# WWI Diary Entry

# Background:

World War I was well known for it’s use of trench warfare on the front between Germany and France. Trench warfare is a style of warfare that relied on establishing well fortified defenses by literally digging trenches into the ground for the soldiers to hide in. Trench warfare has a well documented effectiveness as well as consequences of it’s use.

Trench warfare, combined with new mechanical innovations in weaponry lead to a gruesome and deadly style of fighting that years of intense fighting with very little ground changing hands as a result.

What’s more, the soldiers faced harsh and difficult conditions, being asked to wait in trenches filled with water, mud, insects, rats, and worse while the enemy occasionally rained destruction on you through violent shelling from mortar, cannons, and artillery. The shelling was often very inaccurate but just accurate enough to fill soldiers with a constant sense of dread and panic. What’s more, without good shelter the soldiers were constantly exposed to natural conditions like winter cold and summer heat without an opportunity to escape.

All the time that a soldier sits in a trench and hopes not to be shelled they are waiting for the enemy to go “over the top” to charge across the “no mans land” between the trenches and the fighting begin in earnest. Or, the order could come from their side to go “over the top” and then they have to rely on your training and luck to keep themselves alive as enemy machine guns tried to bring them down.

By many accounts, just as bad or worse, was the conditions of the trenches and the effects that those conditions had on the soldiers. Many soldiers left the front lines to go back to a hospital not from bullet wounds or shrapnel from a shell, but from trench foot (where tissue of the feet begins to break down due to long exposure), frost bite (from exposure to the cold), or other diseases and infections.

This document is a series of excerpts from Sgt Bernard Joseph Brookes from England. He was a member of the Queen’s Westminster Rifles and served in and around the trenches of between Germany and France. While he was there he kept notes in various “pocket books”. He specifically endeavored to leave out anything that happened to him that might be unique and unusual, working to depict an account of the average life of a British soldier in the Great War.

The Diary of Sgt Bernard Joseph Brookes of the Queen’s Westminster Rifles, 1914-1915 <Exceprts>

(Accessed from <http://www.bobbrookes.co.uk/diary_main.htm>)

**9.12.1914**

I must have gone nearly a mile before I came to the conclusion that something was wrong, and I became desperate. The "whiz" of the bullets told me that I was going parallel with the trenches, so I struck off at right angles across a field, hoping to meet somebody. I had not gone more than 50 yards when I saw a light. My heart beat rapidly, - where was I? Were these the British or German trenches? I laid down flat in the mud and listened.…I explained that I was in the Queen’s Westminster rifles.… After explanations and a chat with an Officer who gave me a tot of rum, I was informed that I would have to go about a mile to the left, and that, as the trenches in parts were full of water, I had better get out again and walk along the top. Once inside, I did not quite like the idea of being on top again, but as there were some men about, it was not so bad. The Germs, I was told, were some four or five hundred yards in front.

…I came across my Battalion about 10.30 PM saying a sincere prayer, and heaving a sigh of relief.

I had the only "dug-out" left, and it was very badly built, the bottom being under…about three inches of mud and water….However I got my waterproof sheet on the ground, and was thankful to get my pack, blankets, and equipment off my back….

**15.12.1914**

The next day we had more rain and the trenches were flooded. During the afternoon I took off my greatcoat to scrape the mud away from which was adhering and making the coat weigh very heavily. I must have lifted it slightly in the air for I had just put it on top of my dug-out, when, - "ping" - it was hit by a bullet which embedded itself a foot of two in the mud….

A large number of men by this time were suffering from such complaints as Rheumatism, Frost Bite, Trench Feet, and suchlike, which caused them to be removed from the trenches and many got back to England. The cold had been very intense, and we had been standing in water, at times up to our hips, whilst the rest of our clothing was soaked through. We had slept in this state, and had no wash since entering the trenches, so it can hardly be wondered at that there was illness about. Now that I look back and think of my first experience of the trenches, which was certainly the worst, I really cannot understand how I am alive to tell the tale. Apart from the risk of being shot, being in wet clothes for so long a period is serious…

**26.6.1915**

We were heavily shelled at 5.30 and 6.30 am on a Saturday 26th June but, except for four casualties, nothing out of the ordinary took place.

**23.7.1915**

The casualties on this day at "stink cottages” [the name given to the location where the author was stationed] were four men killed, which included the champion boxer of the London Banks.

**25.7.1915**

It was now my turn for duty at "STINK COTTAGES".

The name of "STINK COTTAGES" was indeed well earned for the position consisted of about five or six cottages which ran at the side of the communication trench from our lines to the Germs line….

We therefore defended the communication trench right up to these cottages, when it was blocked up by refuse, dead bodies etc, for a space of 15 yards, the other side of the barrier being used by the Germs as their advance listening post.

**9.8.1915**

I was soaked to the skin and covered in mud, and I found it was impossible to continue along this trench. I therefore jumped out on top, and with my rifle smothered in mud and bayonet fixed, got within 10 - 12 yards of the captured trench. It was then that a salvo of shells burst just above my head and threw me very heavily to the grounds but I was not hit. Some men in our trench spotted me and ran out to give me a hand in to the trench.

As far as I remember, there were are about half a dozen men left who were not wounded, and no officers at all….

They took me to the Major (Major Tyewitt)… and we were all talking when another shell burst nearby, throwing in a mass of dirt etc all over us.

I was taken out of the trenches, and cannot say that I remember much more until travelling in an ambulance to hospital…

**Summary:**

**What risks did soldiers have to face when being stationed in a trench for weeks without a break?**

**Why was trench warfare so common on the German/French front? What were the advantages detailed in this reading?**

The Diary of Sgt Bernard Joseph Brookes of the Queen’s Westminster Rifles, 1914-1915 <Exceprts>

(Accessed from <http://www.bobbrookes.co.uk/diary_main.htm>)

**9.12.1914**

**What happened to Sgt Brookes on December 9th that had him confused?**

**What is a “dug-out”?**

**This paragraph demonstrates two threats in the trenches they are:**

**1.**

**2.**

**Why does Sgt. Brookes state that “being in wet clothes for so long is serious…”?**

I must have gone nearly a mile before I came to the conclusion that something was wrong, and I became desperate. The "whiz" of the bullets told me that I was going parallel with the trenches, so I struck off at right angles across a field, hoping to meet somebody. I had not gone more than 50 yards when I saw a light. My heart beat rapidly, - where was I? Were these the British or German trenches? I laid down flat in the mud and listened.…I explained that I was in the Queen’s Westminster rifles.… After explanations and a chat with an Officer who gave me a tot of rum, I was informed that I would have to go about a mile to the left, and that, as the trenches in parts were full of water, I had better get out again and walk along the top. Once inside, I did not quite like the idea of being on top again, but as there were some men about, it was not so bad. The Germs, I was told, were some four or five hundred yards in front.

…I came across my Battalion about 10.30 PM saying a sincere prayer, and heaving a sigh of relief.

I had the only "dug-out" left, and it was very badly built, the bottom being under…about three inches of mud and water….However I got my waterproof sheet on the ground, and was thankful to get my pack, blankets, and equipment off my back….

**15.12.1914**

The next day we had more rain and the trenches were flooded. During the afternoon I took off my greatcoat to scrape the mud away from which was adhering and making the coat weigh very heavily. I must have lifted it slightly in the air for I had just put it on top of my dug-out, when, - "ping" - it was hit by a bullet which embedded itself a foot of two in the mud….

A large number of men by this time were suffering from such complaints as Rheumatism, Frost Bite, Trench Feet, and suchlike, which caused them to be removed from the trenches and many got back to England. The cold had been very intense, and we had been standing in water, at times up to our hips, whilst the rest of our clothing was soaked through. We had slept in this state, and had no wash since entering the trenches, so it can hardly be wondered at that there was illness about. Now that I look back and think of my first experience of the trenches, which was certainly the worst, I really cannot understand how I am alive to tell the tale. Apart from the risk of being shot, being in wet clothes for so long a period is serious…

**26.6.1915**

We were heavily shelled at 5.30 and 6.30 am on a Saturday 26th June but, except for four casualties, nothing out of the ordinary took place.

**23.7.1915**

The casualties on this day at "stink cottages” [the name given to the location where the author was stationed] were four men killed, which included the champion boxer of the London Banks.

**Why did the soldiers call this area “Stink Cottages”?**

**What happened to Sgt Brookes that eventually had him taken away from the trenches?**

**25.7.1915**

It was now my turn for duty at "STINK COTTAGES".

The name of "STINK COTTAGES" was indeed well earned for the position consisted of about five or six cottages which ran at the side of the communication trench from our lines to the Germs line….

We therefore defended the communication trench right up to these cottages, when it was blocked up by refuse, dead bodies etc, for a space of 15 yards, the other side of the barrier being used by the Germs as their advance listening post.

**9.8.1915**

I was soaked to the skin and covered in mud, and I found it was impossible to continue along this trench. I therefore jumped out on top, and with my rifle smothered in mud and bayonet fixed, got within 10 - 12 yards of the captured trench. It was then that a salvo of shells burst just above my head and threw me very heavily to the grounds but I was not hit. Some men in our trench spotted me and ran out to give me a hand in to the trench.

As far as I remember, there were are about half a dozen men left who were not wounded, and no officers at all….

They took me to the Major (Major Tyewitt)… and we were all talking when another shell burst nearby, throwing in a mass of dirt etc all over us.

I was taken out of the trenches, and cannot say that I remember much more until travelling in an ambulance to hospital…

**Summary:**

**What risks did soldiers have to face when being stationed in a trench for weeks without a break?**

**Why was trench warfare so common on the German/French front? What were the advantages detailed in this reading?**

The Diary of Sgt Bernard Joseph Brookes of the Queen’s Westminster Rifles, 1914-1915 <Exceprts>

(Accessed from <http://www.bobbrookes.co.uk/diary_main.htm>)

**What happened to Sgt Brookes on December 9th that had him confused?**

**What is a “dug-out”?**

**This paragraph demonstrates two threats in the trenches they are:**

**1.**

**2.**

**Why does Sgt. Brookes state that “being in wet clothes for so long is serious…”?**

**9.12.1914**

I must have gone nearly a mile before I came to the conclusion that something was wrong, and I became desperate. **The "whiz" of the bullets told me that I was going parallel with the trenches**, so I struck off at right angles across a field, hoping to meet somebody. I had not gone more than 50 yards when I saw a light. My heart beat rapidly, - **where was I? Were these the British or German trenches?** I laid down flat in the mud and listened.…I explained that I was in the Queen’s Westminster rifles.… After explanations and a chat with an Officer who gave me a tot of rum, I was informed that **I would have to go about a mile** to the left, and that, as the trenches in parts were full of water, **I had better get out again and walk along the top**. Once inside, I did not quite like the idea of being on top again, but as there were some men about, it was not so bad. **The Germs, I was told, were some four or five hundred yards in front**.

…I came across my Battalion about 10.30 PM saying a sincere prayer, and heaving a sigh of relief.

I had the **only "dug-out" left**, and it was very badly built, **the bottom being under…about three inches of mud and water**….However I got my waterproof sheet on the ground, and was **thankful to get my pack, blankets, and equipment off my back**….

**15.12.1914**

The next day we had more rain and the **trenches were flooded**. During the afternoon I took off my greatcoat to scrape the mud away from which was adhering and making the coat weigh very heavily. I must have lifted it slightly in the air for I had just put it on top of my dug-out, when, - "ping" - **it was hit by a bullet** which embedded itself a foot of two in the mud….

A large number of men by this time were suffering from such complaints as **Rheumatism, Frost Bite, Trench Feet**, and suchlike, which caused them to be removed from the trenches and many got back to England. The **cold had been very intense, and we had been standing in water, at times up to our hips, whilst the rest of our clothing was soaked through**. We had slept in this state, and had no wash since entering the trenches, so it c**an hardly be wondered at that there was illness** about. Now that I look back and think of my first experience of the trenches, which was certainly the worst, I really cannot understand how I am alive to tell the tale. Apart from the risk of being shot, being in wet clothes for so long a period is serious…

**26.6.1915**

We were heavily shelled at 5.30 and 6.30 am on a Saturday 26th June but, except for four casualties, nothing out of the ordinary took place.

**23.7.1915**

The casualties on this day at **"stink cottages” [the name given to the location where the author was stationed]** were four men killed, which included the champion boxer of the London Banks.

**Why did the soldiers call this area “Stink Cottages”?**

**What happened to Sgt Brookes that eventually had him taken away from the trenches?**

**25.7.1915**

It was now my turn for duty at "STINK COTTAGES".

The name of "STINK COTTAGES" was indeed well earned for **the position consisted of about five or six cottages** which ran at the side of the communication trench from our lines to the Germs line….

We therefore defended the communication trench right up to these cottages, when **it was blocked up by refuse, dead bodies etc, for a space of 15 yards**, the other side of the barrier being used by the Germs as their advance listening post.

**9.8.1915**

I was soaked to the skin and covered in mud, and I found it was impossible to continue along this trench. I therefore jumped out on top, and with my rifle smothered in mud and bayonet fixed, got within 10 - 12 yards of the captured trench. It was then that **a salvo of shells burst just above my head and threw me very heavily to the grounds but I was not hit**. Some men in our trench spotted me and ran out to give me a hand in to the trench.

As far as I remember, there were are about half a dozen men left who were not wounded, and no officers at all….

They took me to the Major (Major Tyewitt)… and we were all talking when **another shell burst nearby, throwing in a mass of dirt etc all over us**.

**I was taken out of the trenches**, and cannot say that I remember much more until travelling in an ambulance to hospital…

**Summary:**

**What risks did soldiers have to face when being stationed in a trench for weeks without a break?**

**Why was trench warfare so common on the German/French front? What were the advantages detailed in this reading?**