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Living and fighting in trenches put soldiers at-risk for getting sick during World War I. This photo depicts Australian soldiers located very close to the German line. Image online, courtesy National Archives of Australia. When American troops went to Europe, they unwittingly carried with them a virus that would end up killing more people than the weapons of war. Photographs from the national archives depict both the fighting men and their surroundings.

- Air evacuation, in 1918, was primitive by today's standards. But then, as now, planes could mean the difference between life and death.
- Soldiers and French civilians had to wear gas masks to protect themselves from mustard gas.
- As U.S. troops crowded into confined spaces such as hospitals, trenches and blocked roads (like the ruins of Esnes behind American lines in the Argonne), they spread the flu virus.
- Americans were sick with the flu in Aix-Les-Bains, France and Hollerich, Luxembourg.
- Triumphant U.S. soldiers marched through Perth, Scotland in 1918 while others, wounded at the front, were brought back to Souilly, France on September 28, 1918.

The following month, civilians back in the States would endure a horrifying outbreak of the flu epidemic as returning soldiers brought the now-mutated virus home. Much worse than its "first wave" (in the spring of 1918), the Spanish Flu had turned deadly.

Philadelphia, where there were more bodies than coffins, was the hardest hit American city.

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

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/SICK-SOLDIERS-Spanish-Flu-Pandemic)

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Questions 2 Ponder

Was a Virus Ever More Deadly than Weapons of War?

The first official cases of the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic were recorded at the U.S. Army's Camp Funston, Kansas, where this emergency influenza ward held treated patients.

A virus is invisible to the human eye; sometimes an invisible virus, which could be deadly to someone else, is not deadly to its carrier.

When American troops went to Europe, to support Allied positions in World War One, many soldiers unwittingly carried with them a virus that would end-up killing more people than the weapons of war.

Is it even conceivable that a World-War-One-era illness would kill more people than all the fighting, shooting, battling, gassing and bombing combined? Explain your answer.

Since the virus-carrying Americans would not have gone to Europe, en masse, if they weren't sent to fight the war, is it safe to assume that but for the war the deaths caused by Spanish Flu would have been far less? Explain your answer.

How Do We Know When a Deadly Virus Will Mutate?

When the "first wave" of a virus-causing illness, which came to be known as Spanish Flu, broke-out in the spring of 1918, no one could have imagined that it would turn even more deadly during its "second wave."

American soldiers, who carried the virus to Europe, returned with a mutated form of the virus which proved to be far more deadly to Americans, especially those who were gathering in large crowds.

Philadelphia, the hardest-hit American city, lost 12,000 of its residents to Spanish Flu during the month of October, 1918. So many people died that the city did not have enough coffins to accommodate all the flu victims.

Do you think it is possible to have advanced warning when an already deadly virus is about to mutate? Explain your answer.

If scientists have developed a vaccine and/or a treatment protocol, for a deadly illness, but the prevention-and-treatment medications do not work on a mutated virus, what next?

How does the worst disaster, about which you've ever heard, compare with the disaster in Philadelphia, during October of 1918? Do the two events have anything in common?

Media Stream



Air Evacuation During WWI

Image, described above, online via Joint Health Command, Australian Department of Defense.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Air-Evacuation-During-WWI>



Air Ambulances during WWI

Image, described above, online via [Library of Congress](#). Reproduction Number: LC-DIG-npcc-33247 (digital file from original).

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Airplanes in 1918

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Airplanes-in-1918>



French Children with Gas Masks - WWI

U.S. Signal Corps photo, now maintained by the [Otis Historical Archives](#), National Museum of Health and Medicine.

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Gas Masks - American Soldiers during WWI

U.S. Signal Corps photo (Reeve 37283), now maintained by the Otis Historical Archives, National Museum of Health and Medicine.

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American Troops and the Ruins of Esne-en-Argonne

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Sick Bay - WWI U.S. Soldiers in France

Image maintained as part of the Otis Historical Archives at the National Museum of Health and Medicine.

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Troops in Sick Bay during WWI

Image (Reeve 15183), maintained by the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, at the National Museum of Health and Medicine.

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U.S. Troops Marching in Perth, Scotland

Image, online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/U.S.-Troops-Marching-in-Perth-Scotland>



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