
World War in the Twentieth Century

93 THE HOME FRONT IN GERMANY

*During World War I, also known as the Great War, the soldiers at the front were not the only ones who suffered the hardships of war. The people at home, too, faced great adversity as they attempted to lead normal lives amid the horrors of war. To ensure that the soldiers had all the supplies needed to fight the war, people on the home front had to endure shortages of food, fuel, clothes, and other items. In many areas of Germany people had to give up such items as new clothes and coffee that they had taken for granted before the war. In the excerpt below from *The Home Fronts: Britain, France and Germany 1914–1918* by John Williams, the author describes what life was like on the German home front during World War I. As you read the excerpt, consider what it would be like to live under wartime conditions.*

In October [1916] a Frenchwoman repatriated from Germany reported her impression that Germany lacked nothing, but that everything was meticulously regulated. Total regulation there certainly was, but, despite that, many commodities were now simply not available. By the autumn of 1916 the country was being squeezed and strained for every scrap of usable material. Wastage had virtually disappeared because there was nothing left to waste. Garbage-saving had been in force since 1914. Households had been scoured for copper and brass, and recently an appeal had been launched for people to bring out their gold. Church bells were being smelted, old iron was fetching fancy prices. Used paper was at a premium. Horse-droppings were being collected as fertiliser, while the streets themselves were left unswept and dirty. To save fuel, summertime [daylight savings] had been introduced, public transport drastically reduced and early closing decreed for shops, cafes and restaurants. And to meet the grave coal shortage, villagers had been allowed to lop dead wood in the State forests. The summer had seen a huge berry-gathering drive, followed by a massive harvesting of nuts and mushrooms. The countryside itself presented a dismal picture. Buildings lacked whitewash; their shutters were dilapidated and walls streaked with damp. Gardens were neglected and such [animal] stock as remained looked uncared-for. Clothing was becoming an increasingly serious problem. With textiles desperately scarce and the best materials going to

the troops, civilians were put to all kinds of shifts to garb themselves. Every old garment was pressed into use or sold to the rag-man for reworking, and recourse was had to "shoddy" (the waste arising from the manufacture of wool). It was found that, with a little added fibre, one old suit could be converted into two. Profiteers reaped rich rewards by selling 'shoddy' as new and asking steep prices for a suit that might disintegrate in the first rain-shower. If the customer complained, he would be told to blame the war.

This picture of Germany as Christmas 1916 approached is reinforced by an observer's impressions. There was, he notes, an almost total absence of young men from the towns and countryside. Through the streets ran ancient horse-drawn cabs and taxis—four-fifths of the latter electrified and, owing to the rubber shortage, almost none with solid composite rubber tyres. Laughter was rare, there was no applause in theatres, night-life had virtually disappeared and dancing was unheard of. Beer-cellars were doing better business than supper restaurants, but the beer was weak and watery. No spirits [hard liquor] could be sold after 9 P.M. Food and drink were largely ersatz. The great staple of German diet was tuna fish, disguised as roast beef, steak, veal chops and so on. There were substitutes for coffee, sugar, milk, butter, eggs and condiments. But on so-called meatless days meat could be obtained from black-market restaurants. Evening clothes were hardly ever seen, and their wearer would be viewed with suspicion. Despite the enormous casualties, little mourning [clothing] was worn, this being in deference to a wish expressed by the Kaiser early in the war. But fashion-conscious women were still obtaining Paris-styled clothes, called "Viennese" by the couturieres, through neutral Berne. There were collecting stations everywhere, for anything from old bottles to paper, bits of rubber, string and rags. And a feature reminiscent of Britain at the end of this year was the nation-wide cultivation of allotments. In an effort to combat the food shortage, Germans were utilising every spare plot of ground, mostly to grow potatoes.

The food difficulties were graphically reflected in the crowded poorer quarters of Berlin's East End. The butchers' shops were almost bare of meat, and long queues—some of them for horse-flesh—were common. The number of empty shops was growing, many small provision-sellers being put out of business by the centralised distribution of food. Bakers did little business except at morning and evening. The dwindling supply of cattle and pigs had allowed the conversion of some slaughterhouses into People's Kitchens, to which thousands of Berliners came for stew that could be bought at 5d. a quart for taking away. In another district the huge Alexander Market was regularly serving 30,000 people. The pervading dreariness of the East End was in contrast to the city's West End and central area, where, as one writer put it, "the cafe lights were bright and music made the restricted menu cards easier to bear." Along with the lights, music helped to bolster war-wearied spirits. The strains of military bands were commonly heard, sometimes accompanying columns of lightly wounded soldiers to and from hospital.

"The great staple of German diet was tuna fish, disguised as roast beef, steak, veal chops and so on."

** Write answers on separate sheet in complete sentences*

READING REVIEW

1. What steps did the Germans take to conserve fuel?
2. How did the Germans compensate for shortages of food and drink?
3. What do you think would be the greatest hardship of living under wartime conditions? Explain your answer.

World War One Multi-choice Quiz

<p>Which countries formed the Triple Alliance?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> France, Germany, Italy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Russia, Britain, Germany</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> France, Britain, Russia</p>	<p>Which Countries formed the Triple Entente?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> France, Britain, Russia</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> France, Germany, Italy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Russia, Britain, Germany</p>
<p>When did World War One begin?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Summer 1914</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Summer 1918</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Winter 1914</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Winter 1918</p>	<p>People were proud of their countries and prepared to fight to defend them. This is called:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nationalism</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Militarism</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Imperialism</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Stupid</p>
<p>Who assassinated Franz Ferdinand?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Principal Gavrillo</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Gavrilo Princip</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Pavlio Garip</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Gari Principle</p>	<p>Which country had the most soldiers?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Germany</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Austria-Hungary</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Britain</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Russia</p>
<p>What is the name of the space between the two sides' front lines?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Free for all</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No man's land</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nothing land</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Empty space</p>	<p>In the trenches, what did the expression 'Going over the top' mean?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Becoming suicidal</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Talking too much</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Going out of the trench to fight</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Going insane</p>
<p>What were sandbags used for?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> To protect the men from bullets</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> To stop the trench from collapsing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> To protect artillery</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> All of these</p>	<p>What was a trench block?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A ball of barbed wire and wood</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A trench that was flooded</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A trench that was taken by the enemy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A trench that had collapsed</p>

Lusitania & the Zimmermann Note Worksheet

Part I - Lusitania

Directions: Use the information below & information from your notes & textbook to answer the following questions. Answer the questions using complete sentences.

The following notice accompanied the advertisement to the left:



“NOTICE!

Travellers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY

WASHINGTON, D.C., APRIL 22, 1915.”

1. Why were travelers being warned that if they rode on the *Lusitania* they would have to do so at their own risk?
2. According to the Notice, where was the “zone of war”?
3. What happened to the *Lusitania*, and how did that affect popular opinion in the United States?

Part II – Zimmermann Note

Directions: Use the reading passage below & answer the following questions using complete sentences.

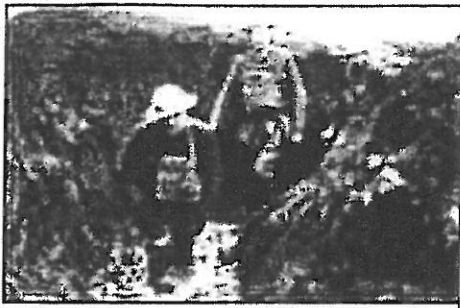
We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal or alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President (of Mexico) of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, invite Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace.

Signed, ZIMMERMANN

- telegram from Arthur Zimmermann, German foreign minister
to the German ambassador to Mexico (January 16, 1917)

4. What is the German foreign minister prepared to offer Mexico if Mexico will go to war with the United States? Why might Mexico consider such an offer?

5. What other country do the Germans plan to attempt to recruit as an ally?



Life in the Trenches

The trench, when we reached it, was half full of mud and water. We set to work to try and drain it. Our efforts were hampered by the fact that the French, who had first occupied it, had buried their dead in the bottom and sides. Every stroke of the pick encountered a body. The smell was awful. *Private Pollard*

The stench of the dead bodies now is awful as they have been exposed to the sun for several days, many have swollen and burst. The trench is full of other occupants, things with lots of legs, also swarms of rats. *Sergeant A Vine*

No washing or shaving here, and the demands of nature answered as quickly as possible in the handiest and deepest shell-hole. *Guy Chapman*

The other one said to me "Chas, I am going home to my wife and kids. I'll be some use to them as a cripple, but none at all dead! I am starving here, and so are they at home, we may as well starve together." With that he fired a shot through his boot. When the medics got his boot off, two of his toes and a lot of his foot had gone. But the injuring oneself to get out of it was quite common. *Charles Young*



The other soldiers in the hut took their shirts off after tea. They were catching lice. We had never seen a louse before, but they were here in droves. The men were killing them between their nails. *Henry Gregory*

All we lived on was tea and dog biscuits. If we got meat once a week we were lucky, but imagine trying to eat standing in a trench full of water with the smell of dead bodies nearby. *Richard Beasley*

If you have never had trench feet described to you. I will tell you. Your feet swell to two or three times their normal size and go completely dead. You could stick a bayonet into them and not feel a thing. If you are fortunate enough not to lose your feet and the swelling begins to go down. It is then that the intolerable, indescribable agony begins. I have heard men cry and even scream with the pain and many had to have their feet and legs amputated. *Sergeant Harry Roberts*

Activity
Imagine that you are a soldier fighting in the trenches. Write a 3/4 page letter home describing the conditions in the trenches.



These feet have trench foot and frostbite caused by standing for hours in a freezing waterlogged trench. To avoid this condition soldiers were told to change their socks regularly, wear waterproof footwear or gumboots and cover their feet with whale oil.