

LESSON THREE: TRAINING

This scene is about the basic training soldiers received as they prepared to fight the enemy. A large percentage of those training in preparation for the Battle of the Somme, including our main characters, were volunteers and had come from all classes and every profession, from factories and farms to offices, shops, banks and many other areas.

The following scene follows the new recruits as they prepare to go to war and the script explains in detail how weapons should be used and the importance of being fit.

Look at the additional historical information section on **Trench Warfare** and **The Battle of the Somme**.

Play DVD: *Section Three – Training*

The following drama exercises are intended to stimulate discussion and debate about training.

Exercise One: Survival of the Fittest

The group will now participate in a number of training games intended to prepare them for war. This game is a variation of 'Lifeboats/Captain's Coming' where the recruits have to respond instantly to various commands. Pick four points in the room allocating them the following:

- Point One** *Bayonets* Push bayonet into an enemy and twist
- Point Two** *Digging* Dig frantically with spade
- Point Three** *Shells* Drop flat on floor
- Point Four** *Sergeant* Stand to attention and salute

Students are required to be alert and respond quickly to the commands as you point to the various allocated points in the room. It is useful if you take the character of a stereotypical Sergeant Major, barking orders at the students.



Exercise Two: Blind Assault

Create an assault course using chairs, bags, coats and the students themselves. It should be challenging but safe. Students not part of the assault course should be dotted around the room. Select two confident students in the group to be the ones tasked to get through the assault course using their own personalised

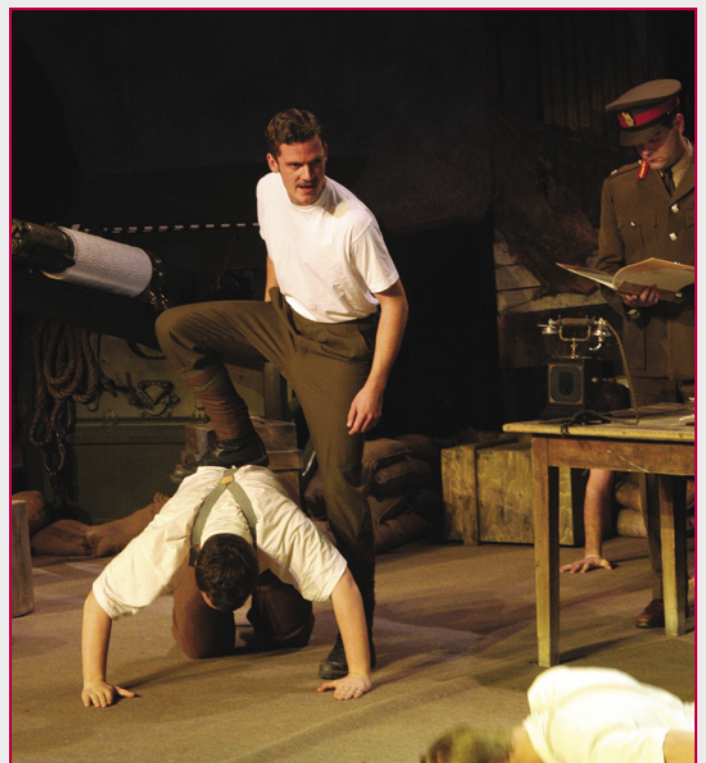
commands for right, left, backwards and forwards etc complicated further by having one of the pair close their eyes or preferably blindfolded and positioned at opposite ends of the space. The rest of the group must prevent the pair from completing the assault course by calling out bogus instructions.

Exercise Three: Fall Out

Split the class into five smaller groups. Once done allocate the lines below taken from the play. You should give each group a couple of minutes to play around with their given line thinking about the sounds of the words, the way it could be split up and who should say what. Building on this you should ask each group to work as a team to dramatise their lines with simple movements that support the text. It can be as simple as a salute or marching drill for example. Each group should make their movements as sharp, clear and clean as possible. The teacher should move to the centre of the space and call each group to the middle to perform. This should be done several times until the pieces flow into one another. This could be developed further by introducing music.

- Line One** *'Twisting the blade'*
- Line Two** *'Don't bloody smile this isn't funny!'*
- Line Three** *'Walk forward to the gas chamber'*
- Line Four** *'Seize and consolidate'*
- Line Five** *'Next time will be the real thing'*

After sufficient time each group should perform their scene back to the rest of the group who should comment on the tone of each and what worked and what did not.



TRENCH WARFARE (WESTERN FRONT)

By September 1914 it became clear that because of the range, accuracy and firepower of modern weapons, in particular the machine gun, soldiers could only survive on the battlefield by taking shelter in trenches. Attempts by each side to outflank the other failed and by December 1914 the opposing lines of trenches extended from the English Channel to the Swiss frontier. For four years the combatants sought ways of ending this stalemate. On a tactical level this resulted in successive attempts to break through using massive artillery bombardments, gas and the development of new weapons such as the tank.

Trench warfare created a unique world of its own in which soldiers on both sides had to contend with difficulties of communication and supply, the hardship of wet, cold, mud, rats and lice and the continual strain of living with the fear of death and dreadful wounds. Life in the trenches was not necessarily the adventure that many had hoped for. Camaraderie and friendship were extremely important and could make it just about bearable.

Key Points

- 1 Often described as nine tenths boredom and one tenth action but with constant tension.
- 2 Usual routine was, 3 days in the front line, 3 days in the support trench, 3 days in the front line then 3 days rest at least a half-mile behind the front line. This is where soldiers had the opportunity to relax and visit the Estaminets, in the villages, to sample red wine. They would also have more time to write letters home.
- 3 The parapet, top of the trench, was a couple of feet higher than the average height of a man and structures were reinforced with wooden planks and sandbags. Each section of trench had a latrine dug at the back.
- 4 Night time was a busy time. Wiring parties would repair barbed wire defences. Raiding parties would also go on night raids, which aimed to kill as many opponents as possible and to seize prisoners for interrogation.
- 5 Gas was a particularly horrendous weapon first used by the Germans in 1915. Chlorine and phosgene gas could suffocate the victim and mustard gas caused burns and temporary blindness. Protection initially was a canvas hood, which later developed into a more substantial respirator.

- 6 Supplies such as ammunition and rations were always brought in after dark for safety.
- 7 There were hygiene problems and soldiers invariably had body lice that could cause trench fever and typhus.
- 8 Bayonet training was for hand-to-hand combat when fighting within a trench with a rifle could not be used.
- 9 Receiving letters and writing home was important for morale. Letters were censored and any information that could be used by the enemy was crossed out. Field service postcards were quick forms of communication where the soldier just crossed out the information that was not applicable and signed their name. Ranges of postcards from comical to sentimental about life in the trenches and being a soldier were very popular to use. Before a major engagement all soldiers wrote a last letter home which would be sent to their loved ones if they were killed.
- 10 Attitudes to the Germans varied from a kind of compassion; feeling that they were in the same situation with no choice, to hatred; especially if friends had been killed. During Christmas 1914 there was an unofficial truce along a few sections of the front line in which both sides downed weapons and met in No Man's Land to exchange gifts and play football.

Trench Slang As with many groups which live and work together in exceptional circumstances, a unique language developed which helped build a sense of camaraderie.

bag of rations A term of contempt, referring to a fussy or domineering superior

bags The trench parapet, constructed with sandbags. 'Mounting the bags', 'over the bags' meant the opening of an attack, going 'over the top'

battle bowler Steel helmet

Blighty England. Home. Derives from the army in India. A 'Blighty wound', involved returning to England

Boches The universal French name in the war for Germans, taken up in England by the public in general and the Press. The nicknames Jerry and Fritz were more usual terms in the Army and Navy, and Hun with the Air Force.

body snatcher A stretcher-bearer

bonfire A cigarette

bongo boosh A tasty morsel of food

cached in Finished; dead

cat stabber Bayonet

clod To shell heavily. Suggested by the heaving up of the earth as shells burst on impact

coal box A German heavy shell, from the dense black smoke at its bursting

cricket ball A type of hand grenade, from its size and shape

dickey leave Absent without leave

duckboards The slatted timber paths laid down in trenches, from the resemblance to the sloping boards leading up to duck houses at the edge of a pond.

dug-out A protected place of shelter in the trenches. Also an elderly officer returning to service.

fairy light Vêry Lights, were flares or fire balls fired from a pistol used at night to see what was happening in No Man's Land.

fatted for the slaughter The intensive training in readiness for the next move back to the trenches

hose of death The Lewis gun; from the stream of bullets it discharged

Hun pinching Raiding an enemy trench in order to secure prisoners for interrogation

in the pink In good health. The usual greeting in a soldier's letter. 'Hoping this finds you in the pink, as it leaves me'

kitch A recruit in Lord Kitchener's 'New Army'

Kitchener's Mob The popular name for the men who joined up in response to Lord Kitchener's Appeal in August 1914

lucky bleeder Bullet

No Man's Land The area of land between the front line trenches of either army, held by neither but patrolled, at night by both. Originally barren stretches of waste ground between two provinces or kingdoms.

number's up To be in trouble, to be dead. *His number's up*

Old Bill A veteran or old soldier

on the barbed wire Killed. Every attack usually left a number of men killed in getting through the enemy's wire entanglements and literally hanging there

out there 'On the Western Front'

over the top To leave the shelter of a trench in order to make an assault, troops had to hoist themselves over the front wall of sandbags (parapet). 'Over the top' became a synonym for an attack

pipped Hit by a bullet

plaster To shell heavily

plum pudding The name for a type of trench mortar shell; suggested by its shape and size

stand to The vigilance kept in all trenches, especially before dawn and at nightfall, when everyone stood on the firesteps in case of attack

spirit of the bayonet To go forward with aggressive determination and confidence

tin hat The steel shrapnel-helmet adopted in the spring of 1916

tin opener A bayonet

toffee apple A name given to a trench-mortar stick bomb

Tommy Atkins The popular generic name for the British private soldier, originates from 1815 when the War Office issued the first Soldier's Account Book using as an example the name Tommy Atkins. Rudyard Kipling's poem familiarised the name all over the English-speaking world.

trench foot The familiar term for a problem to the feet, similar to frostbite, caused by men having to stand in cramped positions in flooded trenches stopping the circulation of blood in the lower limbs.

wind up, to have To be nervous or frightened

windy corner A name for any place that was particularly dangerous

zeppelin in a cloud Sausage and mashed potatoes

zero hour The term for the time officially appointed for the opening of an attack, kept secret at headquarters and meanwhile referred to as 'zero', the actual time being finally made known to the troops only at the last possible moment before the attack.