

## Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize – Question 2

By Jenique Howard

Throughout World War I, trench warfare was the leading arrangement of fighting. It involved the use of long, narrow ditches to fight from the offense and the defence. The security and protection that the trenches provided, led to ongoing stalemate, prolonging the war. Trench warfare dominated in many locations such as the Western Front, the Eastern Front, and Gallipoli. It was a powerful defence method that evolved and grew across the course of the war. The use of trenches had large variety of advantages and disadvantages, from stable protection and shelter, to diseases and difficulty navigating the trenches. Trench warfare was extremely significant in World War I and dominated across all fronts, with the level of defence and the technology involved, prolonging the duration of the war.

Trench warfare was a very significant strategy in World War I. This warfare is constructed upon the use of trenches, long, deep ditches in order to serve as a protective defence. It was a tactic that led to continual 'stalemate,' neither side could gain a winning advantage. By 1915, trenches of the Western Front stretched over 500 kilometres, and held millions of troops. Trench warfare is comprised of opposing forces attacking and defending from permanent trench systems. This warfare style is conducted when the enemy line holds the superior firepower, forcing the opposition in defence to dig down and form trenches (Editors of Encyclopedia, 2020). Trenches prevent artillery attacks and the zig zag nature in which they are built can contain explosions. Although trenches proved to have a wealth of benefits, many harrowing disadvantages followed. The trenches through their design, allowed soldiers more time to take other defensive steps, such as putting on gas masks. They were also thought to offer protection against exposure of chemical warfare and poison gas. Life in the trenches was unimaginably horrific, with the stench of death and the weight of sorrow on the soldiers' consciousness. Those living in the trenches were to deal with a wide range of horrible conditions, these included mud, gas attacks, diseases, and trench foot. The threat of a gas attack caused soldiers to constantly be on edge, and the noise of the shells constantly firing made many men go mad and obtain shell shock. The poison gas could remain active in the soil for several weeks. Australian troops witnessed these traumatising conditions, in early 1916, in the trenches of Gallipoli. The summer was extremely hot, dry, and dusty, with water always short in quantity. Decomposing bodies in No Man's Land and the trenches, only helped to attract the flies and the rats. Food was limited in both quality and quantity, and rations were regularly cut down. *"The worst things here (Turks excepted) are the flies in millions, lice and everlasting bully beef and biscuits and too little water. Also, it will be a good thing when we get a chance to bury some of the dead."* - Captain D.G. Campbell. Trench warfare was a strategy of great significance within World War I, the trenches provided many positive advantages, although the negative factors outweighed them and made life miserable for the soldiers.

World War I was dominated by the method of trench warfare, a strategy that proved beneficial early on in the war. Trench warfare began in a small proximity of Western Europe; however, this method of fighting grew and came to dominate the Western Front. This style of warfare was initiated during the First Battle of Marne, September 1914. German troops were being pushed back by Allied forces, they "dug in" to protect their remaining territory (Daniels, 2020). The Allied troops were unable to break through the German line of defence. Seeing this as an ideological tactic to preserve their land, the Allies also constructed trenches as a line of defence. Fighting from the trenches produced less casualties than the open field warfare. Although, the average life expectancy of a soldier whilst in the trenches was six weeks (Pitogo, 2013). Trench warfare did not only prevail on the Western Front, but it was also launched in Eastern Europe as well as Turkey. The Eastern Front was a much larger battlefield, so whilst trenches were used, they never developed into the solid trench systems of the Western Front (Hunt, 2017). The trenches in the Gallipoli peninsula of Turkey, were constructed upon

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steep terrain, with the ANZACs on the edge of the cliff, whilst the Turkish troops withheld the higher ground (Cleary, 2015). The warfare involved a range of weapons, and the technology of these weapons continued to advance and progress over the duration of the war. The weaponry of WWI was comprised of machine guns, heavy artillery, gas, tanks, and methods of communication. The machine guns such as the Lewis gun, heavy artillery, and the gas, proved to be powerful when combined with the trench defence systems. The tanks were initially of poor quality, however, once the tanks were further established, they were able to overcome trenches and barbed wire obstacles. A strategy that started as a swift defence mechanism, evolved into a significant method of fighting, manipulating the outcome of the war.

The duration of World War I was prolonged due to the use of trench warfare. The tactic encouraged militarism and that led to a continuous stalemate. As one military grew and expanded its power, the enemy troops would feel compelled to match the initial acts of that military. Quite similarly, as the Triple Alliance expanded their trenches to cover more area, the Triple Entente would replicate this move to prevent the enemy from advantage. The trench warfare and the new developments in technology, were constantly adding time to the duration of the war. Trenches slowed down the war and changed the rate of advancement for troops. The No Man's Land between the trench lines was entirely open land, preventing troops from readily advancing without being easily targeted. In Gallipoli, conditions were far more severe. Due to the steep beaches and terrain, the campaign proved to be a much harder challenge than anticipated. The Australian soldiers were in Gallipoli for eight months because of the use of trench warfare. Similar to the Western Front, the campaign consisted of back-and-forth fighting, with no major successes. Trenches were found to be ineffective on the steep terrain of Gallipoli, whereas the Western Front was a relatively flat battlefield. In both locations, trench warfare prolonged the movements and advancements of the troops. Trench warfare, whilst being a strong form of defence, proved to be a time prolonging tactic.

Trench warfare was a simplistic strategy that developed into the primary war method on the Western Front in World War I. Comprised of zig zag shaped, narrow ditches that held a variety of benefits. From containing explosions to preventing artillery attacks, the trenches supported troops in great numbers. Although life in the trenches was horrendous, trench warfare remained prevalent. Originating from German fall back, the construction of trenches was adapted and inherited across the Western Front. The style of warfare dominated World War I, with both opposing forces having adopted the tactic. It was a ploy that proved to be successful in preserving and protecting land. The trenches were an advanced version of moats, acting as a barrier, securing the remaining land from infiltration. Trench warfare was an imperative factor of World War I, engrained in history as a dominant, prolonging tactic.

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