

# Introduction

## Early Warfare

One of the earliest examples of warfare found in the archeological record took place in the riparian valley of the Kingdom of Sumer, in what is now the Middle East. Ancient Greeks called this region Mesopotamia, meaning “the land between two rivers,” and this ecological position is the key to understanding why wars have been fought for control of this region for thousands of years.

The Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow from the high terrain in what is now eastern Turkey through the states of Syria and Iraq, and from there to the Persian Gulf. Each year, snow melting from the mountains creates in the valley a rich, loamy soil. Historians aren't certain when desert nomads first discovered the Mesopotamian valley, but it must have seemed an oasis in the midst of the harsh and unforgiving desert landscape that surrounds it. The nomadic bands that settled there ultimately gave rise to the Sumerian civilization, one of the most famous in the history of Western civilization, and their innovations fueled the rise of societies throughout Europe. The Sumerians conquered dry summers with irrigation, and their civilization grew in size and complexity, producing a thriving market-driven culture and one of the earliest forms of written language, “cuneiform,” which began as financial records scrawled on clay tablets.<sup>1</sup>

By around 4000 BCE, the Sumerian civilization had given rise to possibly the world's first urban environment, sprawling residential areas connected by shared irrigation and sewage systems bound together by communal markets and a broad network of trade and commerce. Ultimately, there were 14 Sumerian city-states, and as these evolved, tensions began to emerge. Archaeologists found evidence of massive city-state warfare between 3000 and 2334 BCE, fought over territorial borders and access to essential resources.

Fighting continued for years, as warlords competed for control and faced foreign threats, the greatest being the Kingdom of Elam. Historians believe that Sumerians and Elamites fought each other beginning in the Neolithic period, but the first recorded war took place in 2700 when the Sumerian King Mebaragesi waged war against the Elamites, taking from them a vast store of weapons and technology. The war took place in what is now the city of Basra, near the salt marshes that are still found throughout the region. This period of warring states ended in 2334, when Sumerian King Sargon the Great united

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## Historical Timeline

**Antiquity:**

Warlords and city-states establish the first policing systems to enforce laws and the will of community leaders.

**1607:**

Jamestown Colony is established, utilizing military officers from England.

**1619:**

The first organized law enforcement systems are established, later giving rise to the militia system.

**1636:**

The City of Boston establishes the first Night Watch system for law enforcement.

**1743:**

The British military book *A Treatise of Military Discipline* is published, guiding General George Washington's effort to organize the US military.

**1754:**

French and Indian Wars begin.

The Iroquois Confederacy inspires the US Constitution.

**1756:**

The Seven Years War between England and France leads to the Revolutionary Movement in the United States.

**1775:**

The Revolutionary War begins.

Paul Revere's midnight ride signals the beginning of open hostility between the colonies and England.

The US Continental Army is created by the Second Continental Congress.

The US Navy is established in Philadelphia.

**1776:**

The Declaration of Independence is signed.

Congress passes laws allowing privateers to be recruited into the US Navy fleet.

## IN THE TRENCHES

### *Trench Warfare in World War I (1914–1918)*

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#### **Introduction**

War in the early 1900s was very different from war in the twenty-first century. The Great War came at a time of tremendous modernization and technological innovation, but the combat strategies were far different. Without drones and long-range laser-guided weaponry, soldiers lined up along great trenches dug into the earth and bombarded one another in month after month of relentless fighting. It was the era of trench warfare, a brutal style of warfare that necessitated the invention of many new, terrible technologies and helped make the Great War one of the deadliest wars in recorded history.

#### **Topics Covered in this Chapter Include:**

- World War I
- Trench warfare
- The Christmas truce
- Trench foot

#### **This Chapter Discusses the Following Source Document:**

Rader, Phil, “Foes Mingle as Friends on Death Strip between Trenches in Xmas Truce,” *Newark Evening Star*, March 24, 1915



In the 2000s, a group of archaeologists used laser scanners to map the region around Ypres Salient in Belgium, which was the site of at least two major battles during the First World War. In the intervening years, this region of Belgium had grown into an idyllic pastoral landscape covered in gentle grasses, flowers, and bushes, but beneath this was a landscape scarred and pocked by the war.

Ghent University archaeologist Birger Stichelbaut explained that the laser scans revealed that the fields were covered in so many artillery shell craters that they resembled the surface of the moon. The team also found in their investigations nearly 3,000 kilometers of forgotten trenches that had been carved into the landscape. These trenches are visible evidence of a unique form of outmoded warfare in which armies utilized trenches to protect themselves from artillery and enemy fire as they advanced across a battlefield. Dubbed “trench warfare,” this kind of fighting became the most famous aspect of battle in the First World War.<sup>1</sup>



Trenches of the 11th Cheshire Regiment on the Somme, July 1916. By John Warwick Brooke, Imperial War Museums, via Wikimedia.



## The Invention of the Trench

The idea of using trenches predates World War I by millennia, and evidence of trenches has been found as far back as ancient Rome and Greece. The Romans dug the massive Cluilian Trench, which formed a circle about 3 to 5 miles outside the city and was meant to prevent cavalry from advancing on the city while providing an outer line of defense for Roman soldiers to occupy in case of war.<sup>2</sup> Over the centuries that followed, trenches were sometimes used to defend important positions or to hide infantry from volleys of arrows and later gunpowder-fired projectiles, but the use of trenches became synonymous with World War I in the war for the Western Front. It was here that Allied troops from France and Britain (later joined by the United States) attempted to stop the advance of German troops through France and Belgium.

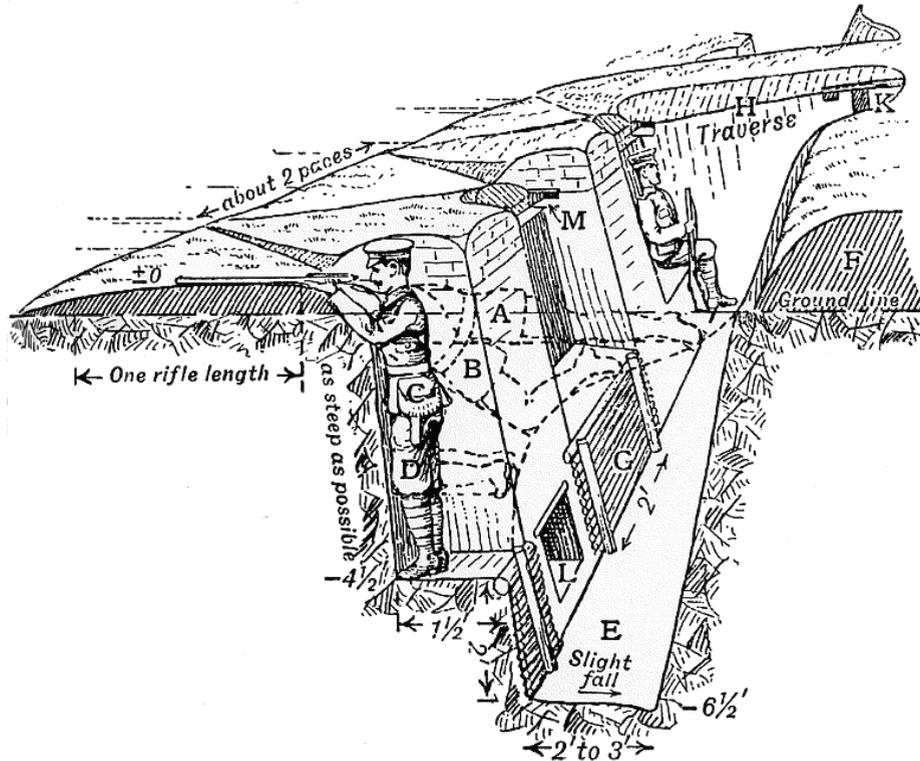
The proliferation of trenches was a response to the introduction of many new kinds of deadly weapons. World War I saw the introduction of the machine gun, both as a weapon for individual soldiers and larger stationary versions that could throw thousands of bullets toward an advancing army. Engineers also introduced new kinds of artillery that had longer reach and were more accurate than previous long-range explosives. Finally, scientists introduced new chemical weapons that could be used to attack entire groups of soldiers at once. The trenches gave some degree of defense from enemy bullets, artillery, and, to a minor extent, clouds of noxious gasses.

Because of these new kinds of weaponry, armies that attempted to charge through a contested territory were vulnerable to machine gun fire and artillery. During the First Battle of Marne, in September of 1914, Allied soldiers managed to halt the advance of German soldiers by digging protective trenches and firing artillery and machine guns at the advancing Germans. The German Army did likewise, and by the end of the month the two armies were at a stalemate. From Marne, the strategy of using trenches spread across the front.<sup>3</sup>

## Designing A Stalemate

The use of trenches, more than any other single factor, extended the war. Neither side could afford to advance as long as enemy forces were safely entrenched, and so there were long stretches with little or no advancement on either side. Typically, there would be about 250 to 300 yards between the trenches on either side. This area was typically known as “no man’s land,” the origin of the English idiom referring to an area owned by no one and into which crossing was considered dangerous or deadly.





A diagram of trench construction from a 1914 British infantry manual, via Wikimedia.

The first trenches were dug in haste by infantry soldiers, but as the trench war deepened, engineers were advising both sides on how to build more secure, better-lasting trenches. The front wall of the trench facing the enemy was known as the “parapet,” and was usually around 10 feet tall. The inside of the trench was lined with sandbags and a row or two of sandbags were arranged along the top of the trench wall as well, for extra protection. Beneath the parapet was a ledge, known as the “fire-step,” which was used to peek over the top, through breaks in the sandbags, before firing. The back wall of the trench, or “parados,” was also lined with sandbags to protect against shrapnel from ordinance and to keep the walls of the trench secure in the rain and during shelling.

The trenches were not dug in straight lines; angles were incorporated so that if enemy soldiers entered the trench, they would only have access to a single section. The main forward trench, or the “fire line,” was connected to smaller trenches that were used to move supplies. For additional security, there were at least two more larger trenches behind the fire line. These auxiliary trenches contained reserve soldiers and supplies that could be used to support the soldiers operating in the main trench.



In some of the longest-lasting trenches of the war, engineers also built subterranean rooms below the main floor of the trench. These rooms, known as “dugouts,” were typically simple cellars used to store supplies or to house wounded soldiers, but in some cases the soldiers used the time during long stalemates to develop these wartime rooms. When some of the German positions were captured, soldiers found dugouts outfitted with electricity, toilets, and even decorated with wallpaper and other furniture.<sup>4</sup>

## **Living in the Trenches**

Another English idiom that came from World War I is the phrase “in the trenches,” which means to experience the brunt of some struggle or hardship directly, especially with another person. This idiom reflects the terrible experiences that the soldiers who fought in the Great War endured, especially those who spent long, grueling months fighting in the trenches of the Western Front.

Soldiers assigned to the trenches typically rotated through positions over a period of days. Those in the fire line did the shooting and other fighting, while soldiers in the reserve line would stay in position unless called to fill positions on the fire line. Those in the support line were the backups for the backups and managed the delivery of supplies. After rotating through the fire line, reserve line, and support line, the soldiers would be given a period of rest, before returning to the fire line for another rotation.

For British and American soldiers, morning typically began with a “stand to,” during which the soldiers in the fire line would step up on the fire step and train their bayonets to the top of the line, the idea being that they could defend against any early attack. A similar “stand-to” happened in the evening because dawn and dusk were the most likely times of attack. There was then a period known as the “morning hate,” in which brief volleys or artillery rounds might be exchanged between the sides. Following the “morning hate,” soldiers on both sides typically observed a brief truce for breakfast.

Fighting did not typically occur during the day; most of the serious offensive maneuvers were better mounted in the evening or at night when visibility was low and soldiers could move outside the trenches without being easily spotted. As there was usually little to no fighting during the day, soldiers in the trenches did chores or passed the time with games.



# NOTES

## Introduction

1. Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character*.
2. Gabriel, *The Great Armies of Antiquity*.
3. Brown and Morgan, *Arming Slaves*.
4. Abrahamyan, "War: Still Turning a Profit for the World's Elites."
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8. Jaeger, "Here's How Education and Military Spending Compare."

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2. Phillips, *Wealth and Democracy*.
3. "Enlightenment and Revolution," *The Pluralism Project*.
4. Spannaus and White, *The Political Economy of the American Revolution*.
5. Hinderaker, *Boston's Massacre*.
6. Carp, *Defiance of the Patriots: The Boston Tea Party and the Making of America*.
7. Horan, "First Continental Congress."
8. Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord: The Beginning of the War of the American Revolution*.
9. Clinton, "225th Anniversary of the United States Army."
10. Grundset, Diaz, Gendry, and Strahan, *Forgotten Patriots*.
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4. Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid*.
5. "Negro Raid Is the Chief Topic," *The Brownsville Daily Herald*.
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# GLOSSARY

## A

**acquisition and cross-servicing agreement**—Agreement, negotiated on a bilateral basis with countries or international organizations, that allows United States forces to exchange food, fuel, transportation, ammunition, and equipment.

**active duty**—Full-time duty in the active military service of the United States, including active duty or full-time training duty in the Reserve Component

**Active Guard and Reserve**—National Guard and Reserve members who are on voluntary active duty providing full-time support to National Guard, Reserve, and Active Component organizations.

**adversary**—A party acknowledged as potentially hostile to a friendly party and against which the use of force may be envisaged.

**aerospace defense**—Defensive measures designed to destroy or nullify attacking enemy aircraft and missiles and also negate hostile space systems

**agency**—In intelligence usage, an organization or individual that collects and/or processes information.

**air and missile defense**—Direct defensive actions taken to destroy, nullify, or reduce the effectiveness of hostile air and ballistic missile threats against friendly forces and assets.

**air assault**—The movement of friendly assault forces by rotary-wing or tiltrotor aircraft to engage and destroy enemy forces or to seize and hold key terrain.

**air corridor**—A restricted air route of travel specified for use by friendly aircraft and established for the purpose of preventing friendly aircraft from being fired on by friendly forces.

**aircraft carrier**—A warship designed to support and operate aircraft, engage in attacks on targets afloat or ashore, and engage in sustained operations in support of other forces.

# HISTORICAL SNAPSHOTS

## 1880–1881

- The plush Del Monte Hotel in Monterey, California, opened
- The country claimed 93,000 miles of railroad
- Halftone photographic illustrations appeared in newspapers for the first time
- Midwest farmers burned their corn for fuel as prices were too low to warrant shipping
- President James A. Garfield was assassinated
- The Diamond Match Company was created
- Marquette University was founded in Milwaukee
- Barnum & Bailey's Circus was created through the merger of two companies
- Chicago meatpacker Gustavus F. Swift perfected the refrigeration car
- Josephine Cockrane of Illinois invented the first mechanical dishwasher
- A U.S. Constitutional amendment to grant full suffrage to women was introduced in Congress this and every year until its passage in 1920
- Thanks to high tariffs, the U.S. Treasury had a surplus of \$145 million
- The U.S. had 2,400 magazines and daily newspapers, and 7,500 weekly newspapers
- The typewriter and the telephone were both novelties at the 1876 Centennial in Philadelphia; in 1880, 50,000 telephones existed nationwide and at the turn of the century, that number tripled
- George Eastman's famous slogan "You Push the Button, We Do the Rest" helped make Kodak camera a part of many American homes

## 1885

- The Canadian Pacific Railroad reached the Pacific Ocean
- Baseball set players' salaries at \$1,000-\$2,000 for the 1885 season
- The first photograph of a meteor was taken
- Dr. William W. Grant of Davenport, Iowa, performed the first appendectomy
- Bachelor Grover Cleveland entered the White House as president
- Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was published
- The Washington Monument was dedicated
- The U.S. Post Office began offering special delivery for first-class mail
- The Salvation Army was officially organized in the U.S.
- Texas was the last Confederate state readmitted to the Union

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