

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR
JOHN ELLIS, *EYE-DEEP IN HELL: TRENCH WARFARE IN WORLD WAR I*¹

1. Ellis notes that “almost fifty percent of the casualties were directly attributable to the appalling conditions in the trenches” (p. 58). What could either the Allies or the Germans have done to improve the physical conditions (i.e., hygiene, medicine, and so forth) in the trenches to increase the odds for soldier survivability?
2. Why do you suppose that such horrible conditions moved certain of the soldiers to express their feelings in poetry?
3. In his chapter “Battle: The Reality,” Ellis depicts how the old aristocratic *elan* and the older “trust in God” gave way to the technological reality of “barbed wire and machine guns” (p. 91). Discuss how “a mystical faith in the justice of their cause and the determination of their men” prompted the Allied generals to order “mindless” battle charges against the enemy and needlessly waste lives.
4. Discuss how the varying perspectives on troop identity, even within the same person in different situations, produced a certain cynicism (p. 104).
5. Why was mail important to the troops who served on the front lines? How did “twelve and a half million letters” (p. 137) move so quickly in a war zone? Describe the censorship of mail and whether you agree or disagree with its value in a wartime setting.
6. What problems in troop discipline developed toward the end of the War (pp. 178ff.)? How were these handled by the Allied leaders? By the German High Command?
7. Explain “community of martyrs” and “brotherhood of the damned” (in his “Conclusion,” pp. 189ff.).

¹Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1976, 205 pages.