

## The 'Pompeii' of the Western Front: Archaeologists find the bodies of 21 tragic World War One German soldiers in perfectly preserved trenches where they were buried alive by an Allied shell

- Men were killed when a huge Allied shell exploded above the tunnel in eastern France in 1918, causing it to cave in
- Engineers find trench network 18ft beneath the surface near town of Carspach while excavating for a new road
- Scene likened to Pompeii after skeletal remains found in same positions the men had been in at the time of the collapse

By [Graham Smith](#)

UPDATED: 13:37 EST, 10 February 2012

The bodies of 21 German soldiers entombed in a perfectly preserved World War One shelter have been discovered 94 years after they were killed.

The men were part of a larger group of 34 who were buried alive when a huge Allied shell exploded above the tunnel in 1918, causing it to cave in.

Thirteen bodies were recovered from the underground shelter, but the remaining men had to be left under a mountain of mud as it was too dangerous to retrieve them.

Nearly a century later, French archaeologists stumbled upon the mass grave on the former Western Front in eastern France during excavation work for a road building project.



© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk



Mass grave: The bodies of 21 German soldiers entombed in a perfectly preserved First World War shelter have been discovered in France 94 years after they were killed



© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk



Amazing condition: The soldiers were buried alive in mud inside the underground shelter (left) which contained items including beds, a bottle and a helmet (right)

## HARD TIMES: NOT SO QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Some 7.5million men lost their lives on the Western Front during World War One.

The front was opened when the German army invaded Luxembourg and Belgium in 1914 and then moved into the industrial regions in northern France. In September of that year, this advance was halted, and slightly reversed, at the Battle Of Marne.

It was then that both sides dug vast networks of trenches that ran all the way from the North Sea to the Swiss border with France.

This line of tunnels remained unaltered, give or take a mile here and a mile there, for most of the four-year conflict.

By 1917, after years of deadlock that saw millions of soldiers killed for zero gain on either side, new military technology including poison gas, tanks and planes was deployed on the front.

Thanks to these techniques, the Allies slowly advanced throughout 1918 until the war's end in November.

Many of the skeletal remains were found in the same positions the men had been in at the time of the collapse, prompting experts to liken the scene to Pompeii.

A number of the soldiers were discovered sitting upright on a bench, one was lying in his bed and another was in the foetal position having been thrown down a flight of stairs.

As well as the bodies, poignant personal effects such as boots, helmets, weapons, wine bottles, spectacles, wallets, pipes, cigarette cases and pocket books were also found.

Even the skeleton of a goat was found, assumed to be a source of fresh milk for the soldiers.

Archaeologists believe the items have been so well-preserved because hardly any air, water or lights had penetrated the trench.

The 300ft-long tunnel was located 18ft beneath the surface near the small town of Carspach in the Alsace region of France.

Michael Landolt, the archaeologist leading the dig, said: 'It's a bit like Pompeii. Everything collapsed in seconds and is just the way it was at the time.'

'Here, as in Pompeii, we found the bodies as they were at the moment of their death. Some of the men were found in sitting positions on a bench, others lying down. One was projected down a flight of wooden stairs and was found in a foetal position.'

'The collapsed shelter was filled with soil. The items were very well-preserved because of the absence of air and light and water.'

'Metal objects were rusty, wood was in good condition and we found some pages of newspapers that were still readable. Leather was in good condition as well, still supple.'

'The items will be taken to a laboratory, cleaned and examined.'



© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk

**Network of tunnels: French engineers stumbled upon the mass grave on the former Western Front near the town of Carspach in the Alsace region of eastern France during excavation work for a road building project**



© pall archeologie/BNPS.co.uk

**A drinks cup and the remains of a rifle that have survived almost intact for a century. Archaeologists believe the items have been so well-preserved because hardly any air, water or lights penetrated the trench**



© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk

Stuck in time: A German newspaper from 1918 lies partly preserved inside the shelter







**Building tool: A large hammer (left) that archaeologists believe was used to help dig the trench network (right)**

Archaeologists also uncovered the wooden sides, floors and stairways of the shelter.

The dead soldiers were part of the 6th Company, 94th Reserve Infantry Regiment.

Their names are all known - they include Musketeer Martin Heidrich, 20, Private Harry Bierkamp, 22, and Lieutenant August Hutten, 37, whose names are inscribed on a memorial in the nearby German war cemetery of Illfurth.

The bodies have been handed over to the German War Graves Commission but unless relatives can be found and they request the remains to be repatriated, it is planned that the men will be buried at Illfurth.

The underground tunnel was big enough to shelter 500 men and had 16 exits.

It would have been equipped with heating, telephone connections, electricity, beds and a pipe to pump out water.

The French attacked the shelter on March 18, 1918 with aerial mines that penetrated the ground and blasted in the side wall of the shelter in two points.

It is estimated that over 165,000 Commonwealth soldiers are still unaccounted for on the Western Front.



© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk

**Helmet:** Soldiers were discovered sitting upright on a bench, one was lying in his bed and another was in the foetal position having been thrown down a flight of stairs



© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk



**Built to last:** An aerial view of the trenches (left) reveals the scale of the discovery, while a rifle (right) lies intact after a century underground



© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk

Poignant: Personal effects such as this leather holster, boots, helmets, weapons, wine bottles, spectacles, wallets, pipes, cigarette cases and pocket books were found



© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk

**Delicate work:** An archaeologist slowly uncovers more of the buried shelter, which was big enough to shelter 500 men and had 16 exits





© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk

A bottle (left) and a bell (right) found during the dig. The tunnels were equipped with heating, telephone connections, electricity, beds and a pipe to pump out water





© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk

Archaeologists uncover the buried shelter, which was attacked by the French on March 18, 1918 with aerial mines that penetrated the ground and blasted in the side wall of the shelter in two points



© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk

Unidentified military items (pictured) were discovered alongside bizarre finds including the skeleton of a goat, assumed to be a source of fresh milk for the soldiers

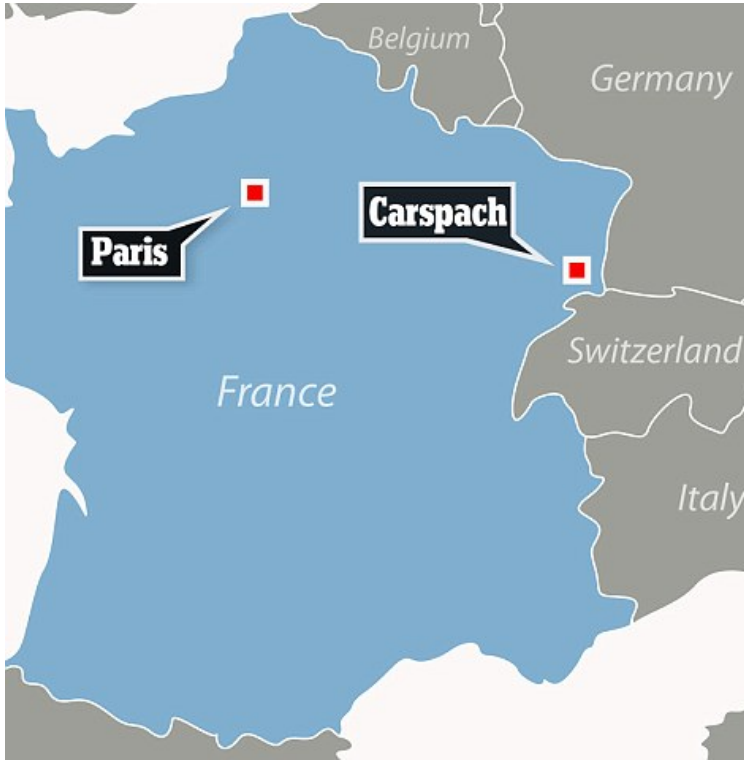


© pair archeologie/BNPS.co.uk



Pieces of history: A rifle (left) lies intact after a century underground, while archaeologists are still trying to work out what the item on the right is





German soldiers on the Western Front pose for a photo (left) that shows the elaborate construction of trenches. The 300ft-long tunnel was located 18ft beneath the surface near the small town of Carspach in the Alsace region of France

## MOST READ NEWS

- [Previous](#)
- [1](#)
- [2](#)
- [Next](#)



[5-month-old taken away from parents for wanting second...](#)



[The stunning story of a Vietnam vet shot down in 1968 who...](#)



[U.S. lands just ONE top-10 restaurant in the 'World's 50...](#)



[Inside the most violent city in the world: Horrific...](#)



[Charles attends Queen's abdication party... but...](#)



[FBI agents search Rhode Island home of Boston bomber's...](#)



[EXCLUSIVE: Deadliest Catch star's dying wish: New book by...](#)



['He's basically a new man': Successful surgery leaves...](#)



[Father's enchanting photo-diary of his identical twin...](#)



[The moment a queen signed away her throne in favour of her...](#)

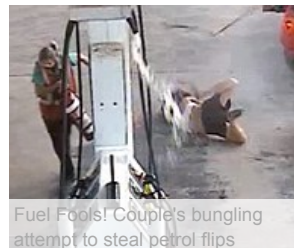
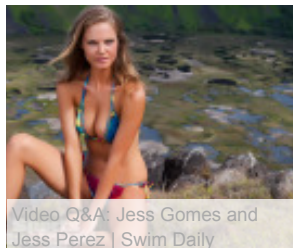
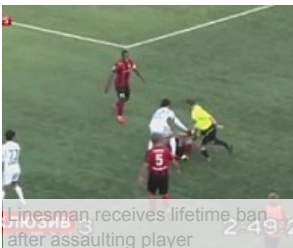


[Prisoners review their jails on Yelp: The staff at Sing Sing...](#)



[Teenage student dies suddenly on class trip to DisneyWorld...](#)

VIDEOS YOU MAY LIKE



by Taboola



Sporting heroes gather for Michael Jordan's wedding

## Comments (410)

- [Newest](#)
- [Oldest](#)
- [Best rated](#)
- [Worst rated](#)

[View all](#)

Leaders of countries should remind themselves that biblical law says it is just to declare war upon your enemies to protect your own country and citizens but the leaders of these countries should be at the frontline of the battle serving the country in which they "Lead"! How many of our own soldiers would still have their lives if Tony Blair had remembered this before sending our troops to their slaughter for the 'good' of ANOTHER country, with him at the front?!?!

- [John H](#) , Bolton, 13/2/2012 08:55

Click to rate \_\_ Rating 57

[Report abuse](#)

I too call upon the French Government to preserve and restore these trenches and shelters as a world heritage monument .People need to be able to see something like to assist in understanding how men in WWI lived in the trenches and show the horror of war.

- [Robert Ball](#) , Brisbane Australia, 13/2/2012 02:19

Click to rate \_\_ Rating 217

[Report abuse](#)

All politicians should be made to be first on the front line...all wars would rapidly end.

- [Julian Leonard](#) , Durham UK, 12/2/2012 23:03

Click to rate \_\_ Rating 187

[Report abuse](#)

The unidentified round item(s) are ember disks for a Catholic priest's incense burner (notice the cross on them). The disks are lit to create a glowing ember in the incense burner upon which myrrh is placed. The myrrh then smolders on the ember making smoke. The other item is the pouch used by the altar boy or deacon to hold the disks.

- [WSJ](#) , Pomfret, USA, 12/2/2012 21:38

Click to rate \_\_ Rating 98

[Report abuse](#)

over 886,000 british men were killed in ww1.116,000 americans were killed in ww1.

- [guy](#) , uk, 12/2/2012 21:19

Click to rate \_\_ Rating 11

[Report abuse](#)

Last item to the right = a purse with coins.

- [Johan](#) , Stockholm, 12/2/2012 19:07

Click to rate \_\_ Rating 21

[Report abuse](#)

politicians and war makers should be made to walk through there to actually realize what happened in the war to end all wars.

- [dave](#) , st petersburg, florida, u.s. of a., 12/2/2012 11:04

Click to rate \_\_ Rating 71

[Report abuse](#)

Now all's quiet on the Western Front.

- [Italics Mine](#) , Center Ossippi, NH, 12/2/2012 03:11

Click to rate \_\_ Rating 50

[Report abuse](#)

That unidentified object to the right of the hanging rifle is probably a bread bag, the rusted metal objects inside it were probably canisters of food. Another possibility is it's a bag of gas mask filters. History ignored will be history repeated. The trench should be turned into a museum, students should tour it and walk through it.

- [Cali](#) , US, 12/2/2012 01:26

Click to rate \_\_ Rating 87

[Report abuse](#)

"I hope that a historical location such as this, does not get plowed under for the sake of a road or a parking lot." It could be for a good cause such as The Museum of Tolerance.

- [Sir Oscar Whiskey](#) , Detroit USA, 11/2/2012 23:58

Click to rate \_\_ Rating 82

[Report abuse](#)

The views expressed in the contents above are those of our users and do not necessarily reflect the views of MailOnline.

#### **We-Bore-It**

Directional Boring  
and Trenching  
Services.  
Nationwide  
Coverage  
[www.We-Bore-It.com](http://www.We-Bore-It.com)

#### **New Rule in MICHIGAN:**

(APR 2013): If You  
Pay For Car  
Insurance You  
Must Read This  
Immediately  
[www.ConsumerFinanc](http://www.ConsumerFinanc)

#### **Colonic Irrigation Kits**

Home Colonic  
Irrigation kits helps  
clean and detoxify  
your body  
[www.enemakit.com](http://www.enemakit.com)

#### **MegaMillion Code Cracked?**

Professor  
Discusses How He  
Won Mega Millions  
4 Times In A Row!  
[www.secretmasterform](http://www.secretmasterform)

---

Published by Associated Newspapers Ltd

Part of the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday & Metro Media Group

**Glam**Entertainment

© [Associated Newspapers Ltd](#)



