

3. No Man's Land

The area of land between two opposing trenches was referred to as "No Man's Land." The average distance of No Man's Land was 250 yards, but could be as small as 50 yards, or as large as 500 yards.

In order to attack the enemy, soldiers had to charge across the open area, leading to substantial death and destruction. No Man's Land was heavily defended on both sides by machine guns, riflemen, artillery and barbed wire, making any advance extremely difficult. Craters from artillery riddled the land. Corpses and wounded soldiers were left scattered across the fields because enemy fire made it nearly impossible to recover the bodies.



No Man's Land before an attack

Ernst Toller describes an experience of the war:

"One night we heard a cry, the cry of one in excruciating pain; then all was quiet again. Someone in his death agony, we thought. But an hour later the cry came again. It never ceased the whole night. Nor the following night. Naked and inarticulate the cry persisted. We could not tell whether it came from the throat of German or Frenchman. It existed in its own right, an agonized indictment of heaven and earth. We thrust our fingers into our ears to stop its moan; but it was no good; the cry cut like a drill into our heads, dragging minutes into hours, hours into years. We withered and grew old between those cries.

Later we learned that it was one of our own men hanging on the wire. Nobody could do anything for him; two men had already tried to save him, only to be shot themselves. We prayed desperately for his death. He took so long about it, and if he went on much longer we should go mad. But on the third day his cries were stopped by death."



A soldier searches No Man's Land following a battle