

Trench Warfare on the Western Front

Germany wanted to take over France quickly and then attack Russia. But France and its allies put up a strong fight. New weapons, such as machine guns, kept both sides pinned in place. So both armies built trenches (deep, narrow lines of defense, dug into the earth). The trenches

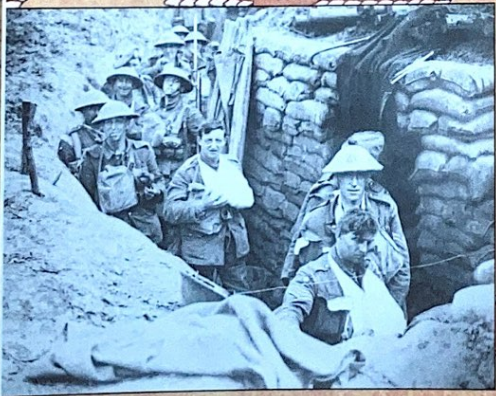
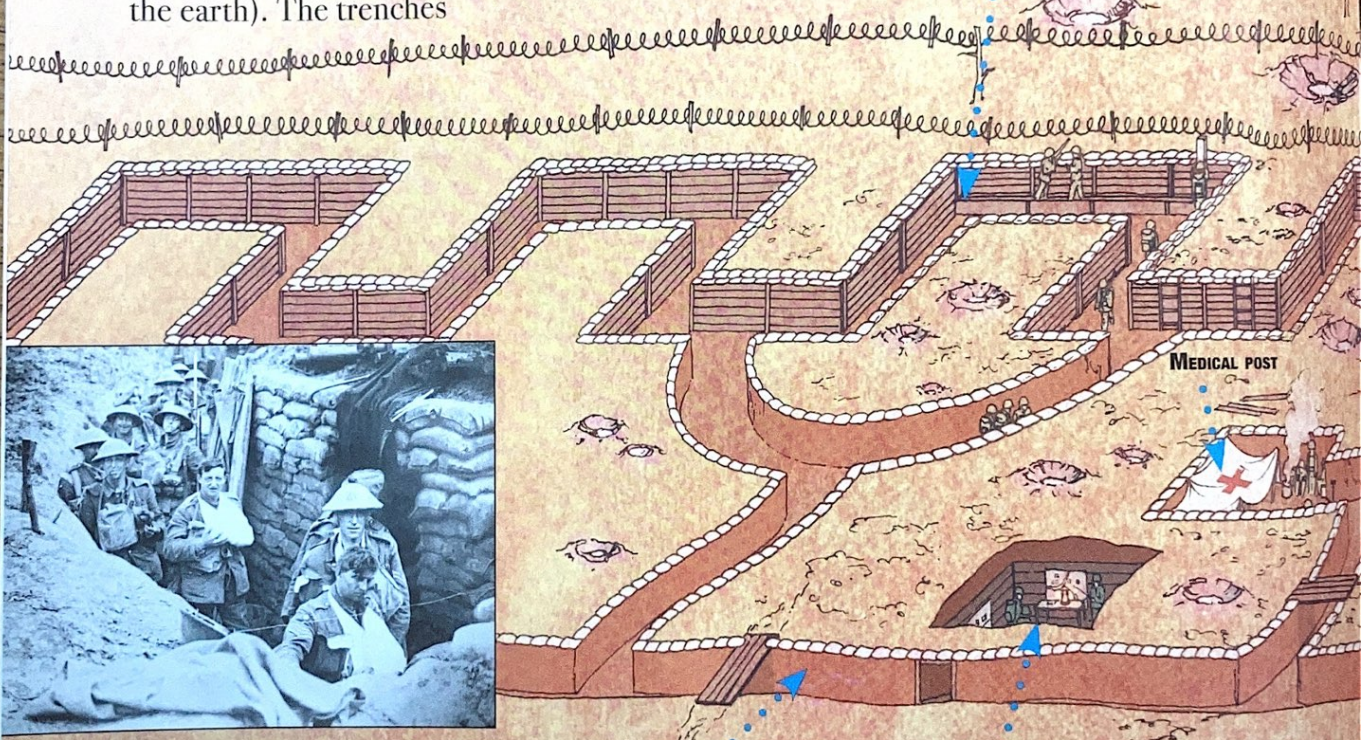
stretched along France's western border for about 400 miles. They marked the battle's front lines, or front – the area where fighting takes place. The armies attacked each other from their trenches, but neither side could win a clear-cut victory.

► **TRENCH WARFARE** (fighting from trenches) was very dangerous. When soldiers climbed out of the trenches to attack the enemy, they often got caught in their own side's barbed wire and were mowed down by

enemy machine guns. Many soldiers got shell shock (extreme stress caused by the horrors of combat). Some shell-shocked soldiers couldn't fight anymore. Others couldn't even speak.

TRENCHES

- were about six and a half feet deep. Soldiers
- placed sandbags around the tops.



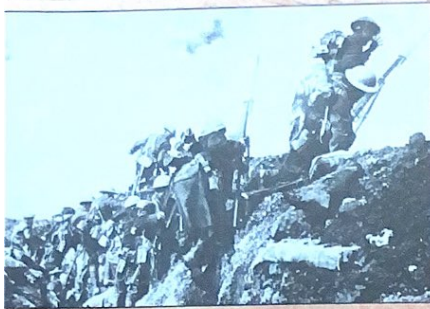
▲ **SOLDIERS IN THE** trenches couldn't bathe or change clothes for days or weeks and became covered with lice. The bottoms of the trenches were often muddy. Human waste and unburied bodies

attracted flies and rats. Hot food was rare. Soldiers lived on hard crackers, stale bread, jam, and canned stew that was mostly turnips. Tea was carried to the front lines in gasoline cans.

SUPPORT TRENCHES were behind the front lines. They included command posts, medical posts, and supplies. They also housed men who were waiting to go to the front lines when they were needed.

COMMAND POST

ARTILLERY POSTS were usually placed behind the trenches. They held heavy artillery (weapons), such as cannons on wheels.



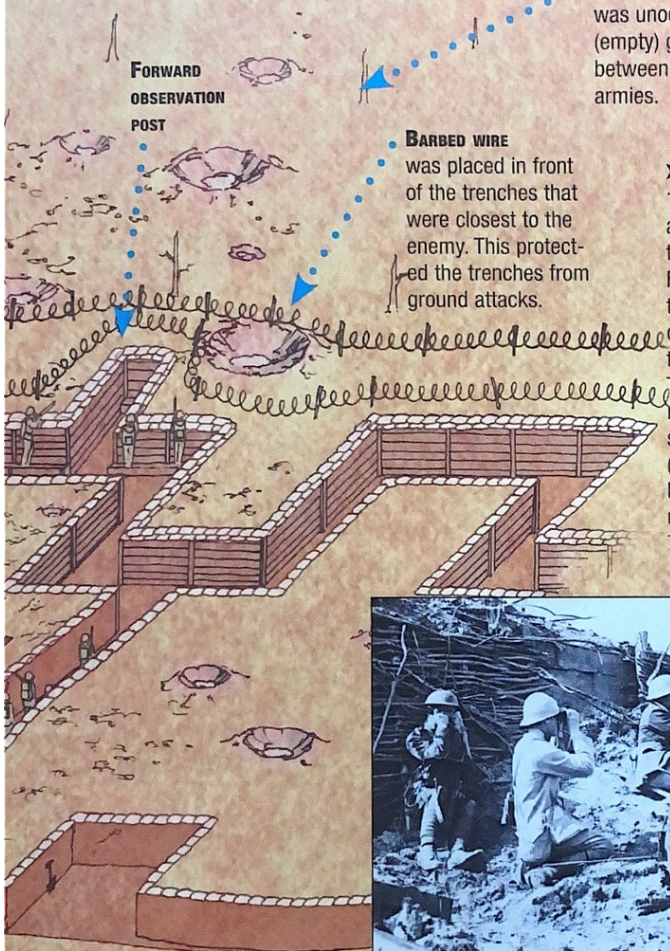
ENEMY TRENCHES

NO-MAN'S-LAND was unoccupied (empty) ground between the two armies.

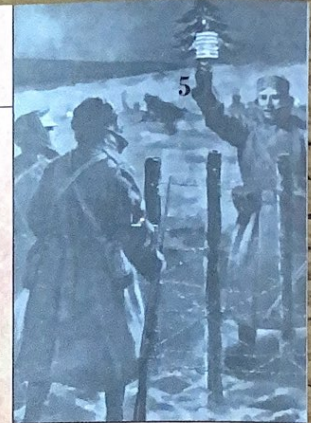
FORWARD OBSERVATION POST

BARBED WIRE was placed in front of the trenches that were closest to the enemy. This protected the trenches from ground attacks.

▶ In FEBRUARY 1916, the Germans attacked Verdun, a town in northwestern France. They wanted to wear the French down and force them to surrender. They fought for 10 months, but neither side won. Casualties (soldiers who were killed or wounded) numbered about 750,000.



▶ AFTER FIVE months of fighting, almost 2 million soldiers had been killed or wounded. By this time, everyone knew the war wouldn't be over by Christmas. On Christmas Day 1914, white flags were flown at several places along the trenches. The flags signaled a truce – an agreement to take a break from fighting.



Some German and Allied soldiers even met in no-man's-land and exchanged small gifts.



◀ DURING THE fighting at Verdun, the British launched their first major attack. It took place in France, near the Somme River. Soldiers from Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, India, Ireland, British West Indies, and New Zealand, along with some French

troops, fought the Germans from July to November 1916. In the end, the British were able to advance only about six miles from their starting point. Casualties were high: 420,000 British, 195,000 French, and 650,000 German.

▶ FEMALE NURSES worked at medical stations near the front lines. One nurse's diary tells of "stopping hemorrhages [bleeding], replacing intestines, and draining and re-inserting innumerable rubber tubes." British nurse Edith

Cavell ran a Red Cross hospital in Belgium. Germany controlled that country for the entire war. The Germans found out she was helping French and British prisoners of war escape. They shot her for spying.



EDITH CAVELL



Tanks and Other New Weapons

Trench warfare wasn't the only new military development in World War I. It was the first war to be fought with handheld machine guns, tanks, poison gas, submarines, and airplanes. These new weapons and inventions changed the way war was fought.



◀ **In 1915, the** Germans started using poison gas. They opened up cans of gas when the wind was blowing toward the enemy. They also shot gas-filled shells into enemy areas. Poison gas killed, blinded, and

wounded many soldiers, burning skin, throats, and lungs. A gas mask, worn here by a Russian soldier, gave some protection. Both sides used poison gas until the end of the war.

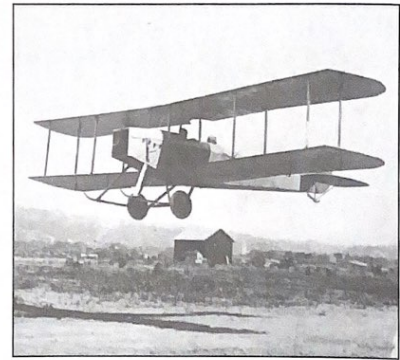
THINK PIECE!

In World War I, the nations on both sides of the conflict used powerful modern weapons that killed and wounded millions of people. The war dragged on for more than four years. World War II, with even more powerful weapons, brought many more casualties and lasted even longer. Do you think it's a good idea for countries to have powerful weapons? Why or why not?



► **WHEN THE WAR** broke out, airplanes had existed for only 10 years. Early in the war, they were used to survey (look at and map) enemy territories and movements. This is called reconnaissance. The planes didn't carry weapons.

They couldn't send information, so sometimes they flew back to their own side to drop a message. By the end of the war, photographs could be taken from the air, and reconnaissance planes had radio communication.



▲ **THE BRITISH** first used armored tanks with guns to help soldiers cross no-man's-land at the First Battle of the Somme in 1916. These early tanks were very slow, moving only three miles an hour. They also broke down often. By 1918, tanks had become more powerful.



▲ **BOTH SIDES** developed and built bombers and fighter planes. These planes were armed with machine guns. Bombers were used for long-range missions. They attacked

important targets such as transportation centers and munitions factories, which made guns, bullets, bombshells, and other ammunition.



▲ **THE BRITISH** and French often launched attacks by sending men up and out of the trenches to attack the enemy's line. Machine guns,

used by both sides, fired hundreds of bullets a minute. Many attacking soldiers barely got out of their trenches before they were shot. One British

attack took place during the Battle of Loos in September 1915. German machine guns killed or wounded about 8,250 British soldiers out of 10,000.

RICKENBACKER



▲ **FIGHTER PILOTS GOT** into aerial battles called dogfights. The best pilots were known as aces. Captain Eddie V. Rickenbacker was the top American ace. He shot down 26 enemy planes. Germany's top ace, Baron Manfred von Richthofen (the Red Baron), may have shot down 80.

▼ **EARLY IN THE** war, British ships blockaded (blocked off) German ports. This kept the German navy from going anywhere. As a result, there was only one major

RICHTHOFEN



▼ **NAVIES WERE JUST** learning how to use submarines in warfare. Both sides used submarines to fire torpedoes into warships

and sink them. Germany also used its submarines (called U-boats) to sink ships bringing cargo (trade goods) to and from Britain. Sometimes they sank ships from neutral countries. Because Britain is a small island, it needed these shipments to survive. This U-boat (below) was stranded in England after the war.



naval battle during the war. It was the Battle of Jutland, which took place in the North Sea, near Denmark, on May 31, 1916. The British had a greater number of

fast, heavily armed battleships than Germany did. The British navy drove the German ships back to their home ports, where they stayed for the rest of the war.

