Outdoing the Mine Throwers

Stokes gun used by British proves simple and effective in trench warfare. You drop in the shells. German "Minenwerfers" aren't in it!

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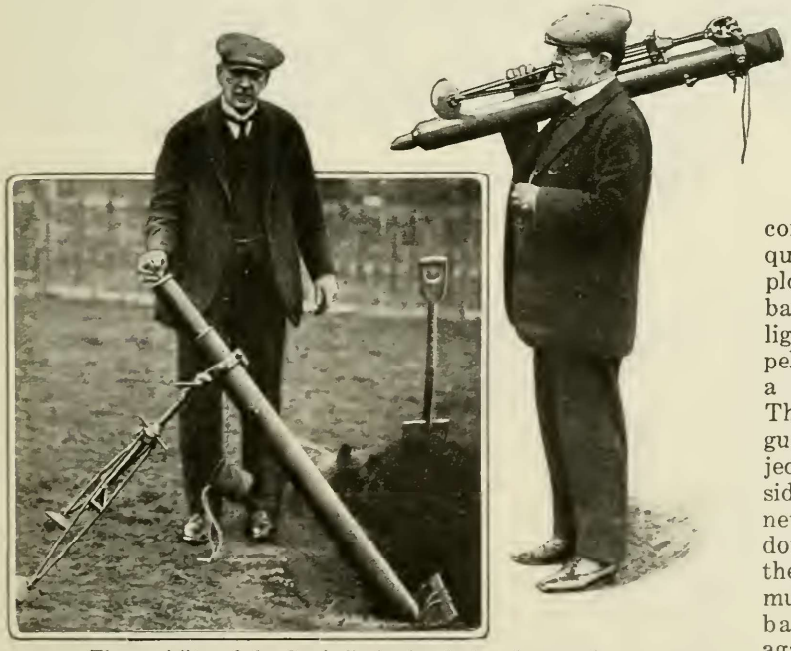
A new gun and various types of shells now used in trenches

A WEAPON with little velocity but which could heave considerable quantities of high explosive into an enemy trench, was badly needed at the beginning of the war. The Germans were the first in the field. Hans worked out little trench mortars he called *minenwerfer*. Soon the British replied with the Stokes gun. This latter is now linked with the famous Lewis machine gun, the Mills and Hale grenades, and the like, as one of the most potent inventions brought about by the war.

Trench mortars and howitzers are merely short-barreled, light-shell pitching guns used for sending shells via the indirect fire route from one trench, over Deadman's land, to another trench. High velocity would defeat its own purpose, just as would direct fire. One would drive the shell entirely too far when the gun was elevated to pitch the shell, the other would merely shoot over the top of the other trenches after the fashion of a rifle bullet. In consequence, a mortar of any sort is elevated to not less than a 45-degree angle. This causes a shell to go skyward and over toward the other fellow like a deceased cat over your alley fence. The method is simple. It is effective none the less.

Taking advantage of the fact that a mortar is always elevated at an angle of 45 degrees or more from the horizontal, Wilfred Stokes worked out a shell, consisting of a case containing a large quantity of high explosive, fitted to a base filled with a light charge of propellant powder—also a primer therefor. The bottom of the gun barrel has a projection or stud inside. So when this new shell is dropped down the barrel of the gun from the muzzle, the fall bangs the primer against this stud and sets off the gun.



The rapidity of the fire is limited only by the speed at which the gun crew can drop shells down the barrel