

World War I

Learning Objective:
To explore the advancements of warfare that
occurred during WWI.

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Think, pair, share...

Why do you think WWI was known as 'the war to end all wars'?



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WWI was one of the biggest wars that had ever happened at the time. When it began, many people believed that it would bring about a change in leadership and the kind of thinking that started wars. Writer H.G. Wells wrote this in an article:

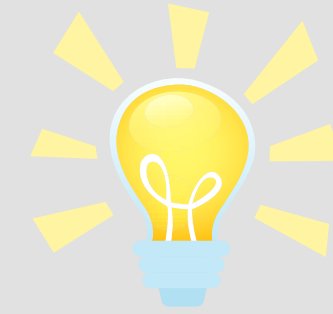
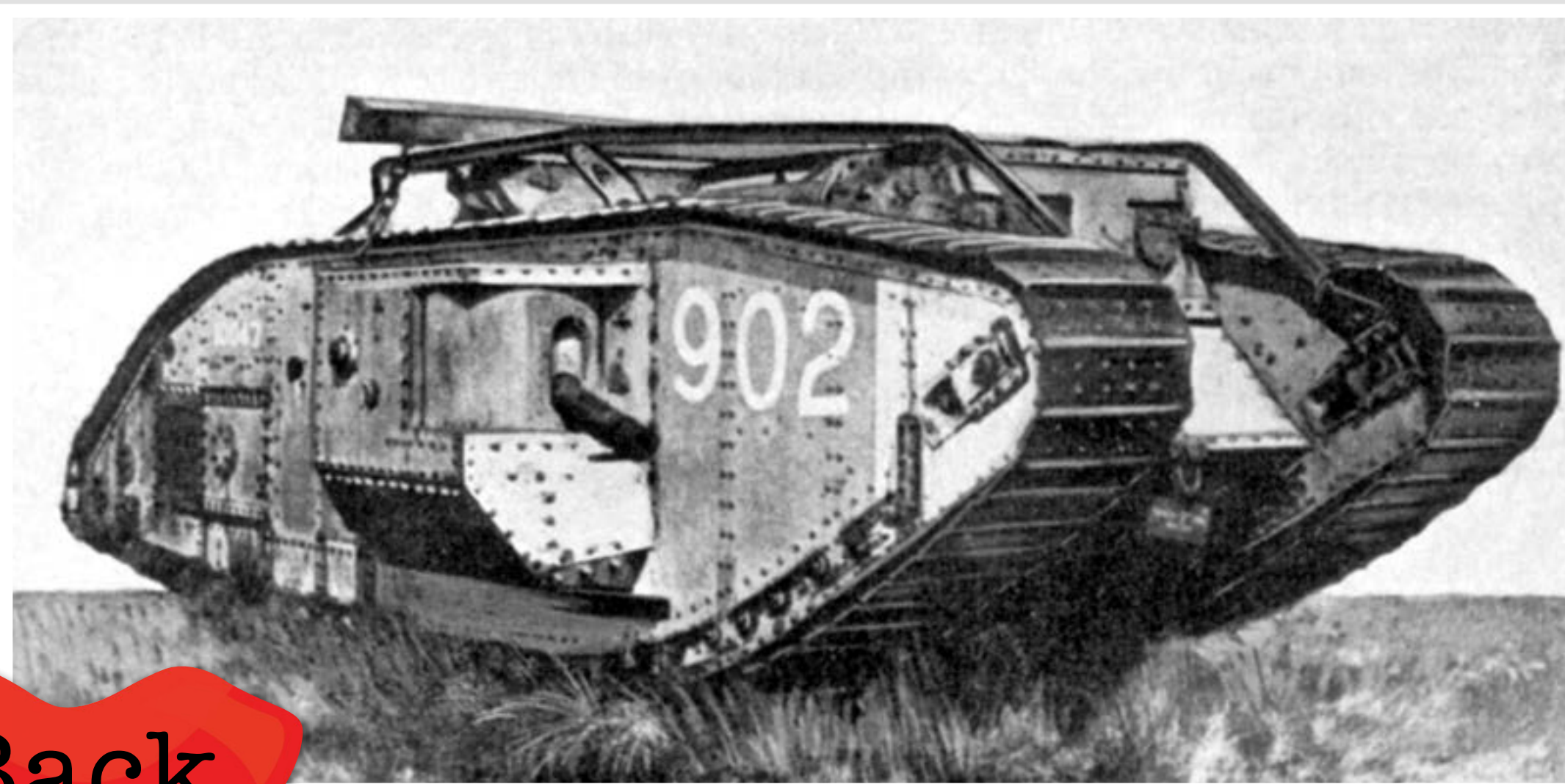


This is already the vastest war in history. It is a war not of nations, but of mankind. It is a war to exorcise a world-madness and end an age... For this is now a war for peace. [...] It shall stop this sort of thing for ever. Every soldier who fights against Germany now is a crusader against war. This, the greatest of all wars, is not just another war—it is the last war!

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WWI brought about serious changes in warfare and technologies that were developed to help each side gain advantages over their opposition.



Gaining the upper hand over the enemy was essential for the push for victory in the war. New, more effective machines, tactics and weapons were invented, introduced and used to become more powerful.

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Machine guns or ‘MGs’ were a new weapon used in WWI. They needed around four to eight men to transport and operate them and early versions were cumbersome to move.

They were used all along the Western Front, defending the trenches against enemy infantry attacks. They could fire up to 600 bullets in a minute and were incredibly dangerous. MGs were one of the main reasons that so many soldiers dreaded going ‘over the top’.

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During the war many officers began thinking about making an armoured vehicle which could work on different types of land. They wanted something that could drive through the barbed wire and thick mud in no man's land and over the trenches of the Western Front, leaving a path for infantry to follow afterwards.



The engineers that designed them pretended that their designs were for containers to hold large amounts of water. This was to fool any enemy spies. They called them **tanks**.

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Tanks were first used by the British in the Battle of the Somme in 1916. Unfortunately they weren't very reliable and broke down or got stuck. Later versions of tanks became much more reliable and could carry out their jobs effectively.

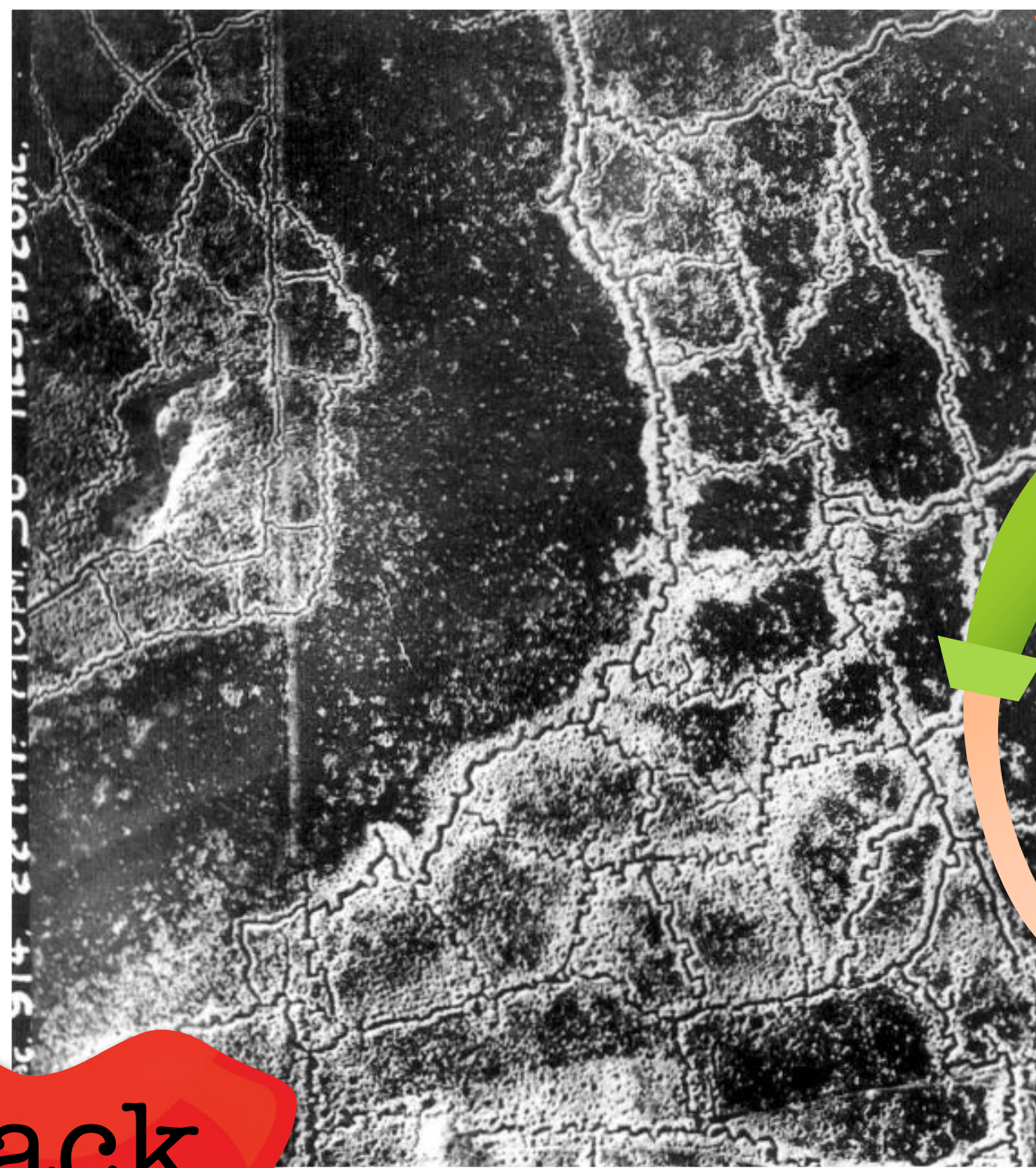


The tracks of the tanks made it easier for the vehicle to gain grip on different types of ground. The thick armour meant that bullets did little to no damage to the tank and they could advance through places that were too dangerous for infantry.



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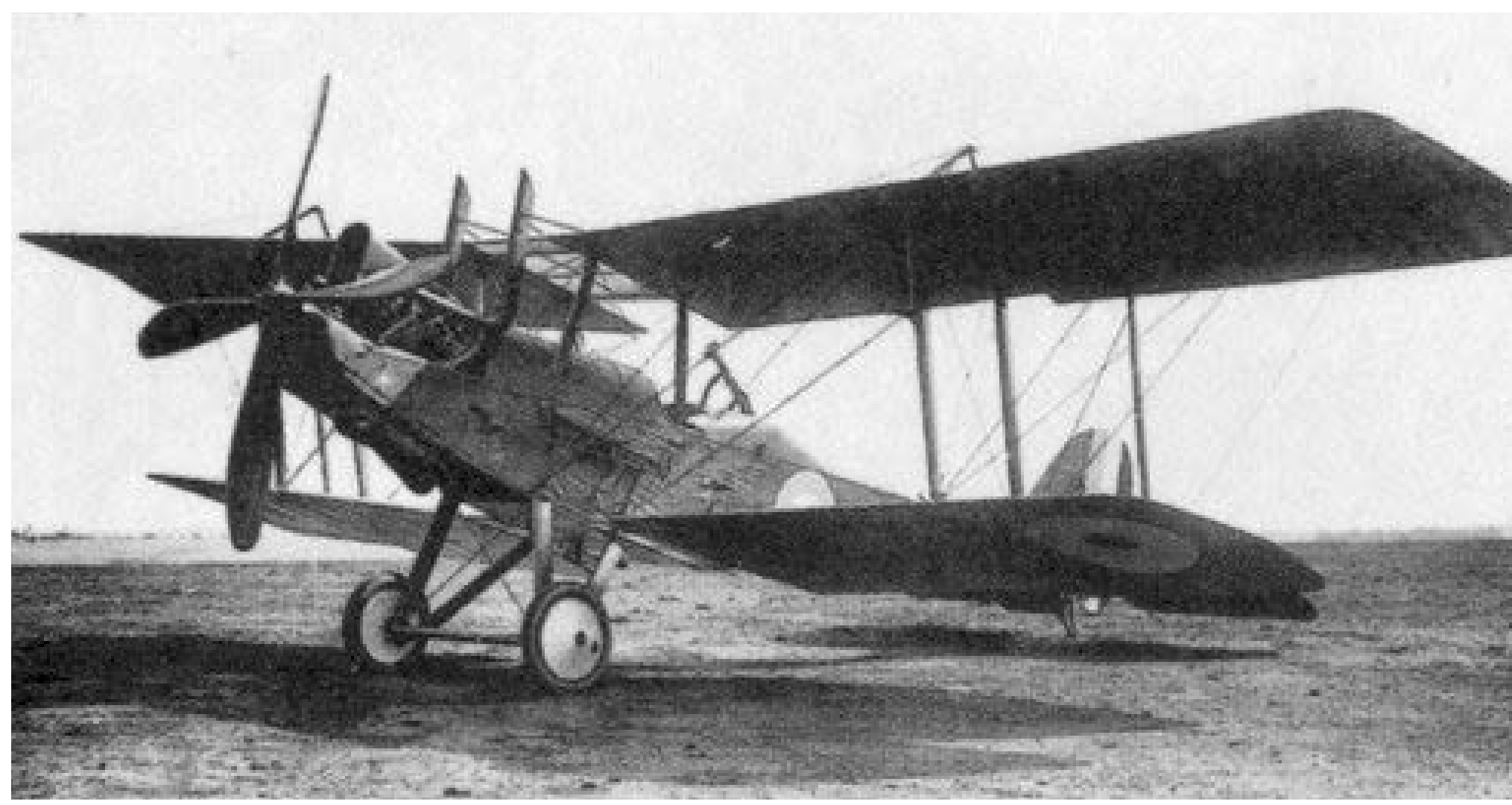
Aeroplanes were a relatively new idea at the beginning of the war. Having only been invented a few years before, officers could see the advantages for using them to capture aerial viewpoints of surrounding landscapes and enemy camps. This could tell them the layouts of enemy trenches or even the number of soldiers, weapons and vehicles they had. This was called reconnaissance.



To begin with, this was the main use for planes in the war. Then, after new technologies allowed the planes to travel further and with more agility, along with the ability to mount machine guns on the front and rear of the plane, they became formidable weapons against the enemy.

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Skilled pilots engaged enemy planes in battles called dogfights. Pilots who were able to shoot down the enemy became known as aces and became famous during and after the war.



British



French



German

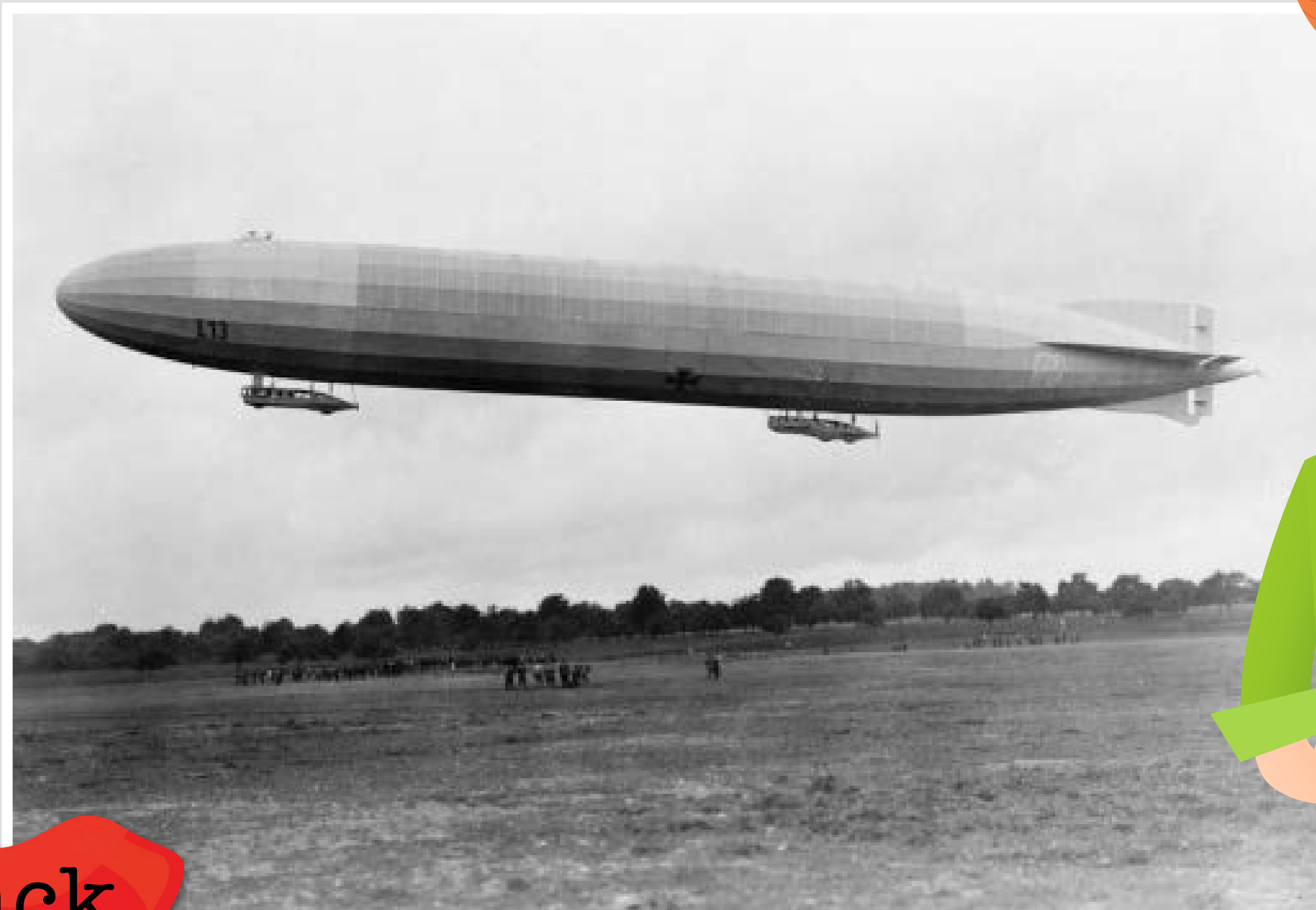
Anti-aircraft weapons were soon developed to stop reconnaissance missions. Early planes were hard to recognise, meaning they might be shot down by their allies. This led to planes having markings on the underside of their wings to identify them.

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Planes weren't the only kind of aircraft used in WWI. The German forces were fond of using **zeppelins** for some of their reconnaissance missions as well as using them to drop bombs on the enemy. Zeppelins were long tube-shaped airships which had huge bags filled with hydrogen gas. Hydrogen is lighter than air, allowing the airships to float easily.

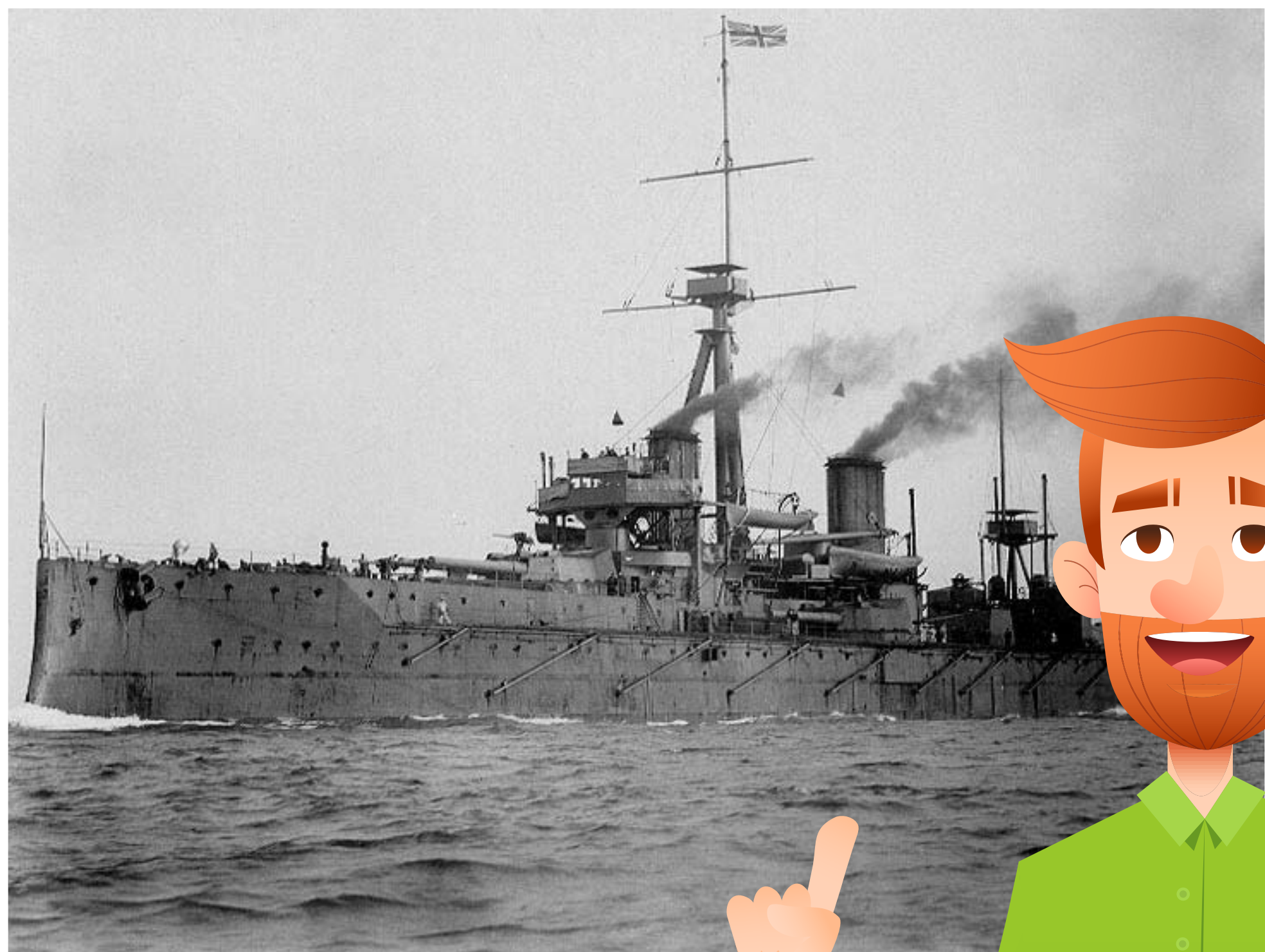


Unfortunately hydrogen is also very flammable and pilots who knew how to set it on fire could easily take down the large airships. Once this was common knowledge, the Germans used zeppelins less.

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In 1914 Britain had one of the most powerful navies in the world. Germany was building their own navy to match and even overtake Britain's naval force.

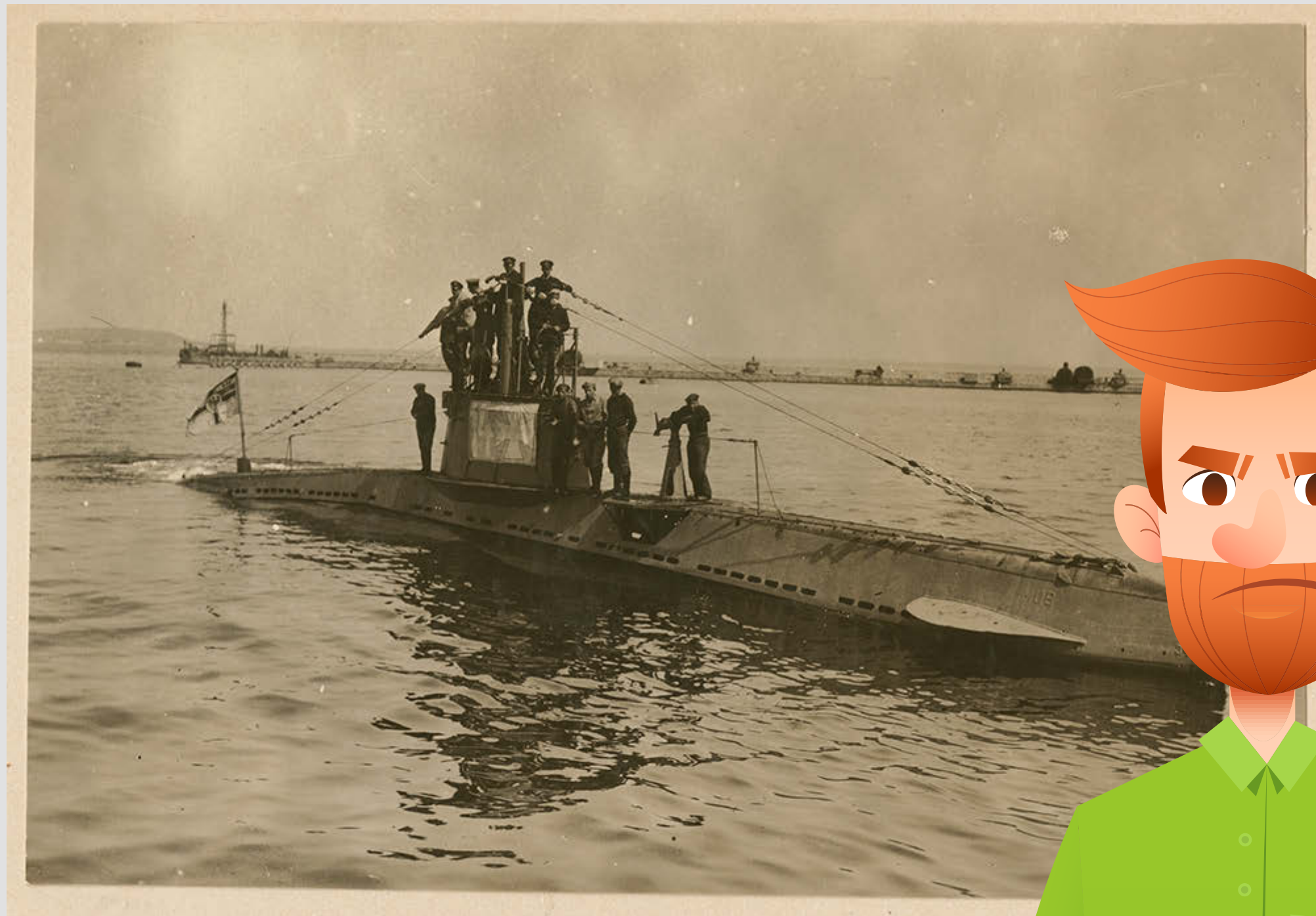


Both countries had built **dreadnought** class ships to add to their navies. These ships were incredibly powerful; equipped with more powerful guns which could reach longer ranges, they were the pride of the countries that owned them.

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Along with the growing number of battleships, the German navy were also using submarines called U-boats (or **U-boats** as the English called them).




The Germans used these to sink ships around the British Isles to stop supplies of oil and food reaching Britain. They would sneak up on the ships below the surface of the water and use torpedoes to blow holes in the sides of the ships. In response the ships equipped themselves with anti-submarine weapons and microphones that could pick up the submarines' sonar signals.

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Before the war, in 1907 a convention of different countries met and discussed the laws of war: what behaviours and acts would be illegal if a war broke out. All the countries that agreed to these laws were expected to follow them if they ever went to war.



These laws made it illegal to kill anyone who was not fighting in the war (civilians) as well as forbidding the use of chemical weapons such as harmful poisonous gas.

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However, during WWI the forces on both sides used poisonous gas attacks to gain the upper hand in small enclosed areas such as the trenches and dugouts of the Western Front.



A British gas bomb

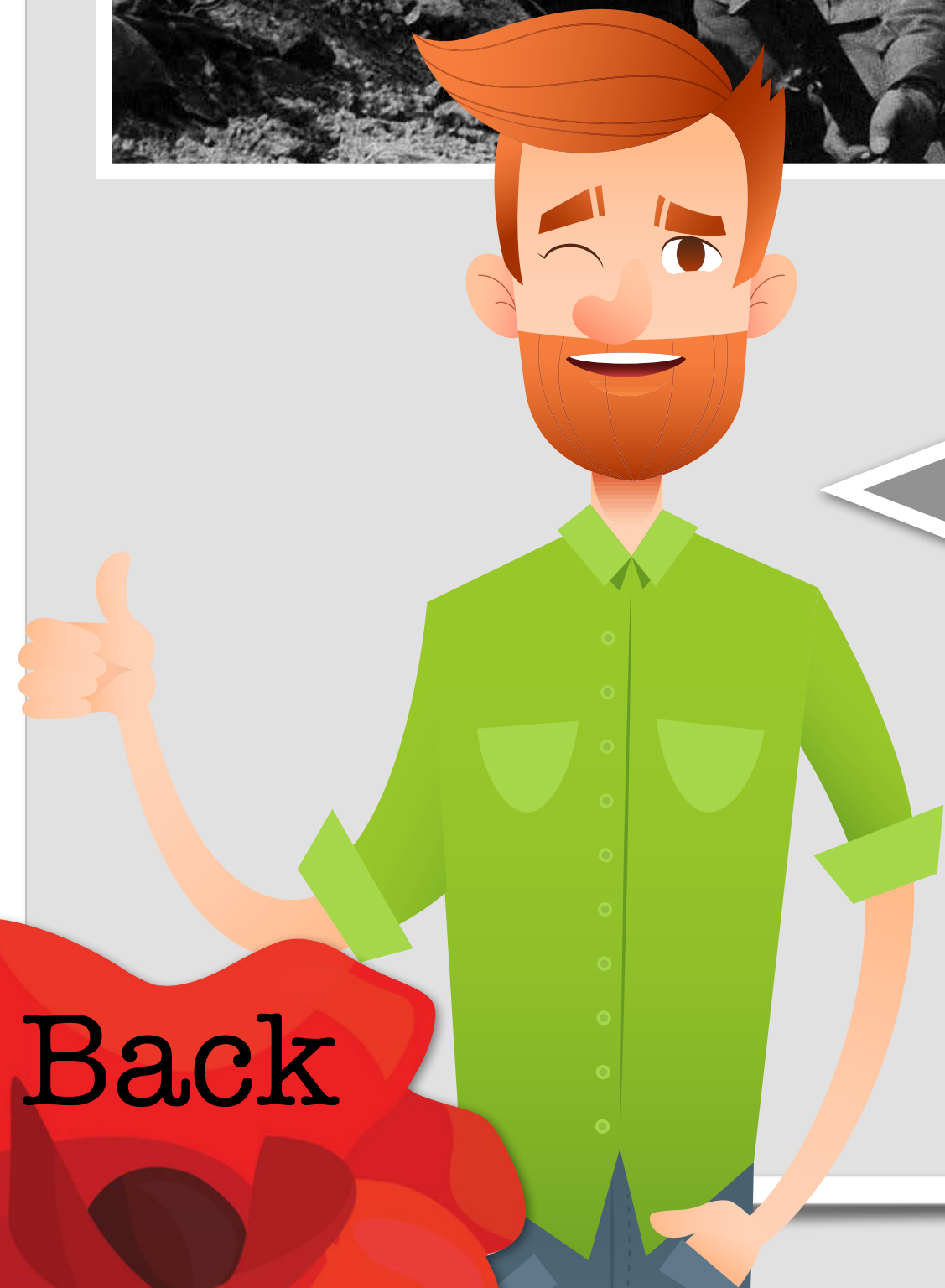
Bombs containing harmful gas were thrown as small hand grenades or fired from artillery guns. The gas could cause serious burns or damage soldiers' eyes and lungs if they were exposed to it for too long.

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The use of gas weapons meant that a counter measure had to be thought of quickly. **Gas masks** became part of a soldier's kit very quickly and were used to protect the men from the harmful effects of gas attacks.



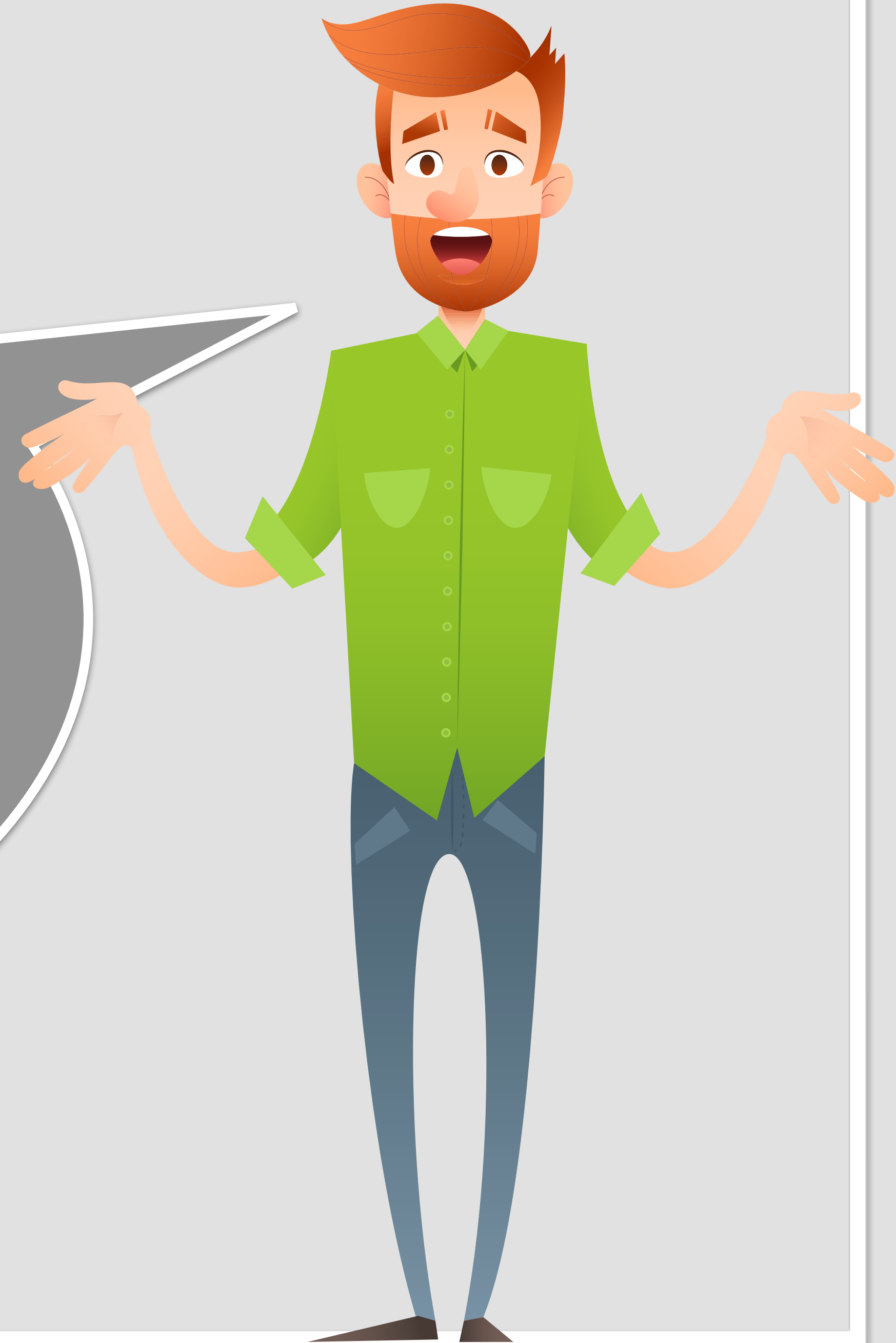
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It was important that everyone fighting in the war was protected. Special masks were developed for horses and dogs to wear.



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Which of the technologies
you've looked at today do you think
was the most significant development
of the war?
Which do you think changed the ways
in which wars were fought the
most?



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