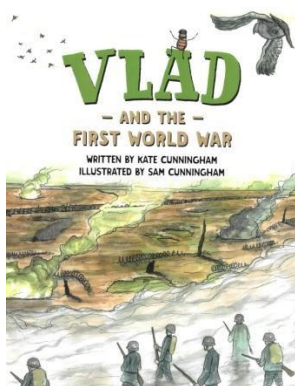




## History Planning – First World War

This is a set of 7 lesson plans for the First World War history topic. Highlighted powerpoints and worksheets for the work outlined in the lessons are available as free downloadable resources.



A full colour illustrated story about Vlad the flea and Crisp VC the carrier pigeon with Vlad the flea as the narrator.

The story and pictures show what it looked like living in London in the seventeenth century and how the people reacted to the fire and its aftermath. The clothes and houses are shown along with artefacts as they would have been used 350 years ago.

All this is shared through the power of story which encourages the children to engage with the real people in history.

As well as other free teaching materials you can buy additional Reading Riddle resources that support the topic:

### Vlad and the First World War Teacher's Guide

Take your own understanding of the events to a higher level and get a deeper understanding of the context, to guide you in providing quality first teaching with:

- a comprehensive overview of the **historical context** for teaching this unit
- page-by-page notes explaining how the illustrations incorporate artefacts, information from **primary sources** and knowledge so it can be drawn out through the story
- **Big Questions** about the people and events 250 years ago – take the pupil's understanding to the next level with wider discussion points about the consequences and impact

### Vlad and the First World War Activity Book

- fun activities
- games suitable for homework or short lesson fillers

How to find or communicate with Vlad or Kate:



Click [here](mailto:readingriddle@gmail.com) to email me  
readingriddle@gmail.com



@vlad\_flea  
Click to visit



@reading\_riddle Click to visit  
@vlad\_flea Click to visit



<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/readingriddle>  
Click to visit



[www.facebook.com/readingriddle](https://www.facebook.com/readingriddle)  
Click to visit



<https://www.youtube.com/c/ReadingRiddle>  
Click to visit

## **National Curriculum:**

### Aims

- Gain and deploy a historically grounded understanding of abstract terms such as 'empire'.
- Gain historical perspective by placing their growing knowledge into different contexts, understanding the connections between local, regional, national and international history; between cultural, economic, military, political, religious and social history; and between short- and long-term timescales.

### Subject content

- A study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066  
Example – a significant turning point in British history

## **Detailed aims of the Topic:**

**Substantive knowledge** – to know that the First World War began in 1914 and ended in 1918. To be able to name countries involved in the conflict, including countries in the British Empire, and be able to identify who were allies. Able to discuss a range of ways people served both at home and overseas. Understand what the Western and Eastern Front were and why trenches existed along them. To know about advances in technology during the course of the war.

**Second order knowledge** – to know why the war started and spread. Discuss how the war changed life for men and women in Britain. Understand how the first world war affected independence in countries in the British Empire. Understand what happened after the war and how people remembered and commemorated the conflict.

## **Curriculum links:**

- Maths – number lines /time lines. Place numbers in order and discuss their relative distance from one another
- DT – design a memorial
- PSHE – commemorating bravery and sacrifice; conflict and resolution
- Geography – map of the World and recognising countries on it
- Literacy – writing a newspaper article (see separate planning)

## Planning - First World War

<u>Learning Objectives &amp; Success Criteria</u>	<u>Teaching Sequence</u>	<u>Vocabulary &amp; Resources</u>
<p><b>Lesson 1</b></p> <p><u>We are learning</u> when the First World War happened.</p> <p><u>What I'm looking for:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I know when the First World War started</li> <li>• I know what key events happened on the run up and during the war.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Guiding Questions:</u></b>            When did the First World War happen?            What other events were happening around then?</p> <p><b><u>Introduction/Minds on:</u></b>            Read the story of Vlad and the First World War.            When do you think this story is set?            What clues helped you think about that?            [existence of vehicles and aircraft, professions such as nurses, no mobile phones, style of hair, monocles and moustaches]</p> <p>Look at KWL sheet.</p> <p><b><u>Introduction/Minds on:</u></b>  <b>Timeline</b>            Explain that a timeline is when we put dates in order and this shows us which events came first. Dates are numbers and deciding the order is like ordering any number on a line.            Put interactive timeline on the board <a href="https://vladflea.co.uk/timeline-game/">https://vladflea.co.uk/timeline-game/</a>            Challenge children/teams to come up and complete a timeline together on the board.            Emphasise that the smallest number goes first.  <b>Note:</b> The ancient Egypt cards are the equivalent of minus numbers as most of the dates are BCE/BC. Therefore these numbers get larger as move to the left from the dividing point when dates change.            This activity might be easier if it follows a maths lesson about numberlines.</p> <p>Use Vlad flea Timeline game cards, or own resources:            Give groups a set of cards and piece of string. Ask children to put the cards in order using the dates at the top.</p>	<p><b><u>Vocabulary:</u></b></p> <p>Timeline            Order (chronological order)</p> <p>more recent            longer ago            between            years            century</p> <p>x happened because of.....</p>

	<p>Compare the order of different groups by making a human timeline at the front with groups contributing by placing them correctly and checking their table timeline. Fine tune the timeline by grouping and spacing events to reflect different gaps in the timeframe ie 1665 is directly before 1666 but there is a larger gap between 1666 and 2012.</p> <p><b><u>Consolidation:</u></b> Look for other date related material in class eg birthdays, calendars, timetables, displays relating to key annual events etc. Ensure children understand how we record events by day, month, year and times we commonly use this in our lives eg birthdays.</p> <p>Ensure children remember that the First World War started in 1914 and ended in 1918. Discuss how some countries joined at later dates (eg USA), but that that does not alter when the conflict began.</p>	<p><b><u>Resources:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://vladflea.co.uk/timeline-game/">https://vladflea.co.uk/timeline-game/</a></li> <li>• Vlad flea timeline game (available to purchase from the Reading Riddle website or your own alternative date cards</li> <li>• KWL sheet</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Lesson 2</b></p> <p><u>We are learning</u> which countries were involved in the First World War.</p> <p><u>What I'm looking for:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can identify key countries involved in the First World War and which side of the conflict they fought on.</li> <li>• I can identify them on a map</li> <li>• I can explain why some countries were allies</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Guiding Questions:</u></b> Which countries were involved in the First World War? Which side were they on?</p> <p><b><u>Introduction/Minds on:</u></b> What countries were named in Vlad and the First World War? Which side do you think they were fighting on?</p> <p><b><u>Activities:</u></b> Read the Fact File and add to the information gathered at the start of the lesson. Use the list of countries and identify them in an Atlas. On a blank world map use one colour to mark Allies and a different colour for the Central Powers who were fighting the Allies. Borders, country names and control of areas has changed, so colouring it exactly will be difficult eg Ottoman Empire. This provides a discussion point that one of the outcomes of the First World War was to change power in many areas and affected independence and control. Look up a list of Commonwealth countries. Many of these joined the fighting because they were colonies of Britain so their soldiers were expected to fight for us.</p> <p><b><u>Consolidation:</u></b> Many countries such as India or Australia were a long way from where the war was being fought. Why do you think they were involved? Do you think they would have chosen to be part of a war on the other side of the world if they had been able to choose?</p>	<p><b><u>Vocabulary:</u></b> Allies The Central Powers</p> <p><b><u>Resources:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of countries in World War 1</li> <li>• World maps to colour</li> <li>• Atlases</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Lesson 3</b></p> <p><u>We are learning</u> what roles people took during the war.</p> <p><u>What I'm looking for:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can name some of the different branches of the forces and the other roles people needed to fill</li> <li>I can name some roles that were important for civilians as well as the army and navy</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Guiding Questions:</u></b></p> <p>What were the main branches of the forces? (specifically the army and navy with an understanding that aircraft flew for both and RAF was formed after the war).  What jobs did different people take?  In what ways was this different from peace time?</p> <p><b><u>Introduction/Minds on:</u></b></p> <p>What transport does Vlad flea and Crisp VC see during the story? (ships, trucks, aircraft).  These reflect the different parts of the armed forces.</p> <p><b><u>Activities:</u></b></p> <p>Many recruits joined with friends or work colleagues – Walter Tull joined the Footballers Battalion, there were many Pals Battalions which were men from the same village or area.</p> <p>Ask children to discuss why they think people signed up to fight.  [Talk about patriotism, pressure from other people, wanting adventure, escaping badly paid/dangerous jobs, thinking it was the right thing to do, friendship, thinking it would be over quickly, not wanting to appear cowardly]</p> <p>Ask children to record what they think the recruits felt before they joined.  In groups take a section of Vlad and the First World War (the sailors, in trench, hospital tent, pilots, Indian cavalry)  What do you think they feel at this point in the story which is set in 1918?  Consider how far from home some of the characters are, how long they have been in the War, how dangerous their situation is etc  Discuss other sections eg volunteers who were stretcher bearers because they did not want to fight and would have gone to prison otherwise (eg Quakers who are pacifists).</p> <p><b><u>Consolidation:</u></b></p> <p>Ask children which branch of the armed forces they would choose and why.</p>	<p><b><u>Vocabulary:</u></b></p> <p>Army  Navy</p> <p>Soldiers  Sailors  Pilots</p> <p>Battalions  Cavalry</p> <p>Recruits  trenches</p> <p><b><u>Resources:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use the wordmat to help identify some of the language when talking about the forces</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Lesson 4 and 5</b></p> <p><u>We are learning</u> about the records that help us find out about the First World War</p> <p><u>What I'm looking for:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can name some of the different sources that provide us with information</li> <li>• I understand which records are personal and which are more official</li> <li>• I can use the records to act out what happened.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Guiding Questions:</u></b>  How do we know about different experiences?  Is there only one type of record?  Are they reliable records?</p> <p><b><u>Introduction/Minds on:</u></b>  In groups or pairs think about how we find out about things now and if they would have been available in the First World War.  Communications were different but cinema and photography was being used much more.  Think about letters, official records, poems, newspapers, diaries.</p> <p><b><u>Activities:</u></b>  Children work in groups and look at the different testimonies that have been transcribed from books and verbal records on the IWM website. (These have been chosen to be more accessible, but will need to be checked according to the age and appropriateness of your class).  Ask children to read the pieces together and then take time to check that they have understood the testimony, clarifying any questions or misunderstandings.</p> <p>Children work together to either enact the event or create a tableau (frozen scene) to represent it.</p> <p>Once all the groups have had time to discuss and create their pieces they take turns to share it with the rest of the class. This will take 2 lessons to enable reading, discussion, arranging and performing.</p> <p><b><u>Consolidation:</u></b>  As each group performs, allow time to discuss their work both to allow the rest of the class to ask questions, but also to feed back to the performers.</p>	<p><b><u>Vocabulary:</u></b></p> <p>Records  Testimony</p> <hr/> <p><b><u>Resources:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Personal testimonies</b></li> <li>• Recording equipment to capture the work, both as a record and a resource for discussion and writing during the topic</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Lesson 6</b></p> <p><u>We are learning</u> how the war ended.</p> <p><u>What I'm looking for:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I know when the First World War ended</li> <li>• I know why it ended and who agreed to it</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Guiding Questions:</u></b> How did the war end? What was the impact of the end of the war?</p> <p><b><u>Introduction/Minds on:</u></b> How do we solve fights or arguments? Do we forgive each other immediately or does it take a while to be friends again?</p> <p><b><u>Activities:</u></b> Look back at the map of countries and which side they fought on. Which side do you think had the most soldiers? Which side had more resources such as food? By 1918 Germany and its Allies were struggling to feed their population and pay soldiers. The Kaiser was overthrown and discussions began to end the War. On 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918 at 11:00 an Armistice started Armistice = truce or agreement to stop fighting. On 28<sup>th</sup> June 1919 the Treaty of Versailles was signed ending the war.</p> <p>Discuss whether the end of the War is the Armistice or the Treaty. Why do we celebrate the Armistice as the end of the war not the Treaty?</p> <p>After the war The League of Nations was established to try to prevent future conflict. Did it work? Design a flag to represent a worldwide organisation. This eventually was replaced by the United Nations (for light relief watch Kofi Annan on Sesame Street <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxqzWweOSbU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxqzWweOSbU</a> )</p> <p>Do you think everything returned to “normal” after the war? [lots of injuries/disabilities, many families bereaved, less money (wars cost a lot), people wanting change eg women’s votes, independence in India]</p> <p><b><u>Consolidation:</u></b> Review what we know about the First World War. Review the KWL sheet and consider if there are still unanswered questions.</p>	<p><b><u>Vocabulary:</u></b></p> <p>Peace Armistice Cease Fire Treaty</p> <p><b><u>Resources:</u></b></p>
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<p><b>Lesson 7</b></p> <p><u>We are learning</u> how we commemorate the war.</p> <p><u>What I'm looking for:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I know when we commemorate the War</li> <li>• I know why we remember it</li> <li>• I know how we commemorate it</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Guiding Questions:</u></b> Why do we commemorate those who took part in wars?</p> <p><b><u>Introduction/Minds on:</u></b> Who do you think we should remember from the wars? Encourage discussion of all the people and animals that were involved. Should we also include people who did not fight such as medical staff, miners, farmers etc</p> <p><b><u>Activities:</u></b> Look at the memorials powerpoint to see the range of memorials that have been created.</p> <p><b>Design a memorial</b> Who would you commemorate? What images represent them? Would you include names or symbols on the memorial?</p> <p>How big and what style of memorial would you create? What material would you use to make it?</p> <p>Draw a design to reflect your ideas? Label key features to show your thinking.</p> <p>The drawn image could be followed up with a lesson modelling and creating the design and evaluating it.</p> <p><b><u>Consolidation:</u></b> Share the memorials and the ideas about remembrance.</p>	<p><b><u>Vocabulary:</u></b></p> <p>Remembrance Commemorate Memorials Conflict Peace Contribution</p> <p><b><u>Resources:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• War memorial powerpoint</li> </ul>
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## Countries in the First World War

Borders, names and relationships have changed in the hundred years since the First World War. Modern names have been given when necessary, with information explaining where they were in relation to the current situation.

Allies	The Central Powers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serbia</li> <li>• Russia</li> <li>• Montenegro</li> <li>• France</li> <li>• Belgium</li> <li>• Great Britain</li> </ul> <p><i>Including colonies such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Jamaica, Trinidad (for a full list look at countries in the Commonwealth)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Japan</li> <li>• Italy</li> <li>• Portugal</li> <li>• Romania</li> <li>• United States</li> <li>• Cuba</li> <li>• Panama</li> <li>• Greece</li> <li>• Siam (Thailand)</li> <li>• Liberia</li> <li>• China</li> <li>• Brazil</li> <li>• Guatemala</li> <li>• Nicaragua</li> <li>• Costa Rica</li> <li>• Haiti</li> <li>• Honduras</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Austria-Hungary (Austria and Hungary)</li> <li>• Germany</li> <li>• Ottoman Empire (Turkey, Syria and Israel)</li> <li>• Bulgaria</li> </ul>

The Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark and associated colonies were neutral and did not join either side.

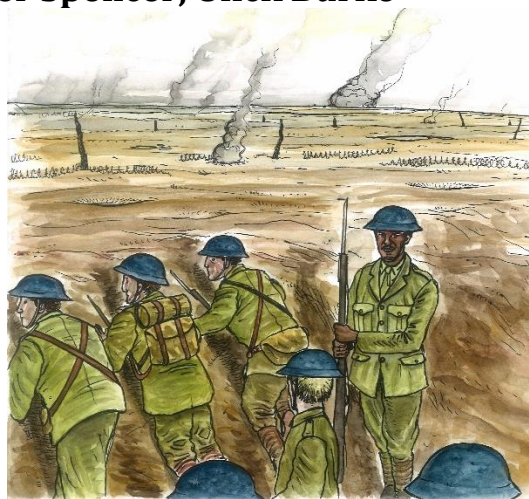
## Night-time trench raids

Well it was a listening patrol and wire – see if I could cut some of the enemy wire so that a few nights later we would do a raid. Well we did that all successfully – four men – and going out you lead them, but coming back you come last. And we had stayed a tiny bit too long and it was just getting dawn. Anyhow it was enough for the enemy to form a silhouette and they started firing just as we were coming over the wire. And I was the last across and I got hit in the foot and I lost two toes.

Well, you'd try and get down to a part of the enemy trench where you thought it was least manned, you see, and you'd grab a prisoner if you could. And of course he'd give a gawk and that's when the fun started. Cos when he shouted, they'd man the trench you see and anything that was moving they would... but invariably you could get a bloke to come. When you get him out of the trench he'd come with you alright and you'd get him back to the line. But it was a very hazardous job. We lost a lot of men on patrols, of course.

They never used to ask for volunteers; they used to say you, you, you and you, and you were in the party. They usually went over in silence at night and you didn't carry any equipment. All you carried was a rifle and bayonet, that's if you were detailed for that. The parties were arranged like this: number one was the rifleman, he carried a rifle and bayonet and 50 rounds of ammunition and nothing else. The next man was a bomb thrower, a grenade thrower; he only carried a haversack which was full of Mills hand grenades. And the next man, he also was a bomb thrower, and he helped the first man replace his stock when he exhausted it. And the last man was a rifle and bayonet man and all he carried was a rifle and 50 rounds of ammunition and a bandolier slung over his shoulder – nothing else.

**Sidney Amatt, Walter Spencer, Ulick Burke**



Illustrations from **Vlad and the First World War**. Images © Sam Cunningham

## Stretcher Bearers and Medical Officers

I did my share of bringing men off the battle field but by the time it came to Aubers Ridge I'd been transferred to the nursing Division, working in the main dressing station a little way back from the line.

For three days we never stopped dressing the wounded men as they were brought in, and at the end of these three days we still had something like sixty or seventy stretcher cases outside. We just didn't know what to do with them. The Major I was with dropped on the floor. As soon as you dressed them they were taken out and put in ambulances and lorries and taken away down to the Casualty Clearing Stations. The vehicles were packed jam-full.

I never saw any attack with so many men who had bullet wounds as at Aubers Ridges. The Germans just mowed them down and most of the bullet wounds were through the legs. We had a lot of splinting to do, splinting, splinting, splinting.

**Private L Mitchell, 24<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, 8 Division**



A stretcher squad consists of four men and you lift the stretcher up and on to the shoulder, and each corner had a man. Now that's the only way you can carry a man properly. But, it was hard work, really hard. I mean, the road there was all lumps and bumps. It was being fed with every stone and every old brick that you could think of, and there was no steam-roller rolling it down flat, you know! It was being knocked down with mauls. And carrying over that rough ground is very hard. And of course it's hard on the

shoulders. When the conditions got really appalling, it required twelve men to a stretcher, but they couldn't get on the stretcher all at the same time ... you could get six ... one on the middle one side, one the other, and then they would stop and another six men would take over. You see, you're being dragged down in the mud and of course you're plastered in mud yourself. And not only that, they're not fed up like boxers for a contest, they're living on bully beef and water and dog biscuits. No hot meals! Hot meals? Never heard of them.

What we had was stretchers and the field surgical haversack with the usual bandages, morphia, quarter grain tablets, scissors, plaster, dressings. If I came across a casualty, and it would be dealt with, I always used the use the first field dressing out of the uniform pocket. You ripped the waterproof covering and there as a pad of gauze and an ampoule immediately and the iodine was released all over the pad. And then you put the pad to the wound and bound him up. Every soldier carried one in his jacket, so naturally, to save my dressings in the surgical haversack, the first thing I used was the soldier's own field dressing.

**Sergeant WJ Collins, Royal Army Medical Corps**



Illustrations from **Vlad and the First World War**. Images © Sam Cunningham



# Sailors and Submariners

## Newspaper report of action of HM Armed Smack “Nelson”, on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1917:

On the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1917, the Smack “Nelson” was engaged in fishing when she was attacked by gunfire from an enemy submarine. The gear was let go and the submarine’s fire was returned.



The submarine’s fourth shot went through the port bow just below the water line, and the seventh shell struck the skipper, Thomas Crisp, injuring him, and passed through the deck and out through the side of the ship. In spite of the terrible nature of his wound Skipper Crisp retained consciousness, and his first thought was to send off a message that he was being attacked and giving his position. He continued to command his ship until the ammunition was almost exhausted and the smack was sinking. He refused to be moved into the small boat when the rest of the crew were obliged to abandon the vessel as she sank, his last request being that he might be thrown overboard.

The posthumous award of the Victoria Cross to Skipper Thomas Crisp, DSC, RNR, 10055DA, was announced in London Gazette No 30363 dated the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1917.

Illustration from **Vlad and the First World War**. Images © Sam Cunningham

## **Testimony of Adolf K.G.E. von Spiegel, Commander of a German U-boat**

'Stand by for firing a torpedo!' I called down to the control room.'

'FIRE!'

" A slight tremor went through the boat  
- the torpedo had gone."

"The death-bringing shot was a true one, and the torpedo ran towards the doomed ship at high speed. I could follow its course exactly by the light streak of bubbles which was left in its wake."



"I saw that the bubble-track of the torpedo had been discovered on the bridge of the steamer, as frightened arms pointed towards the water and the captain put his hands in front of his eyes and waited resignedly. Then a frightful explosion followed, and we were all thrown against one another by the concussion, and then, like Vulcan, huge and majestic, a column of water two hundred metres high and fifty metres broad, terrible in its beauty and power, shot up to the heavens."

'Hit abaft the second funnel,' I shouted down to the control room."

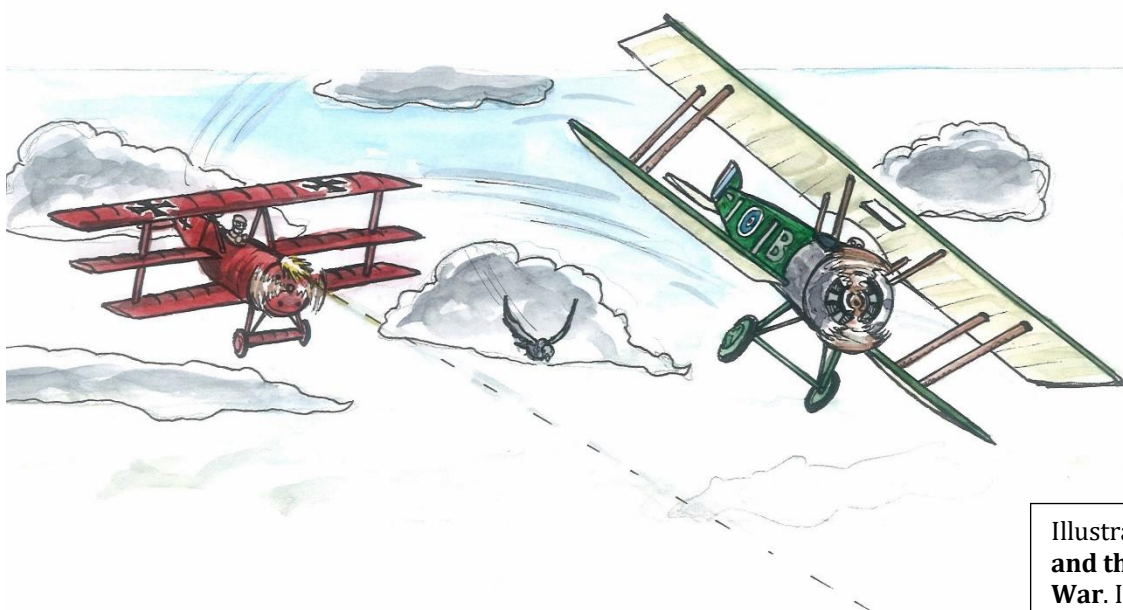
## Pilots

We ran our engines up for 2 or 3 minutes time to get them warm and then took off separately and at about 500 feet would start to get into formation and head slowly out towards the lines.

When we got our height we would go over and look for trouble, and we usually got up to about 15,000 to 16,000 feet before we actually crossed the lines into enemy territory. This was a good height, but of course very cold.

Our eyes, of course, were continuously focussing, looking, craning our heads around. Moving all the time looking for those black specks which would mean enemy aircraft at a great distance away. And we would perhaps be between clouds and not see the ground or only parts of the ground sliding into view like a magic lantern screen far, far beneath. And then sooner or later we would spot the enemy. If we were lucky it would be below us. We used to engage irrespective of whether there was anyone above or not and just chance it.

And so the whole squadron would enter the fight like that in good formation but within half a minute the whole formation had gone. There was nothing left except chaps weaving and zooming and diving.



Illustrations from **Vlad and the First World War**. Images © Sam Cunningham

We flew like goldfish in a bowl, swimming around the sky.

There were Germans going down and one of our chaps on his tail and a German on his tail, another Hun behind that.

Sometimes standing on our tails, sometimes with our heads right down, sometimes over on our backs, sometimes at right angles to the ground.

Extraordinary glimpses one got of people approaching head-on, firing at each other as they came and they just at the last moment turning and slipping away.



And our machines could turn on such tiny circles that we had simply swerved round in an amazingly small space of air, missing each other sometimes by inches, darting in and out amongst the others in the sky, weaving the most fantastic patterns.

The fight lasted altogether for perhaps altogether 10 minutes to quarter of an hour. We would come down from 15,000 feet right down to almost ground level by that time probably ammunition exhausted and you only had 2 hours petrol anyway so you couldn't stay up for very long.



Our own armament was 1 lewis gun operated by the observer. The pilot sat behind the observer and frequently had to duck his head to avoid the lewis gun. It was quite difficult too to use the gun without hitting some of the many flying wires which gave the plane its nickname of the birdcage.

Personally I always used to take a rifle up with me because you could fire that sideways from the open cockpit if you held the joystick between your knees. You did have a revolver as well. Once after emptying my rifle I optimistically threw my revolver at a German machine. Of course, I didn't hit it and we ended up by giving each other a friendly wave and flying off home.

Our enemies were not the men in the machines but the machines themselves. It was a case of our machine is better than yours.

**Extract of testimonies of Cecil Lewis and Norman Macmillan recorded by IWM and BBC.**

The spring of 1917 was the worst month experience in that war with 245 aircraft lost, 211 aircrew lost and 108 aircrew taken prisoner.

## Munitions Workers – “Canary Girls”

When we went in we had special clothes. When you went in in the morning you took your clothes off and put them in a big bag and that was called your dirty. You put their overalls on and a mob cap. You couldn't have any hair pins, any hooks or eyes, anything metal on you. Special shoes. We were all covered up with mob caps, you weren't allowed to have your hair loose. Nothing on your shoes to keep them on [such as buckles]. Even linen buttons had tin in them.

Ethel Dean

We had buses to take us to the factory because it was secret work. This was filling 9.2 gas shells. They started us first on stemming the shells. There was a certain amount of powder and you had to fill it from the bottom to the top and the stem was like a handle of a brush and you had a wooden mallet and you had to hammer from the bottom to the top to get it all down.

Isabella Clarke



They sent me to the detonator place. There was a cap like that and that had to be unscrewed and come off and put in a box comprised of about a dozen different things, little springs, a little this a little that all packed in there. And each part had to come out, be measured with a thing that we had for measuring and weighing the springs to see if they took

the right pressure, all that sort of thing that and as you done that box you passed that box on and another girl would do another part of it and that how it would go on down the table and when it got to the end of the table it came back the other end to be assembled again – you didn't do all the job yourself. That is how it was done.

Amy May

You always heard of someone getting hurt, and saw the ambulance fetch them out. But they were only slightly hurt not seriously hurt. When I was soldering a bottle of bullets up it sort of went bang and my fingers, these fingers have always been a bit funny. I was away for about 6 weeks and I couldn't use my arm, they put it in a sling.

Lilian Miles



I was yellow all over. I had black hair and it was practically green. Well it wore off once you come out of it, it wore off within a couple of weeks it was gone. It wore right off very quickly but while you were working in there you were yellow. Well you could wash and wash and it didn't come off. Your whole body was yellow.

You were yellow all over. It didn't wash off. Everything that powder touches goes yellow, all around their mouths. They had their own canteen, in which everything was yellow that they touched... Everything they touched went yellow – chair, tables, everything.

Ethel Dean

# The Christmas Truce 1914

Testimony of Frank Richards

On Christmas morning we stuck up a board with 'A Merry Christmas' on it. The enemy had stuck up a similar one. Platoons would sometimes go out for twenty-four hours' rest - it was a day at least out of the trench and relieved the monotony a bit - and my platoon had gone out in this way the night before, but a few of us stayed behind to see what would happen. Two of our men then threw their equipment off and jumped on the parapet with their hands above their heads. Two of the Germans done the same and commenced to walk up the river bank, our two men going to meet them. They met and shook hands and then we all got out of the trench.

Buffalo Bill [the Company Commander] rushed into the trench and endeavoured to prevent it, but he was too late: the whole of the Company were now out, and so were the Germans. He had to accept the situation, so soon he and the other company officers climbed out too. We and the Germans met in the middle of no-man's-land. Their officers was also now out. Our officers exchanged greetings with them. One of the German officers said that he wished he had a camera to take a snapshot, but they were not allowed to carry cameras. Neither were our officers.

We mucked in all day with one another. They were Saxons and some of them could speak English. By the look of them their trenches were in as bad a state as our own. One of their men, speaking in English, mentioned that he had worked in Brighton for some years and that he was fed up to the neck with this damned war and would be glad when it was all over. We told him that he wasn't the only one that was fed up with it. We did not allow them in our trench and they did not allow us in theirs.

The German Company-Commander asked Buffalo Bill if he would accept a couple of barrels of beer and assured him that they would not make his men drunk. They had plenty of it in the brewery. He accepted the offer with thanks and a couple of their men rolled the barrels over and we took them into our trench. The German officer sent one of his men back to the trench, who appeared shortly after carrying a tray with bottles and glasses on it. Officers of both sides clinked glasses and drunk one another's health. Buffalo Bill had presented them with a plum pudding just before. The officers came to an understanding that the unofficial truce would end at midnight. At dusk we went back to our respective trenches.

...The two barrels of beer were drunk, and the German officer was right: if it was possible for a man to have drunk the two barrels himself he would have bursted before he had got drunk. French beer was rotten stuff.

Just before midnight we all made it up not to commence firing before they did. At night there was always plenty of firing by both sides if there were no working parties or patrols out. Mr Richardson, a young officer who had just joined the Battalion and was now a platoon officer in my company wrote a poem during the night about the Briton and the Bosche meeting in no-man's-land on Christmas Day, which he read out to us. A few days later it was published in *The Times* or *Morning Post*, I believe.



British and German troops  
mingle in No Mans Land  
Christmas 1914

During the whole of Boxing Day [the day after Christmas] we never fired a shot, and they the same, each side seemed to be waiting for the other to set the ball a-rolling. One of their men shouted across in English and inquired how we had enjoyed the beer. We shouted back and told him it was very weak but that we were very grateful for it. We were conversing off and on during the whole of the day.

We were relieved that evening at dusk by a battalion of another brigade. We were mighty surprised as we had heard no whisper of any relief during the day. We told the men who relieved us how we had spent the last couple of days with the enemy, and they told us that by what they had been told the whole of the British troops in the line, with one or two exceptions, had mucked in with the enemy. They had only been out of action themselves forty-eight hours after being twenty-eight days in the front-line trenches. They also told us that the French people had heard how we had spent Christmas Day and were saying all manner of nasty things about the British Army.

### References:

This eyewitness account appears in Richards, Frank, *Old Soldiers Never Die* (1933); Keegan, John, *The First World War* (1999); Simkins, Peter, *World War I, the Western Front* (1991).