

Journal #8



These Canadian machine-gunners were among the men who had to endure the miseries of fighting in the mud at Passchendaele. While holes in the mud might provide shelter, they could also become death traps in which men drowned.

The early 19th century German soldier and military theorist Karl von Clausewitz stated, “War is nothing but a continuation of politics“. In other words, warfare is an acceptable way to advance political concerns. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

Letter

Corporal Henry Gregory on the state of the trenches in November 1917

This was the winter when the trenches gave way and fell in. What a state they were in; they were two or three feet in water and mud. We were always soaked well above the knees, and plastered in mud. We had to sleep and stand about all day in this condition. The discomforts at this time were terrible, and can hardly be realized by those who were not there.

It was hard work going up the trenches while they were in this condition, the water swishing above your knees, and your boots slipping about in the slime underneath. We used to get on the parapet when we got the chance, as it was slow moving down in the water and mud, but the order came through that no one was to walk on top of the parapet. This they made a crime.

1. Describe the trenches as portrayed in this letter.
2. Why would the men walk on the parapet?
3. Why do you suppose this was forbidden?

Vocabulary

Banana skins: Duckboards. Wooden slatted planks laid down to allow soldiers to cross muddy ground in and out of the trenches. After sandbags, perhaps the second most common item of the trench system of the Western Front. They were extremely slippery and treacherous.

Gum Boots: Rubber boots or waders sometimes worn in wet trenches.

Parnee: Water. From Hindustani

P.B.I.: Poor Bloody Infantry

Sump hole: Small holes dug at intervals in the base of a trench for collecting water.

Wonky: Defective