

## A New Kind of War

# WWI Trench Warfare

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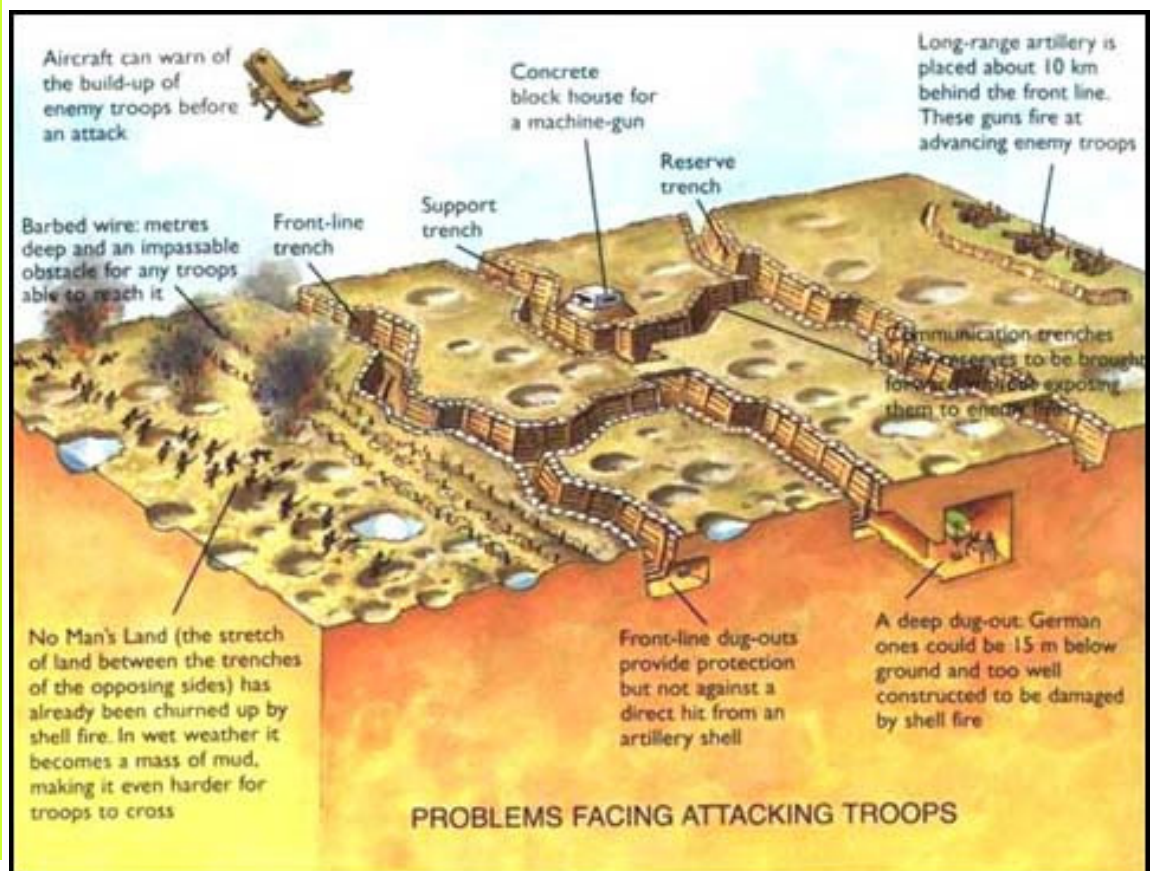
### Why the trenches stayed:

- Barbed wire— difficult to cut, spread men out in a line
- Machine Guns— Mowed down men with intersecting crossfire
- Gas—Effective in slowing down attackers, not so effective against men in trenches
- Shells—trenches saved soldiers from all but a direct hit
- Lack of secrecy— Enemy could easily see when extra supplies were being brought in for an attack
- Lack of experience— Generals couldn't think of ways to break through the trenches
- No Man's Land— Difficult to cross because of the barbed

### Reasons for Trenches

Both sides soon found that they could stop an enemy attack by digging trenches and setting up machine guns. Trenches soon became a permanent fixture of warfare and the trench lines changed little in three and a half years. Sandbags protected the soldiers from bullets and shrapnel. Barbed wire was set up to delay any enemy advance. The ground between the trench lines became pock marked with shell craters. The British developed the tank to destroy machine gun positions, cross rough ground and go through belts of barbed wire.

### Trench Diagram



## WWI Soldier's Equipment

A soldier had to carry a lot of equipment when living and fighting in the trenches. When soldiers went 'over the top' to attack the enemy he had to carry all of his equipment through the mud, barbed wires and crater holes made by mines. They had to make sure that they did not get shot at the same time.



### Advantages and Disadvantages

#### Advantages:

- Easy to make
- Easy to defend
- Cheap to build
- Don't need lots of men to

#### Disadvantages:

- Wet and cold
- Hard to get in and out of without being seen by the enemy
- Dirty and unhygienic
- No running water

There were 400 miles of trenches along the western front.

### Body Lice

Men in the trenches suffered from lice. Various methods were used to remove the lice. A lighted candle was fairly effective but the skill of burning the lice without burning your clothes was only learnt with practice. Where possible the army arranged for the men to have baths in huge vats of hot water while their clothes were being put through delousing machines. Unfortu-

nately, this rarely worked. As well as causing frenzied scratching, lice also carried disease. This was known as trench fever. The first symptoms were shooting pains in the shins and was followed by a very high fever. Although the disease did not kill, it did stop soldiers from fighting and accounted for about 15% of all cases of sickness in the British army.



## Trench Foot

Initially believed to be a symptom of poor morale by military authorities, 'trench foot' was in fact a fungal infection of the feet brought on by prolonged exposure to damp, cold conditions allied to poor environmental hygiene. Its effects on armies - of all sides - during the early stages of trench warfare, before trench conditions were much improved, could be severe.

Some 20,000 casualties resulting from trench foot were reputed to have been suffered by the British Army alone during the close of 1914. Improved trench drainage and conditions in general led to a rapid diminishment of cases; local commanders were also held accountable for such outbreaks, which consequently encouraged the provision of better trench conditions, along with regular feet inspections, greasing of toes and changes of socks. Waterproof footwear also greatly helped.



## Trench Rats



Many men killed in the trenches were buried almost where they fell. These corpses, as well as the food scraps that littered the trenches, attracted rats. One pair of rats can produce 880 offspring in a year and the trenches were soon swarming with them. The area was infested with them and it was impossible to keep them out of the dugouts. Some were nearly as big as cats.

## The Christmas Day Truce

**Christmas truce** was a series of widespread unofficial ceasefires that took place along the Western Front around Christmas 1914, during the First World War. Through the week leading up to Christmas, parties of German and British soldiers began to exchange seasonal

greetings and songs between their trenches; on occasion, the tension was reduced to the point that individuals would walk across to talk to their opposite numbers bearing gifts. On Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, many soldiers from both sides – as well as, to a lesser degree,

from French units – independently ventured into "no man's land", where they mingled, exchanging food and souvenirs. As well as joint burial ceremonies, several meetings ended in carol-singing. Troops from both sides were also friendly enough to play games of football with one another.



