Breaking the Deadlock

Technology and tactics on the Western Front

9-12.US2.7 "Explain how new technologies influenced strategies, military tactics, and battle conditions on the Western Front during World War One."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each technology and circle a nearby change in tactics or battle conditions that it caused.

Across No Man's Land

1. On the Western Front, armies dug long lines of trenches across France and Belgium. A soldier ordered to advance had to cross no man's land, the exposed ground between enemy positions. Machine guns could fire rapidly at troops in the open, while barbed wire slowed those troops near enemy trenches. Commanders learned that a mass charge could end in heavy losses without gaining much ground. Both sides built deeper trench systems and looked for ways to weaken defenses before sending infantry forward.

2. Artillery crews fired shells at enemy positions before infantry attacks, hoping to cut wire and silence machine guns. But shelling often left deep craters that slowed attackers, and defenders could shelter in dugouts until the barrage ended. Poison gas added another danger: wind could carry it toward opposing trenches, but changing winds could also threaten the side that released it. Gas masks reduced exposure, while the need to wear them made movement and communication harder.

3. Later in the war, tanks offered a way to cross wire and trenches while shielding crews from some gunfire. Early tanks were slow, broke down often, and could not win ground without infantry following them. Aircraft spotted enemy positions and helped direct artillery fire, making hidden troops and supply routes less secure. These inventions did not end trench warfare at once. Commanders had to coordinate weapons and soldiers, while mud, broken ground, and enemy fire still shaped every attack.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did machine guns and barbed wire change the risks of an infantry charge?

2. Why might an artillery barrage help an attack but also make the advance harder?

3. How did wind and gas masks affect the use of poison gas and soldiers' conditions?

4. How did tanks and aircraft help attacks in different ways, and why did tanks still need infantry?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

After rain leaves no man's land muddy, plan an attack on a defended trench. In one paragraph, put two technologies from the passage in a useful sequence, explain how each changes your tactics, and identify one danger that remains.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.US2.7

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each technology and circle a nearby change in tactics or battle conditions that it caused. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did machine guns and barbed wire change the risks of an infantry charge?	**Machine guns could hit troops crossing open ground, and barbed wire slowed them near enemy trenches. A mass charge could bring heavy losses with little ground gained.**
2	Why might an artillery barrage help an attack but also make the advance harder?	**Shells might cut wire and silence machine guns, but their craters could slow attackers. Defenders might also survive in dugouts.**
3	How did wind and gas masks affect the use of poison gas and soldiers' conditions?	**Wind could carry gas toward the enemy or back toward the side that released it. Masks reduced exposure but made movement and communication harder.**
4	How did tanks and aircraft help attacks in different ways, and why did tanks still need infantry?	**Tanks could cross wire and trenches while shielding crews; aircraft spotted positions and directed artillery. Infantry had to follow tanks to take and hold ground.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

First, I would send an aircraft to locate the enemy's machine-gun positions instead of sending infantry across open ground without that information. Artillery would then target those positions before the troops moved, giving them a better chance to reach the trench. I would wait until the shelling stopped so our own fire would not strike them. Even then, muddy craters could slow the soldiers and leave them exposed.

Accept other workable sequences using two passage technologies if the response explains each tactical effect and identifies a remaining danger. Plans should not claim that any technology guarantees a successful attack.