

# Paper 1:B - WWI 1894-1918

## Module 2: The war from 1914 - 17



### Part 2: The War from 1914 - 1917

#### 1B: 2.1

- The Schlieffen Plan: its failure,
- The Battle of Marne and its contribution to the stalemate.
- Race to the sea and the eastern front.

#### 1B: 2.2

- Trench warfare including attrition and attack;
- Military tactics and technology
- Key battles: Verdun, Somme and Passchendaele

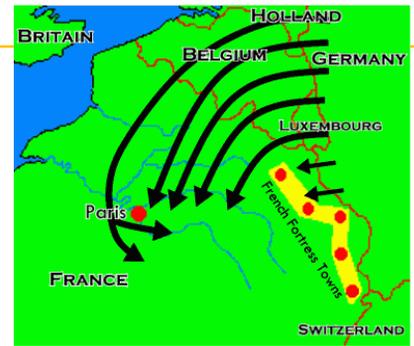
#### 1B: 2.3

- The wider war: Gallipoli
- The war at sea and air.

## 1B 2.1 The Schlieffen Plan, its failure and the Marne

### Schlieffen Plan: Where did it come from?

Created as the result of the Franco Russian Alliance, the plan was to deal with a German war on two fronts. The plan was created by Alfred Von Schlieffen who decided it would be better to attack France first and then Russia to avoid splitting the German Army. The plan assumed Russia would take weeks to mobilise so France could be defeated quickly and then Russia could be focused on after.



### Problem with the Plan:

- Assumptions were made that Russia would take 6 weeks to mobilise.
- Germany would have to attack France through Belgium which violated the Treaty of London 1839 which could bring Britain into the conflict.
- It was the only plan Germany put into place.
- The plan was changed by Moltke who reduced the numbers of men the initial plan included.

### The failure of the plan.

- The plan relied on speed to attack and defeat Belgium quickly but the Belgium army slowed down the German advance, especially at Liege, which delayed the plan by 4 or 5 days.
- Britain sent the BEF (British Expeditionary Force) to assist the Belgium troops who were well trained and despite being smaller than the Germans delayed the plan and forced the Germans to abandon the sweep around Paris.
- Russia mobilised in just 10 days rather than the 6 weeks initially planned forcing Germany to send troops to the east sooner than they wanted.

### The Battle of the Marne

Germany had had no choice but to turn away from Paris early causing them to reach the River Marne just 40km outside of Paris. There were fewer troops by this time too giving Britain and France the opportunity to attack.

- Britain and France attacked on September 6 from the West forcing the Germans to stop their advance to meet them.
- This created a gap in the German army which the allied troops could take advantage of.
- The push by Britain and France forced the Germans back to the River Aisne.
- More than 2 million men were involved in this battle and more than half a million were injured or killed in less than one week of fighting.
- It was clear Germany would not be able to advance so began to dig trenches which they added machine guns and barbed wire to fortify their position. This signified the end to the war of movement for now.

### Race to the Sea

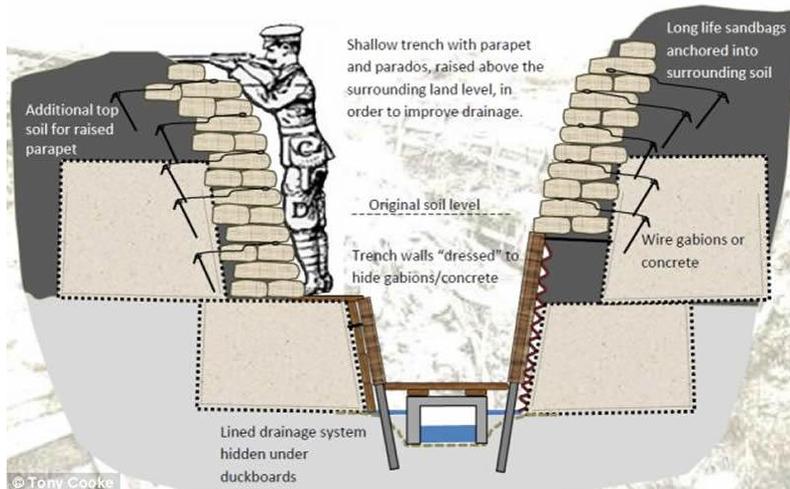
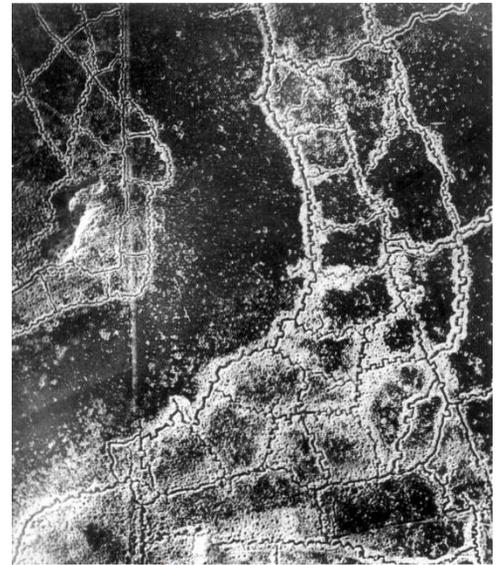
By September 1914 both sides were developing trenches and each tried to get around the back of the other. There were several battles during this time but the result was the development of a trench system that spanned 400 miles and the positions hardly moved for the next 4 years. A stalemate had begun.

### War in the East

The Russian Army of over 1 million men had marched into German territory but were badly equipped. Under the leadership of Hindenburg and Ludendorff the Germans managed to make gains back. The Russians had greater success against Austria forcing several retreats and over a few months the Eastern Front developed spanning nearly 1000 miles.

# Trench Warfare

- The trenches began from holes the soldiers dug to protect themselves from artillery and machine gun fire.
- These holes were extended and fortified with barbed wire and sandbags for protection.
- The land between two opposing trenches was called no-mans land.
- Trenches were designed in a zigzag pattern to disperse the explosions to reduce the loss of men.
- Both sides trenches followed a similar structure of a front line trench, support and reserve trenches all connected by communication trenches.
- Often trenches were only 50 to 200 metres apart.
- The German trenches were often better built as the Germans realised far sooner than the British and French the war of movement had stopped so their trenches were deeper and more fortified. German dug outs could be up to 10 metres below the ground with electricity and beds. The British and French developed their trenches much later.

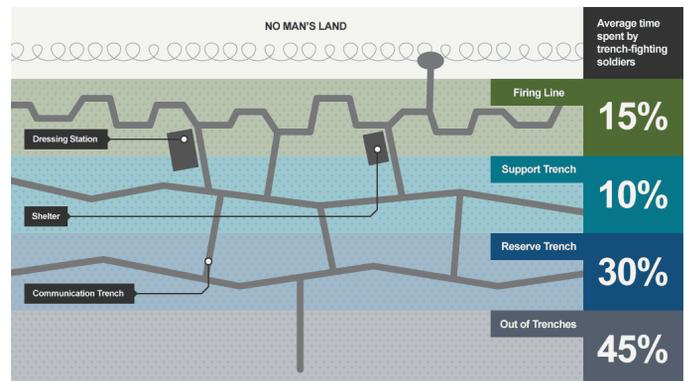


- The general system of attack in the trenches followed the same plan:
- 1. Artillery would strike the enemy position to smash the opposing system and hopefully blow holes in the barbed wire.
- 2. Soldiers then go over the top by climbing out of the trench and then head across no-mans land.
- 3. The soldiers enter the enemy trenches and shoot or fight and soldiers not killed by the artillery.
- This general plan very rarely worked as the shells did not often destroy the barbed wire and the German trenches especially were strong due to being reinforced with concrete.

- Attrition warfare is what the First World War became.
- Attrition means to wear away.
- In most cases leaders of both sides believed if they could kill more of their opponents than the losses they suffered then they would win.
- This view meant that the side with the most resources (manpower, equipment etc) would most likely win.
- Occasional breakthroughs did happen along the front lines but the retreating forces simply withdrew to reserve trenches then within a matter of weeks or occasionally months they would then counter attack to re-occupy the original trench.

## Life in the trenches

- The trenches were probably the dirtiest, unhealthiest and most frightening places in the world.
- Soldiers lived a rather boring daily life when there were no battles to be fought.
- The men in the front line trenches rotated their duties so one third of the men were on sentry duty, one third on repair duty and collecting supplies and the other third would rest.
- In a typical month soldiers may serve up to 4 days in the front line trench, four days in the support trench, 8 days in the reserve trenches and then the remainder of the time behind the lines in towns or villages.
- Soldiers on both sides performed the 'stand to' before sunlight which was the highest state of alert in readiness for an enemy attack.
- Some soldiers tried to cope with the tedium of the trenches by using humour. The Wipers Times is a good example of a collection of stories and jokes which the soldiers printed using the old printing press found in Ypres.
- There were lots of medical conditions in the trenches with disease accounting for almost a third of British casualties.
- One particular condition was trench foot which was the result of weeks of cold wet feet causing the foot to swell and sores to develop.



- Shell Shock was common and was caused by the noise and constant fear of death.
- Soldiers found it impossible to keep clean and almost everyone was infested with lice. There were no toilets and rats infested the trenches too.
- Food was basic: stew, bread and hard biscuits. Water tasted of chlorine and some soldier had to boil water from shell holes.
- Around 12 million letters arrived in the trenches every week from home. Parcels could contain toiletries and other gifts from people back home.
- Soldiers could also send letters home but often did not discuss the horrors for fears of upsetting loved ones and knowing their letters were read by commanding officers first who would censor the content.

# The weapons of trench warfare

<h2>Artillery</h2>		<p>Artillery were the large guns fired over long range to soften the enemy. Artillery was responsible for about 60% of all wounds and before a major assault artillery could be used hours or days before a major attack. Artillery could be loaded with gas, high explosive or shrapnel shells.</p>
<h2>Machine Guns</h2>		<p>Machine guns were well used during the war with devastating effect. They could fire 10 bullets per second and the French reported 200,000 casualties in the first 2 weeks of the war, mostly down to machine gun fire. One machine gun was the equivalent to about 100 rifles.</p>
<h2>Gas</h2>		<p>Gas was a weapon of terror. First used by Germany in 1915 it opened up a 6km gap in the French lines but there were not enough Germans to hold the opening. After that gas was used by all sides and using different types but it was not as deadly as other weapons.</p>
<h2>Rifles and bayonets</h2>		<p>The rifle was the standard weapon used by the soldiers. The rifles were accurate up to about 600 metres and a soldier could fire between 15 and 20 rounds per minute. A 40 centimetre bayonet knife was attached to the end which could be used in close range combat, such as inside the trenches.</p>
<h2>Grenades</h2>	<p>U.S. War Office -1919-</p> <p>American Hand Grenades of WWI</p> 	<p>There were a total of 15 WW1 hand grenades in use between 1914 to 1918. these were medium range weapons designed to slow attacking forces or damage enemy trenches at close range.</p>
<h2>Flamethrowers</h2>		<p>Flamethrowers were used to clear out small areas like dugouts. If flamethrower units were spotted these would be the first to be fired upon by soldiers.</p>
<h2>Tanks</h2>		<p>First used by the British in 1916 they could roll over the battlefield and crush barbed wire. Germany only produced 20 tanks as they were unreliable and slow. Britain produced 2636 tanks and France 3870.</p>

## Key battles of WW1 - Verdun

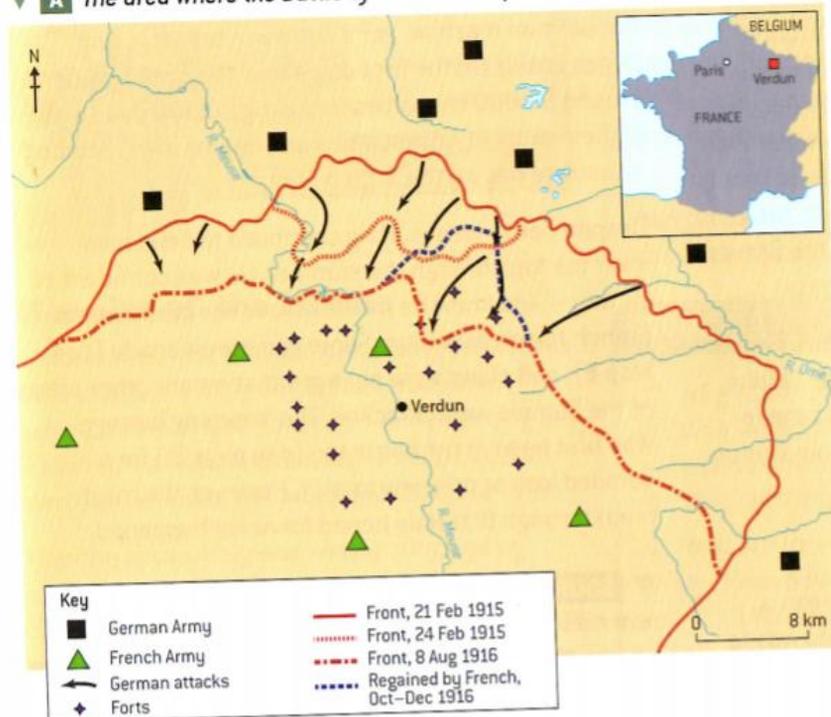
The battle of Verdun was the longest battle of the First World War. It took place in North eastern France as French troops defended against major German attack. The Germans trust was at Verdun because it was of special historic significance to France. The den was considered the strongest fortification in France so the Germans wanted to defeat it to defeat French pride. The German attack began on the 21st of February 1916 with an artillery bombardment on the north side of Verdun. On the first day at more than 2,000,000 high explosive shells were fired by 1400 guns. On the 2nd day of the attack the French retreated to their reserve trenches and it looked as if Verdun was going to fall.

The French army were determined not to let the Germans beat them at Verdun But realised the defence of Verdun would result in a lot of French casualties. The French were determined to inflict as much damage on the Germans as possible while holding Verdun. Plans were put in place to make sure enough food and ammunition could get to the soldiers in Verdun and over the next 5 months tons of supplies and thousands of soldiers were sent to Verdun along a single road.

The German attack was initially halted in February but then on the 6th of March a new German attack saw them advance a further 3 kilometres but then in April the French army began to counter attack this continued over the next few months.

Further fighting in Verdun continued throughout the summer and early autumn but the size of the German attack was reduced on the Western Front because of the battle of the Somme which the German sent troops to reinforce. Also the Germans were being attacked by the Russians on the eastern front which meant that German troops were needed there as well. This allowed the French at Verdun to gain back several kilometres from the Germans.

▼ A The area where the Battle of Verdun took place



By the time the battle was over and the German called off the attack they had used over 23,000,000 shells destroying Verdun in the process and killing about 315,000 French soldiers.

The Germans had lost around 280,000 soldiers.

Despite losing more men the French saw themselves as the victors at Verdun yet neither side had made any real military gains.

When the war was over 170 square kilometres surrounding Verdun were declared a red zone because of the number of unexploded bombs in the ground also 9 villages were destroyed around Verdun which have never been rebuilt and left as memorials at known as the village is that died for France.

## Key battles of WW1 - Somme

The battle of the Somme was the largest battle of the First World War taking place between the 1st of July and the 18th of November 1916. It was fought near the River Somme in northern France by both armies of France and Britain against the Germans. More than 3 million men were involved in the battle over the course and around 1,000,000 were wounded, killed or missing making it one of the bloodiest battles ever to have taken place in history.

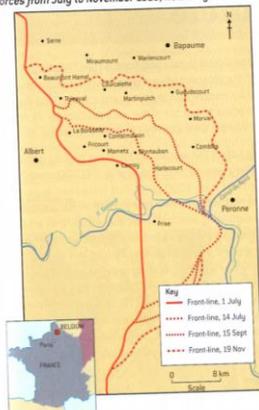
Since the summer of 1915 both Britain and France had been planning to coordinate an attack in hope of breaking the stalemate and pushing Germany back. The reason the Somme was chosen as a battle site is because that was where British and French lines met together. The British were led by general Sir Douglas Haig and the majority of the British forces involved were the volunteer army who had been signing up to the war since 1914.

When the Germans attacked at Verdun the British decided to attack at the Somme to try and relieve some of the pressure on the French troops. The battle began by a huge artillery bombardment of the German trenches. The idea was to destroy their front lines allowing attacking soldiers to walk across no man's land into German held territory. More than one and a half million shells were fired in 8 days but the Germans knew that the attack was coming because their spotter planes had seen saluted artillery moving into position. The Germans had secretly pulled back from their front lines and taken shelter in concrete dugouts. The Germans had stretched barbed wire in a 30 metre wide band in front of their trenches and the French and British else had simply lifted the wire and dropped it back down and even more tangled mess.

As soon as the shelling ended the British troops got into position to attack the German lines but when the shelling also stopped the Germans moved into position to counter attack. The British were told they would be virtually no opposition to their attack however the Germans opened their machine guns cutting down the attacking forces easily leading to 60,000 casualties on the first day alone.

Despite these heavy losses general Haig continued to send men over the top throughout the summer as he was confident of victory and he knew he had to relieve the pressure on the French forces at Verdun. Some gains were made during this battle and a new tactic the creeping barrage was developed during this time but the major breakthrough that Haig hoped for never happened.

▼ The advance of the British and French forces from July to November 1916, near Belgium



▼ SOURCE D The body of a German telephone operator near his dugout at the Somme, 1916



In November of 1916 the attacks were stopped. British and French troops had gained a strip of land about 25 kilometres long and 6 kilometres wide and they'd lost around 620,000 men the Germans had lost about half a million men.

After the battle general Haig was criticised by politicians, soldiers and newspapers and he was nicknamed the butcher of the Somme. There has been debate whether he deserves this title he certainly mastered the effectiveness of the eight day bombardment continued to send men into battle for months on end but his actions must be put into context of the time none of the military leaders had any experience of trench warfare on this scale. Haig himself argued that the battle of the Somme did achieve its main aim which was alleviating pressure on the French at Verdun saving hundreds of thousands of French lives and killing hundreds of thousands of German troops therefore weakening the German army.

## Key battles of WW1 - Passchendaele

The soldiers fighting in the battle of Passchendaele in 1917 experienced some of the worst conditions in the entire of the war. The battle took place from July to November of 1917. It was fought between troops from Britain its empire against Germany for controlling the Hills S and east of the Belgian city of Ypres.

In the spring of 1917 several attacks were planned by both French and Britain in an attempt to breakthrough the German lines the results were mixed. On the 9th of April the British managed to push the Germans back at Aris and British Empire forces including Canadian troops managed to capture Vimy Ridge however the German soon brought back up reserves and the British advanced stopped.

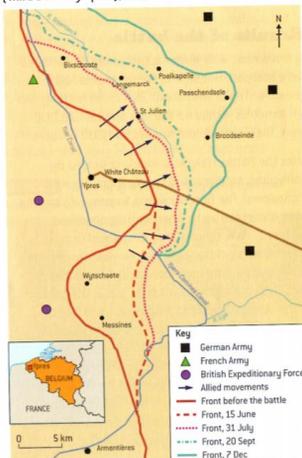
The French suffered a mutant within the army after the failure of the Nivelle offensive. Half of the entire army refused to follow orders and this was only stopped when hundreds of mutinies were sentenced to death and the French army were given improved food rations preventing mutiny from continuing.

While this was going on the British attacked once more at Messines. This attack was successful because the British had dug trenches and tunnels underneath the German lines laying millions of tonnes of high explosives, on the 7th of June 1917 they were detonated. this explosion completely destroyed the Hill opening the German lines and the British soldiers were able to push the Germans back.

Encouraged by this victory general Haig ordered the army to advance further towards the Belgian town of Ypres. Haig was convinced he could achieve a quick breakthrough here and advanced enough to capture the Belgian pots which were been used by the Germans as submarine bases .A further reason had thought this was a good time to attack was America just joined the war and we were being reinforced by American troops but there were also suspicions that Russia was about to pull out of the war as well.

The attack on Ypres started on the 18th of July with an artillery bumboat of four and a half million shells launching from 3000 guns this went on for 10 days. The explosion from the shelled coupled with the heaviest rainfall in 30 years turned the entire area into a quagmire of sticky mud. when the troops began their attack they have to get over the mud by laying boards down and walking on those and a soldier slipped off the boards they could drown in the mood weighed down by their equipment. As the battle went on and people died during the battle their bodies began to rot in the mud began to stink.

▼ **H** Advances made at the Battle of Passchendaele (Third Battle of Ypres), 1917



▼ **SOURCE** An aerial view of the village of Passchendaele before and after the Third Battle of Ypres, 1917



Within the 1st week of this battle the British lost 30,000 men the artillery bombardment had also failed to destroy the German positions. The British continued to attack again and again and by October the fighting had reached the village of Passchendaele about 8 kilometres from the starting point. The village was captured in November of 1917 and then because the conditions were so bad on the battlefield the attacks were called off.

in total 400,000 soldiers in the British in its empire were killed and injured. The Germans lost over 300,000 soldiers. General Haig's reputation was further discredited after the battle.

One of general heads officers commented "my God did we really send men to fight in that?"