2.2 The Western Front, 1914-18: Trench Systems and the Terrain of the British Sector: 30-minute Pack

EDEXCEL 1HI0 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Questions 2 and 3 refer to Source A and Source B. Write in full sentences for Questions 2, 3, 4 and 5. You are advised to spend about 30 minutes on this pack.

Source A and Source B: Building and Mapping the Trench System, 1916

Source A and Source B were written for Revision Library as original, representative teaching material. Source A is an account in the style of a Royal Engineers officer's report, written to represent the kind of first-hand account of trench construction described in verified historical accounts of the Western Front; it is not the testimony of a real, named individual, and no genuine wartime document has been reproduced or quoted. Source B is an illustrative table styled on historical research into trench layout; its figures are representative estimates for teaching purposes, not measurements from an authentic official record.

SOURCE A: from an account written in the style of a Royal Engineers officer, describing repair work on the Somme battlefield, 1916.

Two days now with the working party, trying to shore up the section of front-line trench that came down after the rain. The chalk here holds better than the clay we had further north, near Ypres last year, and the German dugouts opposite are said to be twenty feet down, cut clean into the chalk and lined with timber; ours are shallower, mostly just deep enough to stand in. Even so, a week of rain has turned the top few inches to the same grey mud as everywhere else, and the duckboards we laid on Tuesday are already half sunk. Sandbags for the parapet came up last night, along with more timber for revetting, but a working party of eight men can only manage so much trench in a night before it grows light enough for the enemy to see us moving. The support line is in better shape, being further back and less shelled, but the communication trench between the two is in a poor state, narrow and slippery, and it will want widening before wounded men need carrying down it in a hurry.

SOURCE B: an illustrative table showing the typical layout of a British trench system on the Western Front and the approximate distance of each line behind no man's land.

Trench line	Approximate distance behind no man's land	Main purpose
Front line	0 metres (borders no man's land)	first contact with the enemy; observation and firing positions
Support line	roughly 100 to 300 metres	held troops ready to reinforce the front line quickly if needed
Reserve line	roughly 500 metres to over a kilometre	held reserve troops and stores further from immediate danger

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Note: communication trenches, dug roughly at right angles to these lines, connected the front, support and reserve lines together. Distances varied considerably along the Western Front depending on terrain and the tactical situation; the figures above are illustrative and typical rather than measurements from one specific location.

1 Give two reasons why the terrain of the Somme battlefield differed from the terrain of the Ypres Salient, and how this affected trench conditions.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 How useful is Source A for an enquiry into the practical difficulties of building and maintaining trenches on the Western Front? Explain your answer, using Source A and your own knowledge of the historical context.

(Total for Question 2 is 8 marks)

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3 How could you use Source A and Source B to find out about the layout of trench systems on the Western Front? Explain your answer, using Source A, Source B and your own knowledge.

(Total for Question 3 is 8 marks)

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4 Source A suggests one possible line of enquiry into the construction of trenches on the Western Front. Complete the table to explain how you could follow this up.

(a) Detail in Source A that I would follow up: **(1)**

(b) Question I would ask: **(1)**

(c) What type of source I could use: **(1)**

(d) How this might help answer my question: **(1)**

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

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5 Explain why terrain and geology significantly affected the design and construction of trenches on the Western Front.

(Total for Question 5 is 8 marks)

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Mark scheme · 2.2 The Western Front, 1914-18: Trench Systems and the Terrain of the British Sector: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

the Somme battlefield was chalk downland, which drained well and allowed deep, dry dugouts to be dug, particularly by German forces	**B2**
the Ypres Salient lay on low, flat Flanders clay with a high water table, so dugouts flooded easily and trenches were often waterlogged	**B2**

Answer: The Somme's chalk allowed deep, dry dugouts; the Ypres Salient's clay and high water table caused flooding and shallow, wet trenches.

Question 2

Level 1 Makes a simple comment on the content of Source A, with little or no reference to its nature, origin or purpose, or to own knowledge.	**1-2**
Level 2 Describes the content of Source A and begins to comment on its value, with limited reference to its nature, origin, purpose or own knowledge.	**3-4**
Level 3 Analyses the content and the nature/origin/purpose of Source A, using own knowledge to support a developing judgement about how useful it is for the given enquiry.	**5-6**
Level 4 Analyses the content and the nature/origin/purpose of Source A in a well-supported and convincing way, using precise own knowledge to reach a sustained judgement about how useful it is for the given enquiry, considering its limitations.	**7-8**

Indicative content:

- Content: Source A shows the constant physical labour trench-building and maintenance required, e.g. shoring up a collapsed section, laying duckboards that quickly sank in the mud.
- Content: it shows the contrast between Somme chalk terrain, which allowed deep German dugouts, and the mud produced by rain, plus the danger of working at night to avoid enemy observation.
- Nature/origin/purpose: as an account written to represent a Royal Engineers officer's report, it reflects the kind of first-hand testimony historians use for construction and maintenance work, but because it is written for this pack rather than a genuine wartime report, it cannot be used as direct primary evidence for a specific date, unit or location.
- Own knowledge: contextual knowledge of the contrast between Somme chalk and Flanders clay terrain, and of standard construction features (sandbags, revetting, duckboards), can be used to assess whether the account's content is consistent with verified historical accounts of the period.
- A full answer weighs the source's plausible, typical content, consistent with verified historical knowledge of trench construction and terrain, against its limitations as illustrative rather than archival material, before reaching a judgement on its usefulness for the stated enquiry.

Question 3

Level 1 Makes a simple comment on the content of one source, with little or no reference to using the sources together or to own knowledge.	**1-2**
Level 2 Describes the content of both sources and suggests, in general terms, what each could be used to find out.	**3-4**
Level 3 Explains what Source A and Source B could each be used to find out, and begins to explain how they could be used together, supported by own knowledge.	**5-6**
Level 4 Explains clearly and convincingly what Source A and Source B could be used to find out both separately and together, supported throughout by precise own knowledge of the historical context.	**7-8**

Indicative content:

- Source A shows the practical, first-hand experience of building and repairing one section of trench, which could be used to investigate the day-to-day difficulties of trench construction.
- Source B shows the overall pattern of how a trench system was organised into front, support and reserve lines, which could be used to investigate the general layout used along the Western Front.
- Used together, Source A's individual account and Source B's general layout could be used to investigate how far one working party's experience of building a particular section fitted the wider, typical pattern.
- Own knowledge could be used to check both sources against what is known about trench terminology (parapet, parados, fire step, traverses) and about the terrain differences between sectors such as the Somme and the Ypres Salient.
- A full answer explains what each source could be used to investigate, and how using them together allows a more complete enquiry than either source alone, while noting that both are illustrative rather than genuine archival material.

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Question 4

(a) a relevant detail identified, e.g. the working party could only repair a limited amount of trench each night because of the risk of being seen by the enemy at first light **B1**

(a) Answer: The working party could only manage a limited amount of trench repair each night because of the risk of being spotted at daybreak.

(b) a follow-up question that clearly relates to the chosen detail, e.g. how much trench a Royal Engineers working party could typically construct or repair in one night on the Western Front **B1**

(b) Answer: How much trench could a typical Royal Engineers working party construct or repair during a single night?

(c) an appropriate type of source named, e.g. Royal Engineers unit war diaries or official engineering reports from the period **B1**

(c) Answer: Royal Engineers unit war diaries and official engineering reports.

(d) a clear explanation linking the source type to the question, e.g. war diaries would record the work carried out and the time taken, allowing a check on whether Source A's account of limited nightly progress was typical **B1**

(d) Answer: War diaries would record the actual amount of trench work completed and the time it took, letting me check whether the limited progress described in Source A was typical.

Question 5

Level 1 Identifies one or two general reasons why terrain mattered, with little or no supporting detail or explanation. **1-2**

Level 2 Identifies and begins to explain one reason, supported by accurate detail. **3-4**

Level 3 Explains two reasons why terrain and geology significantly affected trench design, each supported by accurate and relevant detail. **5-6**

Level 4 Explains two or more reasons in a well-developed, logically structured way, supported throughout by precise and accurate detail, showing how the reasons connect. **7-8**

Indicative content:

- The chalk downland of the Somme drained well and allowed deep, dry dugouts to be dug, particularly on the German side, giving better shelter from bombardment than the shallower British dugouts.
- The low-lying clay of the Ypres Salient had a naturally high water table, and shelling destroyed existing drainage, so trenches flooded easily, producing constant mud and conditions linked to trench foot.
- Waterlogged, collapsing communication trenches, as described in Source A, made it slower and more dangerous to move wounded soldiers back along the chain of evacuation, connecting terrain directly to medical outcomes.
- Trenches were still built in zigzagged traverses everywhere, regardless of terrain, to limit blast and enfilade fire, but soft or collapsible ground made this pattern harder to maintain and repair.
- Overall, terrain and geology shaped both how well trenches could be built and how quickly and safely the wounded could be evacuated, linking the quality of trench construction to the effectiveness of medical care.

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