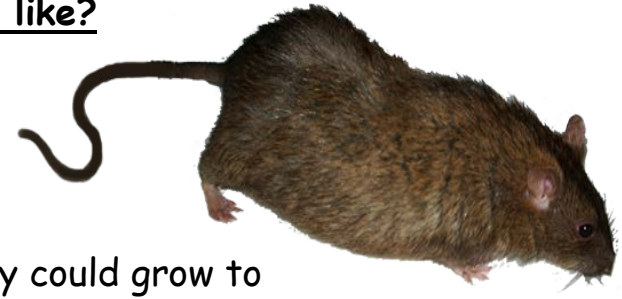


What were the conditions in the trenches really like?

Rat Infestation

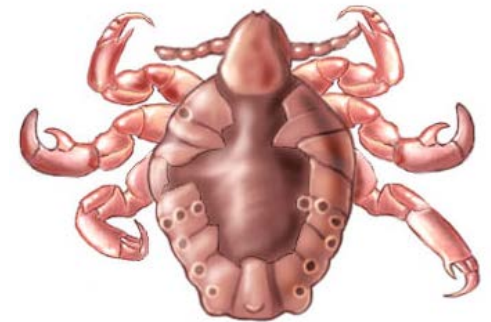
- Rats in their millions infested trenches. There were two main types, the brown and the black rat.
- The brown rats were the worse. Gorging themselves on human remains they could grow to the size of a cat.
- Men, maddened and afraid of these rats (which would even run across their faces in the dark), would attempt to rid the trenches of them by various methods: gunfire, with the bayonet, and even by clubbing them to death.
 - A single rat couple could produce up to 900 offspring (babies) in a year, spreading infection and contaminating food. The rat problem remained for the duration of the war.



Lice infestation

Lice were so common because men in the front-line rarely, if ever, washed. It was not unusual for men to go over a month without washing. Lice spread due to this, breeding in the seams of filthy clothing and causing men to itch constantly. One soldier counted 163 on himself!

- Even when clothing was washed and deloused, lice eggs remained hidden in the seams; within a few hours of the clothes being re-worn the body heat generated would cause the eggs to hatch.
- Lice caused Trench Fever, a particularly painful disease that began suddenly with severe pain followed by high fever. Recovery - away from the trenches - took up to twelve weeks. Lice were not actually identified as the cause of Trench Fever until 1918 (after the war).



What were the conditions in the trenches really like?

Trench Foot

- Many soldiers fighting in WW1 suffered from trench foot. This was an infection of the feet caused by cold, wet and unhygienic conditions.
- In the trenches men stood for hours on end in waterlogged trenches without being able to remove wet socks or boots.



- The feet would gradually go numb and the skin would turn red or blue. If untreated, trench foot could turn gangrenous and result in amputation.
- The only remedy for trench foot was for the soldiers to dry their feet and change their socks several times a day. By the end of 1915 British soldiers in the trenches had to have three pairs of socks with them and were under orders to change their socks at least twice a day. As well as drying their feet, soldiers were told to cover their feet with grease made from whale-oil.

What were the conditions in the trenches really like?

Food

- It is not surprising that food in the trenches was poor. The main food was tinned bully beef with bread or biscuits.
- A popular meal was manochie - tinned Irish stew which could be heated easily.
- This was of poor quality and eating the same thing everyday added to the often dull nature of trench life



- There was little drinking water so soldiers drank rum instead. The water was treated with chloride to kill the germs so had an unpleasant taste.

What were the conditions in the trenches really like?

Boredom and camaraderie

- Once the soldiers had completed the daily trench chores of refilling the sandbags, repairing the duckboards and trench floor, and draining the trenches, many of them became bored.
- They couldn't really move around or do much as the fear of a sniper's bullet was always there.
- To relieve the boredom, they used to write letters home and diaries.



Camaraderie

- Many soldiers enlisted with their friends. That meant that they were often in the same 'PALS' battalion as them and fought alongside them in the trenches.
- They would spend hours together and became close. To pass the time they would sing, talk about home, and write letters. They would try to help and protect each other

