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First World War Learning Resource Teacher Notes KS3 and KS4



Overview

The Royal Armouries learning resources are perfect for your pupils studying **challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day**, and they also support **AQA, OCR** and **Edexcel** GCSEs. Our resources have been created for you to use in your classroom or for your pupils to access from home. They have been designed to engage and inspire pupils to use sources and create their own opinions of history, whilst also learning critical historical knowledge and other cross-curricular information. This document gives additional information you may find useful to support the resources we have created.

Pals Battalions: A pal prepares for war **Video**

This performance is a fictional representation of a soldier from the First World War, but it is based on multiple accounts of the thoughts and feelings of soldiers that joined 'Pals Battalions'. It gives a glimpse into what basic training included and the effects this training had on the physical and mental wellbeing of soldiers. The script has been designed to assist with **historical knowledge** and help put knowledge into a relatable perspective for your pupils. Please see the Photo Bank for an image of an SMLE rifle mentioned in the video.

George A. Weston's Letter **Audio File**

A perfect source for **historical knowledge** and also use in **literacy**. This letter was written by George A. Weston the day after arriving at his new base, Fort Nelson, Portsmouth in November 1914.

About George A. Weston

Born on 12 April 1894, George A. Weston enlisted voluntarily soon after the declaration of war. He was 20. He trained at Glen Parva Barracks in Wigston, Leicestershire. He then joined the new 10th (Service) Battalion, which had been formed in Portsmouth to assist in the defence of the south coast against possible invasion. His base was Fort Nelson, a 19th-century fort that was repurposed during the war to whatever was the greatest need, as by 1914 the Fort was militarily obsolete. The fort is now one of three Royal Armouries sites. As tens of thousands of soldiers signed up to volunteer at the start of the war, the War Office needed to find ways to scale up housing and training

them. Temporary buildings (such as the sheds George mentions sleeping in) and repurposed sites (such as the Fort) were common all over the UK as the Armed Forces struggled to cope with the sheer number of new soldiers.

George's letter gives us a glimpse into the life of recently trained. Although it is clear George does not reckon much to the food he is provided with, supplying soldiers with their basic needs was a huge operation. For instance, many soldiers only received uniforms in November 1914. And George's description of his sleeping arrangements makes it clear that there is little in terms of bedroom furniture and heating provision at this point. Logistical support of this kind was largely the responsibility of the Army Service Corps - in this letter George is waiting to hear about a possible transfer. Just as important to soldiers' wellbeing was 'down time'. George mentions that he and his fellow soldiers '*fall out at half past three. The drawbridge pulled up at nine o'clock*', meaning they were off duty in the evenings and could get leave to go out into the surrounding areas.

George went on to have a very eventful war, to say the least. The battalion moved to Barnard Castle in June 1915, where George stayed with it until 6 October. By that time the 10th Leicesters were designated as a Reserve Battalion, which meant that the battalion replaced casualties in the two regular and nine service battalions deployed overseas. He was sent out to France in July 1916 and fought in the Battle of the Somme until the 16th when he was injured in the arm and sent back home. He was in hospital in Southport, Liverpool until July 1917. After convalescent leave he entered retraining at Ripon Camp, Patrington until 18 October when he was sent back to France. Less than a month later a bomb blast injured his thigh and he was repatriated again, recuperating in a hospital in Edinburgh. Once again he was discharged, took leave, entered retraining, and was redeployed in February 1918. But on 24 August George was shot and wounded in the lungs, so by September he was back in hospital in Edinburgh, and was discharged on 21 November, ten days after the Armistice. He was sent home to Hedon, although he was only technically discharged from the army on 23 January 1919.

Letter transcript *(spelling as per original)*

Dear Parents,

I arrived here last night, and I can tell you I never dropped into such a hole in my nach. There is but one consolation, others have got to go through it, I am not the only one. It is not a patch on Wigston. It is all underground. The wall a 4 foot thick and all the roofs are arched brick. It is like living in cellars, and the fires that burn fill the place with smoke. The food is good but spoilt in the cooking, it is smoked and all the dinner is boiled. I was relieved last night when they told us there was no room in the barracks for [us] to sleep. We slept in sheds. They are new sheds, in fact they are hardly completed, boarded floors and walls. We have mattress and pillow, and the blankets, and sleep on the floor. I found a pal last night and we put our bed side by side, one blanket over the two and five blankets on top. So we were warm enough. There is no fire about. I have only seen one and that was in a field kitchen. The nearest place is Fareham, 2 miles away. This place is a fort, and you would be struck with the strength of the place. As I said the walls average 4 feet thick and in many places as much as 8 feet thick, anyone in an areplane could not see it, as it is all turfed over, only the chimdyes which stick out of the ground. There is a moat all around it 5 ft deep but it is dry now. On the embattlements the[re] are the guns looking out over Portsmouth, and gun platforms are everywhere. You can walk miles underground in arched galleries, emerging in far off woods and fields, of course this is an old fort and is of no military use except for bivo[ua]king us here. I thought I was coming to the world's end when I got here. I was disappointed. We went over the drawbridge by the light of lanterns, which gleamed on the fixed bayonets of the sentries, and the heavy bridge clanged to behind us. It has been miserably cold all day, and wet. We aren't many yards from the sea, and the fleet can plainly be seen when the mist lifts. The fleet were having firing practise today, and the thunder of the guns was terrible and grand, it made our fort fair shake. Nelson's monument is here, with the gulls whirling and kicking up their fiendish cries, as if rejoicing over our rotten lot.

There is an apology for a reading room here, but Glen Pava is a palace to this. It is like living in an opening hole, the cliffs rise up above the grim old fort shutting out all sunshine but not the wind by any means. And the officers are a mardy lot. All sorts of uniforms are seen here but the colors fade under the cote of dirt with which the[y] are covered. I am only glad I am in the sheds they are at least clean. After dinner the thick mists roll up from the sea and blot out the landscape, but crumbs they don't silence the gulls.

We were eight hours in the train I thought I should never get here. Two areplanes followed us till dark, this place is very interesting you know, but I wish I was out of it for all that. One good thing the Leicesters are all together, I

think I should have gone mad if I had had to sleep with some of the men in the rooms underground. I hope we shall soon be shifted. I have not heard [about the Army Service Corps], perhaps they are not wanting men at present. We are going to have a free pass at Xmas I suppose and 7 days leave. It only wants six weeks, so won't be very long. I wish it weren't so long though for all that. Perhaps my impression will change a little in a while when I have seen the district I have seen nothing yet scarsly. We fall out at half past three. The drawbridge pulled up at nine o'clock. Remember me to all at home. I am in the best of health only a little depressed. That will wear off. Remember me to Francie, Sophie, Grannie Eva, Tom and [the] kiddies, and all others.

Your loving son George A. Weston

Photo Bank

The photo bank has been compiled to assist your lessons in any way that you see fit. They are all original photographs or images of items in our collection. Please download them for educational use only. They would be great for increasing **historical knowledge**, **building evidentially supported enquiries** and **historical source work**.

Images will be added and updated on a regular basis.

We have added notes to each image; collections items are hyperlinked to our Collections Online, where you can get more images and technical information; and the asset numbers for our Image Library are given where relevant. If you would like any more information about any image, please contact educate.leeds@armouries.org.uk and we would be happy to assist.