothold in mainland Europe.

In February 1916 the attack on Verdun opened with a devastating artillery bombardment. German troops advanced.

French General Philippe Pétain was ordered to save Verdun at all costs. The Battle of Verdun dragged on for ten months at a cost of 700,000 French and German lives.

To the French troops who fought there, Verdun was the ultimate in patriotic self-sacrifice, but also the last word in horror.

Display captions

French Poster

This French poster shows the Battle of Verdun.

The Germans attacked the fortress city, winning a series of victories in the spring of 1916.

For France's army and its people, the defence of Verdun became the greatest test of their resolve to win the war.

Stereoscope viewer

This stereoscope viewer shows photographs of the Verdun battlefield. Stereographs offered a three-dimensional viewing experience. They were one of the ways in which the public could see images of the war fronts, and were particularly popular in France.

Photo caption

A French colour slide of the 'Saviour of Verdun', General Philippe Pétain

07. Feeding the Front

In 1915 Britain faced falling army recruitment and shells shortages at the Front. To win the war, a transformation

was needed. A 'home front' was created to supply the fighting fronts' constant demands for men, weapons, equipment and food.

A new government stepped up the effort at home. It built a network of factories for weapons production and recruited an army of men and women to work in them. It passed laws which controlled people's lives in ways they had never expected. And no longer would the government ask men to volunteer for the army. From 1916, it would make them fight.

Display captions

**Postcard, white feather and 'Not at Home' disc
Hate mail was sent to many men who had not joined up.**

An anonymous 'scoutmistress' sent this sarcastic postcard to a 'Mr Brooks', a railway porter.

Some men received a white feather, symbolising cowardice, such as this one sent to pacifist Bernard Taylor.

A 'Not At Home' disc displayed in the window could shame neighbours with no relatives fighting.

Summary caption

In August 1915 over two million single men of military age were still not in uniform.

A hostile public, whipped up by the press, saw all of them as 'shirkers' and 'slackers'.

With Britain needing more troops, there was heated debate about how to solve the 'manpower crisis'. The recruitment campaign now put moral pressure on men to enlist.

Official recruiting poster

This official recruiting poster was the idea of Arthur Gunn, director of the London printing firm that produced it. Gunn felt guilty at not having volunteered for service himself. He saw the persuasive potential of a child's awkward question to a 'shirker' father once the war was over. Shortly after the poster's publication, Gunn himself enlisted. But the public soured at the use of shame to boost recruitment, undermining the impact of such posters.

Registration form

In March 1915 80,000 women filled out a registration form to declare their willingness to do war work and release more men to fight.

But there was no real system for employing them. Two months later, fewer than 2,000 of the volunteers had been taken on.

Some men also felt left out. A Mr Day from Hampshire circulated this leaflet demanding that 'perfectly fit' older men like him should be allowed to fight.

Letters

These letters show the political tug-of-war over manpower in summer 1915.

New Minister of Munitions David Lloyd George needed to keep skilled war workers. War minister Lord Kitchener needed them as soldiers. Critics of Prime Minister Herbert Asquith felt that his failure to bring in conscription showed a lack of drive. If Britain were to meet the needs of both Front and factory, stronger leadership was needed.

War service badges and war work certificates

War service badges and war work certificates were issued to show that men were engaged on vital war work. They helped employers shield their male workers from the attentions of recruiting officers, zealous patriots and tiresome accusations of cowardice. The badges were tightly regulated to stop any 'shirkers' from wearing them fraudulently.

Display captions

Summary caption

Most men who had not enlisted were not 'slackers'.

Many were already doing crucial work in Britain's rapidly expanding war industries. Skilled workers feared that their families might suffer on low army pay. Coal miners and railwaymen were discouraged from enlisting. Other men were medically unfit for military service. But as long as serving in the Army remained a matter of personal choice, the government would not get the numbers of soldiers it needed.

Film 'A Call to the Young'

The film 'A Call to the Young', excerpts of which are shown here, was made after the introduction of conscription. The origins of the film are not clear, but it reflects the crushing pressure on the more reluctant British men to do their bit.

Printed letter

Employers despaired at losing skilled workers to the Army. This printed letter was sent by a manager to his men at the Coventry Ordnance Works, a munitions factory. He implores them to ignore 'well-meaning but misguided people' and to stay at the Works. By early 1916 army recruiting officers had stripped Britain of nearly 30 per cent of its male workforce.

Leaflets

There was organised opposition to the growing calls for compulsory military service. The leaflets shown here were distributed by the pacifist Independent Labour Party and the No Conscription Fellowship, whose members believed that the war was wrong. Even some members of the government saw conscription as a grave threat to Britain's longstanding tradition of personal choice and freedom.

Why are they not at war?

When one sees young men idling...one thinks: '**Why are they not at war?**'

Arnold Bennett, British writer

By 1916 Britain needed more soldiers. But volunteer numbers had fallen. Compulsory military service, conscription, was made law.

Many argued that, in a war to defend freedom, men should freely choose whether to fight. But the demands of war had now become too great for a voluntary system. Conscription confirmed Britain's commitment to total war.

Were all men now conscripted?

Many men were not called up because they were needed for vital war work at home. Others were exempted because their families would suffer real hardship if they went to the Front or because they were medically unfit.

A small number of men with ethical or religious objections could also appeal against conscription. These 'conscientious objectors' became social outcasts.

Display captions

Summary caption

After months of heated debate, the voluntary system finally collapsed.

From January 1916 onwards 2.5 million men were conscripted into Britain's armed forces. Tribunals and medical boards exempted those who could prove they had families to support, were doing work of 'national importance' or were unfit for military service.

A number of 'conscientious objectors' refused to fight for moral reasons, and faced a barrage of public hostility.

Letter

This letter was sent by an employer to a conscientious objector looking for a job. The applicant was rejected for being 'a servant of Germany'. 'Conchies' were regarded with downright contempt by most British people. One army officer described them as 'England's cowardly and most useless people'. Their numbers were relatively few. Of 2.5 million men conscripted, less than one per cent raised moral or political objections.

Military Service Act

The first Military Service Act on 27 January 1916 made conscription law for single men aged between 18 and 41. Four months later married men were called up. Over the course of the war standards were gradually relaxed to capture more men, eventually up to the age of 50. Conscription was never enforced in Ireland. While New Zealand and Canada followed Britain's example, Australia and South Africa did not.

Brassards

The Derby Scheme was a last appeal for volunteers. In October 1915 Lord Derby, Director of Recruiting, called upon men aged between 18 and 41 to sign 'attestation' forms declaring that they would serve, but only when absolutely necessary. These 'Derby men' wore brassards to prove they were ready to fight when called upon - khaki for the Army, blue for the Royal Navy.

Appeal

In November 1915 Prime Minister Herbert Asquith issued this appeal. He was responding to the fury of married men who had attested under the Derby Scheme, only to find that thousands of single men still had not volunteered. Asquith hinted that conscription would be introduced if more men did not enlist. But by December 1915 fewer than half of the eligible 5 million men had registered. The door for conscription was now open.

Cartoon

This cartoon appeared in the rabidly patriotic paper 'John Bull'. It shows a conscientious objector lazily smoking at his fireside while his entire family is fighting or on war work. His dandyish clothes and cigarette holder identify him as a 'Knut'. These idle, fashion-obsessed young men had been the object of amused scorn in pre-war years.

Bernard Taylor

Bernard Taylor, a pacifist, refused to fight. Granted exemption, he worked instead as a non-combatant in France with the Quaker War Victims Relief Association. He wears their armband in this photograph. His friend, an 'absolutist' who objected to helping the war effort in any way, sent him the letter shown here from prison. 6,000 absolutists were imprisoned for their beliefs and often received brutal treatment.

Documents

These documents relate to William Harrison, one of 16,500 conscientious objectors who had to prove the

sincerity of their beliefs before tribunals. Harrison argued that, 'War inevitably means ... that the nations involved degenerate and become like brutes'. A former colleague testified that Harrison had long opposed 'all forms of militarism'. But the appeals were rejected and Harrison was later sentenced to hard labour by a court martial.

Irritating, unnecessary and useless restrictions

'The average citizen...has patiently submitted to **irritating, unnecessary and useless restrictions...**'
League of the Man in the Street leaflet, 1915

The government brought in new laws to help pay for and win the war.

The rate of income tax increased, as did the number of people paying it. Clocks were put forward to make the most of daylight hours during the working day. Personal freedoms were restricted in a way never imagined before.

How were freedoms restricted?

Beaches were closed off for fear of invasion. Railways and docks were taken over to move weapons and troops. Censorship of letters and newspapers became a fact of life. 'Enemy aliens', mainly Germans, were interned.

To curb drunkenness, pub opening hours were limited. People were fined or faced prison for breaking any one of hundreds of new regulations.

Most people accepted such restrictions on their freedom as a necessary sacrifice.

Display captions

Summary caption

These are just some of the thousands of war proclamations pasted up across Britain's cities and towns.

Most restrictions for 'securing the public safety' were brought in under the Defence of the Realm Act, introduced on 8 August 1914.

The measures relating to fireworks, pigeons and sketching seem trivial, but they reflect the fear that German spies might collect and send vital information.

Illustrated magazines

People in Britain bought illustrated magazines which offered vivid war reports. In them they learned about soldiers' lives and deaths, the progress of the fighting, acts of gallantry and unfamiliar new weapons.

'Bystander' magazine published special volumes containing the humorous drawings of Captain Bruce Bairnsfather, which gave a soldier's view of trench

warfare. The first two volumes sold nearly two million copies in 18 months.

Munitions, more munitions, always more munitions

‘...the problem set is a comparatively simple one, **munitions, more munitions, always more munitions.**’
Field Marshal Sir John French, March 1915

In 1915 a shortage of shells was blamed for a British defeat in France.

In the wake of public uproar, Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith formed a new coalition government of the three main political parties.

How did Britain solve the supply problem?

A Ministry of Munitions was created to increase supplies for the Front. It took over existing munitions factories and built a sprawling network of new ones. It recruited an army of workers to take the places of men away fighting. Many of them were women who left their pre-war jobs to become ‘munitionettes’.

All across Britain, vast quantities of shells and guns poured out of factories. Railways and ships pumped this essential equipment to the front line.

Without this lifeline between factory and Front, worker and soldier, there could be no victory.

Display captions

Summary caption

In the first five months of the war, munitions production had increased significantly, but not enough.

In May 1915 BEF commander Sir John French blamed Lord Kitchener's War Office for a shell shortage which he insisted had led to the failure of an attack at Aubers Ridge. The press went into a frenzy over the 'shell scandal'.

In the aftermath Prime Minister Herbert Asquith dissolved his Liberal government. He formed an all-party coalition to oversee Britain's 'full mobilisation and organisation' for war.

Recruitment posters

Government recruitment posters showed the value of munitions work and encouraged women to work alongside men in war industries.

Patriotism and good pay saw 563,000 women enter the factories in the year from June 1915.

At Woolwich Arsenal there were 195 women workers in June 1915. Two years later there were over 25,000.

Factories also took on refugees, volunteers from the Empire, children over 12 and men too old for conscription.

Figurine and cartoon

David Lloyd George proved a great success as the first Minister of Munitions.

Energetic, determined and innovative, but also self-promoting and cunning, his achievements are celebrated in this figurine and 'Punch' magazine cartoon.

In his year in office, shell deliveries rose nearly five-fold. In June 1916 Lloyd George would succeed Kitchener as war minister following Kitchener's death when the ship in which he was travelling struck a mine.

Summary caption

Asquith's new government created a Ministry of Munitions under David Lloyd George in May 1915.

The Ministry, rather than Kitchener's War Office, would now direct production of shells and guns. It built huge munitions factories and encouraged women to help fill the labour shortage. Thousands of small businesses, from jewellers to manufacturers of railway carriages and bicycles, were converted to 'controlled establishments'. They churned out guns, wagons, fuzes and shells.

Display caption

The Ministry of Munitions appointed a health committee to ensure all workers were looked after and therefore more productive.

More women in the workforce meant that factories had to provide more facilities. New, large factories had to build separate canteens and washrooms for men and women. Some even had crèches for the children of working mothers. 'Townships' sprang up around new factories. These were busy and social places, with housing, schools, shops, cinemas, and banks.

Union membership and 'Punch' cartoon

Four million workers held trade union membership in 1914.

The Trades Unions Congress pledged not to call strikes but, even after strike action was made illegal in 1915, workers in some factories still downed tools. Knowing their value to the war effort, they tried to secure higher wages. They also objected to 'dilution', the employment of unskilled workers for skilled work.

Many saw them as unpatriotic, as echoed in this 'Punch' cartoon.

Rule book and diary

Every munitions factory produced a rule book and enforced strict discipline.

A Women's Police Service, unheard of before the war, supervised female workers, as described by policewoman Gabrielle West in her diary.

Alcohol was seen as the greatest threat to productivity. Lloyd George declared that, 'we are fighting Germans, Austrians and Drink'. The British tradition of 'treating', buying rounds in the pub, was banned.

Leaflet, photograph and employer's manual

Employers encouraged workers to use their spare time profitably.

The Church Army Rest Huts promoted in the leaflet here provided chapels, reading rooms and free writing paper. The photograph of a factory's football team reflects the popularity of the women's game at the time.

Without such activities, the employer's manual *Health of the Munition Worker* warned, 'the public-houses and less desirable places of entertainment may benefit'.

Women's football team from a London munitions factory, captained by former actress Gracie Sinclair

Cards

Munitions factories were dangerous places. Major explosions happened in several of them.

These cards commemorate 73 workers killed in a blast at a factory in London's Silvertown factory on 19 January 1917. Chemicals in explosives also caused sometimes lethal blood disorders and liver damage, turning the skin yellow. Sufferers were known as 'canaries'.

Photo caption

Funeral of a Swansea 'munitionette' killed in an accident at work

Display caption

The arrival of women in heavy industry was a profound social change. Yet women still faced discrimination.

Men, who outnumbered women in the factories two to one, usually took home better wages. David Lloyd George thought pay equality 'a social revolution which...it is undesirable to attempt during war time.'

Relations between the sexes could be sour. According to a 1915 labour report, men saw women colleagues as 'interlopers' and 'unfair competitors'.

8-inch high explosive shell

This 8-inch high explosive shell was the first ever made by women in Britain, at the Cunard National Shell Factory in Liverpool.

Of the factory's workforce, 85 per cent were female. The majority of 'munitionettes' were working class and had previously been employed as maids or in the textiles industry. But at Cunard, most were middle class and had never worked in a factory before.

The Cunard factory would go on to make 400,000 more shells.

Uniform for munition worker

For the Ministry of Munitions, a uniform for female munition workers added to ‘smartness and neatness, and so to the general appearance of the factory. It also aids discipline’.

The sight of large numbers of women wearing practical trousers and overalls was something quite new.

Novel ‘Munition Mary’

The well-paid ‘munitionettes’ did not always have a good reputation.

A poem of the time contained the lines, ‘I spends the whole racket, on good times and clothes’.

The novel ‘Munition Mary’ was more generous towards them. The heroine unmask Mrs Webb, who runs the factory canteen, as a spy for Germany intent on sabotaging the factory and the reputation of women workers.

08. Total War

In 1916 British and Empire troops took the lead in a huge attack on the River Somme.

Britain had high hopes for this offensive. In France, it now fielded an army large enough to play a major part alongside its allies. Workers at home could finally supply the shells and guns required.

The first troops went over the top in the early morning of 1 July. By evening nearly 20,000 of them lay dead. Over the next five months, British and Empire soldiers fought repeated battles on the Somme. They gained little ground. But the scale and ferocity of their attacks astounded the German Army.

The big efforts must be ours

‘This next year the **big effort must be ours.**’

General Sir John Charteris, 1 January 1916

The Allies planned to defeat Germany and Austria-Hungary in a series of massive, coordinated offensives.

Britain and France would attack on the Somme. This rural region, largely untouched by war, was where their armies stood alongside each other. But Germany’s surprise attack at Verdun drastically reduced the number of French troops available to fight.

What was Britain’s part in the Allied plan?

Because of Verdun, Britain would now lead this ‘Big Push’. Thousands of fresh, keen troops from Britain’s volunteer army were ready for their first large-scale battle. British commander General Sir Douglas Haig hoped it would bring breakthrough and victory.

Huge quantities of munitions and supplies were shipped from Britain's home front. On 24 June, 1,500 British guns began a week-long bombardment to smash German defences before the infantry attacked.

Display captions

Photo caption

In June 1916 the Allied offensives began with an unexpected success. Russian forces, led by General Alexei Brusilov, shown in this photograph, smashed the Austro-Hungarian Army in Galicia, Eastern Europe. They advanced over 60 miles, taking 350,000 prisoners. Brusilov's success, celebrated in Allied newspapers, persuaded Romania to join the Allies.

General Alexei Brusilov

Cap and jacket

This cap and jacket were worn by General Sir Douglas Haig, who replaced Sir John French as commander of the British Expeditionary Force in December 1915.

Professional, tough and self-assured, Haig believed he was fighting for 'Christ and the freedom of mankind'. His first task was to plan the Somme offensive with French generals Joseph Joffre and Ferdinand Foch.

Note from Haig

This note from Haig to one of his staff asks for estimates of the number of troops likely to be at his disposal during the summer of 1916. Many of these men were the volunteers of 1914. But Haig was worried by their inexperience. Just four months before the offensive was

due to begin, he described the New Army as 'a collection of Divisions untrained for the field'.

British uniform

For most of Britain's volunteer soldiers, the Somme would be their first great battle.

This is the uniform of a private of the 20th Northumberland Fusiliers, a New Army battalion that landed in France in January 1916.

Many Kitchener volunteers were looking forward to action at last. Captain Bill Bland of the Manchester Pals described his men as, 'in good form ... eager and keen. I love 'em'.

French uniform

The French would attack in the south of the 14-mile Somme front, next to their British allies.

This is the uniform of a French infantry captain. Since 1914 the French had learnt costly lessons about fighting large battles.

Musée de l'Armée, Paris

First Field Dressing

Every soldier was given a First Field Dressing in case they were wounded. It was carried in a special jacket pocket.

A sophisticated network of aid posts, clearing stations and hospitals prepared to receive the casualties.

General Rawlinson estimated that the battle would cost 10,000 dead and wounded every day. Costly as this would be, it would be a small price to pay if the German Army could be dealt a crushing blow.

British military conference memorandum General Haig hoped for a breakthrough – a decisive victory.

But this British military conference memorandum shows that his plans did not take this for granted.

As an alternative, Haig looked to support the French at Verdun by ‘wearing down’ the Germans while allowing his raw troops to gain valuable battle experience.

Correspondence

The British artillery plan for the ‘Big Push’ shows the gunners’ tasks before ‘Z Day’, the day the infantry would attack.

These include counter-battery fire - destroying enemy guns.

The correspondence shows disagreement between Haig and his subordinate, Rawlinson. General Rawlinson wanted to shell only the German front line, but Haig pressed for a deeper bombardment. In the event this diluted the British guns’ impact.

British 9.2 howitzer

Heavy artillery such as this British 9.2-inch howitzer opened fire on 24 June 1916. For a week, the guns

pounded German lines with over 1.5 million shells. Confident that the guns would pulverise German defences and the men in them, Haig instructed General Rawlinson to prepare for 'a rapid advance'. On 30 June Haig wrote to his wife, 'I feel that everything possible ...to achieve success has been done'.

Photo caption

Soldiers of the Buffs and the Queen's Regiment in action on the Somme

Going into battle

I placed my soul and body in God's keeping, and I am **going into battle** with His name on my lips.

Second Lieutenant John Sherwin Engall, 30 June 1916

At 7.30 am on Saturday 1 July 1916, British troops lumbered from their trenches to advance across no man's land towards the German lines.

But the attack was a disaster.

In just a few hours, 19,240 of them were killed and 37,646 listed as wounded or missing.

The British failed on most sectors of their front. The French attack was a major success.

Why were the British losses so terrible?

Although the British bombardment was the biggest yet, the shelling was scattered over too wide an area. On most of the front, it did not destroy German guns, cut through dense barbed wire or smash well-protected dugouts. Many shells were 'duds' which did not explode.

The infantry paid the price.

Display captions

Wire cutters

Selected men carried wire cutters, which were intended as a last resort.

The artillery bombardment was meant to destroy the two belts of barbed wire that protected the German front line, each up to 1.5 metres high and 27 metres deep.

But in many places the wire was still intact and British soldiers were caught helpless.

Helmet

French soldier Private Berenger wore this helmet when he went into action by the side of his British allies. It was damaged by shrapnel.

The French, with their greater experience and more effective artillery, won a major victory on 1 July 1916.

Berenger's commander, Major Le Petit, advanced towards the German front line arms linked with the

commander of the 17th Liverpool Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Bryan Fairfax.

Photos

The first day of the Somme saw some successes, particularly where accurate French artillery fire had helped clear the way.

These rare photographs show soldiers of the British 55th Brigade sheltering from German fire after reaching their objective over a mile behind the German front line.

They had left their trenches in early morning mist and had reached their objective by 5pm in stifling afternoon heat.

Letter

This letter was written on 1 July 1916 by General Sir Walter Congreve VC, commander of XIII Corps. His soldiers took all of their objectives, with German wire 'splendidly cut everywhere', although 55th Brigade took heavy casualties. Congreve addresses the letter to his son, Major William Congreve, who was killed on the Somme on 20 July and posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest gallantry award.

German MG 08 machine gun

The German MG 08 machine gun fired up to 450 bullets per minute.

On 1 July this weapon caused heavy casualties as German machine-gunners emerged from their deep dugouts largely unscathed by the bombardment. Major

James Jack described, 'the murderous rattle of German machine guns, served without a break, notwithstanding our intense bombardment, which had been expected to silence them'.

Flag

Ernest Crosse was chaplain to the 8th and 9th Battalions of the Devonshire Regiment.

On 2 July he used this flag to conduct the burials of 163 of their men, mostly victims of machine gun fire.

The casualties of 1 July 1916 were the worst ever suffered by the British Army in a single day. One in five of the British soldiers who went over the top was killed.

Lee-Enfield rifles and Pattern 1907 bayonets

The attacking British infantry expected to drive the Germans from their trenches with their Lee-Enfield rifles and Pattern 1907 bayonets.

But many soldiers who advanced across no man's land found little chance against machine gun fire and artillery. Some soldiers were cut down even before they had crossed their own front line.

Photo caption

Men of 55th Brigade after taking their objective at around 6pm on 1 July

A costly apprenticeship

'The British...infantry... is very brave but undergoing a costly apprenticeship.'

French officer, 10 July 1916

The Battle of the Somme lasted five months. The Allies kept attacking, but the Germans fought for every inch of ground.

Soldiers from across the British Empire took part in the battle. For many of them it was their first experience of combat on the Western Front.

Why did the battle last so long?

Fighting in an alliance meant honouring agreements. Britain could not let down the French and Russians. And the fighting on the Somme did relieve the pressure on the French at Verdun.

General Haig was convinced that if he kept attacking he might win a clear victory or at least wear the Germans down.

British and Empire forces improved their planning, tactics and use of artillery as the fighting continued. But the battle sank into a muddy stalemate. It was finally called off in November.

Display captions

Yellow line sign

Yellow line sign Signs were immediately erected on captured ground by the Royal Engineers.

This Yellow Line sign marked an objective, a location beyond the French village of Beaumont Hamel. It had been one of the objectives on 1 July, but was not taken until the Battle of the Ancre, the final major attack on the Somme. 'All that is left is a few heaps of bricks', wrote one of the British attackers.

Trench signs

The late summer saw heavy fighting around the places on these trench signs, the village of Pozières and nearby Mouquet Farm, known to British and Empire soldiers as 'Mucky Farm'. In just six weeks of fighting, Australia suffered 7,000 dead, nearly as many as in eight months at Gallipoli. One Australian officer wrote to a friend, 'They are working the Australians for all they are worth just now'.

Display captions

Jacket

Second Lieutenant Harold Cope was wearing this jacket when he was badly wounded on 7 August 1916. It was cut away so he could receive treatment. In 1914, he might have died. But British Army medical services had learned to get the seriously wounded quickly from the battlefield. They were taken to Casualty Clearing Stations near the front line for life-saving operations.

Letters

Pressure was put on officers to keep attacking.

These letters relate to Brigadier General Frederick Carleton, who was sacked from his command. The typed letter gives the reasons for his dismissal. Carleton's letter to his wife conveys his shock and gives his side of the story.

Letters

Letter Close bonds were formed under the stress of battle.

In this letter Corporal Frank Greenwood of the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers praises his dead company commander,

Lieutenant Robert Smylie, and passes on his last words to his widow. Lieutenant Smylie, a headmaster in peacetime, had promised his three children 'some glorious fun' when the war was over.

Smylie's wallet, containing a picture of his wife and children, was damaged when he was killed.

Walking stick

The Somme was a vicious battle.

The German commander, General Fritz von Below, demanded that, 'the enemy should have to carve his way over heaps of corpses'. A British officer carried this walking stick with a spearhead at Delville Wood – a maze of blasted tree stumps. The 1st South African Brigade was nearly destroyed during desperate fighting in 'Devil's Wood', with over 2,500 men killed.

Letter

Letter For the ordinary soldier, the Somme could mean excitement and triumph as well as fear and discomfort. This letter from Private Daniel 'Jack' Sweeney of the 1st Lincolnshire Regiment describes a 'big fight' to his fiancée, Ivy Williams, who lived in Walthamstow, north-east London.

Photo caption

Australian soldiers bury a dead comrade, August 1916

Photo caption

The French 301st Infantry Regiment on the Somme, September 1916

Photo caption

Soldiers of the British West Indies Regiment, who worked to supply the Somme battle

Photo caption

Indian cavalymen of the 20th Deccan Horse, before going into action on 14 July 1916

Photo caption

New Zealanders during the battle for Fiers, 15 September 1916

Photo caption

Triumphant Canadians return from action at Courcellette, September 1916

Display captions

Summary caption

The Somme was mainly a battle of artillery, with observation the key to making full use of the guns.

Observers in aeroplanes and balloons mapped enemy positions and guided artillery fire on to targets. Until the autumn British and French aircraft ruled the skies above the Somme battlefield. This was a huge boost to the effectiveness of their artillery.

The Germans responded by introducing improved fighter planes, making artillery-spotting increasingly dangerous for Allied airmen.

Display captions

Summary caption

Many men wanted to bring home souvenirs to show off to their families.

Many of these trophies were scavenged from the battlefield. But in a major offensive like the Somme, there was an opportunity to take them directly from enemy soldiers.

Military units also laid claim to captured equipment. Guns seized from the enemy were a sign of success on the battlefield.

German drumsticks

These German drumsticks were captured by the 51st Brigade at Fricourt on the first day of the Battle of the

Somme. They were kept by the Brigade signals officer, Captain Eric Carus-Wilson.

The photograph of enemy equipment captured by the Brigade shows them on top of a helmet. The sign appears to indicate that the trophies belonged to '151st Brigade', but the first '1' is probably a coincidental splash of paint.

Madsen light machine gun

This Madsen light machine gun was captured on the Somme by 16th Rifle Brigade. Captured machine guns were often painted with details of the unit that had seized them and sent home as tokens of their triumph in battle.

German Gewehr 98 rifle

Canadian Captain Ralph Webb described in a letter how he captured this German Gewehr 98 rifle.

'I went over the top at Beaucourt Wood, lost my gun and a German officer nearby was about to give me a bullet. I managed to get him in a desperate hand-to-hand struggle, left him dead, and brought back his rifle as a souvenir'.

German helmets and trench knives

These German helmets and trench knives were taken as trophies by British soldiers on the Somme.

Ordinary infantrymen could only keep what they could easily carry in their kit. They often sold their trophies to

officers who could send packages home, or to soldiers working behind the front line who had access to storage.

The German *Pickelhaube* spiked helmet was the most sought-after trophy and could fetch high prices.

Photo caption

51st Brigade's haul of German machine guns, rifles and helmets

Photo caption

An Australian soldier shows off his trophy German helmet to a French stretcher bearer

Photo caption

Soldiers of 10th Sherwood Foresters with trophies captured on 1 July 1916

Photo caption

Men of the 8th North Staffordshire Regiment with captured German machine guns on the Somme

Photo caption

A goat mascot gets to wear a captured German helmet

The decision bought nearer

'A year of indecisive fighting...;on the whole victory inclining to us, and **the decision bought nearer.**'

General Sir Henry Wilson, 31 December 1916

The Battle of the Somme resulted in over 600,000 Allied and an estimated 500,000 German casualties.

War was now being waged on an industrial scale, with unprecedented numbers of men and guns. Yet the victory hoped for by Britain and its allies still did not happen.

Had the battle achieved anything?

The British learned bloody but vital lessons in how to fight big land battles. British generals were impressed with the fighting qualities of their civilian army. They believed the soldiers would do better next time.

For the Germans, the losses on the Somme came as a huge shock. Above all, their soldiers now feared the Allies' ever-growing artillery power. They did not want to face such a battle again.

Display captions

Map

This map of just part of the Somme battlefield was marked after the war with the number of temporary grave markers found in each grid square.

Each recorded the burial of at least one man. Many bodies were obliterated or buried by high explosive and have never been found.

The official British casualty figure was 419,654 dead, wounded and missing. The French suffered 202,567, the Germans probably over 500,000.

Orpen painting *A grave and a mine crater at La Boisselle*

In late summer 1917 official war artist William Orpen painted a series of haunting pictures of the now abandoned Somme battlefield, including this painting, *A grave and a mine crater at La Boisselle*.

Orpen was a society portrait artist who had the personal support of Field Marshal Haig. This gave him privileged access to the front.

Oh God, they're dead!

'Oh God, they're dead!'

Woman in cinema audience, August 1916

The Somme gripped the British public. They knew that history was being made.

An official documentary film, *The Battle of the Somme*, was shown in cinemas from August 1916. An estimated 20 million people saw it within months of its release. Many hoped to glimpse a son, brother, father or friend.

The government also began to employ artists to record the war. The Somme provided their first subject.

Why did the government sponsor film-making and art?

The government and the military wanted to motivate the home front. They hoped people would see how important it was to support the soldiers who were fighting and dying for their freedom.

Films and war art were also shown in America and other neutral countries to create a positive image of Britain's war effort.

Display captions

The Battle of the Somme

***The Battle of the Somme* film was the first feature length documentary to record soldiers in action.**

It was intended to show that the 'Big Push' had been a success and that British soldiers were well supplied and cared for. The full 74 minutes are shown here with its original musical accompaniment.

By October 1916, the film had been booked by more than 2,000 British cinemas. It was also shown in 18 countries.

Booklets

Official war artist Muirhead Bone recorded the Somme battle in charcoal drawings. These were later exhibited and published in a series of booklets.

The authenticity of Bone's drawings made them a great success.

His most acclaimed work gave the public a glimpse of the 'tank'. This revolutionary weapon was used for the first time on the Somme.

09. At All Costs

As 1916 drew to a close, there was still no sign of victory. New leaders urged their weary citizens to work even harder. Total war on the battlefield meant total war on the home front.

Nobody in Britain could escape the impact of war. Women kept the country going, filling jobs usually done by their fathers, brothers and sons. Even children played their part in the war effort.

Britain itself was now coming under attack. German aircraft bombed people in their homes. German submarines attacked ships bringing food and supplies. There was armed rebellion in Dublin. But America's entry into the war offered new hope for Britain and its allies.

The man the nation wants

...the **man the nation wants**... a man who can organise the country for victory.

The *Daily Mirror* on Lloyd George, 4 December 1916

In 1916 both Germany and Britain turned to new leaders to break the deadlock. These men were determined to win at any cost.

Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, heroes of the fighting on the Eastern Front became Germany's military leaders.

What happened in Britain?

David Lloyd George ousted Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, who was criticised for lacking the dynamism to lead the country to a decisive victory.

Lloyd George created a small, all-party war cabinet to make major decisions. He set up new ministries to control the war effort and brought in successful businessmen to run them.

This new system of government meant a new determination to defeat Germany once and for all.

Display captions

Summary caption

Hindenburg and Ludendorff changed the way Germany fought. In March 1917 German troops on the Western Front withdrew to new, stronger defences - the 'Hindenburg Line'.

Germany would now concentrate its attack at sea, using submarines to spare its army heavy losses such as those on the Somme. At home, the 'Hindenburg Programme' conscripted workers to make factories keep pace with Allied production of weapons and munitions. Germany, now almost a military dictatorship, was pushed to breaking point.

Photo of Ludendorff

General Erich Ludendorff, shown in this photograph, was, in principle, Hindenburg's deputy. In practice he became the most powerful man in Germany.

A cold, ambitious career army officer, Ludendorff was described by one fellow officer as 'the evil genius of the German Army'.

But, with Germany struggling at Verdun and on the Somme, another commander wrote that, 'The only man that could help us was Ludendorff'.

Hindenburg posters

Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg became the symbol of Germany's fight for final victory.

Nearly 70 years old when he became Germany's military leader, he looms from the posters here, which advertise

war loans and a film. In the first poster, loan subscribers are assured that their contributions would be 'the best birthday gift' Hindenburg could have. The second asserts that, 'The times are hard but victory is certain'.

**Hindenburg matchbox covers and wooden figure
Hindenburg, depicted on these match box covers,
attracted almost god-like devotion in Germany.**

Towns built statues of him. Parents named their sons after him. The Kaiser, depressed, ill and reduced to the role of figurehead, grew jealous of Hindenburg's popularity.

The wounded British soldier who made this wooden figure was also unimpressed. He portrayed Hindenburg as an old man suffering from gout.

Photo caption

General Erich Ludendorff

Photo caption

Hindenburg, the Kaiser and Ludendorff study maps

Display captions

Summary caption

David Lloyd George became Prime Minister on 7 December 1916.

Unlike Germany's new leaders, his reputation had soared not on the battlefield, but on the home front as Minister of Munitions. He would now lead Britain's all-out war effort.

Lloyd George was deeply critical of the loss of life on the Somme, but he shared his generals' determination to crush Germany. There now was no going back.

Wooden figure

This wooden figure shows David Lloyd George walking the political tightrope.

The toby jug encourages Britain's people to give yet more. A shrewd political operator, Lloyd George engineered Asquith's downfall and his own appointment as prime minister.

He secured support from Conservative and Labour politicians, newspapers and fellow Liberals who had grown frustrated with Asquith's uninspiring leadership.

Daily Mirror front page

The 'Daily Mirror' was one of the popular newspapers which campaigned to make David Lloyd George Prime Minister.

He was not an obvious choice for its support. Before the war, Lloyd George had been a radical Liberal politician hated by conservative papers such as the 'Mirror' and their middle-class readers.

But the need for a strong war leader made him a popular choice.

Photo of Imperial War Cabinet

Lloyd George set up an Imperial War Cabinet, shown in this photograph, to co-ordinate further support and resources from the Empire.

Lloyd George inspired and dominated a streamlined war cabinet of seven senior ministers. He also brought 'men of push and go' - experts and businessmen - into government.

Poster

Two weeks after becoming Prime Minister, Lloyd George made a personal plea, publicised on the poster shown here, for Australian men to join up.

He needed to galvanise not only the British war effort, but that of the Empire as well.

Photo caption

Members of the Imperial War Cabinet in the garden of No. 10 Downing Street

Photo of Falkenhayn

General Erich von Falkenhayn, wearing goggles in this photograph, promised to knock out Russia in 1915 and France in 1916. He did neither. German General Wilhelm Groener wrote, 'Falkenhayn seems physically worn out... the Verdun disaster has made him an old man'. Sacked from command of the German Army, Falkenhayn led German troops to victory over Romania in December 1916.

Asquith photo

As Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, portrayed in this photograph, had quietly overseen the build-up of Britain's army and its home front. Although agricultural minister Lord Selborne noted that Asquith 'cared with his whole soul for England's victory', he was widely seen as indecisive. In September 1916 the death on the Somme of his eldest son Raymond left Asquith a broken man.

The whole nation's war

This War it was not a soldier's or civilian's war, but **the whole nation's war.**

Edwin Montagu, British Minister of Munitions

By 1917 the British people were suffering the harsh realities of war, but remained determined to win.

As more men were called away to the Front, Women, even children, took their place in the workforce. Before the war many women were employed in textile factories or as maids or cooks.

Now they worked in war industries, on farms and in offices. Some served in the new uniformed women's military services. This was revolutionary.

How else did people help the fight?

People gave money to aid the war effort. They donated to war charities and raised funds for weapons.

But by 1917 the strain of war was beginning to tell. A steep rise in the cost of living, long working hours and often tough workplace conditions led to a wave of strikes.

Display captions

Poster

The poster to your right offers young women war work at the new Ministry of Food.

Many female office workers relished the opportunities provided by earning their own money.

The London 'Evening Standard' reported that, 'The majority of girl clerks...have become accustomed to a life of useful work'. Many women did not look forward to giving up their jobs when the men returned from war.

Malins and Sellers letters

These letters were exchanged between Lieutenant Frederic Sellers and his girlfriend, Grace Malin.

Sellers had been invalided home with a wound to the hand. Many soldiers craved a 'Blighty wound' such as his, which was neither life-threatening nor disfiguring but meant a return to Britain.

When they were fit again, men such as Lieutenant Sellers were sent back to the Front.

Photo caption

Convalescent soldiers in hospital blues at the Palace Theatre, London

Brighton pavilion book

This booklet, in English, Gurmukhi and Urdu, shows the Royal Pavilion in Brighton being used as a hospital for wounded Indian soldiers.

It was hoped they would feel at home amongst the Pavilion's oriental architecture.

The hospital strictly observed the differing religious requirements of the 4,300 Hindu, Muslim and Sikh troops treated there. Failure to observe those requirements might have harmed Indian support for the war.

Wooden toy figures

These wooden toy figures were made by disabled ex-soldiers employed in Lord Roberts Memorial Workshops.

One fundraiser for the workshops in Eastbourne wrote in a local newspaper that their purpose was to give, 'the broken soldier the opportunity to learn and work at a trade suitable to his disability...make him self-supporting and free from the stigma of charity'.

Diary

This diary was written by Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse Betty Ruthven Smith, who worked at war hospitals in Bath and Windlesham, Surrey.

The authorities recognised the importance of female nurses in raising the spirits of male patients, particularly Empire troops thousands of miles from home.

Summary caption

By 1917 the number of visibly wounded soldiers in Britain meant that nobody could ignore the human cost of the war.

Disability, once largely confined to the poor and undernourished, now affected thousands of otherwise healthy young men. Many had lost limbs or were horribly disfigured.

Wounded soldiers were treated as heroes. But their sheer number put a huge strain on medical services.

Crutches

These crutches were used by Private Frederick Mann, whose right leg was amputated after he was wounded on 25 September 1917. Over a million British and Empire troops were evacuated from the Western Front to Britain for medical treatment. 240,000 of them suffered partial or total amputation of an arm or leg.

VAD uniform and poster

This is a women's Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) uniform. The VAD was the largest of the wartime organisations which provided nurses and orderlies at home and on the fighting fronts. Many of the VAD's 70,000 volunteers were young middle- and upper-class women, although some were men. They encountered a

scale and intensity of pain and suffering for which their comfortable upbringings could not have prepared them.

Display captions

Hospital blues & photo

Wounded soldiers in Britain's hospitals and convalescent homes had to wear 'hospital blues'. These showed local people that any man wearing them had had been wounded serving his country. The example here is an approved War Office 'sealed pattern' which manufacturers had to copy. Civilians often arranged entertainment for wounded servicemen as a token of appreciation.

Blue overall

This blue overall, which protected clothing from ink stains, was worn by female typists working at the War Office.

Women had worked in office jobs before the war, but, with so many male office workers enlisting in the Army, their numbers more than tripled.

Uniform, hat and bag

The sight of so many women wearing practical trousers and overalls was quite new.

This is the uniform, with gaiters, of a female van driver for the Midland Railway. The hat and bag next to it were part of the uniform for the first women tram conductors in Britain. They were employed by the Glasgow Tram Company.

Unlike office workers, many of the women on the railways, trams and buses were working class.

Khaki hat and overall

The pale khaki hat and overall with the badge on the left lapel was worn by members of the Women's Land Army (WLA).

The 113,000 women who joined the WLA became farm labourers. The work was exhausting, dirty and badly paid.

WLA organisers cautioned Land Girls that 'you should take care to behave like an English girl'. But many farming communities suspected women workers of loose morals.

Wrens hat and photo

This Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) blue and white hat was part of the uniform worn by 'Wrens'.

The WRNS was formed in November 1917. In April 1918 a Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) was also established.

Over 100,000 women joined Britain's armed forces during the war. Most who enlisted in the WRNS and WRAF were middle class, while those who joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps tended to be working class.

Khaki hat, khaki coat, skirt

The khaki hat with the 'WAAC' badge, khaki coat and skirt was worn by the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, established in March 1917.

The British Army's very first women soldiers, the WAACs took on duties such as bakers, cooks, clerks and drivers, releasing men to fight.

Also shown here are an identity tag and bracelet worn by Rosa Cooke, a WAAC driver whose soldier husband had been killed in 1916.

Photo caption

'Wrens' undergo rifle instruction, Crystal Palace, London

Display captions

Summary caption

Just as adults across Britain were mobilised to work for and defend their country, so too were children.

War invaded the classroom, even playtime. Children, many of them younger than the school leaving age of 12 worked in factories and on farms.

In August 1917 Education Minister HAL Fisher expressed concern that 600,000 children had been put 'prematurely' to work. With so many fathers away fighting, often on low army pay, a child's earnings could provide much needed income.

Certificate and photo

The London schoolchildren in the photograph above are queuing to donate their pocket money or

earnings to a war savings association which collected for charity.

Among the causes for which these children had already raised funds were St Dunstan's Hostel for blinded ex-servicemen and the Blue Cross for sick and injured animals.

Such generosity was rewarded with certificates such as those shown here.

Soldier doll

This British soldier-doll, the 'Unconscious Doll Exerciser', was invented by a bodybuilder.

By manipulating its sprung limbs, children were meant to build up their strength.

'The Times' reported an officer saying, 'this toy had the advantage of exercising the muscles of children in a very beneficial way'. He added that fighting in nursery schools was to be encouraged, 'If they did not learn to fight then, they never would'.

Sea Scout's jumper

The boy who wore this Sea Scout's jumper was awarded a badge, seen here just below the neck, for coastwatching.

Coastwatchers had to keep a sharp lookout for German spies and saboteurs landing by sea, and even a possible invasion.

The Scout movement's handbook instructed all Scouts, 'Be prepared ... to die for your country if need be'.

Children's books

Even Britain's very youngest citizens were left in no doubt as to the momentous and historic events they were living through, as these children's books show.

For many children the war was an exciting and colourful event, and publishers had a ready audience for both fact and fiction.

Photo caption

Pupils at a school in Willesden, London, contribute to war savings

Photo caption

Girl Guides making cotton swabs for treating the wounded.

Photo caption

A Boy Scout sounding the 'all clear' after an air raid

Display captions

Summary caption

By 1917 Britain's war spending had quadrupled in two years to nearly 70 per cent of its economic output. Every shell and bullet cost money.

Every one of 5 million soldiers had to be equipped, fed, and transported. Every soldier, sailor and war worker had to be paid.

The government called upon the goodwill of its people to lend money. But it also had to impose tax increases and borrow heavily from other countries, mainly from the United States.

Punch magazine cartoon

This 'Punch' magazine cartoon was published during a wave of strikes in 1917.

Although the government at first feared that anti-war feeling might be the cause, the real reasons for discontent were steep rises in the cost of living, long hours and tough working conditions.

Rather than crush the strikes, the government calmed the situation by granting 'war bonuses' to male workers in war industries.

Photo caption

A chalked message in a shipyard on the River Clyde, Scotland

War loan posters

The war loan posters here, from Britain and Australia, encouraged people to invest in victory by lending their money to their governments.

Lenders were promised that they would get their money back, with generous interest, when Germany was defeated.

But in 1917 it was by no means certain that the Allies would be victorious or that, with national debts mounting, people would be repaid for their support.

War saving certificates, leaflet and stamps **The National War Savings Committee was established in 1916.**

It made lending to the government more affordable by offering war savings certificates for small sums of money. Now the less well-off could 'buy Victory and Peace', as the leaflet explains. Those children of wealthier parents who bought sixpenny war savings stamps were given highly collectable stamps such as those shown here.

Diary

Ethel Bilbrough, from Chislehurst, Kent, wrote in her diary about taxation and the strain upon household budgets. During the war the basic tax rate rose from 6 to 30 per cent. The number of people who paid tax tripled to 3.5 million. In this May 1915 diary entry, Bilbrough records that the war was costing the country £3 million every day. Two years later it was costing well over double that amount.

Tank-shaped moneyboxes

New fighting machines such as the tank inspired the public, and these tank-shaped money boxes were designed to capitalise on that enthusiasm and encourage people to save.

Real tanks were also displayed around the country selling bonds to raise money. They gave people the chance to see the new wonder-weapons their savings were paying for. One 'Tank Week' in Glasgow raised the amazing sum of £14 million.

In a panic

It is rubbish to say that London isn't **in a panic**.

Lady Lilah Morrison-Bell, 3 October 1917

The war unleashed a new terror on the people of Britain. For the first time they became targets of air raids.

The home front was vital to Britain's war effort. So Germany sought to bring fear, death and destruction to British cities and towns using first airships, known as Zeppelins, and then aeroplanes.

How did people react?

Britons were horrified as men, women and children became victims of German 'frightfulness' from the air.

People were angry that there was no proper warning system or shelters and not enough searchlights, aircraft or guns to combat the German raiders.

Yet the raids only increased British people's determination to support the war effort.

Display captions

Summary caption

In January 1915 two German airships, or Zeppelins, raided England's east coast. It was the start of an aerial terror bombing campaign which marked a new chapter in the history of warfare.

From 1917 aeroplanes with heavier bomb loads intensified the attacks. By the end of the war, air raids had killed 1,414 men, women and children in Britain.

But Germany's aircraft were too few in number and not powerful enough to bomb Britain into submission.

Observation car

Above you is an observation car from a Zeppelin.

The car was winched down below cloud level. It contained an observer with a telephone who helped navigate the airship and aim the bombs.

This car was dumped by a Zeppelin to gain height as fighter planes pursued it over Colchester, Essex, in September 1916.

The car was the only place on these highly inflammable airships where crew members could smoke.

Posters

When first put up on 9 February 1915, the 'Public Warning' poster here rapidly drew large crowds.

For many people air raids meant their first experience of seeing an aircraft. Although the chances of being killed or injured were slim, the attacks caused panic. The 'Daily Mail' poster offered insurance for 'regular readers' against death, injury or damage to property. The Belgian artist Louis Raemaekers specialised in scenes of German attacks against civilian populations.

Charred map

This charred map of London was recovered from the wreckage of Zeppelin L31, shot down over Potters Bar, Hertfordshire, on 1 October 1916.

As the airship fell in flames, 'roaring like a furnace', the crew were seen, 'leaping vainly for their lives, and in the glare presented a hideous sight as they fell and were broken horribly upon the meadows while the watching crowds, exultant, roared out the National Anthem'.

Bombs

The large high explosive bomb above you was dropped by a Zeppelin airship over north-east England in 1918.

The two smaller incendiary bombs in the showcase were intended to set buildings ablaze. 'Great booming sounds shake the city... bombs - falling - killing - burning', wrote an American journalist who witnessed a raid on London.

Display captions

Summary caption

Air raids were such a novelty that sightseers flocked to see the devastation they wreaked and the remains of any downed German aircraft. But while British planes began to shoot down Zeppelins in 1916, the faster German Gotha bombers that superseded them seemed unstoppable. The first raid by Gothas on London in June 1917 caused the heaviest casualties, 162 dead and 432 injured. The Gothas created such fear that 300,000 people sheltered in the London Underground nightly.

Bullets

These incendiary bullets were invented by New Zealander John Pomeroy. When they struck an airship, they ignited the hydrogen gas that kept it airborne. First used in action in September 1916, Pomeroy bullets helped swing the advantage in the skies over Britain from the German attackers to the British defenders.

Napkin and photo

This napkin commemorates the first shooting down of a German airship by a British plane.

The photograph is of the 21-year-old pilot, Lieutenant William Leefe Robinson, who destroyed SL11 over Cuffley, Hertfordshire, on 3 September 1916.

He became the idol of the public and press, 'Lieut. Robinson, with his handsome features, boyish laugh, modest courage, and infallible skill approximates to the ideal hero of the air'.

Badge and cufflinks

People wanted to own a piece of history.

The badge and souvenir cufflinks here were made from pieces of airship SL 11 and sold to raise money for the Red Cross.

Lieutenant Leefe Robinson was astounded at the jubilation over his feat, 'and the cause of it all – little me sitting in my little aeroplane above 13,000 feet of darkness!! - It's wonderful!'

He was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Letter and debris

This letter was written by Patrick Blundstone, a schoolboy who witnessed airship SL11 crashing to earth near the house in Cuffley where he was staying.

Writing excitedly to his father in London hours after the incident, Patrick was one of those who picked up souvenir pieces of debris from the airship, such as those shown here.

Display captions

Ammunition box and binoculars

The ammunition box and binoculars and other airship fragments displayed here came from Zeppelin L31.

The third airship to fall victim to British fighters, it was shot down by Second Lieutenant Wulfstan Tempest. The crew of the airship were all killed, including the

commander, Heinrich Mathy. Realising airships were now vulnerable, Mathy wrote before his death, 'It is only a question of time before we join the rest'.

Binoculars lent by Mr JC Hook

Propeller, leaflets, documents and letter
Lieutenant Tony Arkell, aged 19, kept this propeller from a Gotha bomber.

He was the pilot of the Bristol Fighter aircraft 'Devil in the Dusk' which shot the raider down over London, on 20 May 1918.

Arkell described the action in a letter to his father. He also kept these newspaper articles celebrating his success and his official pass to view the wreckage. He and his observer-gunner were awarded medals.

Photo caption

Lieutenant Arkell and his observer-gunner view the Gotha wreckage

Photo caption

Second Lieutenant Wulfstan Tempest

Ireland's battle is now

The time for **Ireland's battle is now**, the place for Ireland's battle is here.

James Connolly, Irish republican leader, January 1916

Over Easter 1916 a violent uprising erupted in Dublin.

Divisions over British rule in Ireland had been largely set aside since 1914. Most Irish people supported the war. Men from across the country, both Protestant and Catholic, joined the British Army.

Why did the 'Easter Rising' break out?

Irish republican rebels believed an uprising would help gain Ireland independence. Germany tried to send them guns and ammunition. It hoped rebellion in Ireland would divert British troops from the Western Front.

On Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, shots rang out on the streets of Dublin. Fierce street fighting followed. But by the end of the week, the rebels were defeated by the Army.

The brutal executions of the rebel leaders would fan the flames of Irish nationalism.

Display captions

Shotgun

This sporting shotgun was used by Irish republican rebels in 1916. Their insurrection did not go ahead as planned. They resorted to weapons like this because the Royal Navy had intercepted the modern rifles and machine guns which the Germans had shipped to arm them. Many republicans opposed or were reluctant to engage in armed revolt. The Easter Rising was confined to Dublin, with around 1,000 rebels taking part.

Martial law proclamation

The proclamation here confirmed that martial law – rule by the Army - was to continue in Ireland. It had first been imposed on 26 April 1916. After the Easter Rising 1,800 men and women were interned in England after being arrested as suspected republicans. While thousands of Irish soldiers continued to fight and die for the Allied cause, the harsh British response to the rebellion increased sympathy in Ireland for the republican cause.

Photo and note

This photograph show British soldiers in Dublin.

Caught unprepared, they had to recapture rebel-held territory, street by street, house by house. The note was scribbled by republican leader Patrick (or Pádraig) Pearse from his headquarters in the General Post Office. In it, he offers safe passage to a wounded British prisoner needing treatment. He had declared an independent Irish republic just hours previously.

Documents

These documents relate to the surrender of the Irish rebels. The first, from the commander of British forces in Dublin, instructs rebel leader Patrick Pearse how to give himself up. The second is a surrender signed by Pearse. It orders the rebel fighters to give up, 'to prevent the further slaughter of Dublin citizens, and in the hope of saving the lives of our followers now surrounded and hopelessly outnumbered'.

Field service book & letters

This field service pocket book, struck by a bullet, probably saved the life of Captain Arthur Dickson. The bullet is still embedded in the cover. Dickson's Sherwood Foresters battalion suffered 183 casualties during bitter fighting against Irish rebels on Dublin's Mount Street. In a letter to his girlfriend, Jessy, he reveals his brush with death. An estimated 130 British soldiers and police, 60 rebels and 300 civilians were killed or wounded in the Easter Rising.

Memorial postcards and secret report

The leaders of the failed uprising against British rule were tried by court martial. Fifteen of them were shot. The memorial postcards here commemorate two of the executed men. James Connolly, wounded in the chest and ankle, faced the firing squad while tied to a chair. An extract from a secret report sent to King George V sets out the case against Patrick Pearse, 'shot 3 May'

Photo caption

British troops behind a barricade in Dublin

Playing her last card

'Everyone is excited about the submarine question...

Germany is **playing her last card.**'

Evelyn, Princess Blücher, February 1917

In 1917 Germany planned to starve Britain out of the war rather than face another battle like the Somme with its huge casualties.

Britain, an island nation, relied on imports from all over the world to supply the war effort and feed its people. Germany ordered its submarines to sink without warning ships heading to and from British ports.

Germany's leaders were taking a big risk. Neutral America had already warned Germany against waging unrestricted submarine warfare, and American ships were now in the firing line.

Did the German plan work?

Submarine attacks on shipping destroyed millions of tons of goods. By May 1917, Britain was facing defeat. But it found ways to counter the threat, including a ship convoy system.

Britain survived and, fatefully, American anger had been aroused.

Display captions

Summary caption

Between February and April 1917 German U-boats were at their most deadly.

Germany not only had many more submarines than during their 1915 campaign. They also carried more torpedoes.

Ship after ship, Allied and neutral, was sunk. The success of this underwater campaign relied on surprise

and terror. Lurking beneath the waves, U-boats could sink a ship without warning.

Lack of space on board meant they could not pick up survivors from stricken vessels.

Lithograph of U-boat in London

'The Day Will Come! U-Boats in London!' boasts this German lithograph of a U-boat on the River Thames. It was found in an abandoned German dugout on the Western Front in 1918. The 'day' in question was meant to have occurred by in August 1917. By then, German naval leaders had predicted, five months of submarine attacks on merchant shipping would have brought Britain to its knees through hunger and economic chaos.

U boat posters

The early success of the 1917 U-boat campaign was a real morale boost for Germans. These posters promoted the films *U-Boote Heraus!* ('U-Boats Out!') and *Der Magische Gürtel* ('The Magic Belt'), featuring the most successful submarine of all, U-35, which in 25 missions sank 224 ships.

Sea mine

This sea mine was laid by a German submarine - a U-boat - in the Thames Estuary. It was designed to float just below the surface of the water and to detonate when a ship struck one of its horns. 235,000 sea mines were laid by both sides. They turned large areas of sea into a no man's land for warships and merchant vessels alike. This mine recovered by a British minesweeper in July 1917.

Display captions

Summary caption

German U-boats sank 2 million tons of merchant shipping between February and April 1917. A desperate British Admiralty changed its strategy. Ships would now travel together in convoys. Groups of 20 to 54 merchant ships would be protected by warships as they neared port. A convoy was just as hard to locate in the middle of a vast sea as a single ship. This greatly reduced the number of targets available to U-Boats. The rate of sinkings plummeted.

Poster and photo of Merchant seamen

Keeping Britain supplied with food came at a cost in human lives.

The poster on your right appeals to the people of Britain not to waste food.

Over 14,000 merchant seamen died in the war - 4,000 of them in just three months during 1917 when the number of successful U-boat attacks on merchant vessels peaked.

Dazzle ships models

These models were used to test 'Dazzle', a camouflage scheme for ships invented by artist Norman Wilkinson.

The idea was, wrote Wilkinson in 1917, 'to paint a ship with large patches of strong colour...which will so distort the form of the vessel that the chances of successful aim by attacking submarines will be greatly decreased.

By the end of the war over 4,000 British ships were painted in Dazzle schemes.

Photo of ship and airship

Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) airships and aeroplanes helped to defend merchant ships and warships as they approached or departed from Britain's ports. This photograph shows an airship keeping a watch for approaching U-boats. Throughout the war only one ship was sunk by a U-boat while escorted by an aircraft.

Zeebrugge items (photo and document)

In April and May 1918 the Royal Navy raided ports in German-occupied Belgium used by U-boats. The photograph shows three British 'blockships', warships filled with concrete - sunk at the entrance to Zeebrugge to stop U-boats getting out. The document is an operational order for HMS *Vindictive*, sunk as a blockship in the later Ostend raid. The raids were daring, but only partially successful.

Photo caption

Submarine Scout Zero type airship escorting a minelaying ship

Photo caption

Crew from across the British Empire on a British merchant ship

Neutral no longer!

Neutral no longer! America the friend and the ally.
Elizabeth Banks, an American living in London, April 1917

In 1917 disastrous German decisions provoked American anger and changed the course of the war.

Although the USA was neutral, American businesses had acted as bankers and suppliers to Britain and its allies.

Americans were furious at German submarines sinking their ships and killing their citizens. For the US government, the last straw was a German plot to gain Mexico as an ally in case of war with the United States. On 6 April 1917 America declared war on Germany.

What did this mean for the Allies?

The Allied nations rejoiced. They could be certain of American financial and military backing.

But while America had a large navy, its army would not be ready to fight in Europe for over a year.

Display captions

Zimmermann telegrams

On 19 January 1917 German foreign minister Arthur Zimmermann sent a coded telegram – shown here in facsimile - to Germany's ambassador to Mexico.

Intercepted by British Naval Intelligence, the document revealed a German plan for Mexico to take Germany's side in the event of war with America. Mexico would then receive US territory. For neutral America it was the final straw and on 6 April it declared war on Germany.

Recruitment posters

'Enlist': this 1917 American recruitment poster called upon men to enlist and avenge the May 1915 sinking of the liner Lusitania by a German submarine. 128 Americans were drowned but, despite the outrage, America's people had not wanted war in 1915.

However, two years later, provoked by the unrestricted German U-boat campaign and the Zimmermann telegram, the mood had changed.

Newspaper report

This newspaper reports US President Woodrow Wilson's speech to Congress on 2 April 1917.

Wilson argued that the United States should fight on the side of the Allies to make the world 'safe for democracy' and 'bring peace and safety to all nations'.

Four days later, with overwhelming backing from Congress, America declared war on Germany.

Photo caption

President Wilson reads his 'War Message' to Congress, 2 April 1917

Posters and photos

In 1917 the United States, encouraged by posters such as those shown here, saw an enthusiasm for war like that seen in Europe three years earlier.

There was an initial rush of volunteers, although the majority of US troops would be conscripted.

The enthusiasm for war was not shared by 8 million US citizens of German descent nor many in an Irish community over 4 million strong.

Photo caption

Volunteers at a US Marines recruiting office

Photo caption

10,000 US soldiers form a Stars and Stripes 'flag'

Songsheet and photo

American troops were not just soldiers like British 'Tommys'. They were 'Crusaders', according to this songsheet.

The photograph shows crowds cheering 'Doughboys' - as American soldiers were known - in London. The immediate effect of US entry into the war was not military but economic. Britain and France's credit in the US had fast been running out. Now they were saved from bankruptcy and could continue to borrow.

Photo caption

American soldiers marching down Piccadilly, London

American flag

An officer of the British destroyer HMS Parthian was given this Stars and Stripes ensign by American naval officers.

Parthian met American destroyers and led them into Queenstown (now Cobh) harbour, Ireland, on 13 May 1917.

The 13 stars on the ensign represent the original states that declared their independence from Britain in 1776 and formed the United States of America.

King's letter

King George V's letter, given to each American soldier when he arrived in Britain, captured the prevailing mood.

The Allies were hugely relieved at US entry into the war and celebrated the arrival of the first American troops.

With the United States at the Allies' side, the 'great battle for human freedom' would surely be won.

10. Life at the Front

Life for a front line soldier could be tense and terrifying. But it was mainly horribly uncomfortable and dreary.

On the Western Front British troops spent more time behind the lines than they did in forward trenches. Wherever they were, it was the small things in life that mattered to most soldiers. Grumbling about food, the

weather and their comrades' annoying habits were daily rituals.

Simple pleasures were also important: friendships, football matches and cigarettes. Although a tiny cog in a vast army machine, each soldier had his own unique experience of this war.

Display captions

Summary caption

Officers were responsible for the lives of their men.

Brave, fair leaders earned real devotion. Incompetent or bullying officers were hated. Soldiers had daily contact with junior officers, but rarely, if ever, with a general.

Officers, with their distinctive uniforms, were easy targets for German snipers and twice as likely to be killed as their men.

In 1914, most officers were drawn from Britain's public schools and universities. But as casualty rates increased, the Army had to cast the net more widely.

Service Dress

Officers received an allowance to buy their own uniforms and, if they paid more, could buy items of superior quality.

This Service Dress jacket was worn by a lieutenant in the Sherwood Foresters. The three chevrons on the

right sleeve mark three years' overseas service. The stripe on the left indicates that he had been wounded.

But in battle officers frequently wore the same style of tunic as lower ranks to make themselves less conspicuous to the enemy.

Trench cap

The officer's 'trench cap' was better tailored than those worn by the lower ranks

Sam Browne belt and leather boots

Only officers wore the leather Sam Browne belt and cross-brace. But an Army Order of January 1915 instructed them to wear canvas webbing, like their men, to avoid attracting the attention of German snipers. By 1917 one officer complained about other officers wearing 'Tommy's' uniforms 'as a sort of disguise...it is a sad departure'. Many officers replaced their specially made leather boots with more practical footwear.

Uniform, equipment catalogue and revolver

The uniform and equipment catalogue was printed by Thresher & Glenny in London, one of many approved regimental tailors which made officers' uniforms.

Officers might also buy their own weapons and personalise them. Major Frederick Chesnutt-Chesney had his name inscribed on this Webley revolver.

Straight tips for 'subs'

Straight Tips for 'Subs' reminded the Second Lieutenant, or subaltern, that he was a mere 'blot on the earth' until he proved himself.

One tip is that he should 'assume the attitude of the new boy at school'. Many inexperienced officers, often teenagers, relied on their battle-hardened non-commissioned officers, the corporals and sergeants, to coach them in the ways of trench fighting and army life.

Cane and whistle Many officers carried a cane.

Such items were not army issue and came in many designs. Lieutenant Colonel James Jack wrote, 'My officers...must be an example to their men in every respect...Proper officers' canes, a present from me, have replaced on parade a miscellaneous collection of walking sticks.'

Far more practical was a whistle, which officers used to give the order to go 'over the top'.

Typed note

This typed note records the court-martial for desertion of Corporal Herbert Smith. Over 3,000 British and Empire soldiers were sentenced to death during the war for offences including desertion, cowardice, rape, mutiny and murder. Most death sentences were commuted to hard labour or prison but more than 300 men were executed. Corporal Smith was sentenced to ten years' prison, but was sent back into battle and killed just weeks later.

Précis of Military Law and King's Regulations'

This 'Précis of Military Law and King's Regulations' simplified a bewildering array of army rules. An officer could punish a minor offence, like failing to salute properly, with extra work duties. But he might have to request a court-martial for a more serious offence like drunkenness. If found guilty, an offender could lose leave or pay, be imprisoned or be tied to a gun, in disgrace, during daylight hours.

Pocket knife

The pocket knife, with its handy tobacco pipe-cleaner and tin opener, was a must-have gadget

Wristwatch

The wristwatch, easier to glance at than the pocket watch, became popular with officers and men alike

Letter writing case

Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Heneker kept his own leather writing case with him in France. Every British officer was allowed up to 35 kilos of personal items with him at the Front. He also had a soldier servant, known as a 'batman', to clean and cook for him. Heneker was killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme while commanding a battalion of the Tyneside Scottish. His writing case was returned to his family, along with his other possessions.

Greatcoat and steel helmet

This greatcoat for mounted troops was warm, but not waterproof. It became heavy and almost unwearable

when soaked. Soldiers often resorted to using rubberised groundsheets as capes to keep out the rain. The steel helmet - worn by all soldiers from late 1915 - was cumbersome to wear, but a lifesaver. Men in the front line were ordered to wear their 'tin hat' at all times.

Handwritten list of names

The British Army's ranks teemed with men from all walks of life. This handwritten list of names of men in the 2nd Durham Light Infantry records the peacetime jobs its soldiers had left behind. Butchers, artists, tea-tasters, jewellers, hairdressers, clerks and journalists were thrown together to live and fight alongside each other.

Canvas webbing

The British soldier on the march carried his life with him, much of it in a haversack and attached to his canvas webbing. Full kit, including rifle, ammunition, entrenching tool and food rations, weighed around half the average man. One corporal described it as 'a cruel, unnatural weight that no man should be forced to carry'. But webbing helped to spread the weight evenly.

Field boots and socks

Around 40 million regulation field boots were issued to British soldiers during the war. Boots were usually adequately comfortable on the march, But in the trenches, although boots were covered with waxy, water-resistant 'dubbin', men often suffered from 'trench foot' caused by prolonged immersion of feet in cold water and mud. Regular changes of socks and rubbing feet with whale oil helped to prevent this painful condition.

Display captions

Summary caption

The 'Tommy's' of the 'poor bloody infantry' fought, slept, ate and lived crammed together.

They were united by loyalty to their battalion, or 'mob', and by deep friendships forged in the stress of the trenches and battle.

Common enemies also united them – not only the Germans, but also unpopular officers and men in safe jobs behind the front lines.

Lee-Enfield rifle

A British soldier's Lee-Enfield rifle was his constant companion. It was a precision instrument and mud could easily clog up its mechanism. Military regulations required a soldier to clean his rifle every day, and to take great care of it so that it fired when necessary.

Sewing kit

Every soldier had a sewing kit - known as a 'housewife' – to repair worn uniforms

Display captions

Summary caption

In the front line, repairing trenches and barbed wire and moving supplies were constant chores.

Such work was usually carried out under the cover of night, sometimes under fire. Behind the lines, 'rest' could

mean the very opposite, with an exhausting, dreary schedule of 'working parties' and 'fatigues', perhaps unloading ammunition or cleaning billets.

There was real resentment towards men in jobs far behind the lines, often regarded as lazy 'lead swingers' by the front line troops.

Reports, messages, memos and maps

For all officers, reading and writing reports, messages and memos and poring over maps were a key part of daily routine

Shovel and canvas bucket

The British 'Tommy' was both labourer and soldier.

The 'Shovel GS' was as valuable as his rifle. It was used for digging trenches, dugouts, gun pits, munitions dumps and latrine pits. Over time many soldiers' hands have buffed the handle of this shovel smooth.

Artillerymen also endured tough labour. The canvas bucket had many uses, among them pouring water on to guns that had overheated after repeated firing.

Trench lantern

The trenches came alive at night as both sides used the cover of darkness to repair their trenches, send out patrols and bring up supplies. The trench lantern gave out little light, so the enemy would be less likely to detect work being carried out.

Carved dragon

This dragon was carved by a member of the Chinese Labour Corps. Nearly 100,000 Chinese labourers were employed by the British to perform vital tasks on the Western Front such as unloading ships, building dugouts, repairing roads and railways, digging trenches and filling sandbags. Other labour units were recruited across the Empire. They included Egyptians, Maltese, black South Africans and West Indians.

Display captions

Summary caption

Food in the trenches was basic but, at least in theory, filling. Rations consisted of meat - usually tinned - and vegetables, fatty bacon, cheese, jam, tea, bread, tobacco and a tot of rum. Troops were supposed to receive one hot meal a day. But front line soldiers sometimes went hungry because ration parties were unable to reach them under shellfire. Parcels from home, eating cooked meals behind the lines and 'scrounged' treats helped to liven up the diet.

Menus

Food did not always mean army rations, especially for officers.

Behind the lines, special occasions were often marked by celebratory meals as these menus show. French householders also cooked for officer-lodgers. Wealthier officers sent for expensive hampers from home, one noting that, 'after seven days bully beef, we felt we must have lobsters and white wine'.

Water bottle

In a front line trench the contents of this water bottle would have tasted revolting.

Drinking water was brought up in petrol cans. It was then purified with chemicals.

There were often shortages of water, so boiling filthy water found in shell holes might be the only way to quench thirst. Drinking from dirty puddles led to diarrhoea and outbreaks of dysentery among British troops.

Rum jar

In the trenches the rum jar was a welcome sight.

Every day an officer poured out a morale-boosting tot of fiery rum to each of his men.

In periods of action the rum ration did not always reach the front line. Soldiers griped that 'SRD' stood not for Supply Ration Depot, but instead for 'Soon Runs Dry', 'Service Rum Diluted' or 'Seldom Reaches Destination'.

Tinned food

Tinned food was a staple of the British soldier's diet, whichever front he was fighting on.

The tins shown here include 'Maconochie', a thin stew containing more vegetable than meat, and pork and beans. Both were a welcome change from tinned corned 'bully beef'.

The army diet, lacking fresh vegetables and fruit, made painful skin conditions such as boils worse. For variety, soldiers often scrounged from local orchards and vegetable plots.

Iron rations

Troops carried emergency 'iron rations' to last one or two days if they were on the attack, or if a ration party could not bring up food because of shellfire.

Iron rations consisted of army biscuits, a tin of 'bully beef', sugar and tea. The 'hard tack' biscuits could crack teeth if not first soaked or pulverised with a rifle butt.

It was strictly forbidden to eat iron rations without permission.

Mess kit

Army issue mess kit from which every British soldier ate his rations, with clasp knife

Cooking stove

Some officers had a small cooking stove to fry bacon and boil water.

This one was used by Lieutenant Colonel Montagu Cleeve on the Western Front.

Cooking in the front line was forbidden. It sent up tell-tale spirals of smoke which might attract snipers and shellfire.

Even so, soldiers improvised braziers from buckets and used tins and candles to heat food and water.

Display captions

Summary caption

Soldiers battled their environment as well as shells and bullets.

Trench warfare created miseries like 'trench foot', a painful condition caused by permanently damp feet and 'trench fever', symptoms of which were like 'flu. On other fronts troops fought diseases such as malaria and sand fly fever.

During the war over 6 million British and Empire soldiers were treated for sickness. Fewer than one per cent of them died. Without improvements in sanitation and medical care, the figure would have been far higher.

Latrines plan

'Toilets' came in the form of latrines sited around the trench network.

This latrines plan shows how to make them. Soldiers heading to answer the call of nature were a target for German snipers and some men preferred to relieve themselves illicitly in empty tin cans, old helmets or shell holes. Toilet paper - 'bumf' - was usually newspaper or old rags. The job of cleaning and emptying latrines fell to the much mocked 'sanitary men'.

Medicines

Soldiers often brought medicines from home or received them in parcels.

Remedies included cocaine, then legal, 'for tickling cough', and extract of opium for stomach troubles. Gelatine lamels, dissolved on the tongue or in drinking water, were used for the relief of common minor ailments.

On receiving a packet of them, a lieutenant at Gallipoli wrote, 'It cost twenty-seven shillings – and under present circumstances worth ten times the money.'

Trenchman belt and fly swat

The privately purchased 'Trenchman belt' was supposed to protect the wearer against lice. It did not. These tiny insects infested clothing, irritated skin and caused 'trench fever' and typhus. Men in the trenches killed lice by 'chatting' - crushing them between finger nails - or burning them out with cigarette ends and candles. The British Army issue fly swat gave men fleeting respite from the swarms of the 'perfect pest'.

Puttees, waders and a sketch

Soldiers wore cloth puttees, wound around the lower leg, to protect against the elements Waders were issued to men in flooded trenches. A grateful Lieutenant Maurice Vyvyan drew a sketch to show off the new officers' trench boots which would make his life more comfortable.

Display captions

Summary caption

In winter soldiers in the trenches were plagued by sore throats, common colds, 'flu and vomiting.

Whatever the season, they suffered from exhaustion, constipation or diarrhoea, skin rashes, boils and sores. Commanders, fearing a mad rush to the rear, were reluctant to allow too many men to seek medical treatment. Medical officers sometimes accused seriously ill men of being 'trench shy'.

Everyone was encouraged to keep clean to help prevent disease. But in the trenches this was almost impossible.

Shaving kit

A soldier needed his shaving kit, not only to keep well turned out in accordance with army regulations but also to keep up his spirits.

Officers lectured men on the importance of cleanliness. Yet in the trenches everybody became dirty whatever their rank.

Only in communal baths behind the front lines could soldiers get rid of the smell and layers of grime.

Until 1916, it was theoretically an offence for a soldier not to sport a tidy moustache.

Kilt cover

The kilt cover or kilt apron was used to camouflage the distinctive patterns of kilts worn by many Scottish,

colonial and some Irish troops. It protected kilts from rain, which made them heavy and soggy. In freezing weather the apron prevented the stiffened wool hems from cutting deep into the men's legs. Kilt covers did not prevent lice from breeding in the warm folds of the kilt underneath.

Jerkin

The British Army issued various types of jerkin to keep soldiers warm.

Some, like this one, were made of sheepskin. Others, according to one soldier, were made from 'animals unknown to zoology'.

To avoid confusion, the Army had to issue an order stating that the 'proper' way to wear them was with the fur outside to 'throw off water'. The revolting smell of damp, animal-skin jerkins led soldiers to call them 'stinkers'.

The 'Gor blimey' cap, with its ear flaps, and the cap comforter gave soldiers respite from the cold

Display captions

Summary caption

Soldiers on all sides were liable to shoot surrendering enemy troops in the heat of battle.

Those soldiers who gave themselves up and made it to prisoner of war camps could consider themselves fortunate. International agreements meant that they

could usually expect more reasonable treatment than in previous wars. Yet conditions in POW camps were still primitive.

Men had no idea how long they would have to endure the drab, tough POW existence.

Sign for German POWs

This sign is for a prisoner cage used to hold newly captured German prisoners of war before they could be sent to POW camps.

By the end of 1917 there were 120,000 German prisoners in 142 camps across Britain. Prisoners were a valuable source of information. This Arabic-English-Turkish phrase book gives a set list of questions to be used by British Intelligence officers in the Middle East.

Escape aids

These escape aids were sent to prisoner of war (POW) Captain Jack Shaw in regular food parcels from his mother. They were devised by British Intelligence. The hollowed-out brush contained a map of the area around the Holzminden POW camp in Germany. The tin of meat held more maps, wire-cutters and compasses with a weight so that it would not appear suspiciously light. The war ended before Shaw could make his escape bid.

Golden Syrup mug, black bread and diary

This mug was made from a tin of syrup at the Sennelager POW camp in Germany by MJ Andrews of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Captured in August 1914, he was one of the first of some 190,000 British and Empire soldiers to be taken prisoner over the course of the war. The black bread was issued in 1918 to another POW, Corporal AB Wilson, in the Cottbus camp. He recorded the rations he received in his diary.

Display captions

Summary caption

The number of soldiers killed in the First World War is shocking.

But many more British and Empire troops would have died had the chain of medical services not become increasingly efficient. Medical teams had to get wounded men fit and fighting again. They were backed by constant research into shock, blood loss and infection.

Knowing that they would get expert treatment if wounded was an important factor in keeping up the morale not only of soldiers, but also of their families at home.

Bullets and shell fragments

The soldiers whose bodies these bullets and shell fragments ripped into kept them as mementos of their escapes from death.

Any wound could prove fatal if an infection such as gangrene set in. But the speed and sophistication of

medical treatment improved and numbers of infection cases decreased dramatically by 1918.

Regimental aid post

The Regimental Aid Post, usually in a ruined building or dugout, was the first link in the chain of treatment for a wounded soldier.

Some men who had 'copped a packet' walked or limped there. Others were brought in by comrades or by stretcher bearers. Their wounds were then assessed. For the more seriously wounded, speed of treatment was essential if they were to survive.

By 1916 front line Casualty Clearing Stations could carry out most surgical procedures.

Surgical forceps

X-rays enabled doctors quickly to locate bullets or shell fragments inside a casualty.

These surgical forceps were then used to extract them.

By 1918 another new procedure, transfusion from stored blood, vastly improved the survival rate of patients suffering from blood loss and shock.

Medical cards

These medical cards were attached to a soldier being treated for a bullet wound at a General Hospital at Etaples, France, and to another with trench fever being shipped to Britain.

Soldiers dreamed of a 'cushy' illness or a 'Blighty wound', which was neither life-threatening nor debilitating, but meant they had to be sent home to be treated and to recover.

Stretcher and haversack

Four stretcher bearers were usually needed to carry one stretcher with a seriously wounded man on it.

Royal Army Medical Corps 'body snatchers', as bearers were sometimes called, each carried a haversack containing a 'shell dressing' and iodine.

They treated stricken men on the battlefield before taking them to safety, often under fire and over muddy, cratered ground.

Display captions

Summary caption

Violent death on such a vast scale brought with it many ethical and practical issues.

Shattered bodies had to be identified, graves had to be marked, families had to be informed and comforted. A soldier's death could have a devastating effect on his grieving comrades.

British soldier John Priestley wrote in 1916, 'I am feeling rather lonely these days, and the loss of these chums has a greater effect on me than the experiences I go through personally'.

Official identity discs and bracelets

Official identity discs helped the teams who collected the dead put a name to men whose bodies had been devastated by high explosive shells or whose remains had decomposed.

From 1916 British soldiers wore two fibre discs. The green one stayed with the body and the red was removed for administrative purposes. German identity tags were metal. Many soldiers also made and wore personalised, unofficial identity bracelets unique to them.

Grave marker

This grave marker was made by comrades of 29-year-old Canadian Corporal Joshua Strong, who was killed in France.

Where possible soldiers who had been killed in action were given a burial which was presided over by a military chaplain.

Not all those who died had individual markers like Strong. Where there had been heavy casualties, the dead – often just body parts - were buried in mass graves and records kept of the locations.

Telegram and letter of condolence

Every day postmen delivered to families across Britain and the Empire the news that a loved one had been killed or wounded.

Families of British officers were notified by telegram. Families of other ranks received a form, such as the one shown here sent to the widow of Sapper Poole. His commanding officer also wrote a letter of condolence reassuring her that her husband had 'died a noble death for his country'.

Display captions

Summary caption

Behind the front lines officers organised sports and entertainment to keep their men fit and to boost their morale.

Most soldiers needed little encouragement to play football or take part in other sports, from cricket to fishing.

Concert parties, with songs and sketches, brought the tradition of the music hall to the front line. But soldiers also found other ways to keep themselves entertained which were sometimes frowned upon.

Woodbines and pipe

Soldiers lived in a fug of cigarette smoke.

Brands from home such as Woodbines were far more popular than army issue tobacco. At the Front smoking helped to counter the smell of decay, relieve boredom and soothe frayed nerves. As one officer wrote, it 'fills the place in a man's life, out here'. Older soldiers tended to smoke a pipe.

Ventriloquist's dummy and carrying case

Sergeant Arthur Harden entertained his comrades in France with his ventriloquist's dummy, Douglas. Harden's commanding officer soon realised the value of the 'talking' dummy's act to his troops' morale. To keep Douglas and his owner out of harm's way, Harden was put on clerical duties. On one occasion Douglas's carrying case was hit by shrapnel, but he and Sergeant Harden escaped unscathed.

Hunting knife and floral wallpaper

Front line soldiers made extra cash by selling battlefield trophies to officers or troops behind the lines.

The hunting knife was bought by Lieutenant Montague Moore from a British soldier who had taken it from a dead German. Moore sent it home, noting that, 'it will look very fine in the drawing room'.

Souvenirs were more impressive if they came from enemy territory, like this sheet of floral wallpaper torn from a German dugout.

Boxing belt, programme and medals

Sport kept men fit and entertained while allowing them to let off steam.

The boxing belt here was awarded to the 8th Division's champion fighters in France.

Horse races were very popular. Just as at home, the soldiers could get a programme such as the one here.

Competitions were also held for more sedate activities as these vegetable show medals reveal.

Jug and swagger stick

Battlefield junk was sometimes turned into trench art, either by soldiers, or, more usually, by local craftspeople.

The jug we show here was made from an 18-pounder shell case by a Sapper of the Royal Engineers while he was manning an underground telephone exchange in the Ypres area. The swagger stick was made from cartridge cases, bullets and coins. Soldiers behind the lines tended to be the main customers for those who made trench art.

Wiggle Waggle journal

The Royal Engineers' 'Wiggle Waggle' was one of hundreds of trench journals produced by soldiers for soldiers on the fighting fronts.

Some were professionally printed, others handwritten. They contained news, humour, gossip, and poked fun, often at officers.

Cards and dice game

Gambling was officially forbidden, but flourished behind the lines during rest periods. Many soldiers risked their spare change on games played with cards. Seasoned gamblers played Crown and Anchor, a dice game. More lenient officers turned a blind eye to this activity, but soldiers often posted a lookout during games, just to be sure.

Calling cards

For most soldiers there was little chance of 'clicking' with a local girl, so ten minutes with a prostitute offered what passed for intimacy. These calling cards advertise one of the brothels officially tolerated by the British Army. They ask in French, 'Where are you going tonight?'. These brothels were regulated to try and control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, which hospitalised 150,000 British soldiers during the war.

Lucky charms

Soldiers regularly carried lucky charms in the hope of avoiding the bullet or shell 'with their name on it'.

These were often in the form of traditional good luck symbols such as the horseshoe, shamrock or piece of coal. Many soldiers also had superstitious rituals. One Indian soldier heard that, 'when you go into action, you take with you a piece of raw onion, bullets will not touch you'.

Gramophone and records

Lieutenant Cyril Tobitt took this gramophone record player to the Western Front with him.

Only wealthier soldiers could afford such a luxury. Tobitt kept his records in an ammunition box, asking his fellow officers to bring back new tunes when they went to Britain on leave.

Most soldiers had to make their own music. They sang popular songs, often with crude variations to lyrics.

Display captions

Summary caption

In peacetime, going to church had been part of many British soldiers' Sunday mornings.

The Army provided religious services not just for Christians, but also for men of other denominations. War tested soldiers' faith to the extreme. Even if not religious, many of them had a deeply felt sense of spirituality and superstition. Most men drew their greatest strength from the mates they lived and fought alongside, and the thought of going home to their families.

British Army pay book and local currency

This is a British Army pay book. Some soldiers' pay was allocated to their families, while the rest was received in local currency. In France much of this was spent on food and drink in *estaminets* or in villagers' homes.

Estaminets were rough and ready bars serving unfamiliar delights such as omelettes, chips, steak and coffee and white wine - 'vin blanc'. Non-drinkers might prefer to eat in a 'dry' YMCA canteen or Church Hut.

Phrase books

Most soldiers had never before left Britain and spoke no French.

They used phrase books or loud 'franglais', a tangled mix of English and French, to communicate.

Disagreements occasionally flared between soldiers and French civilians. British soldiers accused *estaminet* owners of watering down beer and inflating prices.

French civilians resented soldiers stealing their crops and animals and damaging their property.

Field Communion set

Chaplains of all denominations were given officer status in the British Army.

They held religious services, offered a friendly and sympathetic ear to soldiers, gave comfort to the wounded and buried the dead.

One of them, Reverend Franklyn de Winton Lushington, used this field communion set on the Western Front. In 1915 Lushington had left his post as headmaster of Dover College, Kent to become an Army chaplain.

Embroidered postcard and chocolate soldier

This embroidered postcard, known as a 'silk', and the chocolate soldier were made by local people and refugees living behind the Allied lines to sell to soldiers. Refugees staying in convents were given embroidery silks by the nuns so that they could earn money by making embroidered postcards. Soldiers were eager to buy such gifts for their families at home.

Display captions

Summary caption

Rest behind the lines was intended to restore soldiers' dignity and humanity.

They could walk upright without danger and enjoy the sights of ordinary life and reminders of home.

On the Western Front, French towns and villages were flooded with men on rest seeking food, drink, gifts and companionship. French locals often welcomed British troops, but sometimes relations between them could be tense.

Display captions

Summary caption

The cry of ‘mail up!’ heralded the arrival of letters and parcels from wives and girlfriends, parents, siblings and friends.

Letters kept up the spirits of the soldiers. They contained love, moral support, a reminder of home, food and gifts.

The Army Postal Service was hugely efficient. In four years of war an enormous depot in London dispatched 2 billion letters and 114 million parcels to serving soldiers.

Postcards

Scoring out the lines on a Field Service postcard was the simplest way to let loved ones know you were alive and thinking of them.

There was also a postcard for Indian troops. Supplied by the Army, these cards were a salvation to men to whom words did not come easily or who were simply too exhausted to write at length.

Letter and green envelope

Officers censored letters written by their men, a job that gave them an intimate insight into their lives. In this letter an officer has scored out sensitive information in case it should fall into enemy hands. Occasionally soldiers were given a green envelope in which they could seal letters expressing more personal, intimate thoughts. These would only be read and censored at base by officers who did not know the writer.

Leave and travel passes

Leave and travel passes to England, only around 80 miles from the trenches, were regarded as magic tokens. Officers had more freedom to return home than their men, who were lucky if they went home more than once a year. For most Empire troops it was impossible to go home. Leave at home was hugely anticipated. But many soldiers found it difficult to talk to their families about their experiences.

Letter and Princess Mary gift box

In January 1915 Private Edward King sent his sister this letter in a Princess Mary gift box, griping that she should not 'trubble about letters'.

Many soldiers lacked the ability or desire to put pen to paper, or simply did not have the time. When Private King wrote his letter, he and his comrades were trying to cope with appalling winter conditions in waterlogged trenches. He was killed on 20 January.

Kodak camera, photos and letter

Private photography and diary-keeping on the fighting fronts were officially forbidden in 1915.

There were fears that they could give the enemy vital intelligence. But Lieutenant Herbert Preston continued to use his Kodak Box Brownie camera and secretly sent the photographs to his wife. She used a cover name, Mrs Maxwell, shown on the letter displayed here, to sell them to the press.

Oxo cubes, pudding and tea

The Army Postal Service handled 60,000 parcels every day. Parcels to the Western Front usually contained cigarettes and other favourite comforts from home such as Oxo cubes, suet pudding and tea. These were often shared out with mates in the trenches. Caring officers sometimes asked their families to send out presents that they could then give to their men.

Sketches

The Reverend Cyril Lomax, a battalion chaplain, drew sketches on his letters.

In one he wrote, 'One is so utterly glad to receive a letter... You can have no idea how one looks for the post, and how disappointed one feels if there is nothing for one'.

Many soldiers enclosed a pressed 'Flanders Poppy' with their letters, like this one sent by Sergeant Joseph Shaddick to his wife Bidy. Poppies grew wild on the Western Front battlefields.

Picture postcards and heart

Picture postcards were one of the most popular ways of keeping touch. In the year before the war 900 million postcards had been delivered in the UK and the separation of soldiers from their families gave the postcard industry an added boost. Many wives and girlfriends gave their soldiers a keepsake such as this heart to remember them by.

11. Machines against Men

In 1917 Britain's army looked increasingly to machines to win the war.

Britain developed new weapons. It found ways to make guns even more destructive. It taught closer teamwork between soldiers and the crews of guns, tanks and planes.

Yet new ways of fighting did not bring victory war on the Western Front became even more costly and destructive soldiers fought in landscapes devastated by shellfire. A massive British offensive around Ypres became bogged down in mud. It was called off with the capture of a village called Passchendaele.

Mark V tank

The British Mark V tank was introduced in 1918. This 'male' Mark V was armed with two 6-pounder guns and four machine guns. 'Female' tanks carried only machine guns. British tanks were terribly slow. The top speed of the Mark V was 5 mph. The crew consisted of a commander, a driver, who operated levers to change

direction, and six gunners. Tanks were notorious for breaking down.

The day of the rifleman is done

The day of the rifleman is done ...his day is over.

Lieutenant Colonel John Parker, US Army, 1917

New technology, inventions and tactics changed the way the war was fought.

After three years of fighting, armies had learnt hard lessons from often bitter experience. British commanders were learning to exploit the deadly potential of tanks and aircraft.

Artillery could now locate and destroy hidden enemies and obliterate barbed wire defences. Soldiers could advance into battle behind a protective storm of steel and fire.

Why did these advances not win the war?

All armies successfully used innovative tactics and technologies in 1917. At the Battles of Arras, Messines and Cambrai, British and Empire troops forced their way into enemy defences.

But it was difficult to bring artillery forward across the devastated battlefield. This always gave the defenders time to regroup. There was still no decisive

breakthrough.

Vickers gun

The British Vickers Gun could hit targets 2 miles away. From late 1915 all Vickers guns came under the control of the new Machine Gun Corps. They were now used as a form of artillery, to attack and not just to defend. From 1917 British soldiers became used to the rushing sound of machine gun barrages carefully plotted to arc over their heads and hit German positions.

Display captions

Summary caption

The appearance of British tanks on the battlefield from 1916 terrified German soldiers.

Tanks were a revolutionary British invention. They crushed barbed wire, crossed trenches and destroyed machine gun posts. By the end of the war 5,000 had been built.

British general Archibald Montgomery declared, 'There is no doubt they are a great adjunct to an infantry attack, although they will not win the war by themselves'.

Photo caption

Camouflaged British tanks, with some of their crews, after the Battle of Cambrai

British tanks

This photograph shows camouflaged British tanks after the 1917 Battle of Cambrai. The new weapon was the brainchild of Colonel Ernest Swinton, a Royal Engineers

officer. Its development was kept top secret. A Landships Committee considered several codenames to disguise the project as a new water-carrier. The members considered 'reservoir' and 'cistern', but settled on the more memorable 'tank'.

Signal flat, letter and postcard

In November 1917 378 British tanks scored a rapid victory at Cambrai. Second Lieutenant Gordon Hassell, a tank commander, used this signal flag to relay messages during the battle. His own tank was hit by artillery, but Hassell concealed his fear in this triumphant letter to his family. He included a postcard found behind German lines. But days later the Germans counterattacked and recovered the lost ground.

Anti-splinter mask and tank helmet

The inside of a tank in action was scorching, deafening and filled with poisonous engine fumes.

Second Lieutenant Hassell wore this anti-splinter mask to protect his face from the showers of hot metal fragments caused by bullets striking the tank's armour. Crew were also issued with a leather tank helmet. In the heat of battle, it was sometimes mistaken for a German helmet and crew abandoning their tanks risked friendly fire.

Anti-tank grenade

Germany manufactured few tanks and instead used tanks captured from the British.

The British No.44 anti-tank grenade was designed to knock out these 'looted tanks'. Fired from a rifle at close range, these grenades caused a massive explosion. The blast killed the tank's crew. Though intimidating, tanks were vulnerable to armour-piercing bullets and any type of artillery.

Display captions

Summary caption

Much of the technology and tactics used by British and Empire armies in 1917 had not even existed in 1914.

Gunners could now pinpoint and destroy enemy guns by the sound and flash they made when fired.

Creeping artillery barrages rolled ahead of advancing soldiers, forcing German troops into cover. Highly sensitive fuzes tore barbed wire.

Light machine guns gave British infantrymen their own automatic firepower.

Communications were now more reliable and secure.

Fullerphone, pigeon message-book and dog collar

The Fullerphone prevented German listening posts picking up British phone conversations in front line trenches. Captain Algernon Fuller's invention used an early form of signals scrambling device. Despite such new technologies, soldiers still needed animals to deliver messages. The message pad would be used by

an officer to write down a note and attached to a carrier pigeon. The messenger dog collar was worn by 'War Dog 180'.

Fuze 106

Thousands of Allied soldiers attacking German lines met their deaths helplessly entangled in thickets of barbed wire. But the invention of the Fuze 106 meant that British artillery could finally blast away wire obstacles. Fuzes controlled how and when a shell exploded. The 106, used in large numbers from 1917, was so sensitive that the shell exploded the instant the nosecap struck, ripping the wire apart.

Flag

On 9 April 1917 40,000 Canadian troops stormed Vimy Ridge, near Arras.

They advanced behind curtains of artillery and machine gun fire towards the Ridge, in Germans hands since 1914. This flag was carried at Vimy by 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion, raised in Saskatchewan, western Canada.

The flag was kept by the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Lorn Paulet Owen Tudor, an Englishman who emigrated to Canada before the war.

Summary caption

New weapons had led to a revolution in tactics.

In 1914, the basic infantry unit had been the company, about 200 men armed with rifles and bayonets. In 1917, the basic unit was now the platoon, around 40 men.

Each platoon had four specialist sections, grenade throwers - known as 'bombers' - rifle bombers, riflemen and Lewis light machine-gunners. Their roles were clearly set out and rehearsed in detail.

Rifle-grenades and grenade carrier

Grenades like these were fired by 'rifle bombers'.

One example here has a rod for insertion into the rifle barrel. The other was fired from a cup discharger like that on the Lee-Enfield rifle at the back of this showcase.

Rifle bombers showered enemy machine-gunners with grenades while expert 'bombers,' each with a cotton grenade carrier, worked their way to within grenade-throwing distance then blasted their way along enemy trenches.

Lewis gun and sign

The Lewis gun was a machine gun light enough to be carried by attacking troops.

By late 1917 each platoon had two Lewis guns. The weapon's rapid covering fire allowed the rest of the platoon to attack. It could fire over 500 rounds a minute.

The sign was put up to show Lewis gun teams where to collect filled magazines of small arms ammunition – 'SAA'. Each circular drum magazine held 47 rounds.

Lee-Enfield and bayonet

The British Tommy's Lee-Enfield rifle was still an essential weapon.

Riflemen, lightly armed and mobile, protected bombers by keeping the enemy's heads down and rushing in to kill defenders stunned by exploding grenades. Platoon commanders were instructed that, 'the object is to come to close quarters with the enemy as quickly as possible so as to be able to use the bayonet'.

Photo caption

Lancashire Fusiliers cleaning a Lewis gun

Sopwith Camel

The Sopwith Camel was one of a new generation of modern, fast fighters. Experienced pilots loved this 'Hun Killer' for its agility. Inexperienced pilots found it difficult to control, a 'Cadet Killer'. On 11 August 1918, while flying this aircraft, 18-year-old Flight Lieutenant Stuart Culley shot down the last German airship to be destroyed in the war. The importance of air power was recognised with the establishment of the Royal Air Force in April 1918.

Display captions

Summary caption

For the first time in the history of warfare, the sky became a battlefield.

Aircraft flew over the trenches, directing artillery fire, spotting and photographing targets.

Royal Flying Corps observers, usually sitting behind the pilot, were the eyes of the Army. They also acted as air gunners, warding off enemy fighter planes. Pilots and observers came under terrific strain, flying several patrols each day, often for weeks on end.

Photo caption

A camera fixed to a BE2c reconnaissance plane

Photo caption

An Intelligence officer using a viewer which gave a 3D effect.

L-Type camera

The L-Type camera was a major advance in aerial photography. Its 18 glass plate negatives were held in a magazine which slid them automatically into place. The observer no longer had to lean over the side of a bumpy plane and change them himself. When reconnaissance planes landed, Intelligence officers then examined the photographs their crew had taken, identifying and marking targets for the artillery.

Summary caption

Fighter planes - 'scouts' - duelled in the air and attacked ground targets.

In summer 1917 a new generation of British fighters such as the Camel meant that the Royal Flying Corps

began to dominate the skies again after suffering terrible losses to superior German machines.

Fighter pilots became celebrities. But mechanical failure and the fear of being shot down in flames haunted even the toughest airmen. On average a British pilot lasted ten weeks before being shot down.

McCudden flying clothing and combat report
Major James McCudden was an ace, an airman who had shot down more than five enemy planes.

His exploits made him a celebrity, something he accepted reluctantly. Shown here are items of McCudden's flying clothing and a combat report detailing one his 57 'kills', a German LVG reconnaissance plane.

His uniform tunic shows ribbons for the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest gallantry award, and other decorations.

Richthofen photos
These photographs relate to Baron Manfred von Richthofen, the war's most famous airman.

Known as the 'Red Baron' because of his red planes, he commanded the 'Flying Circus', a squadron of brightly painted aircraft. A brilliant tactician, cool-headed pilot and inspirational leader, von Richthofen was both feared and admired by Allied airmen. He shot down as many as 80 Allied aircraft, keeping serial numbers and engine parts from his 'kills' as trophies.

McCudden shattered windscreen and sketch

This shattered windscreen is from the SE5a fighter plane in which McCudden crashed to his death in July 1918 when his engine stalled shortly after take-off. A Royal Air Force driver made a sketch of the crash site. Formerly a Royal Flying Corps mechanic, McCudden's success lay not in reckless bravery, but in professionalism and a thorough knowledge of his machine. But accidents claimed the lives of even the most experienced pilots.

Richthofen's flying log-book and cloth fragment

On 21 April 1918 Manfred von Richthofen was killed, probably by ground fire from Australian troops, while pursuing a British fighter.

Scottish air ace Captain John Gilmour recorded the event in his flying log-book. Allied soldiers flocked to the site of his death and took souvenirs, such as this cloth fragment from his red Fokker triplane. Von Richthofen was buried with full military honours by the Australian Flying Corps.

Photo caption

A studio portrait of Manfred von Richthofen

Photo caption

Trophies displayed in von Richthofen's family home in Germany

Photo caption

Von Richthofen landing his red Fokker DR 1

Extraordinary hardships

Extraordinary hardships imposed by the conditions ...called for the exercise of courage, determination and endurance.

Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, December 1917

On 31 July 1917 Britain launched a major offensive around the Belgian town of Ypres.

Field Marshal Haig aimed to capture vital rail links and submarine bases. The first attacks were hampered by rain, turning the battlefield into liquid mud. Haig was forced to settle for wearing down the Germans. During a drier spell the Germans were forced back with terrible losses. Victory seemed possible.

But the rains returned. A halt was called after Canadian troops captured the village of Passchendaele.

Was it a success?

British commanders believed they had pushed the enemy to breaking point. But many soldiers felt utterly demoralised. 275,000 British and Empire soldiers were killed. Confidence in Haig had never been so low.

Display captions

Official photos

The large photographs show scenes during the Third Battle of Ypres. They were taken by, from left to right, the Australian official war photographer Frank Hurley,

the Canadian William Rider-Rider and Briton John Warwick Brooke. They were among photographs shown in exhibitions around Britain and its empire. The failure at Ypres, fought in appalling conditions, shook the spirit of soldiers and people in a way that the Somme never had.

Photoviewer caption

This viewer shows more photographs taken by British and Empire official war photographers on the Western Front. There were only 16 permanent photographers on all fighting fronts. They produced 40,000 images for publication and display at home. At first they experienced hostility from the Army, but over time their importance in showing the public the sacrifices made by the soldiers was recognised.

Map and memo

General Headquarters kept this relief map of the Ypres area for planning operations.

British generals disagreed on how to achieve Haig's ambitions to capture a rail junction and drive the U-boats from Zeebrugge.

In a memorandum, Major General Sir John Davidson urged that the 1917 offensive focus on capturing successive, limited objectives. Lieutenant General Ivor Maxse favoured all-out attack and wrote the critical margin comments.

Secret document

This secret document was sent to an infantry battalion to confirm the date and time for the all-out assault that launched the 1917 summer offensive.

From September, faced with ferocious German resistance, the British Army had to turn to 'bite and hold'. This meant setting more limited goals and only capturing what could then be defended.

These tactics killed thousands of Germans but were never likely to achieve Haig's bold aims.

Menin Gate sign

The Menin Gate was an Ypres landmark. Marching down the Menin Road to the Front, hundreds of thousands of British and Empire soldiers passed this sign. In the trenches around Ypres they came under constant fire from German guns on ridges around the town. One of Haig's aims in 1917 was to seize this high ground and force the Germans back. In November, after the capture of Passchendaele Ridge, he called a halt.

Cabinet report

Field Marshal Haig sent this report to the War Cabinet on the first day of the Third Battle of Ypres. Like Haig, soldiers and civilians across Britain and the Empire believed that one final effort might bring victory. Prime Minister David Lloyd George had major concerns about suffering more casualties for little gain, but did not stop the offensive. By November Haig's strategic ambitions had drowned in a sea of mud.

Duckboard

This duckboard was used close to Passchendaele village, near Ypres. The Ypres battlefield was turned into a swamp by prolonged rains and the obliteration of the local drainage system by shellfire. Duckboards were often the only way for soldiers to cross. Tripping or slipping could mean death by drowning. The dreadful weather also meant that guns and shells could not be transported, while low cloud grounded reconnaissance planes.

The most frightful nightmare

I have seen **the most frightful nightmare** of a country...unspeakable, utterly indescribable.

Paul Nash, War artist, November 1917

The machines of war created a new and unrecognisable world of devastated landscapes.

The British government's war art scheme began to employ men who were both soldiers and artists. They painted the shattered world they saw around them in strikingly new ways.

What impact did the art have?

War art was hugely popular. The images appeared in exhibitions, in magazines and on postcards. Large crowds were drawn to displays of official war

photographs and paintings. British people wanted visual impressions of what their loved ones were going through.

Display captions

After a Push painting

CRW Nevinson's uncompromisingly bleak landscape *After a Push*, 1917, shows flooded shell holes after the Ypres offensive. 'The further forward one goes,' he wrote, 'the nearer to danger, the fewer and more hidden the men ... the more it becomes an empty landscape.'

Nevinson letters and document

The handwritten letters are from CRW Nevinson to Charles Masterman, head of the government war art scheme at the Department of Information, later re-titled the Ministry of Information. Using the support of his famous journalist father, Nevinson lobbies to be made an official war artist. He then reports on a successful trip to France following his appointment in July 1917. The typescript document, initialled by Masterman, confirms Nevinson's war artist status.

John Nash's paintbox and brushes

The paintbox and brushes shown here were used by John Nash. An infantry officer, he became an official war artist in January 1918 following a determined campaign for his appointment by elder brother Paul. Unlike many artists, John Nash had no formal artistic training and preferred to paint from memory.

Art exhibition print and postcard?

The art exhibition, print and postcard were recognised as essential ways of recording the war's significance for future generations. In 1917, a year of setbacks, they were part of a sustained propaganda effort at home. The Imperial War Museum, formed that same year, would commission its own works of art. By 1918 the emphasis of official art had changed from propaganda to commemoration.

Menin Road painting

Official war artist Paul Nash completed The Menin Road in 1919 as part of a planned Hall of Remembrance project, celebrating national ideals of heroism and sacrifice. Nash, a former infantry officer, saw himself as 'a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting'. The shell-pocked road itself barely survives amid the devastated, flooded landscape. Dwarfed by the chaotic setting, two soldiers doggedly follow the roadway.

12. Breaking Down

By 1917 war was putting ever greater strain on armies and home fronts.

A growing number of civilians, politicians and soldiers were looking for a way out.

Statesmen thought about negotiating an end to the war. On the battlefield soldiers went on strike and deserted.

On home fronts there was hardship and often hunger. Public calls for peace became louder.

Austria-Hungary and Turkey began to crumble. But Russia, one of Britain's allies, broke first. Grippled by revolution, Russia left the war. By 1918 Germany could concentrate its army on the Western Front.

It would gamble on one last offensive to defeat Britain and France.

The war cannot go on

No material thing can ever justify this war nor afford any compensation. **This war cannot go on.**

Captain Frederick Chandler, 17 August 1917

As the war dragged on, some politicians and intellectuals made public calls for peace.

Meanwhile, governments secretly explored the possibility of a negotiated settlement. America, while neutral, had urged this publicly. But compromise proved impossible.

Why did more people not demand peace?

The price already paid in blood by all the fighting nations meant that anything but victory would mean defeat.

By the end of 1917 800,000 men from Britain and its empire had been killed. To bargain with Germany would seem like they had fought for nothing.

On both sides, as long as people believed victory possible, they were prepared to keep fighting.

Display captions

Wooden figure

Allied and German attempts to negotiate peace centred on the idealistic US President Woodrow Wilson.

Wilson saw it as his mission to bring 'just and lasting' peace to the world. This wooden figure of the President who became a celebrity in Britain after American entry into the war, was made by a wounded British serviceman.

Summary caption

Since 1914 some political figures and intellectuals in Britain and Germany had looked to end the slaughter. Most voices against the war were not outright pacifists but instead urged negotiation.

In Germany breakaway socialists led opposition to the war. In Britain the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) condemned the secret decisions and treaties which had, in its view, taken the world to war and were now prolonging it.

But the public dismissed the UDC as a bunch of 'peace prattlers'.

Sassoon's protest letter

In July 1917 Siegfried Sassoon, a British army officer and poet, wrote this protest letter against the continuation of the war.

The letter was read out in Parliament. Sassoon risked heavy punishment for questioning the conduct of the war. To dampen the controversy, the Army diagnosed him with 'shell shock' and sent him for treatment. He voluntarily returned to the Western Front in 1918.

Sassoon's poems

Sassoon's *The Old Huntsman and Other Poems* was published in 1917.

He was one of a number of soldier-poets which included Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden. In their writing, they expressed horror at the fighting and at public ignorance of its realities, as well as frustration with the way the war was being fought. At the time their poetry did not reach a wide audience.

Emperor Karl of Austria-Hungary and Kaiser Wilhem of Germany

This photograph shows the newly-crowned Emperor Karl of Austria-Hungary with Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany.

Karl came to the throne after the death of Emperor Franz Josef in November 1916. Franz Josef had reigned

for 68 years. Karl had new ideas. He was desperate to withdraw his failing empire from the war, and enraged the Germans by attempting to negotiate separately with the Allies.

Photo caption

Kaiser Wilhelm with the new Austrian emperor, Karl

Poster

This poster gives the Kaiser's response to the Allies' rejection of his December 1916 'peace note' and an assurance to his people of ultimate victory.

To quieten growing opposition at home to the war, Germany had publicly approached the then neutral USA to find out what peace terms the Allies might accept.

But German leaders knew negotiation was unlikely and hoped the Allies would be blamed for continuing the war.

Photo caption

German chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg reads the 'peace note' to the Reichstag

We are men and not beasts

'...we are men and not beasts to be led to the abattoir to be slaughtered ... we demand peace.'

French soldier, 1917

By 1917 war-weary soldiers began to mutiny or desert in increasing numbers.

After a disastrous spring offensive, the French Army mutinied and refused to mount further senseless attacks.

Defeat at Caporetto, on Italy's Alpine front, prompted mass surrender and desertion by Italian soldiers.

Turkey's army in Mesopotamia and Palestine unable to stop British advances and plagued by sickness and hunger, began to crumble.

Why did soldiers keep fighting at all?

A sense of duty, patriotism, comradeship and hatred of the enemy kept soldiers fighting. Refusal to fight risked punishment – including execution.

Wiser commanders treated soldiers as people, with rights as well as duties.

Soldiers with food, rest and the hope of victory was more likely to keep fighting.

Jerusalem sign

This sign was put up to point the way to Jerusalem. At Christmas 1917 the city was captured from Turkish control by British and Empire troops led by General Sir Edmund Allenby. It was a terrible blow for the Turks. A Turkish writer, Falih Rifki Atay, recorded that, 'The words "Jerusalem has fallen" spread like news of a death in the family'.

Displays captions

Illustrated London News

This issue of the 'Illustrated London News' reports the appointment of General Philippe Pétain as French commander-in-chief. By the summer of 1917 the French Army was in turmoil. Many soldiers refused to obey orders and called for peace. Pétain, the hero of the Battle of Verdun, restored order. He mended morale by offering the soldiers incentives, such as regular leave.

Souvenir shell case

This souvenir shell case was brought back from Italy by a British soldier. British and French troops were rushed to the Italian Front after the near collapse of the Italian Army in late 1917. Italian soldiers suffered huge casualties and harsh discipline. They surrendered or deserted in their thousands after defeat at the Battle of Caporetto. Italy, a sought-after ally in 1915, had now become a liability.

Bayonet

This dress bayonet commemorates the service of a soldier from the Austrian 27th Infantry Regiment who fought against the Italians. The Austro-Hungarian Army badly needed a morale boost to keep them fighting. It came late in 1917 when Austro-Hungarian troops, with German support, shattered the Italian Army at the Battle of Caporetto.

German P08 pistol

In 1917 British Empire troops invaded Palestine, then part of the Turkey's empire.

This German P08 pistol was captured there by an Australian soldier of Queensland's 5th Light Horse Regiment. Already a desirable souvenir, the soldier has personalised it by having the grips decoratively carved, probably by a Turkish prisoner of war.

TE Lawrence's agal

Encouraged by British promises of self-government, Arabs revolted against Turkish rule in 1916.

Britain sent advisers to assist them. One of them, TE Lawrence, wore Arab dress including this *agal* (head-rope).

The track section is from the 800-mile-long Hejaz railway, which ran from present day Syria to Saudi Arabia. Lawrence encouraged Arab guerrilla attacks on the railway to deny Turkish forces of food, water and supplies.

Photo caption

Colonel TE Lawrence, 'Lawrence of Arabia'

Faces like masks

Now one sees **faces like masks**, blue and cold and drawn by hunger.

Evelyn, Princess Blücher, Berlin, February 1917

By 1917 hunger caused by naval blockades threatened collapse on the home fronts.

In Britain the government introduced rationing to ease the effects of Germany's submarine campaign. People now got fair shares of food. Supplies were limited, but nobody starved.

But in Germany and Austria-Hungary, the British blockade caused real suffering, even starvation. Serious shortages of food and resources led to price rises, riots and strikes.

Why was the British blockade so effective?

Men and horses were sent from farms to the Front and food production fell. With imports cut off, a poor harvest in 1916 turned a problem into a crisis.

The supply of food was badly managed. While the armies were fed, civilians, especially those in cities, went hungry.

Display captions

Patriotic crockery and boxes

The British people were urged to eat less and waste nothing. They could buy patriotic crockery designed to encourage smaller meal portions. The boxes shown here, for keeping small amounts of sugar, were made by a wounded Belgian soldier in London. But prices and food queues kept growing, as did public concern and grumbling. The well-off were asked to join a voluntary

rationing scheme so as to leave more food for people in need.

Photo caption

A public kitchen in Hammersmith, London, set up to provide cheap meals

Film, notices and posters

The film and notices here and the posters on your left made plain the need to save food. In 1918 nearly 30,000 people were fined for wasting it. One man had fed his chickens on wheat; another had given oats to a horse 'kept for pleasure'. A woman who had bought over 45 kilos of meat for her dog pleaded that it 'had a weak heart and required careful feeding'.

Ration cards and books

In early 1918, food shortages forced the British government to introduce rationing. Everyone was issued with ration cards, later replaced by ration books, which guaranteed set amounts of meat, sugar, lard and butter or margarine per week. Rationing proved popular and helped reduce the food queues. Retired civil servant Charles Balston wrote in his diary, 'Rationing taught us to bear each other's burdens and to share and share alike'.

Recipes

These recipes use American maize and - an exotic introduction to the British diet - rice from India. Bread formed a far greater part of the British diet than it does today. But wheat to make flour was in short supply, so the government encouraged people to try different foods

which were more available. Kennedy Jones, Director-General of Food Economy, told Britain's women that 'the kitchen is the key to victory'.

Government notices

Farmers had to use all available land and produce all the food they could without waste. They were strictly regulated. Shown here are a government notice to a Gloucestershire farmer advising him of an upcoming government inspection and a Notice to Poultry-Keepers instructing them what they could feed their birds. Heavy fines, even imprisonment, threatened those who flouted the rules.

Maximum prices

The British government set maximum prices on food to stop war profiteers - the wholesalers and shopkeepers who took advantage of the lack of food to make money. One diarist, Annie Purbrook from Hornchurch, Essex, described them as 'greedy monsters to be found almost everywhere' who 'make a profit by holding up supplies and only letting food dribble out at huge prices'.

Photo caption

'Land Girls', children and German prisoners of war help to bring in the harvest, 1918

Posters

Across Europe, children played their part in coping with shortages. French schoolgirls designed these posters calling on people to eat less meat and to sow wheat.

Schoolchildren were also taught food economy. One nine-year-old British boy wrote in an essay, 'If I here of any people grumbling about not enough food I shall tell them not to be grumbling'.

Summary caption

Food shortages haunted the peoples of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Malnutrition led to diseases such as scurvy, dysentery and tuberculosis. The Allied blockade of German ports contributed to the premature deaths of an estimated 500,000 German civilians. Rationing was introduced, but it was poorly organised. Many shopkeepers could be bribed and a black market flourished. Ordinary people spent vast amounts of time and money trying to obtain food. Only the rich could get what they wanted.

German ration cards and war dishes

The German rationing system varied from region to region and town to town, with local ration cards printed for bread, meat, fat, milk, eggs, potatoes and groceries. Patriotic citizens were encouraged to eat smaller meals from 'war dishes'. In the 'Hunger Winter' of 1916-1917 many Germans were forced to exist on a diet based on a coarse type of swede that was usually fed to cattle.

German tobacco, tea, coffee and war bread

Germany produced substitute - *Ersatz* - goods to fill empty stomachs and help overcome shortages. These Ersatz products were of inferior quality. Tobacco contained tree bark. Coffee was made from roasted barley and tea from raspberry leaves. Hundreds of barely edible concoctions were promoted as substitutes

for meat. The most hated food was 'war bread', which sometimes contained sawdust.

Photo caption

Starving children in Vienna, Austria

Photo caption

A mobile soup kitchen feeding hungry Germans

Photographs

Germany and Austria-Hungary hoped to exploit conquered territories in Eastern Europe. These photographs show the Romanian harvest being gathered to feed people in Germany. But it proved difficult to ship food back to Germany and Austria. Germany was able to take less grain from defeated Romania than it had bought there before the war. Romanian farmers harvesting under German supervision

Photo caption

French prisoners of war load Romanian grain for shipment to Germany

Summary caption

The blockade of ports by Britain and its allies forced Germany to adopt extraordinary measures to deal with shortages of raw materials.

These measures prevented serious damage to the war effort and maintained supply of equipment to the Germany Army. But ordinary people paid the price.

They suffered from a lack of fuel for heating and cooking. Inferior substitutes replaced everyday items. People were cold, dirty, poorly clothed and demoralised.

Clothing made from woven paper

The blockade cut Germany off from its main sources of cotton and wool. The German Army took priority, so civilians were forced to go without. People who could no longer patch together their worn-out clothes were forced to wear clothing made from woven paper. Paper clothes were quite strong, but were obviously not suited to being washed or worn in the rain.

Russia has failed us

Russia has failed us when we most needed her help, and her armies have ignominiously retreated.

Ethel Bilbrough, British civilian, 4 November 1917

In Russia the collapse of food supplies, war weariness and no prospect of victory combined to dramatic effect.

There were mass protests. The Tsar was forced to abdicate by his own generals. A provisional government tried to keep the war going. But it was overthrown by Lenin's revolutionary Bolshevik party which promised the people 'Peace, Bread, Land'. In 1917 Russia became the first major power to leave the war.

How did the collapse of Russia affect the war?

At Brest-Litovsk the Bolsheviks signed a punishing peace treaty with Germany and its allies.

Germany could now concentrate its best fighting men on the Western Front. If it could strike before large numbers of American troops arrived, then it might finally seize victory against Britain and France.

Display caption

Russian Banner

In the autumn of 1917 the communist Bolsheviks seized power in Russia.

They succeeded because many soldiers based in the capital, Petrograd (present-day St Petersburg), supported them. This banner was carried on the streets of the city. It bears the words 'Workers of all countries unite! In the struggle you will obtain your rights!'

13. Seizing Victory

1918 saw the dramatic end of trench warfare as both sides used new tactics and colossal firepower to break the deadlock.

The German Army launched gigantic offensives on the Western Front. For the first time since 1914 the Allies feared defeat. They held on, but only just.

From July, the Allies counterattacked. They had more weapons and more supplies. All along the Front they struck devastating blows against the Germans.

Germany's army retreated. Its allies crumbled away.

Its people began to revolt. Germany's army was defeated. On 11 November 1918 a beaten Germany signed the Armistice. The fighting ended.

Hell breaks loose

'Tomorrow there will be nothing to keep secret – for then **hell breaks loose.**'

Rudolf Binding, German cavalry officer, 20 March 1918

On 21 March 1918 ten thousand German guns began to pound the British lines. German troops surged through British defences.

With Russia out of the war, German military leader Erich Ludendorff had decided to gamble on outright victory and attack in the West.

He launched a series of powerful offensives. The Germans advanced up to 40 miles.

Germany seemed on the brink of victory.

How did the Allies survive?

By July the attacks had broken down. The Germans were exhausted. The battles cost them their best men. German soldiers advanced so fast that guns and supplies could not keep up.

Many stopped to plunder abandoned British supplies or get drunk on looted alcohol.

With their backs to the wall, the Allies stood firm and fought back.

Display captions

Summary Caption

The German Army massed its best troops and nearly all its artillery on the Western Front ready for the 1918 offensives.

In just five hours on 21 March, German guns fired twice as many shells as the British had during the week-long bombardment before the Somme. Highly trained 'stormtroopers' led the attacking forces, soon overrunning Allied positions.

But by the end of June over 800,000 German soldiers had been killed, wounded or captured. The Germans realised that their chance for victory had gone.

Uniform and equipment

On 21 March 1918 Lieutenant Ernst Jünger of the German 73rd Fusilier Regiment recorded attacking the

enemy, *'in a mixture of feelings brought on by excitement, bloodthirstiness, anger and alcohol'*. The uniform and equipment of the 73rd Fusilier Regiment includes a shovel for rapid digging-in. The 'Gibraltar' cuff title commemorates the unit's historic 1779 defence of Gibraltar alongside British troops

German light machine gun

Like the Allies, the Germans had developed a machine gun that could be carried into the attack. However, the German MG 08/15 light machine gun. was 'light' in name only. It weighed 22 kilos including the ammunition belt and water for cooling. It provided the main firepower of German infantry from 1917 onwards.

German sign

The Germans had few trucks. Most of their guns and transport were horse-drawn. This is a sign for a horse collection point. By 1918 horses were in short supply and weak from lack of feed. Rudolf Binding, a German officer, wrote that, due to lack of horses, 'we...have to leave guns behind, ammunition wagons and so on. This will reduce our artillery strength by about a quarter. It would not be safe to let the infantry know that.'

Toby jugs and Beauvais Agreement

These toby jugs represent Allied commanders who attended a crisis meeting in late March 1918. The Beauvais Agreement put French General Ferdinand Foch in command of the Allied armies. British Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and US General John Pershing willingly accepted. Foch sent troops where they were most needed, rushing in reinforcements to

help the British. This unity would be the key to Allied victory.

Wex flamethrower

Flamethrowers added to the attacking power of German assault troops. The Wex Flamethrower could project ten bursts of blazing fuel for up to 30 metres. It was operated by two soldiers, one to carry the pack of fuel, the other to direct the flame. The Germans pioneered the use of this terrifying weapon.

Photo caption

A German transport advancing across the old Somme battlefield, March 1918

Now is the time to act with boldness

Now is the time to act with boldness.

Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, 19 August 1918

Suddenly the tide turned.

In July 1918 the French threw back the attacking Germans in the Second Battle of the Marne. On 8 August an Allied offensive, spearheaded by Australian and Canadian troops, smashed the Germans at Amiens.

Marshal Foch, overall Allied commander, masterminded further blows against the Germans. By October, British and Empire forces had broken through the main German defences - the Hindenburg Line.

Why were the Allies now successful?

Foch could draw on the combined power of all the Allies, now including the fresh American Army. Successive attacks gave the Germans no respite.

German soldiers became demoralised in the face of ferocious Allied firepower. The Allies had victory in their grasp.

Display captions

Summary Caption

From summer 1918 the French and British armies were finally able to apply the attacking lessons they had learnt, at such cost, since 1915.

They were joined by the inexperienced but powerful US Army. Together, they drove the Germans back. At the end of September General Ludendorff told the Kaiser that Germany could no longer win the war.

American uniform

On the left of the showcase is the uniform worn by Private Gilbert Wien of the US 1st Gas Regiment. The rapid build-up of an American army of fresh, enthusiastic soldiers was a powerful boost to Allied morale. By November there were 1.3 million US combat troops in France. On arriving, one US officer wrote that, 'This country is well-nigh bled white...and our coming is hailed as the coming of the Lord'.

Canadian uniform

In the centre of the showcase is the uniform of a warrant officer of the Canadian 22nd Battalion, which fought at Amiens in August 1918. On 9 August, British general Sir Henry Rawlinson wrote, 'I think we have given the Boche a pretty good bump this time – the Australians and Canadians fought magnificently'. British and Empire forces played a key role in the Allied victories, breaking the 'impregnable' Hindenburg Line.

French uniform

In spring 1918, France still fielded the Allies' largest army. On the right of the showcase is the uniform of a warrant officer of the French 113th Infantry Regiment, which fought alongside the British during the first great German offensive that year. It later fought in the July counterattack on the Marne. The M1917 RSC, used by platoon leaders and selected marksmen, was the war's most technologically advanced rifle.

Shoulder straps

British and Empire soldiers took more German prisoners between August and November 1918 than during the whole of the rest of the war. The British V Corps took shoulder straps from captured Germans to identify their units, and mounted them on boards as trophies. A French Intelligence report revealed that German soldiers were depressed by 'heavy losses, by the poor quality of their food, and by the crisis inside Germany'.

Leaflet

‘Turkey left the struggle yesterday.’ Turkey’s army was in tatters, its people facing famine. This leaflet tells German soldiers that a new Turkish government has signed an armistice with the Allies, on 30 October 1918, and that Austria-Hungary has asked for ‘special negotiations’. As a result, ‘Germany is now quite alone in the struggle!’.

Propaganda leaflets

‘Bulgaria has given up the war.’ Millions of demoralising propaganda leaflets were dropped on the retreating German Army from unmanned balloons. Many carried news of the collapse of Germany’s allies. Bulgaria, starving and on the brink of revolution, left the war on 29 September 1918.

Propaganda leaflet

‘Immediate ceasefire on all Austro-Hungarian Fronts.’ This propaganda leaflet brought German soldiers news of the collapse of their closest ally. In November 1918, Austria-Hungary’s army was breaking under an Italian offensive, and its empire disintegrating. Hungary ordered its troops home and declared independence. Austria too gave up the fight. Germany now stood alone.

Peace at any price

...the broad masses want only peace, even if it is **peace at any price**.

August Isbert, German general, 30 October 1918

The end came rapidly. Germany's army retreated, its allies disintegrated.

In October, hoping for lenient terms, Germany approached President Wilson for an armistice.

When this became public, angry Germans wondered why they were still fighting. To avert revolution, the Kaiser was forced to abdicate.

On 11 November 1918 Germany signed an armistice which ended the fighting on the Western Front.

What was the Armistice?

An armistice is usually just a ceasefire. But the 1918 Armistice forced the Germans to leave occupied territory and to surrender weapons, aeroplanes and warships. Beaten in battle, Germany had no bargaining power.

For Germany, the Armistice was both a defeat and a humiliation.

Display captions

Instructions to cease hostilities

Instructions to cease hostilities were issued to all troops on the Western Front. The Armistice would begin at 11am on 11 November 1918. These instructions were received by the British 40th Infantry Division, which had been in France since the Battle of the Somme. In just over two years nearly 20,000 of its soldiers had been

reported killed, wounded or missing in action, more than its original strength.

Terms of the Armistice

The Allies were determined to ensure the terms of the Armistice meant that Germany could not fight again. German territory was to be occupied, its warships interned. Defeated Germany's leaders, faced with revolution at home, had no choice but to sign. David Lloyd George insisted that Germany now had to face 'justice, divine justice'. This copy of the Armistice terms belonged to him.

Doodle

In late October British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and the French premier Georges Clemenceau thrashed out the Armistice terms with US President Wilson's representative, Edward House. Lloyd George drew this doodle on a blotter during one of these meetings at the Trianon Palace Hotel, Versailles. The US president had previously announced a liberal 'Fourteen Points' peace plan, but the terms now agreed were much harsher.

Photos of celebration

News of the Armistice prompted jubilation in Britain and the other Allied countries. These photographs show Britons reacting both at home and at the Front. Soldiers had less opportunity for merry-making, and certain units remained in action until 11am. At home, some of those celebrating were yet to receive news of loved ones killed in the final days and hours of the war.

Paper Flags

These paper flags were sold in London on Armistice Day, 11 November 1918. Many Allied cities saw wild rejoicing. In London the unrestrained drinking, dancing and sexual abandon shown by people would have been unthinkable before the war. Duff Cooper, an officer home on leave, wrote that, 'All London was in uproar - singing, cheering, waving flags' while diarist Ethel Bilbrough wrote that the city, 'went quite mad'.

Photo caption

At the Front, soldiers of the Irish Guards hears details of the Armistice

Photo caption

Jubilation in Birmingham city centre, Armistice Day 1918

Photo caption

After the Armistice signing – the Allied delegation

Photo caption

Kaiser Wilhelm II (fourth on the left) en route to exile in Holland

Photo caption

Communist revolutionaries in Berlin, November 1918

14. War Without End

Britain and its empire were triumphant, but much changed by four years of war.

The Great War gave rise to new ambitions, rivalries and tensions. Old empires had fallen, new nations had been born. Revolutionary ideologies like communism and fascism emerged. Wars were still being fought.

The leaders of the victorious powers met in Paris to settle the peace. They were faced with an exhausted and shattered world. People had high hopes that they would create a new, safer and better one.

Display captions

Summary caption

Terrible as the losses were, there was no 'Lost Generation' of young British men. 88 per cent of those who went off to fight came home. But some towns and families paid a disproportionately high price. Many men returned damaged, physically or mentally, some irreparably. At the end of the following decade, nearly 2.5 million war veterans were still receiving a disability pension of some sort.

Film

This is a nine minute edit of an hour-long film made in September 1919 by French pilot Jacques Trolley de Prévaux and cameraman Lucien Lesaint. It shows former battlefields in Belgium and France. Half a million homes in over 1,600 different towns and villages had been destroyed. 6,000 square miles of land which, before the war, had produced nearly all France's iron ore and much of its steel, was a wasteland.

Wooden grave marker

Temporary wooden grave markers like this cross identified the final resting places of British and Empire dead. Under Sir Fabian Ware the Imperial War Graves Commission (now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) had the enormous task of replacing the crosses with headstones. It also secured land for cemeteries and for memorials to those with no known grave. In 1923 4,000 headstones were being delivered each week to cemeteries in France.

Shell shock film

This 1918 film shows men suffering from shell-shock. It was filmed at military hospitals in Devon and Hampshire. 80,000 cases of 'war neuroses' had been reported by the end of the war. In 1928 men with shell shock accounted for ten per cent of all those claiming disability pensions.

Display captions

Facial prosthesis and photos

Over 60,000 British soldiers suffered head or eye injuries. Some wore metal masks like these to hide disfigurements. The photographs show the sculptor Francis Derwent Wood, who first made them, and an array of other facial prostheses. The masks were produced in a hospital department in Wandsworth, London, known as the 'tin noses shop'. Each was fitted individually and painted to match the wearer's skin tone.

Thomas Mann photos

These photographs show Private Thomas Mann, whose nose had been torn off by a shell fragment. Over five years, he underwent plastic surgery at Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup, but found the treatment so painful he gave it up. After marrying hospital cook Minnie Blows, he became a nurse at Queen Mary's. Minnie's soldier-fiancé had been killed and she had resolved to love a wounded soldier. Thomas and Minnie would have four children.

Prosthetic arm

'Next to the loss of life, the sacrifice of a limb is the greatest a man can make for his country,' announced *The Times* in December 1920. Over 41,000 British servicemen, including Leading Seaman William Horne, made that sacrifice. He was fitted with this prosthetic arm. The foremost institution in teaching men how to cope with their artificial limbs was Queen Mary's Hospital at Roehampton, south-west London.

Letters

Behind every statistic of loss in this area lies immeasurable pain and grief. Private William Martin and his fiancée Emily Chitticks sent each other these letters. William wrote his last letter on 24 March 1917. Three days later, he was killed by a sniper. Unaware of his death, Emily wrote to him the following day. She died in 1974, having never married, 'as my heart and love are buried in his grave in France'.

Photo caption

Facial prostheses, with the spectacles which held them in place

Photo caption

Captain Francis Derwent Wood examining finished face plates

Photo caption

Amputee veterans show their new prosthetic arms

The future of the world

'You hold in your hands the **future of the world.**'

French President Raymond Poincaré, to the Paris Peace Conference, 18 January 1919

In Paris, delegates from over 30 countries gathered for a conference to create a lasting peace.

Britain, France and America played the largest part in forming the June 1919 Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty forced the Germans to disarm, pay reparations and surrender territory.

Other treaties forced Germany's wartime allies to accept similar terms.

Was the Peace Conference a failure?

The Conference failed to meet high expectations. The treaties were an uneasy compromise and the peace terms proved difficult to enforce. Many people felt that

the Germans were not punished enough. In Germany, the Versailles Treaty lasting resentment.

But the creation of the League of Nations, designed to prevent future wars and to promote peace, gave cause for hope.

Display captions

Orpen Painting

This oil painting 'The Signing of Peace in the Hall of Mirrors, Versailles, 28th June 1919' is by William Orpen. The fighting over, Orpen stayed in France to document the Peace Conference in Paris. His confidence in the peace process faded as the diplomatic wrangling dragged on over six months, 'In spite of all these eminent men, I kept thinking of the soldiers who remain in France for ever'.

Big Three at Versailles LG, Clemenceau, Wilson

The photograph shows British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, French premier Georges Clemenceau and US President Woodrow Wilson. Lloyd George's agenda was to safeguard Britain's empire, Clemenceau's to protect France. The idealistic Wilson wanted a world where people could 'live their own lives under governments which they themselves choose'. Lloyd George thought him like a 'missionary' come to 'rescue the poor European heathen'.

Photograph of captured German weapons

This photograph shows captured German weapons triumphantly displayed in Paris. Winston Churchill believed that, 'the hatred of France for Germany was something more than human'. Lloyd George later wrote that he never wanted the peace conference held in Clemenceau's 'bloody capital'. He and the Americans would have preferred somewhere neutral, but Clemenceau' wept and protested so much that we gave way'.

German medallion

This German medallion, 'The Hour of Reckoning' was designed by Karl Goetz and shows German delegates receiving the draft Versailles Treaty terms. Having believed that President Wilson would win Germany a favourable settlement, the Treaty's terms shocked them. At dinner in their hotel that evening, one delegate announced, 'Gentlemen, I am drunk.... This shameful treaty has broken me, for I had believed in Wilson until today'.

Photo caption

German guns displayed on the Champs Elysées, Paris

Photo caption

Goetz Medallion Protest meeting at dismemberment of Germany

Photo caption

A protest in Berlin at the loss of German territory to a newly independent nation, Poland

This museum

‘We cannot say with what eyes posterity will regard **this Museum** nor what ideas it will rouse in their minds’.

King George V, opening of IWM, 9 June 1920

The First World War shaped the modern world.

Some of the ideas which motivated people to fight seem strange to us now. Others seem familiar.

Different generations have taken different standpoints as to what the war meant and we still grapple with its meaning today.

What was its impact?

What did it achieve?

Is it still important?

Why do we remember it in the way that we do?

In this final area, you can look at some of the ways in which the war changed people’s lives. Their words and the objects they gave to this museum show us that then, as now, these questions did not – and do not – have a simple answer.

Display captions

The Open Road

Claude Friese-Greene's 'The Open Road', a series of short films, took cinema-goers on a journey through Britain. This edit lasts for seven minutes. 'The Open Road' was completed in 1926. That year a nine-day General Strike gripped Britain. Cabinet minister Winston Churchill proposed using troops if 'the situation threatens to go out of control'. But the revolutionary fervour the government so feared after the war never materialised.

Summary caption

Britain became more democratic after the war. The government extended the parliamentary vote from 8 million men in 1914 to over 21 million people, including, for the first time, women. The state now also had more control over people's lives, not least in the area of taxation. The rate of income tax - around five times that of 1914 and paid by twice as many people - would never again fall to the pre-war level.

Election poster

'Make the Huns pay' Election poster, Essex Times Office, December 1918

In December 1918 Lloyd George called a general election. His coalition of Liberals and Conservatives vowed to make Britain 'a country fit for heroes to live in'. With the Treaty of Versailles yet to be signed, the 'German question' was high on everyone's agenda. This campaign poster is for a Liberal candidate who won his seat comfortably. The coalition was returned to power.

How to vote leaflet

This leaflet advised first-time voters how to exercise their democratic right. In February 1918, the Representation of the People Act gave the vote to all men over 21 years of age and to women over 30. Ten years later, it was extended to women over 21. The increase in the working class vote would contribute, in time, to the rise of the Labour Party.

Photo caption

A woman voting for the first time, December 1918

Photo of Lady Astor

In December 1919 Lady Astor, shown in this photograph, became the first woman to take a seat in Parliament. War had opened doors for women. But with the return of servicemen to their jobs, many of these doors were closed again. Hundreds of thousands of women went back to rearing families or to traditional women's work such as domestic service.

Photo caption

A woman voting for the first time, December 1918

Photo caption

Lady Astor is proclaimed Conservative MP for Plymouth

Photo caption

Women and children going to vote

Display captions

Summary caption

The 4 million war veterans who returned to Britain hoped for the promised 'Land Fit For Heroes'. But economic boom was followed by a depression. Industries that had powered the war economy went into decline. There was a shocking rise in unemployment. In 1922 85 million days were lost to strikes. By the late 1920s many war veterans were questioning what they had actually fought for. But government fears that disaffected ex-soldiers might foster revolution proved groundless.

Service medals

Most of Britain's veterans were proud of their achievements. The service medals shown here were worn at reunions and remembrance events. They are the 1914-1915 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal, known as 'Pip, Squeak and Wilfred' after cartoon characters in the 'Daily Mirror'. The combination of the Victory Medal and British War Medal, worn by men who served from 1916, mainly conscripts, was known as 'Mutt and Jeff'.

Out of work donation policy and lavender sachet

The out-of-work donation policy offered temporary relief to unemployed ex-servicemen. But many veterans were reduced to selling goods like this lavender sachet on the streets. From 1920, the government, fearing political unrest, brought in a new unemployment benefit scheme. The 'dole' paid more generously and could be claimed by most workers if made unemployed. Two million people were jobless by 1922, half a million of them ex-servicemen.

Photo caption

Veterans of 302 Battery Royal Field Artillery at a reunion dinner

Armistice Balls

Armistice Balls, as on this poster, were a feature of British life for some years after 1918. The coming of peace coincided with the Jazz Age, with its new styles, rhythms and sense of fun. The early anniversaries of the Armistice were often marked by riotous 'booze ups' and 'knees ups'. But in the late 1920s celebrations were seen as inappropriate and were quietly dropped in favour of more sedate commemorations.

Badges and menus

These badges represent some of the many old comrades' associations formed during and after the war. The British Legion, a national association run by former officers, was founded in 1921. Reunion dinners like those shown on the menus here gave men a chance to relive their army experience. Veterans' organisations in Britain offered comradeship and support, but did not become political hotbeds as in Germany and Italy.

Display captions

Summary caption

Britain, like most other nations which had suffered dreadful loss, memorialised its war dead in terms of 'sacrifice'. Yet the First World War saw the creation of a language of remembrance unique to Britain. It is with us to this day. We see it in war memorials in our cities, towns, schools, places of worship and workplaces, as well as in rituals such as Remembrance Sunday and the two-minute silence at 11am each 11 November.

Poppy

The first poppy appeal took place in 1921. The poppy had become a symbol of remembrance during the war. Anna Guérin, a French woman, originally had the idea of selling artificial poppies for charity. The idea was taken up by the British Legion and veterans' organisations throughout the Empire. The poppies were made then, as they still are today, by disabled ex-service personnel at the Legion's factory in Richmond, Surrey.

Memorial bookmark and book

Schools, colleges, businesses and families all found ways to remember their dead. A memorial silk bookmark was often given out to friends and relatives of a dead soldier. The memorial book is for Harrow School, one of the public schools attended by the sons of Britain's privileged classes. Many young officers had been drawn from public schools and their losses had been disproportionately high.

Next of kin memorial plaque and scroll

All families in Britain and the Empire who had lost a loved one on active service during the war received the official Next of Kin Memorial Plaque and scroll. The symbolic figure of Britannia on the plaque also appeared on the bronze one penny coin and so it was nicknamed the 'Dead Man's Penny'. Relatives of 600 servicewomen who had died were among those who received these plaques.

Cenotaph drawings

These are original drawings by Sir Edwin Lutyens for the Cenotaph on Whitehall, London. Most of Britain's war dead were buried overseas and the Cenotaph or 'empty tomb', became, and remains, the focus for national remembrance. First made in wood for Victory Day in July 1919, the permanent stone structure was unveiled by King George V on Armistice Day 1920. That same day the remains of the Unknown Warrior were buried in Westminster Abbey.

Diary

This diary records a 1928 pilgrimage by ex-servicemen and women to the Western Front battlefields and cemeteries. With the war over, travel firms and ex-officers advertised tours of the battlefields. Charitable organisations like the British Legion subsidised or conducted their own tours for the less well-off.

Photo caption

This photograph shows a staff member at the new Imperial War Museum, London, with photographs and documents sent in by donors. Conceived in 1917, the Museum first opened its doors in June 1920, at Crystal Palace. According to one of its founders, Sir Alfred Mond, it was not to be 'a monument of military glory' but rather 'a record of toil and sacrifice'. Within nine months it had nearly 1.5 million visitors.

Display captions

Summary caption

The end of war did not bring peace to Ireland. Having won the majority of Irish seats in the 1918 general election, republicans declared independence. This led to

guerrilla war between British forces and the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Following the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, Ireland was partitioned into a southern Free State and Northern Ireland. Many republicans still wanted independence for all Ireland and fought a civil war with former comrades who were content with the compromise.

Sub-machine gun

The Irish Republican Army was among the first to use the American Thompson sub-machine gun. From summer 1921, the IRA smuggled Thompsons into Ireland and used them against British forces. This weapon's serial number has been struck out so that its provenance cannot be traced. Many Irishmen who fought in the 1922-1923 civil war – on both sides – were former soldiers. The Provisional IRA used Thompsons well into the 1970s.

IRA mugshot album

These are British photographs of Irish Republican Army suspects. The men have been made to show their hands for distinguishing marks such as tattoos. The IRA targeted British soldiers, Royal Irish Constabulary policemen and the infamously brutal 'Auxiliaries'. In one incident, the IRA killed 11 unarmed British officers in Dublin. On 'Bloody Sunday', 21 November 1920, the Auxiliaries retaliated, shooting into a football crowd and killing 12 spectators.

Sinn Fein banner

This is a banner of Na Fianna Éireann ('Soldiers of Ireland'), a boys' organisation founded by republican

activist Countess Markievicz. Markievicz became the first woman elected to the British parliament in the December 1918 general election. Like other republican MPs, she refused to take her seat in the House of Commons. British troops found the banner in her home after the Easter Rising.

Banner lent by Her Majesty The Queen.

Photo of negotiators

This photograph shows republican leaders Harry Boland, Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera. De Valera continued to fight for a united Ireland. Anti-Treaty forces murdered Collins in 1922 for helping negotiate the treaty which had partitioned Ireland. Protestant Unionists in Northern Ireland welcomed continued British rule, but there was hostility between them and the significant minority of mainly Catholic republicans.

Photo caption

Irish republican leaders Harry Boland, Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera

Photo caption

Irish Republican Army members during the 1922-1923 civil war

Photo caption

Pro-Treaty Irish National Army soldiers during the 1922-1923 civil war

Display captions

Summary caption

Victory not only secured the British Empire: it expanded the territory under British control. But in the white Dominions, especially Australia and Canada, war had fostered a heightened sense of national identity. Their peoples expected the Empire to evolve into a more equal Commonwealth. In the non-white Empire, especially India, demands for self-rule became more vocal. Britain had to exert control and maintain its rule. The British Empire of Queen Victoria's days was gone forever.

Empire poster and jigsaw

This poster and jigsaw are souvenirs from the 1924 British Empire Exhibition. Wembley Stadium was built for the Exhibition, which attracted 27 million visitors. The displays there were meant to 'strengthen bonds that bind Mother Country to her Sister States and Daughters'. But the war had loosened some of those bonds.

Book. India

This book commemorates Edward, Prince of Wales' 1921 tour of India. India's huge contribution to the war effort intensified demands for independence. The Prince sensed the tension, writing that people 'think my tour is a success, and I must reluctantly tell you it is no such thing'. In 1919, at Amritsar, British-led troops had killed hundreds of unarmed protestors. Mahatma Gandhi later denounced British rule as 'wholly evil'.

Photo of Australian Sapper Arthur Dunbar

The scene in this photograph is a family reception for Australian Sapper Arthur Dunbar following his return to

home to Adelaide from France. Australia fought for the first time as a nation during the Great War. To this day Australians and New Zealanders commemorate their war dead on 25 April - Anzac Day - the date of the first landings at Gallipoli. The fighting there established Australia as a nation not only in name but also in spirit.

Photo caption

Family reception for Sapper Arthur Dunbar

Canada (on jigsaw)

This photograph shows people gathering at the Cenotaph in Vancouver, Canada, 1926. The Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge nine years previously is seen as marking the real birth of Canada as a nation. 'We are no longer humble colonials, we've made armies', said Canadian artist Alexander Young Jackson in 1919. But at the same time, most English-speaking Canadians still had great attachment to their British heritage.

Photo caption

The Cenotaph in Vancouver, Canada, 11 November 1926 City of Vancouver Archives – CVA 99-1561

New Zealand (on jigsaw)

The photograph here shows Armistice celebrations in Levin, New Zealand, November 1918. Historian and former soldier Ormond Burton wrote that 'somewhere between the landing at Anzac and the end of the battle of the Somme, New Zealand very definitely became a nation'. While many New Zealanders began to identify themselves as 'Kiwis', indigenous Maori were divided as to whether they were part of a New Zealand nation.

Photo caption

Armistice celebrations, Levin, New Zealand, November 1918

South Africa (on jigsaw)

This photograph is of a crowd in Pretoria, South Africa, on 11 November 1918. White and black South Africans had served in the war, the latter almost exclusively as labourers. War had brought little change to South Africa. The white minority still ruled this least 'British' of Dominions, which now governed what had been German South West Africa (Namibia). Former Boer War general Jan Smuts emerged from the war as the Empire's leading statesman.

Photo caption

Pretoria, South Africa, 11 November 1918

Display captions

Summary caption

Britain's wartime campaigns in the Middle East meant that it would play a major part in determining the region's troubled future. During the war, Britain and France secretly planned to carve up the Ottoman Empire. Britain took for itself Palestine, Transjordan (now Jordan) and Mesopotamia (Iraq). Arab rulers had been encouraged to support Britain in return for independence. But the Anglo-French agreement meant the Arabs now found that they had exchanged one colonial master for another.

Plane over Mosul

This photograph shows a Royal Air Force plane patrolling over Mosul, Iraq. The city was originally to fall within French-controlled Syria. But the British negotiated with the French to obtain Mosul, with its rich oil resources. The Kurds who inhabited the region had been given assurances that they would receive their own state and staged revolts against British rule throughout the 1920s.

Photo caption

A Royal Air Force Westland Wapiti over Mosul, Iraq

Baghdad painting

The Imperial War Museum commissioned Richard Carline, who painted Baghdad, 1919, to record air operations in Palestine and Mesopotamia.

In 1920 British forces crushed an Arab insurgency in Mesopotamia. A pro-British Arab leader, Feisal, was made 'ruler' and the new state re-named Iraq. At any sign of further unrest, British planes dropped warning leaflets then bombed villages. This 'air control' was cheap but increased hatred of the British.

Gaza painting

Gaza Seen From the Air, Over British Lines on Ali Muntar Hill Looking Towards the Sea was painted by former army flier Richard Carline.

In 1917, in the Declaration, Britain had pledged to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine, which included Gaza. But it had also promised Arab self-rule. There were riots and violence between Arabs and Jewish

settlers throughout the 1920s. The see-sawing of British policy only worsened tensions.

Sound interviews

Our pioneering sound archive recorded these interviews in the 1960s and 1970s. They feature men and women who served in the First World War, on the home and fighting fronts, who tell us what the war meant for them.