**Introduction:**

In 1916, John Masefield was an eyewitness to an American ambulance in Europe during World War I. On October 1, 1918, Peter Schaming Jr. wrote a letter to his parents about his life in the trenches and being overseas during World War I. Almost 90 years later in early 2003, author Richard Rubin interviewed 107-year-old William J. Lake, a World War I veteran who also fought in 1918. Each of these stories tells a different perspective of how American soldiers lived during World War I and their experiences of what is known as The Great War. Soldiers were fighting for the United States in an unknown territory and had many experiences while they were there. This led to the generated inquiry question: “What were experiences like for American soldiers during World War I who were overseas?” In this inquiry, the inference will be made that through different experiences, United States soldiers had similar emotions during the war, had their adrenalin pumping through the fear and risk they could die at any moment while fighting, and were trained before fighting overseas.

**Historical Context:**

In 1917, United States President Woodrow Wilson declared war on Germany, involving us in World War I. During World War I, soldiers were being drafted at a young age to travel across the world to fight for the United States. The primary motivation behind Wilson’s decision to enter us into the war was based on the submarine and merchant ship attacks that occurred that year, causing him to sever diplomatic relations with Germany at the time[[1]](#footnote--1).

On the home front of the United States during the early 1900s, the industrial revolution was occurring with assembly lines and production of new machinery that could make supplies that the general public used as a means for their way of life. The strong industrialization could help them to build the machinery they needed to fight in The Great War. America had a population of 90 million people, which could generate a large army. Around the time World War I began, there were only 190,000 individuals in the military prepared to fight for their country. When Wilson declared war, the country would need much more than 190,000 men to fight and immediately had to draft more men into the military. General John Pershing, who was in charge of the American Expeditionary Force, organized the command to gain more troops.[[2]](#footnote-0)

The military had to quickly train soldiers in large quantities to go overseas and some were sent in without much training at all. In 1917, Pershing allowed Allies to set up training camps and schools to teach American soldiers how they could learn about the new technologies that World War I brought. This included learning about gas warfare, demolitions, hand grenades, and the mortar.[[3]](#footnote-1) This helped soldiers to be knowledgeable about what they would be fighting with in the war. These were some of the efforts that helped train soldiers quickly before sending them to the front lines to fight for our side during the course of the war.

**Analysis:**

John Masefield’s encounter with World War I dealt with the ambulances that would go around and pick up fallen soldiers and transport them back to the American Hospital outside of Paris.[[4]](#footnote-2) Masefield served and was trained in the American Ambulance Field Service. The eyewitness account was produced in order to inform Americans of what the ambulance drivers and riders were doing for our country to help France, one of our Allies in the war. He paints the scene of what was happening and what the job entailed when they would get soldiers and take them to the hospitals. He describes the emotions that went through soldiers like him as they carried out their duties: “All life lies before them in their own country, but they have put that aside for an idea, and have come to help France in her hour of need . . . and all live a life of danger and risk death nightly”[[5]](#footnote-3). It can be inferred that the soldiers who were carrying out their duties overseas like John Masefield were helping others as ambulance drivers while trying to defend themselves against the enemy. Masefield was prepared for war, but not necessarily for what he was going to experience or see while overseas.

When reading the letter that Peter Schaming Jr. wrote, there are several contextual evidences that are present. He is writing the letter to his parents to inform them of his condition while he is fighting for his country. It can be inferred that he is lucky to be alive because he describes, “I have been in the trenches again and I am one of the very few who is still alive and haven’t a scratch on me”[[6]](#footnote-4). There is also information that he dropped out of high school and lied about his age to enter into the National Guard in New York so that he could fight.[[7]](#footnote-5) He goes on to describe the brutality of a drive that they made while in the trenches against the Germans. He describes, “ So we start out for Jerry’s front line keeping after our artillery barrage. Well we get up there alright and killed all the Germans we seen . . . when your back was turned they would let loose with a machine gun. So it was a case of you get them before they get you”[[8]](#footnote-6). This description infers a strong sense of fear and adrenalin that Schaming felt in the trenches. He had to watch his back constantly in fear that he or his fellow soldiers would get shot down and killed.

Due to the fact that Schaming was young when entering the war, it can be inferred that the fear in him was great because he most likely was used to the American lifestyle at home with war not being present. This description even helped author Ernest Hemingway to write his famous book *A Farewell To Arms*, about a soldier who was fighting in World War I.

In 2003, Richard Rubin, author of *The Last of the Doughboys: The Forgotten Generation and Their Forgotten World War*, interviewed World War I veteran William J. Lake, 107, who explained his experience with a German sniper in 1918 when overseas fighting as an American soldier. He was interviewed so that Rubin could use the information gathered in his published book from a personal experience. Lake was one of the soldiers who trained in the United States, Washington, D.C. specifically, before going to the front lines across the Atlantic.

When asked what it was like when he got to the front, Lake described that he and another man were sitting on the bank of a trench talking in the daytime, when gunshots were fired from the enemy, and the other soldier with him was shot instead of Lake. The Americans went back and shot the German sniper that was in a tree and killed him instead of taking him prisoner. Lake also discussed how lucky he was that he was not the one who was shot when he and his friend were sitting together.[[9]](#footnote-7) As Lake was telling his story, it is inferred that after almost 90 years after this event happened to him, it still stuck with him and was vivid in his memory. This proves that he was memorable of something shocking and horrifying that happened to him during his time on the front line in the war. His explanation can also be an interpretation that he was scared for his life when he found out that someone was shooting at him and happened to kill the person right next to him instead of himself.

**Corroboration:**

After viewing all three primary sources, there are some similarities and differences that soldiers had through their experiences. They each were trained before they went to fight for their country, whether they were trained on United States soil or overseas with the Allies. They all had a different role in the war, but each experienced fear and saw sights that forever will be ingrained in their minds. They each had a common fear for their lives as well as others around them fighting when they were in the war.

The time period that each account was documented was different, especially with the interview with William Lake being that it was about 90 years after his experiences in the war. The inferences that were made can relate to the difference in this time period because William Lake proves how he felt about the war later on in his life, and there was no account of the other two soldier’s points of view later on in their lives. William Lake could have felt differently if he had been interviewed right after coming home from war. He may have not been able to talk about it due to posttraumatic stress disorder immediately after war. He could have suppressed those feelings until late in his life to share before he passed on and would not be able to share his experiences anymore.

In order to further answer the historical question, it would have been helpful to find out what happened to John Masefield and Peter Schaming Jr. after they left the war. It would have been helpful to know how William J. Lake lived the rest of his life after the war. The after effects of the war could have given more inferences as to how their experiences were in the war and if they have stuck with them throughout their lives as a memory they want to remember, or a memory they would like to forget.

**Conclusion:**

Once investigating the historical inquiry of what experiences were like for American soldiers during World War I, it is evident that three main inferences can be made. Readers will be able to infer that each of the soldiers with different duties and positions in the war had similar emotions and fears when they were at war. The soldiers each were trained for their position before they entered the war, whether they were trained with the Allies or trained in the United States about weapons, tasks, and warfare. It also can be inferred that soldiers during World War I were in fear for their lives with their adrenalin pumping each moment that they were in active duty. Through this inquiry, readers can see what soldiers personally experienced during World War I.

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