

# Overview of Trench Warfare:

## Knowledge Organiser

### 1. Trench Construction and Layout:

- Trenches were dug in zigzag patterns to minimize the impact of a direct enemy shell hit.
- Fire bays allowed soldiers to fire at the enemy without exposing themselves to the full length of the trench.
- Dugouts provided shelter from artillery barrages and were used for sleeping and protection.

### 2. Over-the-Top Attacks:

- Over-the-top attacks were often preceded by a heavy artillery barrage to destroy enemy barbed wire and fortifications.
- Soldiers climbed ladders to get over the parapet and advance across No Man's Land, often under machine gun and sniper fire.
- Timing was crucial to avoid walking into the barrage's own shelling.

### 3. Artillery Barrages:

- Artillery bombardments aimed to destroy enemy trenches, disrupt communication, and demoralize soldiers.
- Creeping barrage tactics involved advancing the artillery fire just ahead of the advancing infantry to maintain cover and surprise.
- However, poor communication and inaccurate timing sometimes resulted in friendly fire casualties.

### 4. Infiltration Tactics:

- Infiltration tactics evolved to bypass heavily fortified enemy positions.
- Small groups of trained soldiers equipped with rifles, grenades, and sometimes body armor would penetrate enemy lines at night, disrupting communication and capturing key positions.

---

### **5. Raiding Parties:**

- Raiding parties sought to gather intelligence, capture prisoners, and seize enemy equipment.
- Quiet and swift movements were crucial to avoid detection and retaliation.
- The Bayonet Trench Raid on the Western Front in 1917 is an example of a successful British raid.

### **6. Use of Gas and Special Weapons:**

- Gas attacks involved releasing toxic gases, such as chlorine or phosgene, into the enemy trenches, causing respiratory distress and confusion.
- The British developed the Livens Projector, a type of trench mortar that could launch gas-filled canisters at long ranges.
- Flamethrowers were used to clear enemy trenches, but their limited range and vulnerability made them less effective.

### **7. Trench Rotation and Resting:**

- Trench life was gruelling, with soldiers often spending several days in the front line followed by a period of rest.
- Rotations aimed to mitigate the effects of constant stress, exhaustion, and the risk of mental breakdowns.

### **8. Countermining and Tunnelling:**

- Both sides engaged in underground warfare by digging tunnels beneath enemy lines.
- Tunnels were used for mining and planting explosives to destroy enemy positions.
- The Battle of Messines in 1917 saw the British detonate 19 mines simultaneously beneath German lines.

### **9. Improved Communication:**

- Field telephones and runners were used for communication between trenches and command posts.
- Signal flags and lamps were employed to communicate messages over short distances, especially at night.
- Carrier pigeons were used for reliable communication when other methods failed.

## **10. Adaptation to New Technologies:**

- Tanks were introduced in 1916 and used to crush barbed wire and cross trenches, providing infantry support.
- Aircraft were employed for reconnaissance, spotting enemy positions, and directing artillery fire.
- The introduction of the Stokes mortar allowed for more precise targeting of enemy trenches.

## **11. Consolidation and Defence:**

- After capturing enemy trenches, soldiers focused on consolidating their gains, reinforcing positions, and holding against counterattacks.
- Barbed wire obstacles were laid in front of trenches to slow enemy advances.
- Sandbags, timber, and corrugated iron were used to fortify trench walls and provide protection.