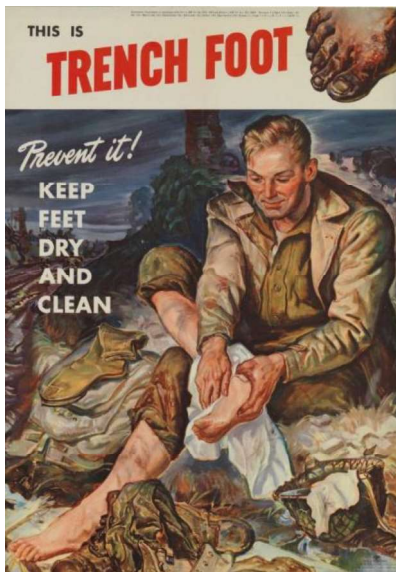
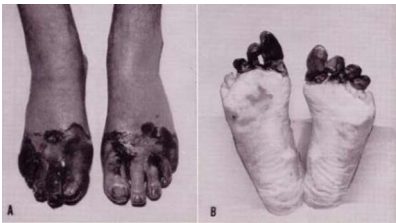


4. Trench Foot



Propaganda Poster encouraging the prevention of trench foot



Medical photographs of trench foot

One of the atrocities associated with trench warfare was the threat of trench foot. Trench foot was a result of prolonged exposure of the feet to wet, cold, unsanitary conditions. During WWI soldiers were forced to stand for hours in waterlogged trenches, unable to remove wet socks and boots. This led to an infection of the feet, occasionally causing gangrene, which may require amputation. During the winter of 1914-1915, over 20,000 British soldiers were treated for trench foot.

One of the first signs of trench foot is numbness in the feet. As the condition worsened, the feet began to swell. Then, the feet would turn red or blue because of poor blood supply. Advanced trench foot often involved open sores. If left untreated, part, or all of the foot would have to be amputated.

Trench foot could be prevented by keeping feet clean, warm and dry. Many armies began ordering their men to change socks several times a day. Also, soldiers began covering their feet with whale-oil, which helped to eliminate foot dampness.

Sergeant Harry Roberts recounts the agony of trench foot:

"If you have never had trench feet described to you. I will tell you. Your feet swell to two or three times their normal size and go completely dead. You could stick a bayonet into them and not feel a thing. If you are fortunate enough not to lose your feet and the swelling begins to go down. It is then that the intolerable, indescribable agony begins. I have heard men cry and even scream with the pain and many had to have their feet and legs amputated."



British soldiers standing in a flooded trench

Source: Simkin, John. "Trench Foot." *Spartacus Educational*, Spartacus Educational, spartacus-educational.com/FWWfoot.htm.