

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

GREAT WAR ARMOR

1916, Western Front

Steel

H. 643 mm x L. 404 mm x D. 140 mm

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This German trench armor – *sappenpanzer* –, which is part of the *Militaria* Management Unit of Angra do Heroísmo Museum, from the World War I time, anachronistically constitutes a paradigmatic example of the use of an old technology in a substantially technical and tactical distinct context.

At that time the large-scale use of automatic machine-guns completely changed the face of the war in Europe. Generally the infantry assaults on enemy positions were carried out with very large forces, so the devastating action of machine-gun fire caused them to pay off like real massacres, transforming, right after the first battle of the Marne, in September 1914, a war of movement in a war of entrenched positions.

The machine-guns, so called heavy, set in fixed positions, at numerous points in the long lines of trenches, played then a fundamental role in containing Infantry attacks. His sniper, who, unlike the rest of the garrison, could not hide behind the backrests, was necessarily exposed to the fire of small arms and the shrapnel of hand grenades and enemy artillery, so to protect him harnesses and armors were adopted.

Consisting of a steel breastplate from which several plates are suspended, also in steel, designed to protect the abdomen and genitals, armors like the one exposed were distributed to troops on the Western Front, since 1916. They were generally used with a plate front, steel, on the helmet. The abdominal and genital plates were suspended from the chest by strips of canvas, having, at their points of contact, thick rectangular felt blocks, designed to suppress the sound of the soldier's movements which, in the silence of the night, was audible from a great distance, denouncing the position of the machine gun. They were usually painted in the greyish green – *Feldgrau* – of German uniforms of the Great War.

It was also distributed to other German soldiers in need of exposure to enemy fires, such as observers or snipers of the first anti-car rifles. However, its use significantly constrains the movements, making it difficult to use a shotgun or to throw grenades. ntly constrains the movements, making it difficult to use a shotgun or to throw grenades.