

Infantry Weapons



The standard infantry man in WWI was equipped with a rifle and bayonet as his main weapons. Rifles from WWI were more accurate, had better range, and were more deadly than before. Rifles no longer needed to be rechambered after each shot and a rifle man could fire all 8 rounds from his bolt action rifle in roughly a minute.

Infantry were also equipped with grenades. Grenades developed from simple explosives on a stick at the start of the war into the familiar "pineapple" shaped fragmentation grenades.

However, the most important piece of a soldiers equipment was probably his entrenching tool. This allowed him to dig trenches to seek cover from artillery and machine gun fire



Trench Warfare

Trench warfare developed out of need. The weapons of WWI were too deadly for open conflict, and the doctrine the armies followed too primitive for anything else.

Trench complexes were massive constructions spanning hundred of miles along the front.

Life in the trenches was unpleasant for soldiers. They spent a lot of time in mud and water and many developed trench foot. The food was poor and the trenches were filled with rats. The rats would steal food and eat the dead.

Trench life was often dull, with very little happening for weeks at a time. Artillery bombardment and snipers were a constant threat.

Many soldiers in the trenches had mental breakdowns from the poor conditions and bombardment. This was called "Shell shock"

Artillery. Kings of the battlefield



Artillery was the undisputed king of the battlefield. Heavy howitzers had an effective range of 10km and were used in large formations called batteries. A battery could barrage an area almost continuously if ammunition and spare barrels were available. The only defence against a continuous barrage was to find cover in your trench and hope you didn't take a direct hit.

In 1917 during the battle of Messines the British deployed 2210 artillery pieces along a 13km front. That's one artillery piece every 6 metres.



Gas Warfare



Poison Gas was first used by German forces in 1915 in an attempt to end the Stalemate:

What is a Stalemate?

Delivered in canisters fired from artillery positions.

Used extensively by both sides.

Led to the development and utilization of Gas Masks.

Chlorine Gas: Hydrochloric acid when it becomes wet. Burns eyes and lungs when inhaled.

Mustard Gas: Blistering agent. When it comes into contact with eyes, nose, lungs, bare skin. Men were known to cough up pieces of their esophagus from the extreme burn.

Machine Guns



The machine gun is the iconic weapon of WWI. Many films depict close infantry formations being mercilessly gunned down by coordinated machine gun fire.

Sadly, this sight was an all too common occurrence in WWI. Machine guns were perfect weapons for defending trenches from attack.

Machines guns such as the British Vickers machine gun were water cooled and could fire 600 rounds of ammunition a minute.



Tanks (Panzers)



The tank was a late addition to WWI. They were designed to cross rough terrain and drive over barbed wire fences and trenches. Tanks were armoured and armed with light artillery guns and machine guns.

Tanks were first used in large numbers at the battle of Cambrai in 1917 with mixed results. While they caused fear in the German soldiers and were fearsome fighting machines, they often broke down from mechanical failure.

The name "Tank" comes from a code name designed to fool German spies

Submarines. (U-Boats)



What is Unrestricted Submarine Warfare?

The Kriegsmarine (German navy) could never hope to match the Royal Navy in an open fight. Therefore the Germans turned to their new weapon, the submarine in an attempt to wage war at sea.

Submarines were cramped, uncomfortable and dangerous to live on. However, they did allow the Germans to attack allied shipping in an attempt to starve Britain of resources and supplies.

After the war Germany was banned from developing submarines

Aerial Warfare



WWI also saw the development of air combat. Biplanes, such as the Fokker D fought in the skies over the western front. Air combat was extremely deadly and many pilots did not survive their first engagement.

WWI also saw the first bombing of civilian targets in order to create terror and panic. These were mostly carried out by Zeppelins, which were large airships.

