

RULES OF WAR

Background Information

Starting just 13 years after Australia became a nation, World War I was one of the first times we came together as 'Australians'.

Many people say our national character was shaped by our experiences in World War I. After Gallipoli, ANZAC soldiers became known and well respected for their courage, endurance and mateship- all attributes that we still cherish as part of the ANZAC Spirit.

In 1915, the population of Australia was just under 5 million. 417,000 people enlisted to serve in World War I a total of 8% of the population. Of those who enlisted, 60,000 did not survive the war (14%) and 156, 000 (37%) were wounded.



Setting the Scene

One of the earliest Military uses of chlorine gas was by German forces in the Second Battle of Ypres on the Western Front in April 1915. At first, Allied soldiers including Australians, thought the gas was a smoke screen to cover an advance by the enemy. They mistakenly walked into the deadly gas. The British responded by using chlorine gas in the Battle of Loos on the Western Front in September 1915. Gas proved to be an effective weapon for both sides and as a result other forms such as phosgene and mustard gas were developed for use later in the war. Many soldiers who survived the war suffered the effects of the gas for the rest of their lives.

The use of poison gas was described by Britain's Daily Mirror newspaper as 'devilry'. Sir John French, then commander of the British Expeditionary Force, described the use of gas as '...cynical and barbarous disregard of the well-known usages of civilised war'. Yet it was only four months later that the British used the same weapon.

The international community sought to outlaw the use of poisonous gas in The Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907.



Research rules of war and unknown dangers on the Western front.

What are rules of war and why do we have them?



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Do you believe we need rules of war?

In World War I, poisonous gas was used by the Germans first and then used by the allies 4 months later. Do you believe that a nation is justified in breaking the rules of war if the enemy does so first? Why/ Why not?

Many historians believe that soldiers were more terrified of gas attacks than any other threat. Why do you think gas was feared?



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Complete the following table on the characteristics and effects of poisonous gas.

Gas	Characteristics	Effects on the human body
Chlorine		
Phosgene		
Mustard		

Soldiers often fought in trenches which provided limited protection to poison gas and bombs. What were some of the advantages and disadvantages of using trenches as places to shelter from and launch attacks?

Advantages	Disadvantages
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.



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Soldiers in the Trenches on the Western Front often suffered a condition known as Trench foot. Trench foot is caused by a combination of cold, wet feet and poor blood circulation. In some cases, soldiers did not unlace or remove boots for days at a time. Eventually gangrene and tetanus set in. Even when soldiers were removed from the front it could take months for infected feet to recover.

Why might injuries caused by gas or trench foot slow an army's capacity to advance and win battles?



PHOTO CREDIT: AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

How do you think the ANZAC's would have felt on the Western Front with the risks of Poisonous Gas and Trench Foot?

