Processing: Trench Warfare Journal Entry

Directions: Read the background information about trench warfare and the journal excerpts from *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Using the information you have read and learned in class, write a journal entry from the perspective of a soldier fighting during World War I. Chose 1 of the 5 topics from the excerpts that appeal to you. This will be the topic of your own journal entry. Your journal entry must be in first person narrative and be a full page in length single spaced.

**Background information on Trench Warfare**

- The Western Front ran some 300 miles across the face of Western Europe, from Belgium to Switzerland. The front consisted of opposing trenches, sometimes only yards apart. The trench warfare of World War I lasted for three years and took several million lives. The Battle of the Somme, an attack by the Allies trying to break through the German lines, took more than four months. The Allies gained only six miles. British and French casualties were 95,675 Britons killed and 60,729 Frenchmen killed. The defense cost the German army 164,055 soldiers killed.

- The trenches were muddy ditches often flooded with water. The bodies of dead and wounded men and animals fouled them. Corpses lay in the no man's land between the trenches. Enemy snipers, rats, lice, and stench from the decaying bodies contributed to the misery of the trenches. Toward the end of the war the German soldiers had little food.

- An attack was preceded by bombardments, some lasting for days. In order to mount an attack, soldiers carrying rifles and packs had to go "over the top." Once in the no man's land they faced barbed wire entanglements, machine guns, bombardment (often by their own misdirected guns), grenades, poison gas and fire from the opposing trenches.

- The First World War was the first conflict in which air planes were used to attack enemy positions.

- The Western Front was in stalemate until the U.S. entered the war. Fresh troops and abundant hardware and supplies from the U.S. tipped the scales decisively in favor of the Allies. An armistice was signed on November 11, 1918 and the Treaty of Versailles was imposed on Germany in June 1919.
Journal Entry Topics - Excerpts taken from All Quiet on the Western Front

Topic: Fear and Anticipation

A shell crashes. Almost immediately two others. And then it begins in earnest. A bombardment. Machine-guns rattle. Now there is nothing for it but to stay lying low. Apparently an attack is coming. Everywhere the rockets shoot up. Unceasing...I lie motionless; somewhere something clanks, it stamps and stumbles nearer—all my nerves become taut and icy. It clatters over me and away, the first wave has passed. I have but this one shattering thought: What will you do if someone jumps into your shell-hole?—Swiftly I pull out my little dagger, grasp it fast, and bury it in my hand once again under the mud. If anyone jumps in here I will go for him. It hammers in my forehead; at once, stab him clan through the throat, so that he cannot call out; that's the only way; h will be just as frightened as I am; when in terror we fall up on one another, then I must be first.

Topic: First Bombardment

One lands behind us. Some recruits jump up terrified. A couple of minutes later another comes over, nearer this time... Then it begins in earnest. We crawl away as well as we can in our haste. The next lands fair amongst us. Two fellows cry out. Green rockets shoot up on the sky-line. Barrage. The mud flies high, fragments whiz past. The crack of the guns is heard long after the roar of the explosions. At last it grows quiet. The fire has lifted over us and is now dropping on the reserves. We risk a look. Red rockets shoot up to the sky. Apparently there is an attack coming. Where we are is still and quite. I sit up and shake the recruit by the shoulder. “All over, kid! It’s all right this time.” He looks around him dazedly. “You’ll get used to it soon,” I tell him.

Topic: Surviving a Gas Attack

The dull thud of the gas-shells mingles with the crashes of the light explosives. A bell sounds between the explosions, gongs, and metal clappers warning everyone—Gas—Gas—Gaas.

These first minutes with the mask decide between life and death: is it air tight? I remember the awful sights in the hospital: The gas patients who lay in day-long suffocation cough up their burnt lungs in clots. Cautiously, the mouth applied to the valve, I breathe. The gas still creeps over the ground...like a big, soft jelly-fish...

Inside the gas-mask my head booms and roars—it is nigh bursting. My lungs are tights, they breath always the same hot, used up air, the veins on my temples are swollen. I feel I am suffocating.

Topic: Daily Life

We must look out for our bread. The rats have become much more numerous lately because the trenches are no longer in good condition... The rats are particularly repulsive, they are so fat.[with] long, nude tails. They seem mighty hungry. Almost every man has had his bread gnawed. Kropp wrapped his in his waterproof sheet and put it under his head, but he cannot sleep because they run over his face to get at it. Detering meant to outwit them he fastened a thin wire to the roof and suspended his bread from it. During the night when he switched on his pocket-torch he saw the wire swinging to and fro. On the bread was riding a fat rat.

Topic: Dealing with Boredom and Cramped Living Quarters

How long has it been? Weeks—months—years? Only days. We see time pass in the colorless faces of the dying, we cram food into us, we run, we throw, we shoot, we kill, we lie about, we are feeble and spent, and nothing supports us but the knowledge that they are still feebleer, still more spend, still more helpless ones there who, with staring eyes, look upon us as gods that escape death many times.