

## Trench Warfare:

In October 1914, after the battles of **Marne** and the **Race for the Sea**, neither side could drive the other back. Both armies dug trenches. By the end of 1914 the trenches stretched from the Alps to the North Sea. The line of trenches was called the Western Front.

**In October 1914 the war changed into trench warfare. Both armies dug trenches. By the end of 1914 the trenches stretched from the Alps to the North Sea. The line of trenches was called the Western Front. Each side tried to break through, to gain land and advantage.**

A line of trenches stretched almost continuously across Western Europe and changed little during the 4 years of war. Once the line of trenches was dug it proved hard for an enemy to break through. All attempts meant huge numbers of dead and wounded soldiers.

**The British generals followed this plan to break through the other side's trench system.**

1. Guns behind the front line bomb the trenches of the enemy. The shells are aimed to smash enemy trenches and rip holes in the barbed wire.
2. The men climb out of their trenches and head for the enemy line. They carried rifles and fixed bayonets<sup>1</sup>.

### Changes in tactics in 1914:

1. Poisonous gas was released against the enemy.
2. Tanks could break through the trench system.

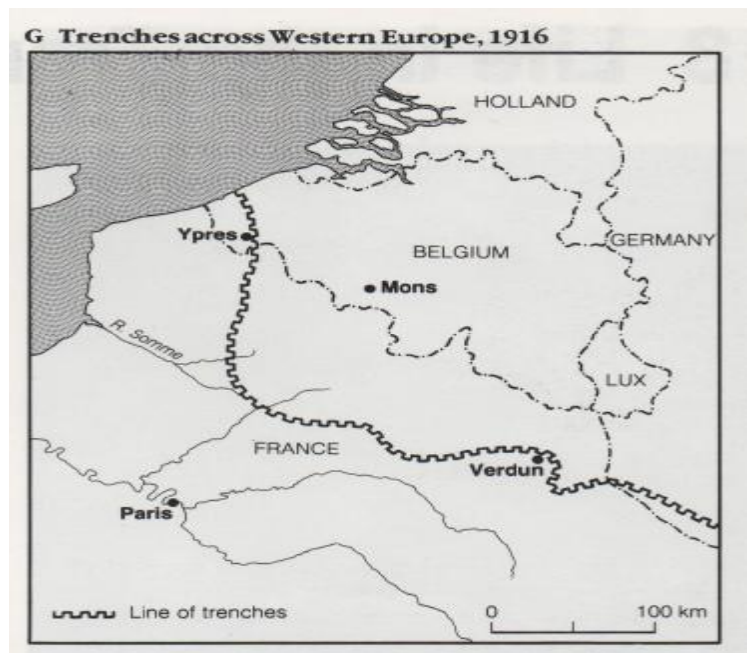
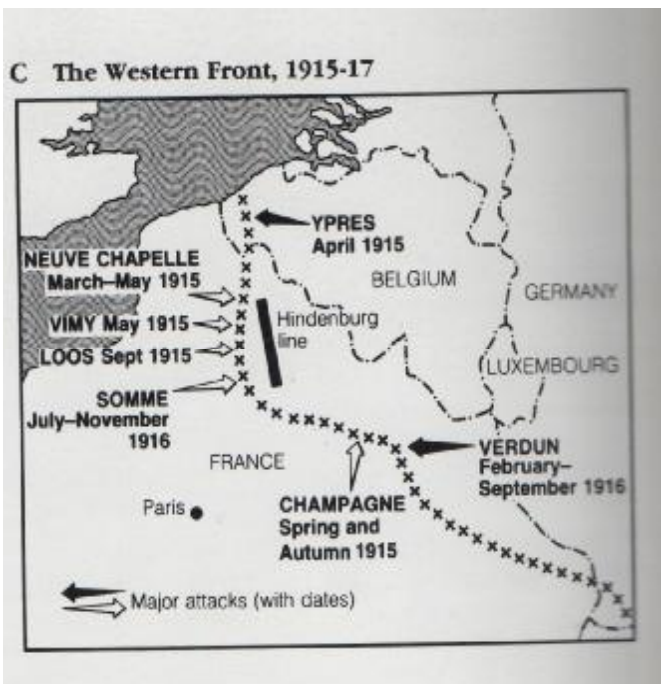
The area between the trenches was pounded by exploding shells. Everything was destroyed, and the area was called "**no man's land**". Deep shell holes provided shelter for the men, but were themselves a source of danger when filled with mud and water.

<b>The trenches were easy to defend ...</b>	<b>... and difficult to attack</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• heavy guns placed behind the trenches</li><li>• guards to spot an attack by the other attack</li><li>• protected by barbed wire</li><li>• machine guns ready to fight off an attack</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• artillery was meant to break through the enemy's barbed wire. In practice this effort just warned the other side an attack was coming</li><li>• the land between the trenches was often knee-deep or even waist-deep in mud</li></ul>

... and even if you made it to the enemy in one place, it was hard to hang on to your position because you were surrounded by the enemy's forces in the rest of the trench.

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<sup>1</sup> A **bayonet**: is a knife-, dagger-, sword-, or spike-shaped weapon designed to fit on, over or underneath the muzzle of a rifle barrel or similar weapon, effectively turning the gun into a spear.



### Life in trenches:

**Soldiers:** 17, 18 years old

**Food:** the standard rations were corned beef = bully beef – konzervované hovädzie, jam, tea and hard biscuits. Hot food was difficult to prepare near the front line. Water was often short.

A soldier remembered: *“Many times we had only one slice of bread for breakfast and biscuits for tea. These were so hard you had to smash them with a stone.”*

Food was issued from the field kitchens which were brought as close to the front as possible.

Rum was often issued before the men took part in an attack.

**Accommodation:** was in dugouts, which were holes made in the sides of trenches and covered with tarpaulin sheets – prikrývky z nepremokavej plachty

Wood, sandbags and any other materials that were available were used for building shelters.

**Sanitation:** Clothes and bodies became dirty because of the lack of washing facilities, and lice were everywhere. They lived in hair and clothing and caused itching and irritation as they bit the skin.

*“Killing each separate louse is hard work when a man has hundreds; they are hard to crack with one’s fingernails. [One of my mates] has hung a boot polish tin over a lighted candle. We throw them in, crack, they are done for – hotový, vyřízený.”* **E. M. Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front**

In winter, deep mud was everywhere, and great numbers of rats lived off – žít’ z čoho, živit’ sa čím - empty bully beef tins and dead bodies. It was not possible to bring back all the dead and wounded.

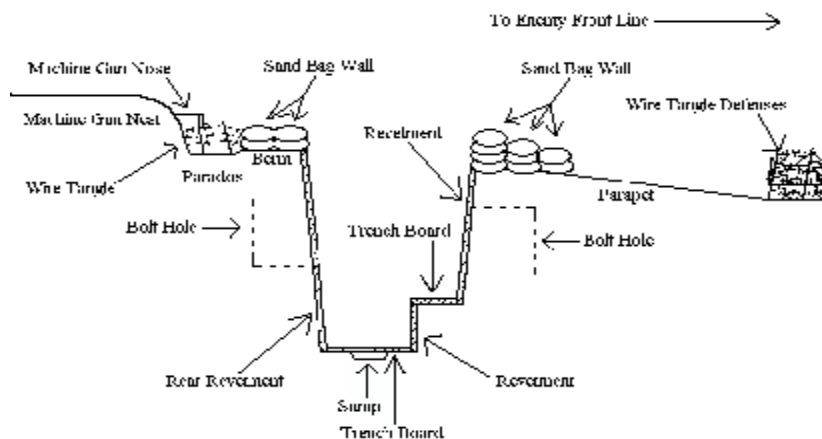
**Health problems:** Poor living conditions gave rise to health problems apart from wounds caused by gunfire and gas. The noise of the heavy guns was so great that many men suffered from some degree of deafness. A nervous condition called “shellshock” was common, caused by living in an almost permanent state of tension. The result was a trembling of limbs or whole body, and stammering - kóktanie. Many soldiers realized that the experience

of war would change them completely. One wrote: “[...] if we go back home we will be broken, worn out – opotrebovaný, uštvany, rootless, without hope. Men will not understand us.”

The men knew that many of those who left the trenches in an attack would be killed or wounded. They had to live with the signs and sounds of death.

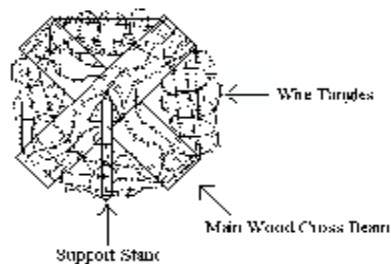
**Christmas:** On Christmas Day 1914, the first of the war, some troops **from both sides** made an unofficial peace. A football match was played, presents were exchanged and carols sung. ... The men were forbidden to let it happen again, and it did not.

Trench Diagram B.



Trench Diagram C.

Typical Trenchblock



## Trenches:

Trenches themselves were sunk down to a depth of about 2, 5 m.

**Sandbags:** to protect soldiers

**Sump – žumpa, odpadová jama:** drain, width of sumps: ½ m

**Trench boards:** to walk on

**Wire:** protection against the others

**No man’s land:** the land between two trenches

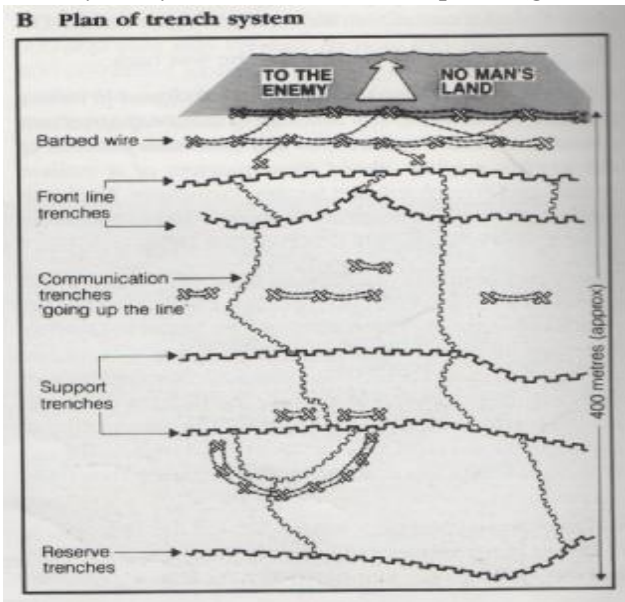
Revetment – obloženie, machine gun – guľomet, bolt hole – diera na útek, parapet – nízka hradba, wire tangle – chumáč z drôtu,

**Advice to be taken:** “Going along whistling I saw a group of men bending over a man lying in the bottom of a trench. He was making a snoring noise mixed with animal groans. At my feet lay his cap splashed with his brains. One can joke with a wounded man, one can disregard a dead man, but no one can joke over a man who take three hours to die after the top of his head has been taken off by a bullet at twenty yards range.” **Robert Graves: Goodbye to all that**

“We were eighteen and had begun to love life and the world; and we had to shoot it to pieces. The first bomb, the first explosion, burst in our hearts. We are cut off from activity, from striving, from progress. We believe in such things no longer, we believe in the war.” **Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet On The Western Front, Ch. 5.**

„But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship. Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late.

Why do they never tell us that you are poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying and the same agony--Forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy?" **Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet On The Western Front*, Ch. 9**



**Life in the trenches was hard and dangerous**

- Heavy artillery fire from both sides
- Aircraft surveillance (and attacks later in the war)
- Gas attacks (from 1915)
- Tanks (from 1916)
- Rapid machine gun. Fires up to 600 bullets a minute.
- Counter tunnelling with sound equipment
- No Man's Land (often deep in mud)
- Dangerous tunnelling to lay explosives under enemy lines
- Trench foot
- Lice
- Rats
- Dug out
- Water logged trenches
- No steel helmet till 1915
- Barbed wire
- Artillery bombardment causing shell shock

Each man got paid one shilling a day. The main rations were bully beef, jam, and tea.



