

The Animals' War

History KS3: Lesson 4

The changing role of horses in WWI





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Lesson Plan Duration: one hour

■ Context of Lesson/Key Ideas:

Historians argue that warfare became more mechanised during WWI, and that technology changed the way war was fought by both sides. As a consequence, the role of horses in the conflict changed between 1914 and 1918.

■ Aims and Objectives:

- Know that the role of horses in war changed during the course of WWI.
- Understand how their role changed as a consequence of developments in military tactics and technology during the conflict.

■ National Curriculum coverage:

- KSt3: The First World War. Understand historical concepts such as continuity and change, cause and consequence . . . analyse trends, frame historically valid questions and create their own structured accounts.

■ Resources (available as downloads from website):

- 1 Image of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and quotation for displaying on whiteboard (slide 2 in *War Horses* PowerPoint)
- 2 Resource sheet 1: Statistics (sources 2a - 2f)
- 3 Resource sheet 2: Personal accounts (sources 3a, 3b and 3c)
- 4 Resource sheet 3: Photos (sources 4a, 4b and 4c)
- 5 Resource sheet 4: Photos (sources 5a, 5b and 5c)

■ Learning tasks:

Starter (5 minutes)

- Display the image of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and his quotation on a whiteboard:
The power of the army as a striking weapon depends on its mobility. Mobility is largely dependent on the suitability and fitness of animals for work.
- Ask students to discuss in pairs what he meant by this statement. (Many generals thought that horses and cavalry would play a decisive role in the conflict as they had done in the past. There were few motorised vehicles and so armies relied on horses to move supplies and equipment.)
- Discuss students' responses.



Main (50 minutes)

1) Use sources to identify changes in tactics and technology in WWI:

- Ask students, working in pairs, to study the sources 2 - 5 and use the evidence they provide to answer these questions:
 - Why was the cavalry not able to play a decisive role on the Western Front in WWI?
 - What happened when the cavalry were sent into battle? Why?
 - From the evidence you have here, in what ways did the role of horses change between 1914 and 1918?
 - Was it for the better or worse for the soldiers and/or the horses?

2) Using the evidence, propose a hypothesis for 'The First World War was a period of change for the role of horses in war'

Plenary (5 minutes)

- Gather feedback on students' ideas for hypotheses.

Homework/extension

- a) Write up your hypothesis in report form, citing evidence.
or b) Produce a PowerPoint making the case for your hypothesis.



Resource sheet 1 Statistics - sources 2a - 2f

Machine guns

2a) Number of machine guns in the German army:

1914	12,000
1918	100,000

2b) Number of Vickers (heavy) machine guns supplied to the British army:

1915	2,405
1916	7,429
1917	21,782
1918	39,473

2c) Number of Lewis (light) machine guns per British battalion:

1915	4
1917	46

2d) **Tank production 1916-18**

	Britain	France	Germany	USA
1916	150	0	0	0
1917	1,277	800	0	0
1918	1,391	4,000	20	84

2e) **Motor vehicles in the British Army**

August 1914	507 (total of all types of vehicles)
January 1918	22,000 (trucks in France)

2f) **Number of horses in the British cavalry**

1917	27,000
1918	16,000

Sources:

2a - 2c: Curiosities of the First World War, Terry Breverton, p79

2d: www.firstworldwar.com/weaponry/tanks.htm

2e and 2f: from Tommy by Richard Holmes p163



Resource sheet 2 Personal accounts - sources 3a - 3c

3a) Captain Reginald Thomas, Royal Artillery, 18 July 1918

It was a magnificent sight as the French cavalry came out of the forest at Soissons. Their uniforms were all new, bright blue, every bit and spur-chain was burnished and polished; their lances were gleaming in the sun; and as the bugler blew the charge the horses went into the gallop in a fan attack – two regiments of French cavalry. They went along beautifully, magnificently, through the wheat field in the afternoon sun, until they met the German machine guns, which had just come up and unlimbered. The machine guns, they opened up on them at close range and aimed high enough to knock the riders off the horses. At the end of the time there was practically nothing left of those cavalry regiments.

Source: Forgotten Voices of the Great War, Max Arthur p293

3b) Trooper Benjamin Clouting, 4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards, 1914

It was a proper melee, with shell, machine-gun and rifle fire forming a terrific barrage of noise. Each troop was closely packed together and dense volumes of dust were kicked up, choking us and making it impossible to see beyond the man in front. We were galloping into carnage, for nobody knew what we were supposed to be doing and there was utter confusion from the start. All around me, horses and men were brought hurtling to the ground amidst fountains of earth, or plummeting forwards as a machine gunner caught them with a burst of fire.

Ahead, the leading troops were brought up by agricultural barbed wire strung across the line of advance, so that horses were beginning to be pulled up when I heard for the one and only time in the war a bugle sounding 'troops right wheel'. I pulled my horse round, then with a crash down she went.

Source: Tommy's Ark, Richard Van Emden, p31/32

3c) Cpl William Hardy, 4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards, 1914

We galloped right across the enemy's firing line, absolutely galloping to death. The noise of the firing was deafening, being mingled with the death shouts and screams of men. Corporal Murphy, riding by my side, was shot through the chest and I had to take him out of the saddle and undress and tie him down to dress his wound. Men were shaking hands with each other, thankful they were still alive. Tracking all night. It was sickening to see the wounded horses that were trying to follow us, but the majority were shot.

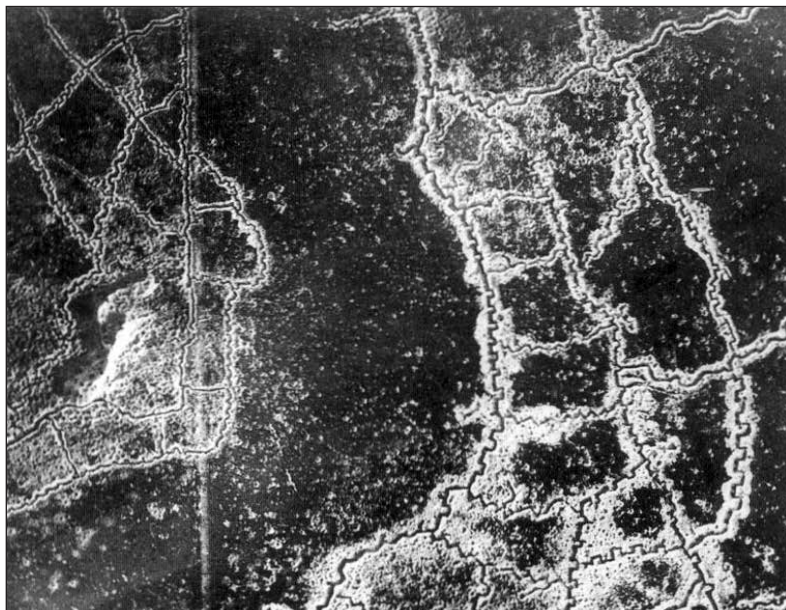
Source: Tommy's Ark, Richard Van Emden, p32



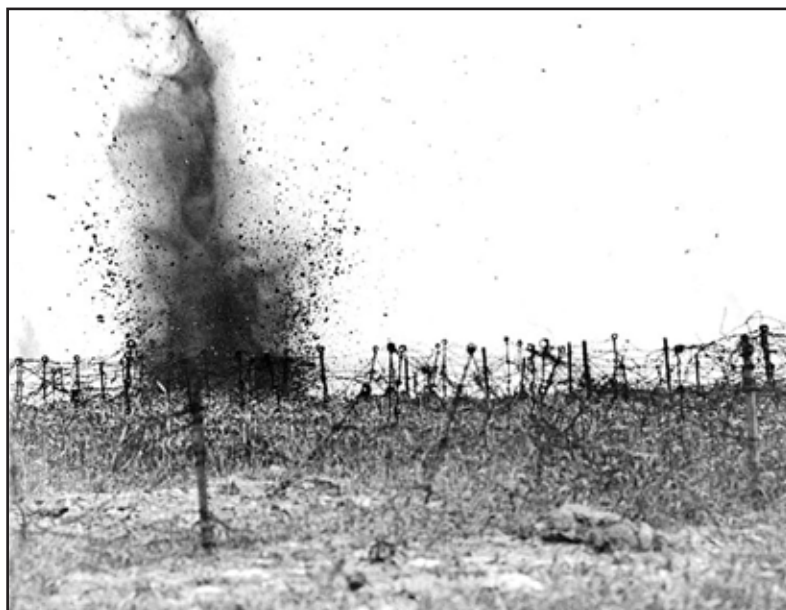
Resource sheet 3

Photographs - Sources 4a, 4b & 4c

4a) Aerial photo of trench system
Loos-Hulluch, July 1917



4b) Exploding shell and barbed wire
in no man's land



4c) British machine gun crew





Resource sheet 4

Photographs - Sources 5a, 5b & 5c

5a) British field artillery on
the Somme 1916



5b) British tank



5c) Troops travelling
by lorry 1916

