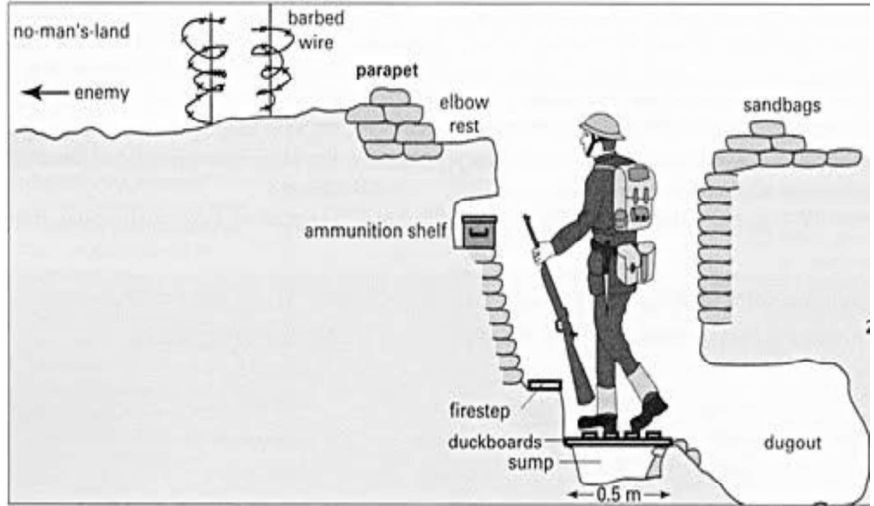


2. Trench Design

Most World War I trench systems consisted of a front-line trench, followed by support and reserve trenches. The three trenches ran parallel to each other and were connected by communication trenches. Communication trenches were used to transport men, equipment and supplies between the front-line, support and reserve trenches.

Trenches varied in size, but were typically seven feet deep and six feet wide. The front side of the trench was called the parapet. Sandbags were stacked at the top of the parapet to provide protection from bullets and shell fragments.



Side view diagram of a trench

Trench lines were built in zig-zag like angles to prevent the enemy from shooting straight down the line if they entered your trench. Fire-steps were dug into the front side of the trench, providing a perch for soldiers to shoot from. Duckboards were placed at the bottom of trenches in an attempt to protect soldiers from the muddy water that often caused trench foot. Also, soldiers made dugouts to provide some protection from the weather and enemy fire. Machine-gun posts and barbed wire protected the front-line trenches.

Lieutenant Bernard Pitt describes trench life in a letter to his parents, December 25, 1915:

"What is life like in the trenches? Well, muddy, and cramped, and filthy. Everything gets covered with mud; you can't wash, for water has to be fetched for a mile. There is no room, and if you walk upright in many of the trenches, you run grave risks; and you sleep, huddled together, unable to stretch. All day long shells and rifle bullets go banging and whistling, and from dark to midnight the Huns [Germans] fire rifle-grenades and machine-guns at us."

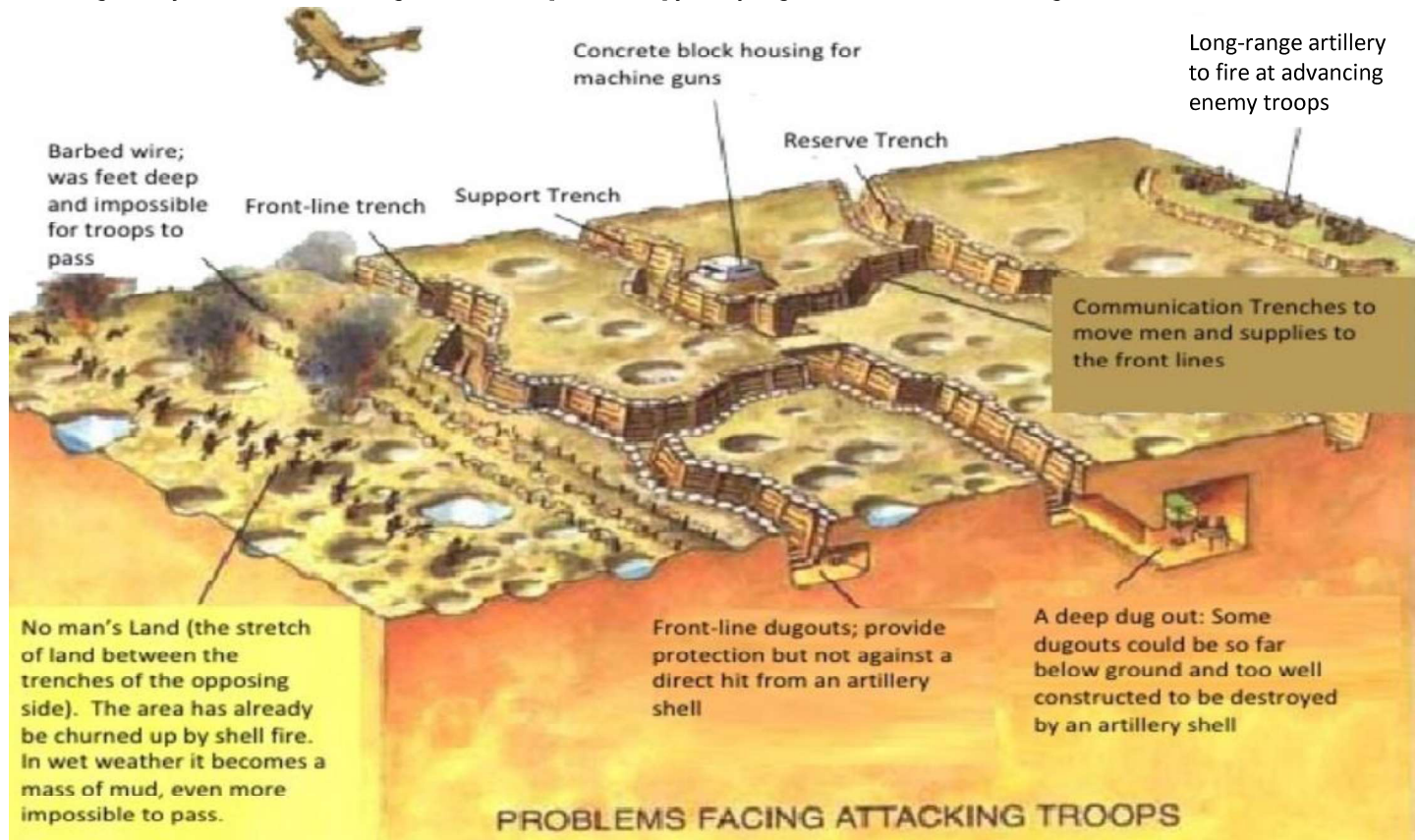


Diagram of a trench system

Source: Simkin, John. "Trench Systems." *Spartacus Educational*, Spartacus Educational, spartacus-educational.com/FWWtrenchsystems.htm.

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