Exploring the War Underground

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Life on the Western Front front was lived underground, either in trenches or dugouts, or even deeper beneath the surface in caves, souterraines ' medieval underground quarries - or complex tunnel systems, designed to defend the frontlines from subterranean attack and then take the fight to the enemy in a deadly, troglodyte game of cat and mouse. The battlefields of Europe and beyond were underpinned by this subterranean world, for it was an essential part of the bloody business of trench warfare and the attritional nature of a conflict, where technology and industrial might had far outpaced long-outdated notions of strategy and tactics. (Matt Leonard)

It is difficult to comprehend what the underground world of the Western Front would have been like, and very difficult to reconstruct today. For the 2012 television adaption of Sebastian Falks novel *Birdsong*, producers attempted to build an accurate replica of part of the vast network of tunnels, believed to be the first undertaking of this kind. However for those studying *Birdsong* or conflict archaeology this simulation provides an alternative immersive experience to explore the conflict landscapes and material culture of the First World War.

The simulation takes you on a journey through an underground tunnel network, as you descend underground though a mine shaft and explore the tunnels you can listen to Matt Leonard, conflict archeologist, explain how men survived in this environment. Within the simulation are contemporary photographs and film footage from the Durand Group, a world-authority on subterranean warfare during the First World War.

Aims

This simulation can be used in a variety of settings and re purposed to fit your own teaching and learning outcomes. Suggested aims include:

- To familiarise students with a key research area in battlefield and conflict archaeology.
- To come to grips with primary source material and contemporary archaeology practices.
- To acquire a deeper knowledge of one aspect of the past through immersive experience that is perhaps not possible otherwise.

Supporting resources

Short Articles by Matt Leonard

- New worlds, old world and underworlds: 'conflict culture' and the First World War
- Verdun 1916
- The Durand Group: modern conflict archaeology beneath the Western Front
- The War Underground: An Overview (text version of audio played in the simulation)

Setting up the simulation

Download the Tunnel Simulation file
All files are contained in a compressed zip file that you must unzip to access.

- For Mac OS - this contains one application file entitled 'The War Underground'.
- For Windows32 - this contains one exe file entitled 'The War Underground_Win32.exe' and a folder of content. Download this file if your computer is running a Windows 32-bit system.
- For Windows64 - this contains one exe file entitled 'The War Underground_Win64.exe' and a folder of content. Download this file if your computer is running Windows 64-bit system

To find out if your computer is running 32-bit or 64-bit Windows, do the following:
1. Open System by clicking the Start button Picture of the Start button, clicking Control Panel, clicking System and Maintenance, and then clicking System.
2. Under System, you can view the system type.

Launch the simulation
After you have downloaded the file you launch the simulation by double clicking the 'The War Underground' application file or the Windows .exe file that you downloaded. Instructions are provided in the menu screen on how to navigate the simulation. We recommend that you use the cursor keys on your keyboard and a computer mouse for the best experience.

Original version