

Geography and History Activity

World War I and Its Aftermath, 1914–1920

Military Technology and Trench Warfare

The New Geography of Warfare

Advances in military technology made World War I very different from previous wars. The geography of warfare was fundamentally changed by the use of powerful artillery weapons that were capable of hurling huge explosive shells onto battlefields from great distances. To protect themselves from artillery, troops on both sides dug networks of trenches that eventually stretched from the English Channel to the Swiss border. Another new weapon, the machine gun, prevented soldiers from overrunning enemy trenches. No-man's-land—the space between opposing trenches—was a barren landscape filled with barbed wire and other obstacles and pocked with craters from artillery bursts.

Because this terrain was so difficult to cross, a stalemate quickly developed, with both sides failing to break through the other's lines. The stalemate led to further developments in military technology that made trench warfare even more horrific. In April 1915 the Germans first used a poison gas that caused vomiting, blindness, and suffocation. The Allies soon followed the Germans. To counter gas attacks, both sides developed gas masks.

New Technology to Attack the Trenches



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Caption: To help capture trenches, the Allies built tanks that were immune to machine gun fire and able to smash through barbed wire. Tanks had tracks instead of wheels, enabling them to cross the mud and craters of no-man's-land.



Marc Arundale/Army Images

Caption: Airplanes offered both sides a way to counter trench warfare. Several types of aircraft, including the British Sopwith Camel shown on the left, could carry 4–5 small bombs to drop on enemy artillery trenches. They also attacked troops using their machine guns.

Geography and History Activity *Cont.*



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Directions: Answer the questions below in the space provided.

Understanding Concepts

1. Why did both sides develop such an extensive network of trenches?

2. How did trenches lead to a stalemate?

3. Why do you think gas attacks were so effective against trenches?

Applying Concepts

4. What other dangers besides the enemy do you think the troops in the trenches faced?

5. Why do you think trench warfare is no longer as prevalent as it was in World War I?
