

First World War Glossary



Armed Boarding Vessel : Civilian ship armed and taken into the navy.

Ack Ack : Term used to describe anti-aircraft fire.

Adrian Helmet : French regulation helmet named after its designer.

Alleyman : British slang for a German soldier.

Pillbox : Reinforced concrete machine-gun post.

Push : A large-scale attack on enemy positions.

ANZAC : Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.

Brass : High-ranking staff officers.

Bangalore Torpedo : Explosive tube used to clear a path through a wire entanglement.

Bantam : Term for members of battalions between 5ft 1in and 5ft 4in.

Battery : A group of six guns or howitzers.

Bully Beef : Canned corned beef that was the principal protein ration of the British Army.

Stick-Bomb : German hand-grenade with a wooden handle, so that it could be thrown further.

Tommy : Slang term for British soldier.

Tour : A period of front-line service.

Tracer : Phosphorescent machine-gun bullet which glowed in flight, indicating course as a aid to aiming.

Traverse : Trenches were not straight ditches, since this would have made them far too vulnerable to enfilade fire. Instead, they had traverses built in. These were protrusions of earth or sandbags into the trench, giving a crenelated appearance when viewed from the air. They also reduced the effect of shells when they landed in the trench.

Trench Foot : Fungal infection of the foot which could become gangrenous, caused by exposure to wet and cold.

Coffin-Nails : A term used by British soldiers to describe cigarettes.

Communication Trench : Narrow trench constructed at an angle to a defensive trench to permit concealed access to the trench.

Conscription : In January 1916, Parliament passed the first conscription laws (compulsory enrollment) ever passed in Britain. At first only single men and childless widowers aged 18 to 41 were called up. By 1918 compulsory service had been extended to include all men aged 18 to 51. More than 2.3 million conscripts were enlisted before the end of the war in November, 1918.

Sampler of World War One Phrases, Terms and Slang

Big Bertha = German 420mm howitzer, named for a family member of the Krupp Arms manufacturing. Now a name for a golf club.

Dogfight = aerial combat

Over the Top = to attack, generally from the trenches; "In the Trenches"

Go West = used when referring to a comrade who had died

Duckboards = slatted wooden planks placed in the bottom of trenches or on muddy ground, hopefully keeping one out of the water

Tommy = British infantryman, from "Tommy Atkins," a fictional name used in instructions for filling out British military forms

Pollu = "hairy one," French infantryman

Kilometerschwein = "kilometer pig," German infantryman

Lakenpatscher = "puddle splasher," German infantryman

Frog's Paradise = Paris (U.S.)

Suicide Ditch = front line trench (British)

Holy Joe/Skyscent = chaplain (U.S.)

Roughneck = artilleryman (U.S.)

Looney or Louis = Second Lieutenant (U.S.)

Hayburners = army horses and mules (U.S.)

Monkey meat = canned beef and carrot mixture ration from South America (U.S.)

Slum or slungum = a stew of meat, potatoes, onions and tomatoes (U.S.)

Belly flopping = to hit the ground quickly during attack (British)

Land Crabs = tanks (British)

Archie = anti-aircraft fire (British)

Pozzy = ration issue jam (British)

Brass hats = enlisted men's term for officers

Woofs = German 4.7 inch high explosive and shrapnel shells (British)

Mothers = 5.7 inch British guns (British)

Wives = 9 inch British guns (British)

Duckboard Trail = as in "someone hit the duckboard trail" - killed in action (U.S.)

Banjo = spade or entrenching tool (Australian)

Black Hand Gang = raiding party or a selected group engaged in some desperate enterprise

Boyau (literally "gut" in French) or **Boy-oh** (British) = communication trench

Coal box = shell burst, generally from a heavy gun, causing a cloud of black smoke

Fiche blanche = white ticket or non-movable casualty (French);

Fiche rouge = red ticket or movable casualty (French)

Furfie = rumor (Australian)

Gaspar = cheap cigarette

Gulasch-Kanone = "stew gun" or German wheeled field kitchen vehicle (German)

Kamerad Schnurschuh = "pal with laced boots," German nickname for Austro-Hungarian troops

Synchronize Watches

"Gives the willies" = be frightened, or shell shocked

What's in a Name? The American Expeditionary Forces

Over eighty years after its organization and its storied history, it is, more often than not, called by the wrong name. The American Expeditionary Forces was never and is still not known as the American Expeditionary Force, but even in very current publications, the