English and History   Life during the war

From 1914 until 1918 British soldiers fought in the First World War. The main countries in the war were Britain, France and Russia, who fought together against Germany and Austria-Hungary. In 1917 the US joined the British side. Most British soldiers fought in trenches on the Western Front, in France. Millions of soldiers from both sides died there in a series of battles which ended in stalemate.

British soldiers on the Western Front

The First World War was the first 'total' war. It was not just fought between armies. Governments told the people in their countries that everybody was involved. People in Britain – women, older people and even children – were told to work to support the soldiers. The war changed their lives, too. These are some of the ways in which life changed:

Recruitment
There was a huge campaign to persuade young men to join the army and fight. Thousands joined the army in 1914 but the government had to introduce conscription in 1916. Men who did not want to join the army could be put in prison.

Industry
The government took control of mines, factories, railways and ships. Factories were used to make weapons and other equipment for the war.

Women
With so many men in the army there were fewer people available to work in factories. Many women did these and other jobs, like driving buses and working in mines, that had traditionally only been done by men. Many women enjoyed doing these jobs. After the war the law was changed so that women could vote in elections in Britain for the first time.

Censorship
The government changed newspaper reports and soldiers' letters to their families so that people would not find out about the awful conditions in the trenches. *The Tribunal*, a newspaper that was against the war, was closed down by the government.

Air raids
The First World War was the first war in which large numbers of bombs were dropped on towns from the air. There were 57 bombing raids on English towns by German airships ('Zeppelins') after 1915.

A German airship ('Zeppelin')

Two recruitment posters from the First World War

trench [trenʃ] – *Schützengraben,* stalemate ['steɪlmeɪt] – *Patt,* recruitment [rɪ'kruːtmənt] – *Rekrutierung (Anwerbung von Soldaten),* to persuade [pə'sweɪd] – *überreden,* conscription [kən'skrɪpʃn] – *Wehrpflicht,* weapon ['wepən] – *Waffe,* raid [reɪd] – *Angriff,* lad [læd] – *junger Mann*

1 Before you start

Make a 'KFL' chart for life in Britain during the First World War. Make notes with the things that you already know (K) and that you think you need to find out (F). Add the most important things that you have learned (L) when you have finished these pages.

2 Changes

a) *Read the texts on page 100.* → Skills 122, 13

b) *What action did the government take during the war? Give a reason for each of the things the government did. Put your notes in a chart like this:*

Action taken	Reasons for action

c) *How did life change for women during and after the war? Why did the changes take place?*

3 Posters

How does each poster try to 'work' on people not yet in the army? Put the message of each poster into words.

4 Your turn

Check in your History book or on the Internet and compare life at home in Britain with life in Germany during the First World War. Work in small groups. Each group finds out about one of the headings from page 100. Present your findings to the other groups.

→ Skills 121, 11