

Document E

Source: List compiled from various sources, including legends and folk songs as well as historical documents.

The Human Cost of the Great Wall

Soldiers

Qin Dynasty

- 300,000 men from Qin's army ordered to build and guard the wall until complete
- Soldiers forced to leave families and villages for several years
- Convict labor sent to do much of work.
- According to poetry and legend, tens of thousands of soldiers died from hunger, sickness, and extreme heat or cold. No exact numbers of deaths are available.

Han Dynasty

- Soldiers ordered to work on wall for two to five years
- Soldiers manned the wall and outposts in desolate western frontier
- Heavy fighting against the Xiongnu during much of 2nd century BCE. One campaign in 104 BCE reported 80 percent Han casualties, a terrible cost of protecting the wall.

Note: For all soldiers, loneliness and boredom was a problem.

Peasants (Qin and Han)

- During the short ten-year period of Qin wall-building, there was heavy use of peasant laborers, who worked seven-day work weeks with little food. During the eight months of winter, temperatures reached 20- to 30-below zero, Fahrenheit.
- In the Han period, peasant farm families were forced to move north and west both to colonize the Chinese frontier and to build some 4,000 miles of earthen wall. While not as brutal as Qin conditions, life was still very hard. Many peasants and soldiers attempted to move across the border to live with the Xiongnu.