

Over-the-top

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This idiom dates back to the First World War 1914-18. The war reached a 'stalemate' very early on, with both sides realising they could not keep on advancing. The only way to hold on to the land that had been captured was to dig trenches. The trenches were hundreds and miles long, and deep enough for soldiers to take shelter in, seeking to avoid enemy bullets and bombs. When the leaders of the army decided it was time to try to take more land, they would give the order to 'go over the top'. Men would literally climb over the top of the trench and run towards the enemy, dodging bullets. Thousands of men died over a few hours - going 'over-the-top' was not something anyone looked forward to.

When thousands of men returned from the trenches back to Britain the phrase entered popular discourse. Now we use it to describe something very extreme, and it is applied to things that have nothing to do with war.

'The dress she wore to her sister's wedding was a bit over-the-top, it made her look like *she* was the one getting married!'

'His reaction to meeting Beyonce was a bit over-the-top... he started crying!'

'The gifts you bought me for my birthday are lovely, but a bit over-the-top... I don't need a Playstation 5 and a gold watch!'