

TANKS FACT SHEET FOR ACTIVITY I



A tank on the Western Front. The cage on top was designed to help grenades bounce off.

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The idea of tanks came from developing farm vehicles that could cross difficult land easily using caterpillar tracks. They had never been used before the First World War. Have a look at some more World War I tanks [HERE](#).

Military commanders were very hostile to the idea of tanks, as they thought it would make cavalry regiments redundant. However, Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest Swinton, pushed for an agreement in 1915 to develop the tank as a new weapon, because trench warfare had made using cavalry regiments very costly, particularly because of all the mud they had to fight in. He decided the new weapon should have:

- A top speed of 4 mph on flat land
- The ability to turn sharply at top speed
- The ability to climb a 5-foot parapet
- The ability to cross an eight feet gap
- A working radius of 20 miles
- A crew of ten men with two machine guns on board and one light artillery gun.

Some modifications needed to be made but by 1916, “Big Willie” as it became known, was being tested. However, when the first model came off the factory floor, the track fell off! This continued to be a problem, and they were known for being very unreliable.

In 1916, 49 tanks were sent into battle. Although slow, they increased mobility on the Western Front and were key to aiding trench warfare.

By 1918, England and France had produced over 600 tanks with Germany just producing 20. However the Germans did find ways of destroying them and by the end of the war, the British Tank Corps had only 8 tanks left.

Tanks created in the first world war often had strange names, including Hornet, Whippet, Big Willie and Centipede. Find out more about the different types of tanks [HERE](#).