To use trenches or avoid trenches? For anyone wargaming World War One, ultimately the subject of trenches will be raised.

Like most trench systems, irrespective of the period, WW1 trenches took the form of a fire trench on the frontline, behind which were the support trenches where supplies and reserve troops would be located, the two trench types being connected by communication trenches.

Also, trenches were not built in straight lines as the zig-zag patterns of the trench systems as these aerial photographs demonstrate.

To ensure that trenches were constructed to the approved specification, in 1914, the General Staff of the British War Office produced the Field Service Pocket Book, a page from which is reproduced on the opposite page, showing how fire and communication trenches were to be dug, with the recommended dimensions.

And the General Staff's helpful instructions further advised:

In selecting sites for fire trenches, the following points require attention:-

(a) Good field of fire. Most important within 400 yards of the trench. Range marks if possible to be added.

(b) Concealment and invisibility. Obtained by adapting trenches to form of the ground, keeping parapets low, and by use of natural or artificial cover.

(c) Parapet should be bullet proof.

(d) Head cover, which must be inconspicuous, should be provided, if possible.

(e) Trenches should be traversed or recessed.

(f) Cover for supports near at hand.

(g) Trenches should have steep interior slope, be wide enough to allow men to pass, and drainage should be provided.

Author’s note: The WW1 photographs accompanying this article are included courtesy of the Harry Holloway Collection. This collection has photos of training, equipment, aerial reconnaissance of France during World War One, and ground camouflage and was taken or collected by Harry Holloway. It is believed that the bulk of these photos are “The Cornell Collection,” a set of the best photographs sent back from the war to the USA for training purposes. To view more of this collection visit:

www.drbill.net/ww1_aerial_reconnaissance_photos/index.htm
Napoleonic Wars 1803-1815

The Trench in Wargaming

Trenches in wargaming are generally represented in one of two ways:

- by cutting downwards into some form of terrain panel, or
- by creating special terrain pieces that lie on top of existing terrain and slope upwards until they are sufficiently high to represent the height/depth of a trench; in effect forming a rampart.

Whichever method you prefer, when considering purchasing, or even making, trench terrain, you need to decide how your troops will be using the trench: will they be passing through the trench standing or crouching, and will they be using firing steps? The answers to these questions will dictate how deep your trenches must be, irrespective of whether you opt for terrain panels or individual terrain pieces.

Terrain Panels.

If you already have a terrain system, check if the same manufacturer sells a compatible trench system. Failing that, look for another trench system compatible with your existing terrain. Fortunately the majority of terrain tile systems that I’ve looked at seem to be around 2ft x 2ft, and about 40mm deep. Any slight variation in height can be solved by ‘packing’ the lower tiles a bit so they match, and handfuls of scatter material can disguise any awkward joins.

If you cannot find a trench system to ‘match’ existing tiles, then you may have to consider purchasing a complete trench system and surrounding terrain. This may not be too much of a financial disaster, because, for example, Total System Scenic (TSS) produce 2ft x 2ft x 40mm trench panels starting at £10 and a useful ‘Shelled/No Man’s land’ tile for £8. AND for added individuality, they are also willing to cut a trench network to suit your specific game requirements.

But you need to bear in mind that most manufacturers of high density polystyrene terrain tiles seem to limit their trenches to about half the depth of the tile to maintain the tile’s strength. So for a 40mm thick tile, the trench is likely to be only about 20mm deep.

Obviously, trenches did vary, some were virtually a slit in the ground, but you need to plan for all the types, or more importantly, depths, of the trenches you’re likely to need otherwise you could start off with trench tiles of one depth and then realise later that to reproduce more detailed or deeper trenches you need deeper tiles, which won’t match your initial purchases! Assuming you want your figures to be totally protected beneath the rim of the trench, then if
you’re using figures more than 20mm high including base, then the head of a standing figure will offer any sniper a tempting target indeed! And if you decide to incorporate firing steps, then the depth of your trench will increase still further. The main depth of the trench would be deep enough for troops to walk or stand, without their heads being higher than the parapet, but for shooting, troops would step up onto a firing step. To determine the optimum depth for your trench you must allow for the depth of the firing step PLUS the difference between the lower edge of the firing step and the base of the trench. For example, if you’re using 28mm figures on the popular square plastic bases you might need a trench with a total depth of 40-50mm! Add to this the necessary thickness of tile beneath the cut out area and you could be looking at a tile possibly 100mm deep! Obviously smaller scale figures will pose less of a problem and will fit in with most proprietary terrain tile systems, but always check the dimensions of the trench before purchasing.

I’m sure that most terrain tile manufacturers could create 100mm deep tiles with trench systems, but unless you’re already using terrain tiles of this thickness the trench tiles won’t match the terrain you already possess and you’ll have to purchase a bespoke set of terrain tiles that you won’t be able to easily integrate with existing tiles, if at all?

**TRENCH PIECES**

The alternative to terrain tiles is to purchase trench terrain pieces, which sit on top of existing terrain like a rampart, which then avoids the need to purchase a dedicated set of trench tiles, albeit possibly at the expense of realism, but after all, it IS only a game… isn’t it?

Having said that, there are other historical periods where the trench/rampart pieces could be used, but the same constraints allowing for depth of the ‘trench’ and fire steps still apply. Bear in mind too, that trench pieces are not necessarily cheap. In some cases you could find yourself paying as much for a single trench piece as for a complete terrain tile!

So, irrespective of which method you choose to create your trenches, make sure to calculate precisely the right depth for your trench so that your miniature figures can actually benefit from being in said trench as opposed to simply being a target! And of course trenches weren’t only dug for infantry; they formed defensive positions for artillery too, which could mean that your trench system might need to be even deeper!

**WHO MAKES TRENCHES?**

The following is a very short list of some manufacturers producing trench terrain of one sort or another with whom I’ve dealt in the past. Many manufacturers will produce terrain systems intended for use with different scales, and of course there’s nothing to stop you using terrain intended for use with 28mm figures for 20mm! There are many other companies as a brief search on the internet will confirm. Whichever company you decide to use, determine exactly what are your long term trench terrain requirements will be, and start from there.
IRONCLAD MINIATURES
www.ironcladminiatures.co.uk
Ironclad Miniatures produce trench sections in unpainted resin. Their Long straight for 28mm is 150mm long and 30mm wide with the trench itself being 30mm across, and costs £10. They also have 20mm and 25mm trench systems.

KALLISTRA
www.kallistra.co.uk
Well known for their hex based terrain originally designed for use with their 10mm scale figures, Kallistra have recently launched a 28mm trench system, based around their Hexon, hex based terrain. Each trench component is designed to sit on top of Kallistra’s standard hex panels, but they can be used separately. Panels are 100mm between the flat sides of a hex, and the trench hexes are sold in two options of finish; plain brown plastic or ready flocked. The trench hexes are priced on the basis of the number of hexes they ‘cover’, so for example a straight trench section covering 4 hexes would cost £3 unflocked, and £5 flocked.

TOTAL SYSTEM SCENIC (TSS)
wwwtotalsystemscenic.com
TSS produce 2ft x 2ft x 40mm trench panels in high density polystyrene foam, starting at £10 and a useful ‘Shelled/No Man’s land’ tile for £8 and, for added individuality, TSS is also willing to cut a trench network to suit your specific game requirements.

WARGAMES WORKSHOP
www.wargamesworkshop.co.uk
Wargames Workshop sell the Ziterdes ready-painted and flocked trench pieces in the UK. A straight trench piece 7” x 6” x 1.5” currently costs around £10.

Of course you might decide to have your terrain built by a specialist terrain builder such as:

TM TERRAIN
www.tmterrain.com
And of course, after having considered all the options you might just decide that you want to create your own trench system. Its not difficult, trust me… but it IS a lot of work, which is why there are so many companies marketing trench systems! Of course it does mean that you can create precisely what you want for your games and incorporate many elements frequently missing from ‘mass produced’ terrain. In the end, as they say, the choice is yours!