

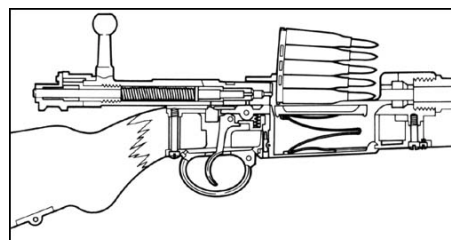
First World War

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Weapons

During WWI, the soldiers in the trenches used a wide variety of weapons, these included:

- ◆ Rifles and pistols
- ◆ Machine guns
- ◆ Artillery
- ◆ Bayonets
- ◆ Torpedoes
- ◆ Flame throwers
- ◆ Mustard and chlorine gases and
- ◆ Smokeless gunpowder.



As well as using them in the trenches, some of these weapons were used by tanks, U boats, Zeppelins (left) and planes.

In the trenches, the weapon carried by all British soldiers was the **bolt-action rifle** (see picture top right). It was possible for the soldier to fire 15 rounds per minute and could kill someone up to 1,400 metres away. French soldiers used the **bayonet**.

Unlike today, **machine guns** were not the main weapons of soldiers. They needed 4-6 men to man them in 1914 and had to be positioned on a flat surface. They could fire up to 400 rounds per minute and had the fire power of 100 guns!



Artillery is the word used to describe large-calibre mounted field guns. The calibre is the diameter of the barrel. The picture to the left is an example of the heavy artillery that was used in the trenches. The stalemate meant they needed long-range weapons that could deliver devastating blows to the enemy. They needed crews of up to 12 men to work them; the shells weighed up to 900lb –very heavy.





This war was also the first to use **chlorine** and **mustard gas**. The German army was the first to use chlorine in 1915 at Ypres.

French soldiers had not come across this before and assumed that it was a smoke screen. It has a distinctive smell – a mixture of pepper and pineapple – and they only realised they were being gassed when they started to have chest pains and a burning sensation in their throats! Death is painful – you suffocate!

The problem with using chlorine is, weather conditions must be right before it is used. WHY?

Afterwards, Allied forces discovered that urine-soaked cotton pads neutralised the chlorine. However, they found it difficult to fight like this!!

Mustard gas was the most **deadly** biological weapon that was used in the trenches. It was odourless and took 12 hours to take effect! It was also very powerful, only small amounts needed to be added to shells to be effective **and** it remained active for several weeks when it landed in the soil!

The nastiest thing about mustard gas is that **it made the skin blister, the eyes sore and the victim would start to vomit. It would cause internal and external bleeding, and would target the lungs. It could take up to 5 weeks to die!**



War Machines



The **Zeppelin**, or blimp as it is also known, is an airship and it was used during the early part of the war in bombing raids by the Germans. These airships weighed 12 tonnes and contained over 400,000 cubic feet of hydrogen. They were propelled along by 2 Daimler engines, which enabled the craft to travel at speeds of up to 136mph and heights of 4250 metres! They usually carried machine guns and around 4,400lb of bombs!

They carried out many raids and were eventually abandoned as they were easy targets for artillery.

Tanks also started to be used in warfare in this war, since armoured cars could not cope with the terrain. The first tank was nicknamed “Little Willie”, it had a Daimler engine, a caterpillar track and needed a crew of 3. Its maximum speed was 3mph and it was unable to cross trenches. Not a success for the Allies.



The more modern tank was not completed until several weeks before the end of the war. It was called the Fiat Tipo! It could fit a maximum of 10 men, had the first revolving turret and could reach speeds of 4mph!



This war also had another first: planes started to be used to deliver bombs. Planes became fighter aircraft armed with machine guns, bombs, and even cannons. They were even used for reconnaissance work. Pilots were even known to fight enemy aircraft in the air, in “dogfights” to protect the men on the ground.

THINGS TO DO

- 1) Make notes about the main types of weapons used in WWI.
- 2) What is artillery?
- 3) Why do you think that the bayonet became an old-fashioned weapon during this war?
- 4) Why do you think that machine-gunner crews were more likely to be killed by the enemy than footsoldiers, if they were captured?
- 5) What are chlorine and mustard gas?
- 6) Why **would** chlorine need certain weather conditions?
- 7) Draw a table to show
 - (a) the smell of the gas,
 - (b) the effects on the soldiers,
 - (c) how long it took to take effect,
 - (d) how long it took to die,
 - (e) when they were first used in battle and
 - (f) the problems with using it.
- 8) What is a Zeppelin?
- 9) Why do you think they were easy targets?
- 10) Why were tanks unsuccessful war machines in WWI?
- 11) How did **this war** change the way men fought in battle?
- 12) Draw a **table** listing the weapons that were used in the 1914-1918 war. How have weapons/war machines changed?

