

Worksheet 4:

Mechanisation in World War I

Exercise 1: Read the information text and write down headwords to warfare and technology of World War I.

Exercise 2: Consider by using of document Q1, M1 and M2 how innovations in warfare and technology of war affected population and especially soldiers.

Information text:

In the years before the First World War there were many scientific discoveries and technical inventions for this reason Europe stood in a second industrial revolution. The focus was on the chemicals industries and on industries for electrotechnology.¹

Consequently the First World War was the first engineered and industrialised war. The armies fought with modern arms: tanks, heavy artillery, submarines, machine guns, aircraft and toxic gas belonged to the technical improvements of modern war-fighting techniques.

The extent of these modern arms can be illustrate in a percentaged extrapolation: In the First World War just 0,1 percent of all soldiers were wounded by the use of traditional weapons, for example with sidearms (bayonets), daggers or sabres.² Most of the injuries were caused by new artillery shells. To escape from the disastrous consequences the soldiers in the static warfare needed mostly of their time digging trenches.

New machine guns (MG 08/15) which could shoot up to 600 times per minute had such a high firepower that an accurate boning of the hostilely soldier wasn't needed and able to. Since spring 1915 toxic gas was in use, first by Germans. Toxic gas was very feared by soldiers because it burned the lungs and caused blindness. Aim of this weapon wasn't the killing of the soldiers but the faintness and fear mongering.

In First World War no longer humans fought against another but machines killed: mechanical, anonymous and efficient. Who survived returned home physical wounded and traumatised.

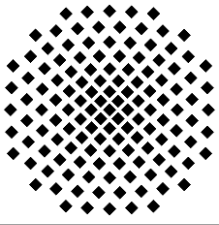


Image Q1: British soldiers with gas masks³

¹ Trischler, Helmuth: Die Technisierung des Krieges. <http://www.vdi-nachrichten.com/Technik-Gesellschaft/Die-Technisierung-Krieges> (26.01.2015).

² Ziemann, Benjamin: Soldaten. In: Hirschfeld, Gerhard/Krumeich, Gerd (e.a.) (Ed.): Enzyklopädie. Erster Weltkrieg. Paderborn² 2004. P. 155-168, Cf. P. 156.

³ Image Q1: Battle of the Somme, Juli 1916. By courtesy of: Imperial War Museums (collection no. 1900-13) http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vickers_machine_gun_crew_with_gas_masks.jpg (05.02.2015).



M1:

From an army postal service letter of an infantryman about the battle of Verdun on July, 2. in 1916:

“Arrived at the position [where I fought in the war] we laid down dead tired in holes made by artillery shells - dugouts or refuges were out of the question; this district was forced only two days before, there we lay for four days wet all over and a half metre in muckiness – a drumfire ripped into us, so we were chucked from one hole in another; cries of pain and moans of the wounded persons who had to perish woeful; [...] – not to keep in mind to carry them back. Shellfire day and night – often that 10-20 bullets in each second, overwhelming us and digging up. Our lieutenant cried like a child; as they lay there, without feet – without arms, frazzled all over. God, this was terrible. [...] You have no idea of this horror and with you nobody who didn’t experience. [...]”³

M2:

Author and war volunteer of First World War, Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970) wrote in his novel ‚All Quiet on the Western Front‘:

“I am young, I am twenty years old; yet I know nothing of life but despair, death, fear, and fatuous superficiality cast over an abyss of sorrow. I see how peoples are set against one another, and in silence, unknowingly, foolishly, obediently, innocently slay one another. I see that the keenest brains of the world invent weapons and words to make it yet more refined and enduring. And all men of my age, here and over there, throughout the whole world see these things; all my generation is experiencing these things with me. [...] Through the years our business has been killing; - it was our first calling in life. What will happen afterwards? And what shall come out of us?”⁴

³ Ulrich, Bernd: Strategien und Waffen im 1. Weltkrieg. <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/ersterweltkrieg/> (05.02.2015). Cited after: Ulrich, Bernd/Ziemann, Benjamin (Ed.): Frontalltag im Ersten Weltkrieg. Ein Historisches Lesebuch. Essen 2008. P. 64. (Author’s translation).

⁴ Remarque, Erich: All Quiet on the Western Front. Boston, Toronto 1984. P. 224.