Crossing No Man's Land

Assess how defenses and new weapons shaped combat.

SS24.WH.7a "Assess the effects of trench warfare and new military technologies on combat during World War I."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways trench defenses made attacks difficult, and circle two ways new weapons helped attackers. Write 1 and 2 beside two limits or dangers of those weapons so you can judge their effects.

A Hard Road to the Next Trench

1 In 1916, a soldier on the Western Front might spend days in a narrow trench, watching the strip of ground called no man's land. Opposing armies dug long trench systems, with shelters and reserve lines behind the front. These defenses made it hard to win and keep ground. To attack, infantry had to climb out and cross open land while defenders could fire at them. Barbed wire slowed attackers, and machine guns could fire many rounds into a concentrated group. Even when attackers captured a front trench, enemy soldiers might retreat to another line and counterattack.

2 Commanders tried to break this deadlock with huge artillery bombardments. Shells could cut wire, destroy shelters, and force defenders to hide. Yet deep dugouts sometimes protected troops, who could emerge when firing stopped. Shells also tore up the ground, leaving craters and mud that slowed advancing infantry. Artillery did not make attacks safe: defenders could fire at troops crossing open ground, while inaccurate shells could hit friendly soldiers. This mix of protection and destruction helped make battles for small pieces of land long and deadly. A weapon that opened a path could also make that path harder to cross.

3 Armies also used poison gas, released from cylinders or fired in shells. It could injure lungs or eyes and force soldiers to wear masks, making it harder to see and communicate. Wind could carry gas away from its intended target, and masks reduced its effect. Tanks first entered combat in 1916. Their armor could shield crews from small-arms fire, and some could cross trenches and crush wire. But early tanks broke down often and struggled in deep mud. Neither gas nor tanks ended trench warfare on its own. New technologies changed soldiers' risks, yet terrain and defenses still shaped the outcome.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did trenches, barbed wire, and machine guns work together to make an infantry attack dangerous?

2. Why could an artillery bombardment both help and hinder an attack?

3. How did poison gas change combat, and what limited its effect?

4. How could tanks help soldiers attack a trench, and why could they not guarantee success?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a reporter near the Western Front in 1917. Write a brief dispatch responding to this claim: "New weapons made taking a trench easy." Weigh the effects and limits of two weapons from the passage, include one trench condition, and give your judgment.

ANSWER KEY

Crossing No Man's Land

GRADE 9 · SS24.WH.7a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways trench defenses made attacks difficult, and circle two ways new weapons helped attackers. Write 1 and 2 beside two limits or dangers of those weapons so you can judge their effects. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did trenches, barbed wire, and machine guns work together to make an infantry attack dangerous?	**Attackers had to cross open ground toward defended trenches. Wire slowed them, leaving them exposed to machine-gun fire, and reserve lines made captured ground hard to keep.**
2	Why could an artillery bombardment both help and hinder an attack?	**Shells could cut wire, damage shelters, and force defenders to hide. They also left craters and mud that slowed attackers, while deep dugouts could protect defenders.**
3	How did poison gas change combat, and what limited its effect?	**Gas could injure soldiers and force them to wear masks that made seeing and communicating harder. Wind could carry gas away, and masks reduced its effect.**
4	How could tanks help soldiers attack a trench, and why could they not guarantee success?	**Tanks could shield crews from small-arms fire, cross some trenches, and crush wire. Early tanks often broke down or struggled in deep mud.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Report from the Western Front, 1917: Some officers say new weapons make taking a trench easy. The ground tells another story. Artillery can break wire and force defenders into shelter, but its shells leave craters that slow the infantry. Tanks can crush wire and protect crews from small-arms fire, yet deep mud can stop them. Meanwhile, attackers still cross open ground toward defended lines. I judge that new weapons made assaults more powerful, but trenches and damaged ground kept victory uncertain and costly.

Accept other passage-supported effects and limits. The dispatch should weigh two weapons, connect their effects to a trench condition, and make a supported judgment rather than simply list facts.