have time to implement it fully before the Germans struck. Thus a small, tired British force that manned sketchy defences and had expected only a quiet sector of the front stood between the Germans and possible victory.

NEW TACTICS

The attacks made by both the Germans and the Allies on the Western Front in 1918 were quite different to the attritional affairs of 1916, for technological developments had once again intervened to alter the modern battlefield. At the Somme and Verdun, a scant two years past, infantry had been seen as almost powerless against an entrenched enemy. However, by 1918 the infantry soldier was once again a force to be reckoned with. There were now truly portable machine guns that gave advancing infantry more firepower. In addition, infantry could now carry their own artillery in the form of hand grenades and mortars. Such weaponry enabled infantry to deal with an enemy strongpoint or machine-gun nest, rather than have their forward momentum stop while awaiting artillery assistance. Finally, the infantry of 1918 carried more exotic weaponry such as flame-throwers and Bangalore torpedoes.

The Germans are often credited with being the first to experiment with updated infantry tactics that used the strength of new technological developments. It was General Oskar von Hutier who codified the new methods, and as a result, they bear his name: Hutier tactics. To be fair, however, all sides were busy developing more modern methods of attack throughout the war. Historians call the process ‘the learning curve’. One can see ample evidence of the advance in tactics throughout the war, with the Brusilov offensive and Cambrai standing out as examples. It was, however, in the Ludendorff offensive of 1918 that the new tactics gained fame. Hutier tactics called for the German infantry to attack in bursts, rushing from cover to cover, rather than in waves. In the van of the attack were elite German storm troops. Their job was to use their firepower and speed to probe the enemy defences for weakness. Once located, the storm troops would infiltrate the weak spots and advance through to depth. Such tactics, it was hoped, would shock and dislocate the enemy defensive system. It was a far cry from the waves advancing at the Somme. The Germans were, in effect, planning to use Blitzkrieg without tanks.