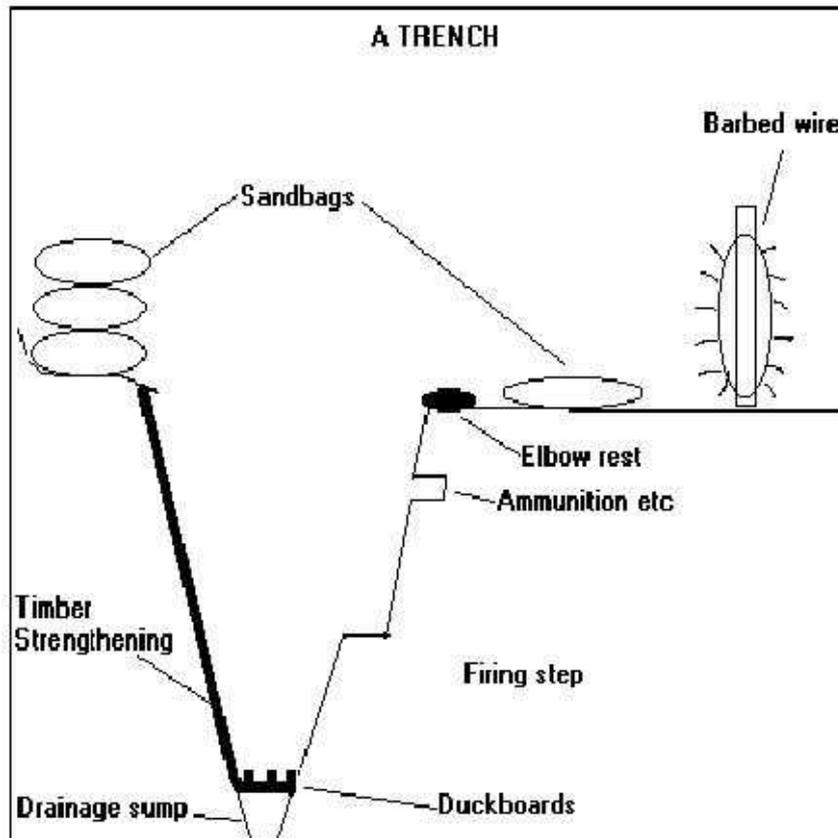


# Trench Warfare in World War I

By Mr Davies



## 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 feature 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.

## Why the Trenches stayed

### Barbed wire

This was difficult to cut. Shelling usually only tangled it up. It spread men out in a line.

### Machine guns

These mowed down men with intersecting crossfire.

### Gas

This was very effective in slowing down heavily-laden attackers. It was not so effective against troops in trenches.

### Shells

The best trenches saved soldiers from all but a direct hit. Shells churned up the ground, destroyed drainage systems and made attack very difficult.

### Lack of secrecy

The enemy could easily see when extra supplies were brought up for an attack.

### Railway

These could rush reinforcements to a threatened spot very quickly. Aeroplanes were not powerful enough then to delay rail traffic by any great amount.

### Attack at walking pace

Men could only advance at walking pace.

### Lack of experience

Generals had never fought this way before and could not think of ways of breaking through the trenches

### Zigzagging Trenches

These were to stop enemy artillery destroying a whole line of trench and to prevent successful attackers being able to fire along a long length of a trench.

### Communication trenches

These joined lines of trenches.

### Blind Alleys

These led nowhere and they were built to confuse and slow down the enemy in the event of a successful attack.

### Forward positions

These were built for miners and snipers.

### Underground 'Saps'

These were tunnels driven under enemy trenches so that explosives could be placed under them and detonated.

### No Man's Land

This was very difficult to cross because of the belts of barbed wire, shell holes and very swampy conditions when it rained.

