

World War I [Revision Cascade]

Failure of the Schlieffen Plan	Schlieffen Plan (1906)	The German Schlieffen Plan was too ambitious – 90% of the German army was to swing down through Belgium to take out France in 42 days
	Belgium (Aug 1914)	August 1914: the Germans took longer to conquer Belgium than they expected
	Mons (23 Aug 1914)	23 August 1914: the British Expeditionary Force held them up at Mons
	Moltke's change of plan (28 Aug 1914)	German Gen Moltke had to send 100,000 troops to fight the Russians, who mobilised faster than expected; he lost confidence and diverted his forces south
	Marne (6–10 Sep 1914)	The French advanced into the gap this created – the exhausted Germans were stopped at the Battle of the Marne
Schlieffen Plan: Significance	It drew Germany into the War	It made the Germany over-confident opinion that they could win a war against a numerically superior enemy.
	It lost Germany the War	It brought France and Britain into the war, and its failure led to the eventual defeat and exhaustion of Germany.
	It discredited Germany	It showed them as the aggressors, led and ruled by over-confident militarists, the cause of the War, the attackers of a neutral country, and the perpetrators of <i>Schrecklichkeit</i> in Belgium.
	Stalemate and the war of attrition	After its failure, the war of movement ended, and both sides dug in for what was to turn out to be a four-year war of attrition
	The enduring myth	The myth of an annihilating encircling plan has influenced Nazi and NATO strategists.
Schlieffen Plan: Historiography	The Schlieffen School	Mainly German army staff, notably General Hermann von Kuhl (in 1920) – they blamed Moltke for the failure of the Plan.
	Gerhard Ritter (1956)	Saw it as a blind surrender of German politicians to militarism, “an over-daring, gamble whose success depended on many lucky accidents.”
	Dennis Showalter (1991)	“A military myth requiring everything to go impossibly right to have a real chance of succeeding”.
	Terence Zuber (2002)	Declared that Schlieffen’s 1905 Memorandum was not a plan of attack, but a pitch for money. The Schlieffen School had “invented the Schlieffen plan in order to protect their reputation”.
	Michael Neiberg (2022)	Not a ‘myth’ but very over-ambitious.

The race for the sea: facts	Battle of the Aisne (13 Sep)	After the Marne (Sep 1914) the Germans retreated, then they turned, dug trenches and held their ground. They could not be driven out – trench warfare had begun
	The 'race for the sea'	First, the two sides tried to outflank each other, digging trenches as they went; the 'race' ended when the two sides had dug a trench-line which reached the sea
	First Battle of Ypres (19 Oct–22 Nov 1914)	October 1914: the First Battle of Ypres (50,000 British casualties, 100,000 German)
	Trenches from the Channel to Switzerland	By November 1914, both sides faced each other across 'No Man's Land' between two lines of trenches stretching from the Channel to Switzerland
	Stalemate	For the next four years, the war on the western front was more-or-less deadlocked in stalemate
The war of stalemate: battles	Loos (1915)	At first, the British commander Haig attempted to break through the enemy trenches; the British suffered 50,000 casualties but made no progress
	Verdun (Feb–Nov 1916)	The Germans developed the idea of 'position warfare' (holding your position and trying to wear down the enemy); 280,000 Germans and 315,000 French died
	The Somme (Jul–Nov 1916)	Casualties: 415,000 British, 195,000 French, 600,000 German
	Passchendaele (Jul–Nov 1917)	Casualties: 325,000 Allied, 260,000 German
	Operation Michael (21 Mar 1918)	The trench war of attrition continued until the Germans developed their 'infiltration' tactics in 1918
Causes of the Stalemate after 1914	Strategies for open warfare failed	The French Plan 17 and the German Schlieffen Plan – and the subsequent attempts to outflank the enemy in the 'Race to the Sea' – failed with unsustainable losses
	Weapons' technologies had made the open battlefield deadly	Esp. artillery and the machine gun
	Armies struggled to co-ordinate infantry and artillery	Artillery technology at the start of the war was not accurate enough to support a moving attack with a rolling barrage, and aerial reconnaissance to identify targets was in its infancy.
	Difficulties of command and control of the huge armies	The armies were huge - millions of men - and telephone technology wasn't equal to the task, and wireless messages <i>en clair</i> could be intercepted
	Supply problems	Infantry had to advance on foot, artillery was pulled by horses, but defenders could rush men and supplies to the Front by train.

The trench system: facts	Layout	Front and support trenches; communication trenches (saps); brigade HQ and artillery 1-2 miles behind; then reserves and cavalry; then supplies and Division HQ
	Bays	Trenches were built in a zigzag to stop the enemy capturing a section and firing a machine gun down the trench
	Construction	Parapet; firestep; duckboards; sandbags
	No Man's Land	Craters; barbed wire
	Protection	Officers' dug-out; funk holes
Trench warfare facts	Routine	3 days on the front line (lightly garrisoned); a week in the reserve trench; 2 weeks' R&R
	Reconnaissance raids	'Booty' (letters; plans); prisoners to interrogate
	Artillery bombardment	Shells; shrapnel; mines
	Over the top	Whistle, over the top (OTT), run, hand grenades, enfilading fire (crossfire)
	"Bite and hold"	'Bite and hold' – but the Germans always immediately counterattacked
Positives of trench life: facts	Adventure	Travel, adventure and comradeship
	Bravery	Patriotism, bravery and respect for their officers (who went over the top with them); R&R and leave (a 'Blighty one' got you sent back home)
	Fun	French girls ('Inky-pinky parlez-vous'); letters from home; hampers and luxuries; humour (the Wipers Times); concerts; songs; sport
	Food	Rations were generally good; working-class soldiers put on weight
	Stoicism	Many soldiers took even the worst philosophically: 'not a sad face, not a word of complaint'

Horrors of trench warfare: facts	Vermin and disease	Lice (chats); rats; mud; rain and cold; trench foot; gangrene
	Death and fear	Dead and wounded; rotting bodies, smell; shell-shock; gas; fear
	Absconding and executions	346 executions for cowardice or absconding; firing squad
	'Fatigues' and fatigue	'Fatigues' (latrines, pumps, digging trenches, burying dead); patrolling (dangerous); marching
	Owen and Sassoon	War poets such as Owen and Sassoon stressed the futility and horror of the war
Gallipoli: causes	To break the stalemate on the Western Front	A breakthrough would open a back door to attack Germany, and draw German resources away from the Western Front.
	Winston Churchill	Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, pressed very hard for a 'second front'
	Russia was losing badly to the Germans on the Eastern Front	Capturing the Straits from the Mediterranean into the Black Sea would allow the Allies to supply Russia.
	Turkey was 'the weak man of Europe'	It had been driven out of the Balkans in 1912 and the British had easily defeated it in [what we now call Iraq] in 1914. The British expected an easy win which would take out Germany's ally.
	To threaten Austria Hungary	Serbia had defeated the Austro-Hungarian army in August 1914, and a successful attack through the Balkans might subsequently take Austria-Hungary out of the war.
Gallipoli: Events	Naval attempt to sail into the Straits, March 1915	Failed 2 French and 2 British ships sunk, and HMS Inflexible severely damaged.
	MEF, 25 April 1915	The ANZACs landed at Gaba Tepe, the British & French on Cape Helles. They suffered heavy casualties just landing and barely established a foothold.
	Sulva Bay, July 1915	Six new divisions were sent to Gallipoli, but third landing at Sulva Bay failed to make any progress.
	Evacuation. December 1915	The defeat of Serbia in November wrecked any hope of a campaign against Austria-Hungary. Hamilton was replaced by Sir Charles Monroe, who advised evacuation
	Casualties	115,000 Casualties – as costly and as stalemated as the Western Front

Gallipoli: Why did it fail?	The Straits were heavily mined and defended	Allied minesweepers were actually trawlers manned by civilians
	Turkish defence	The British underestimated the Turks, who were led by Mustafa Kemal, had German advisers, and copied German tactics from the Western Front.
	Allied failings	'Second fiddle' to the Western Front; inexperienced troops and commanders; financing and supply problems; poor on-the-ground reconnaissance/intelligence
	Dreadful conditions	Heat and lack of water, and lack of space to bury waste or the dead caused dysentery, and the MEF struggled to hold their position, never mind advance.
	Bulgaria	In October Bulgaria joined the war, giving Germany a direct rail link to Constantinople, and resulting in defeat of Serbia.
Gallipoli: Consequences	Second front failed	It was the end of talk of a second front, and proved the need for a deadly war of attrition.
	Defeat of Serbia	By encouraging Bulgaria to join Germany and Turkey, it led to the defeat of Serbia, and failed to support Russia.
	Defeat for the British Empire	Churchill was dismissed and the Liberal government collapsed, to be replaced by a much more war-focused coalition government.
	ANZACs	It dented Australian and New Zealand confidence in Britain, and was part of the beginning of the end of the British Empire.
	Turkish nationalism	In Turkey, the campaign created national pride and cemented Kemal's reputation ... which would lead eventually to the establishment of the Turkish Republic with Kemal as its first leader.
Verdun: Why?	Attrition	If we believe Falkenhayn's 1920 claims, he invented the idea of attrition warfare
	The centre of France's defence system	A complex of French forts which they hoped that they might capture it with few losses, but then destroy the French forces which tried to retake it.
	A 'salient'	So the German artillery could fire on it from three sides, but all the counter-attacking French forces would be concentrated in the one corridor
	Accessible	Close to German railway lines, and the German 5th Army had captured the main French railway line into the area – so it would be difficult for the French to supply their armies
	Weakened	Joffre had been withdrawing men and equipment and sending them into the trench line; Fort Douaumont was defended by just 56 men.

Verdun: facts	21-24 February 1916	Operation Gericht took the French by surprise and made gains on the east bank of the River Meuse ... but NOT the heights overlooking Verdun
	25 February	Joffre was replaced by Pétain, but on 25 February the Germans captured Douaumont.
	7 June	Further German attacks captured more of the area, including Fort Vaux (7 June). Pétain advised withdrawing but was ordered to hold at all costs.
	June-July	The Russian General Brusilov attacked Austria-Hungary/ the British attacked on the Somme; the Germans were forced to transfer men and artillery away from Verdun. German attacks ceased.
	21 October	French General Charles Mangin recaptured Douaumont on 24 October and Vaux on 2 November.
Verdun: Why did the Germans fail?	Eastern Heights	The Germans failed to capture the eastern heights, so could not shell the counter-attacking French from above.
	Abandoned the Plan	Instead of letting the French counter-attack, the German 5 th Army kept attacking.
	Pétain's brilliant defence	... including motorised transport, the Noria system of resting the troops, and the development of the 'creeping barrage'.
	Prestige	The French sent thousands to their death on the <i>Voie Sacrée</i>
	The historian Alistair Horne (1962) blamed Falkenhayn	Horne blamed Falkenhayn's "indecisiveness [and] almost pathological secretiveness"
Verdun: Results	The mythologised battle	But did not destroy either army, though Hindenburg declared it had exhausted the German soldiers.
	The start of the war of attrition?	No: commanders on both sides kept hoping for a breakthrough
	The start of modern warfare	Motorised transport, control of the skies, flame-throwers, the creeping barrage – <i>Materialschlacht</i> (industrialised warfare)
	Battle of the Somme	One of the reasons for the Battle of the Somme was to relieve the pressure on the French at Verdun
	Verdun School	It convinced French generals (esp. Nivelle) of the value of attack – with disastrous results at the battle of the Aisne.

Verdun: historiography	Resonance	For the French it was the symbol of resistance; it convinced the Nazis of the need for a warrior-caste
	The Christmas Memorandum	It has been proved that Falkenhayn invented the Christmas memorandum, but historians disagree whether he invented the idea of attrition.
	Alistair Horne's <i>Price of Glory</i> (1962)	Put the suffering of the soldiers at the centre of the narrative
	Paul Jankowski (2014)	The battle ceased to be about winning a war, and came to be about prestige
	Michael Bourlet (2023)	"The war of movement in a pocket handkerchief" / only about attrition when attacks failed/ a 'transitional' battle in between 1914-15 and later hyperbattles.
Battle of the Somme: facts	Fought to help the French	It was fought to relieve the pressure on the French (who were fighting the Battle of Verdun)
	Artillery bombardment	The 8-day artillery bombardment (1.7 million shells; could be heard in England) failed
	OTT (1 July 1916)	1 July 1916: 7.30am: OTT – each man carried 80lb of kit (ammunition, wire, spade etc.)
	Britain's bloodiest day	19,240 dead and 38,230 wounded (the bloodiest day in the history of the British Army)
	Heavy casualty lists	Haig kept on until November: casualties: British 415,000; French 195,000; Germans 600,000; he said the British had to be 'prepared to see heavy casualty lists'
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	British morale fell	Morale fell – nb the war poets Owen and Sassoon, hatred to 'the generals – and also at home
	Haig's reputation was damaged	Haig is often called 'the Butcher of the Somme'; historian John Laffin wrote: 'The generals had no real strategy at all. It was just slaughter'
	The German Army was damaged	German General Ludendorff admitted 'the German army had been fought to a standstill'; a German psychologist called it 'the muddy grave of the German army'.

Haig: criticisms	He ordered the men to walk	He was so convinced the bombardment had killed all Germans he ordered the men to walk.
	He ignored reports the bombardment had failed	He failed to listen to observers who warned him the bombardment had not worked.
	The mines warned the Germans	The mines, which were exploded at 7.28am, simply warned the Germans an attack was coming.
	His tactics were out of date	His tactics were out of date - he kept cavalry in reserve to charge when the breakthrough he expected happened
	He kept on until November	He kept on until November, even though he could see his men were being slaughtered, for the gain of almost no territory
Haig: defence	No alternative	There was no viable alternative strategy or technology available to him.
	Poor battlefield communications	Communications were not as good as today, so Haig had no way of knowing how the battle was going — at first, he was told it had been a great success.
	New weapons and tactics	Haig did introduce new ideas (tanks, machine guns, aeroplanes, infiltration, creeping barrage).
	Honoured at his funeral	After the war, thousands of soldiers honoured him at his funeral.
	Necessary casualties	Haig believed: 'The nation must be prepared to see heavy casualty lists' if it wanted to win.
Haig: historiography	Churchill and Lloyd George (1916–17)	Criticised Haig for the high casualties and tried to prevent Passchendaele; only the King's support prevented Haig being dismissed
	The Official History (1920s)	After 1918, Haig was greatly praised – not least because he sent a copy of his notes on the war to everybody he knew was writing about it
	Liddell Hart (1930s)	After Owen and Sassoon's poetry changed people's view about the war, Liddell Hart published a fierce account, accusing Haig of incompetence
	The Donkeys (1961)	Alan Clark said the soldiers were 'lions led by donkeys!'; many historians still call Haig a 'Butcher and a Bungler' (Laffin)
	John Terraine (1963)	Terraine argued that Haig did as well as the technology of the time allowed; many historians today are 'unapologetically pro-Haig'

New weapons: facts	Machine guns	A Vickers machine gun could fire 600 bullets a minute; however, until 1918, machine guns were static and could not be used in a moving attack
	Tanks	49 tanks were first used by Haig at the Battle of the Somme (1916); however they had a top speed 4 miles an hour, and kept getting stuck and breaking down
	Planes	Planes at first for reconnaissance; later for dogfights and bombing raids; by 1918, the RFC had 23,000 planes, including the Sopwith Camel, and 'aces' such as Albert Ball were famous
	Gas	Gas (chlorine – phosgene – mustard gas) was first used at the Battle of Ypres, 1915; unreliable (could blow back) and gas masks were quickly developed
	Creeping barrage	Creeping barrage – lifted as the troops advanced
The War in 1917	Second Battle of Arras (9 April to 16 May)	A diversionary attack to help the Nivelle Offensive. The use of creeping barrage, 'leap frog', 'bite and hold', extensive mining, and aerial reconnaissance led to initial success before it bogged down.
	Nivelle's Aisne Offensive (16 April-May)	A disaster, which led to half the French infantry divisions refusing to attack.
	Battle of Messines (7-4 June)	To protect the French. Successful due to a detailed map, better spotting, mining, tanks and overhead barrage.
	Battle of Passchendaele (July to November)	To protect the French. A series of battles – Pilckem Ridge, Langemarck, Menin Road, Polygon Wood. Conceived as a breakthrough attack, it descended into a deadly stalemate, which was actually key in the attrition of the German army.
	Battle of Cambrai (20 November to 3 December)	Cambrai – first to use large numbers of tanks, and 'combined arms' attack. First day hugely successful, but tanks failed and the overstretched attack was defeated with heavy casualties.
The War at Sea: U-boats	1914: Attacks in the Royal Navy.	At first, they attacked the Royal Navy; by the end of 1914, German U-boats had sunk British 9 warships.
	1915: Attacks on merchant shipping	In February 1915, as a retaliation to the British naval blockade, the German Admiralty announced a war zone around Britain and unrestricted submarine warfare. By August 1915 they were sinking two ships a day.
	American outrage	The American public was outraged by sinkings of the Harpalyce, the Lusitania, and the liner SS Arabic.
	1916: the Sussex Pledge	After the sinking of the Sussex, President Wilson forced Germany to agree the 'Sussex Pledge' - not to attack passenger ships, and to allow crews of merchant ships to abandon ship before sinking it.
	1917: 'unrestricted submarine warfare'	On 31 January 1917, Germany once again began 'unrestricted submarine warfare', one of the reasons America entered the war.

Anti-U-boat measures	Q-ships	A warship disguised as a merchant ship, but by the end of 1916, the British had only sunk 15 U-boats.
	Depth charges	The British introduced the first effective depth charge, the Type D, in January 1916
	Mines and submarine nets	in the English Channel
	Convoys	From April 1917, in groups of 20 or more ships, protected by battleships with depth charges.
	American help	With help from the US Navy, by 1918, the U-boats were only sinking 1 in 25 merchant ships sailing to Britain.
Battle of Jutland	31 May 1916	The German navy came out to try to break the British blockade. The British Grand Fleet was commanded by Admiral Jellicoe and the Germany High Seas Fleet by Admiral Scheer.
	Better gunners	German shells penetrated British armour and blew up their ammunition stores; three British ships just blew up. Beatty: "There seems to be something wrong with our bloody ships today."
	British losses	The British lost 14 ships – inc. 3 battleships – and 6,000 men killed. The Germans lost 11 smaller ships and 2,550 men.
	Loss of nerve	Both commanders knew that to lose the battle was to lose the war. Scheer lost his nerve and broke off. Jellicoe let him get away. Both sides claimed victory.
	British blockade	The German fleet never left port again, and mutinied when ordered to do so in 1918. The British Blockade continued, and reduced Germany to starvation.
America's entry into the war: causes	To support the Allies	The USA had supported the Allies with loans, weapons and food.
	Preparedness Movement	After 1915, the 'Preparedness Movement' argued that, in a world at war, America needed to prepare for war; the government increased the army and the navy
	Unrestricted submarine warfare	U-boat attacks (especially the loss of 128 Americans on the Lusitania, 1915) had angered the USA, and in 1917 Germany resumed unrestricted submarine attacks.
	Zimmerman telegram	1917: the Germans sent a telegram (the 'Zimmerman telegram') offering to give Texas to Mexico if Mexico would attack the USA. This angered the Americans.
	A 'world safe for democracy'	President Wilson declared war on 2 Apr 1917 stating that 'we serve no selfish ends' but that America wanted 'a world safe for democracy'

America's entry into the war: results	Impossible to defeat	America was the richest country in the world, beyond the reach of German Zeppelins.
	1.8 million new Allied soldiers	After a year to train, 1.8 million US soldiers were in France by October 1918.
	Fresh and enthusiastic soldiers	American soldiers were fresh and enthusiastic – the German soldiers were exhausted and war-weary, and increasingly young (the older soldiers had been killed)
	Ludendorff Offensive	The entry of the US forced the Germans to try the last-ditch Ludendorff Offensive
	The defeat of Germany in 1918	US soldiers arrived in time to help stop the Ludendorff Offensive, and they took part in the subsequent Allied offensive which forced the Germans to sign the Armistice.
The Ludendorff Offensive: causes	Russia had left the war	Russia had left the war, so the Germans could use 1 million soldiers from the Eastern Front.
	America had entered the war	The Americans had entered the war, so millions of American soldiers would soon be arriving; the Germans had to try to finish the war before that happened.
	Starvation in Germany	There was starvation in Germany because of the British blockade.
	Germany troops were exhausted	German troops were exhausted – older men were dead and their replacements were teenagers.
	Infiltration tactics	The Germans used 'infiltration tactics', not attacking fortified points, but advancing quickly around them – this meant that they could break the stalemate of trench warfare
The events of 1918	The Ludendorff Offensive (1918)	In 1917, Russia left the war, but American joined, so the Germans wanted to use 1 million soldiers from the Eastern Front before the US soldiers arrived
	“Operation Michael’ (21 Mar 1918)	The Germans used 'infiltration tactics', not attacking fortified points, but advancing quickly around them; by June they were only 50 miles from Paris
	“Order of the Day’ (11 April 1918)	The Allies were almost defeated – Haig issued the ‘Order of the Day’ (11 April 1918): ‘Every position must be held to the last man’
	The German army’s ‘Black Day’ (8 August 1918)	Haig counterattacked; in Aug-Nov he secured spectacular victories (190,000 prisoners and 3,000 guns captured) and put the Germans in full retreat
	The Armistice (11 November 1918)	There was starvation in Germany because of the British blockade, the German navy mutinied, and Germany signed the Armistice at 11am on 11 November 1918

Germany in 1918	Starvation, 1917–18	The British blockade and a harvest failure had reduced Germany to starvation (eating berries)
	Strikes, Jan 1918	There was rioting in many cities, and half a million workers went on strike in Berlin (Jan)
	Kiel Mutiny, Oct 1918	The Kiel Mutiny (Oct): German sailors refused to fight, and set up Communist-style 'soviets' (councils)
	The government collapsed, 9 Nov 1918	The Kaiser abdicated (Nov) and fled to Holland
	A humiliating Armistice, 11 Nov 1918	The German government sought and signed a humiliating and harsh Armistice (Nov) which was a humiliating defeat