

## Realities of battle

[DR JONATHAN BOFF]

Throughout history, one thing binds soldiers of all conflicts together. They know what it's like to go into battle, they know what it's like to risk their lives and they know what it's like to be prepared to kill.

These trenches on Salisbury Plain were used to train troops deploying to the Western Front. A hundred years on, it feels like an appropriate spot to visit soldiers of more recent conflicts and to listen to some of those voices of the First World War.

[Clip from archive interviews]

[JOSEPH MURRAY, SEAMAN]

We stood there packed like sardines, unable to even stand up in comfort. Men were fast asleep on their feet. Others just stood staring into the cloudless sky.

[RICHARD TOBIN, NCO]

I remember those lads standing there. Dead silent, couldn't make a noise. The fellow next to you, he was your best friend, you loved him. You perhaps didn't know him the day before.

[JOSEPH MURRAY]

I wondered if I would live long enough to get out of the trench and if I did, would I have enough courage left to rise again and face that rain of lead?

[DR JONATHAN BOFF]

Fear is naturally a part of any conflict but the First World War unleashed many new terrors; the machine gun, the tank, aircraft, the shells. And those were the threats you could hear coming.

Deadly poison gas was used for the first time in 1915 at Ypres. But soldiers faced those fears and yet remained an effective fighting force. To achieve this, then as now, training was key.

By 1917, the British Army could do this within a few months of intensive training. Communications technology became much more sophisticated and innovations such as air reconnaissance meant that detailed calculations – and even replica battlefields – could be made to create the clearest possible picture of the dangers that lay ahead.

The army continues to innovate to prepare its soldiers for the front lines but the human aspect of battle remains startlingly similar. A hundred years on that means the young men and women deploying into battle share those same emotions of nervousness, excitement and fear.

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