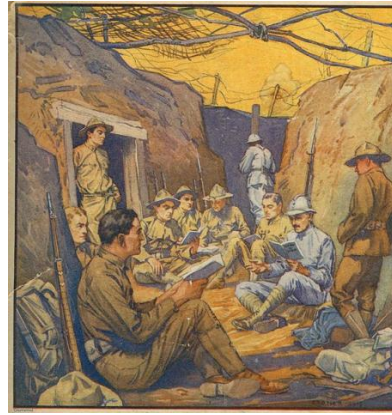




0. TO THE WESTERN FRONT - Story Preface

1. WAS IT LIKE SARS?

2. ALBERT GITCHELL GETS SICK

3. TO THE WESTERN FRONT

4. SICK SOLDIERS

5. A DEADLY SECOND WAVE without SOCIAL DISTANCING

6. PICTURES OF CHAOS

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9. SWINE FLU (Influenza A H1N1) OUTBREAK of 2009

Soldiers serving along the Western Front lived in ground dug-outs called trenches. Rats were common in these outdoor dwellings, making things even more miserable. This illustration, from the 20 October 1917 cover of *Literary Digest*, depicts an idealized version of trench living where English-speaking soldiers are studying French. Public Domain. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

At about the time American soldiers at Camp Funston came down with the yet-unnamed Spanish Flu, French and British forces were in trouble along the Western Front. Germany had a readily observable objective: Split-apart the Allies so the German war machine could break through the 440-mile line and overrun the French countryside.

Although troops on both sides of the line had been unable to really move much for three years, effectively gaining little (or no) ground, the Germans were hopeful their spring offensive would be decisive. Georges Clemenceau—then the French Premier whose men needed additional help to hold the line—told an American newsman (with great urgency):

A terrible blow is imminent. Tell your Americans to come quickly.

And come they did!

According to the American Battle Monuments Commission, the first "American Expeditionary Forces" arrived in France on the 26th of June, 1917. By the time World War I was over, about 2 million American troops were in France.

During the summer of 1918, Americans crossed the Atlantic in droves:

June: 279,000

July: 300,000

August: 286,000

They were bound, among other places, for the trenches at the Western Front. Robert Graves (the British poet, writer-combatant and author of *Goodbye to All That* and *I, Claudius*) had a choice name for the front: "the sausage machine." His reason for such a description?

...because it was fed with live men, churned out corpses, and remained firmly screwed in place.

Rarely had military men been forced to live for so long in such deplorably desperate conditions as those existing at the Western Front. In the trenches, awful rats as big as cats fed on dead bodies while lice inflicted 97% of the soldiers. "Trench fever" often resulted from the filth and exposure.

The arriving American soldiers, who had come to help the Allies, also brought with them a weapon. It was unseen and unknown. It had already taken aim at the Americans; it would soon turn on their brothers-in-arms. And, according to some scholars, it may have actually helped the Allies to win the war.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/TO-THE-WESTERN-FRONT-Spanish-Flu-Pandemic)

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Questions 2 Ponder

What to Do about All the Rats?

Rarely had soldiers been forced to live for so long, in such deplorable conditions, as the trench dwellers of WWI's Western Front. Rats as big as cats, which fed on dead bodies, were not their only woe.

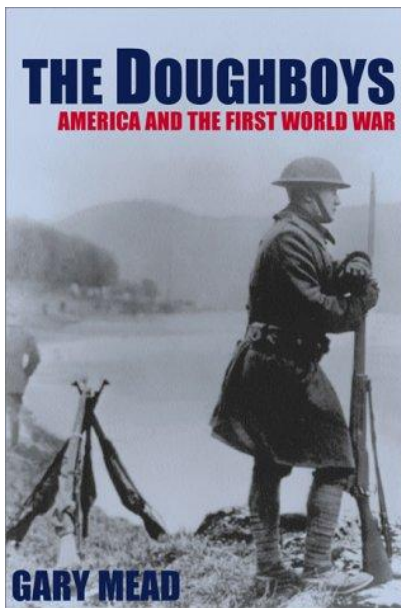
Lice inflicted 97% of the soldiers, and "trench fever" resulted from all the filth and exposure. These are the soldiers expected to fight at a moment's notice, meanwhile never knowing when they would have to "go over the top," to meet the enemy soldiers who lived in their own trenches.

It's hard enough to even think about such conditions, but put yourself into one of those trenches for purposes of this question. How would you cope?

People tend to develop defense mechanisms, to get through traumatic events, but what kind of defense mechanism would get you through a place where you see rats, "as big as cats," feeding on dead bodies in your trench?

What do you think could have been done to rid the trenches of rats? Was that even possible?

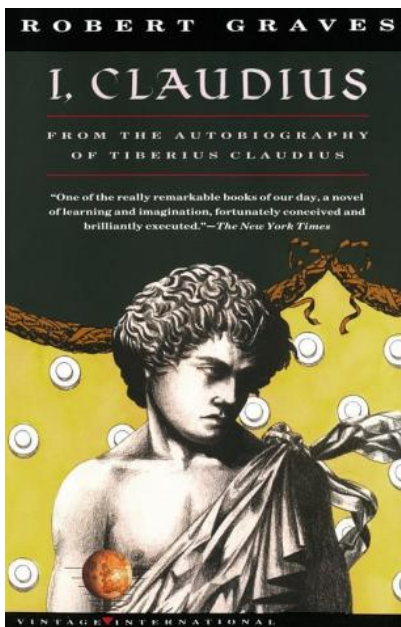
Media Stream



The Doughboys

Image online, courtesy abebooks.com website.

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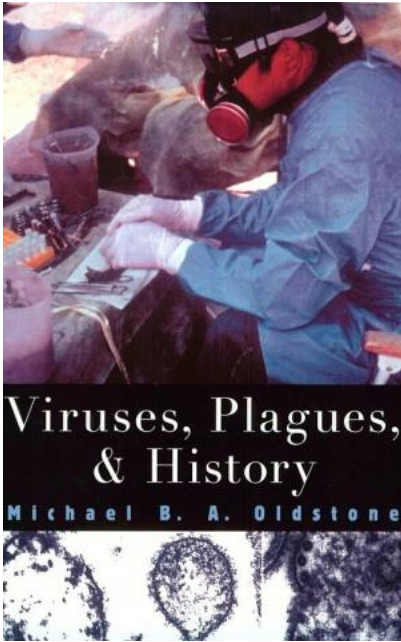


I, Claudius - by Robert Graves

Book-cover image online, courtesy Amazon.

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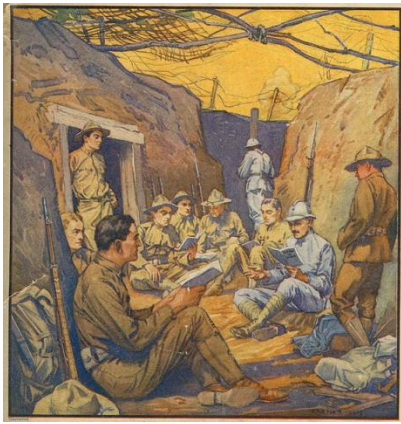


Viruses, Plagues and History

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Rats in the Trenches of France

From the U.K. National Archives.

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