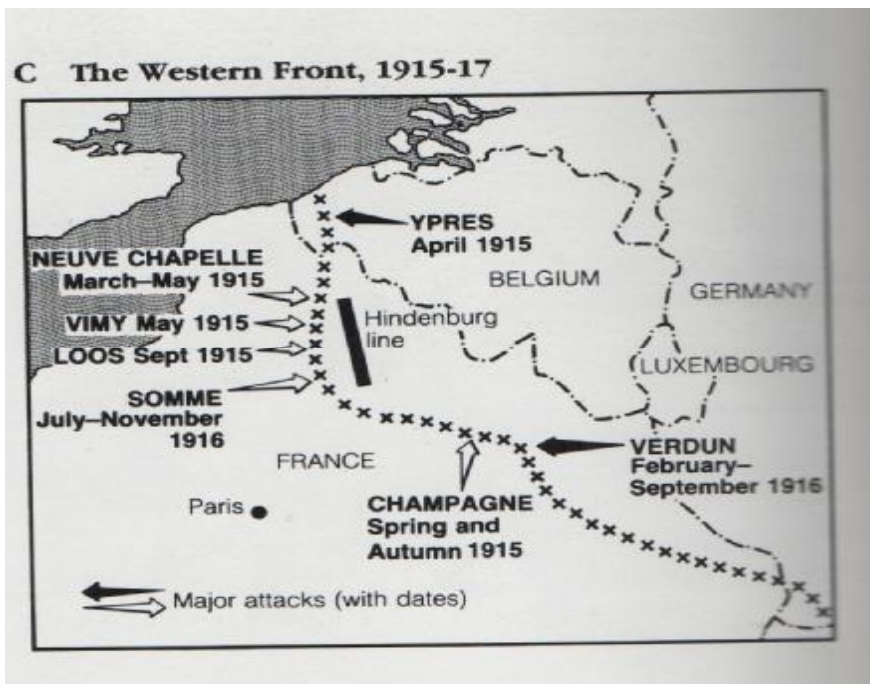


## The Western Front 1914-1917:



General info and introduction:

Following the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the German Army opened the **Western Front** by first invading Luxembourg and Belgium, then gaining military control of important industrial regions in France. The tide of the advance was dramatically turned with the Battle of the Marne. Both sides then dug in along a meandering line of fortified trenches, stretching from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier with France. This line remained essentially unchanged for most of the war.



Between 1915 and 1917 there were several major offensives along this front. The attacks employed massive artillery bombardments and massed infantry advances. However, a combination of entrenchments, machine gun nests, barbed wire, and artillery repeatedly inflicted severe casualties on the attackers and counter attacking defenders. As a result, no significant advances were made.

In an effort to break the deadlock, this front saw the introduction of new military technology, including poison gas, aircraft and tanks. It was only after the adoption of the improved tactics that some degree of mobility was restored.

1915: Italy – po boku Dohody

Japan, Italy – Dohoda

Turkey - Trojspolok

World War I:

The WWI opened with the Germans smashing their way through neutral Belgium and into Northern France. This plan was called **Schlieffen Plan**.

The neutrality of Belgium was guaranteed by Britain  $\implies$  Germany's invasion of Belgium brought the British Empire into the war. For Britain the First World War began with the **BEF** (stands for British Expeditionary Force) going over to Europe to fight the Germans. 125 000 soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force were sent over to help French.

**Important battles (Western front, 1914-1917): Marne, Ypres, Verdun, Somme, Passchendaele, Cambrai**

**The First Battle of the Marne** (September 1914), aka **Miracle of the Marne**

- This battle resulted in an **Allied victory against the German Army**. The battle effectively ended the month-long German offensive that opened the war and had reached the peripheries of Paris. The counter-attack of six French field armies and one British army along the Marne River forced the German Imperial Army to abandon its push on Paris and retreat north-east. The German army retreated north of the **Aisne River** and **dug in there, establishing the beginnings of a static western front that was to last for the next three years**.
- Following this German retreat, the opposing forces tried to outflank each other in the **Race for the Sea (effort of both enemies to outflank – obkľúčit' each other on the way to the ports in La Manche)**, and quickly extended their trench systems from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier.

**In October 1914 the war changed into trench warfare. Both armies dug trenches. By the end of 1914 the trenches stretched from the Alps to the North Sea. The line of trenches was called the Western Front. Each side tried to break through, to gain land and advantage.**

**Ypres (April 1915):**

**This Second Battle of Ypres:** new weapon was tested, **the second large-scale use of chemical weapons**<sup>1</sup>. On 22 April, after a two-day bombardment, the Germans released **168 tons of chlorine gas** onto the battlefield. Being heavier than air, the gas crept across no man's land and drifted down into the British trenches.

**Verdun (February – December 1916):**

The **Battle of Verdun** was one of the major battles during the First World War on the Western Front. It was fought between the Germans who decided to attack the old fortress of Verdun **in north-eastern France** and the defending French armies. The advance of the Germans was stopped.

**Verdun was the longest battle and one of the most devastating in the First World War and more generally in human history.** A total of about 40 million artillery shells were exchanged by both sides, leaving behind an endless field of shell craters. In both France and Germany, Verdun has come to represent the horrors of war. Major General Julian Thompson, a renowned British military historian, has referred to Verdun in the History Channel's: *1916: Total War*, as "**France's Stalingrad**".

**The Battle of Verdun, aka the 'Mincing Machine of Verdun' - became a symbol of French determination and sacrifice.** As a whole, the Battle of Verdun resulted in more than a quarter of a million battlefield deaths and at least half a million wounded.

**Somme (July - November 1916):**

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<sup>1</sup> The poisonous gas „Yperite“ (in Slovak „yperit“), named after the city of **Ypres**.

The **Battle of the Somme**: counteroffensive of the British and French armies after the attack of the Germans in Verdun.

The **Battle of the Somme** took place in the Somme department of France, by the river Somme. The Battle of the Somme was one of the largest battles of the First World War: by the time fighting had petered out in late autumn 1916 **more than 1.5 million casualties had been suffered by the forces involved**, making it **one of the bloodiest military operations ever recorded**.

Work to do: Arrange these sentences in the correct time table to tell the war story right:

5. Large use of chemical weapons in Ypres.
1. The First World War opened with the Germans smashing through neutral Belgium.
6. The Battle of Verdun = "France's Stalingrad", the 'Mincing Machine of Verdun'
3. A great battle that was fought on the river Marne
2. The BEF was sent to France to halt the German advance on Paris
4. In October 1914 the war changed into trench warfare

#### **Messines Hill (June 1917):**

There had been no breakthrough by 1917. The British captured **Messines Hill (in West Flanders, Belgium)**, using 1 million tons of explosives. The roar could be heard in London, over 1 hundred miles away. The attack was also a prelude to the much larger battle at Passchendaele, which began in July 1917.

#### **Passchendaele, aka Third Battle of Ypres (July – November 1917):**

In 1917, the British attacked the Germans at **Passchendaele, near Ypres, Belgium**, hoping to capture the Belgian coast, forcing Germany to withdraw from the Channel Ports and to stop German U-boats using Belgian ports.

#### **Cambrai (November 1917):**

Tanks were used on a **large scale** for the first time at **Cambrai**, north-eastern France. Before then, it was men and horses.

The Allies attacked with 324 **tanks**, with one-third held in reserve, and twelve divisions, against two German divisions. The advance produced an awkward salient and a surprise German counteroffensive, with air cover and their own tanks on 30 November drove the British back to their starting lines. Despite the reversal, the attack had been seen as a success by the Allies and Germans as it proved that tanks could overcome trench defences.

The battle had also seen the first massed use of German **stosstruppen**<sup>2</sup> on the western front, which used infantry infiltration tactics to successfully penetrate the allied lines; bypassing resistance and quickly advancing into the enemy's rear.

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<sup>2</sup> **Stormtroopers** (in German **Stoßtruppen**, "shock troops") were specialist soldiers of the German Army in World War I. In the last years of the war, **Stoßtruppen** were trained to fight with "infiltration tactics", part of the

**J Major battles 1915-17**

	<b>Place</b>	<b>Attacking force</b>	<b>Result</b>
Jan/Mar 1915	Champagne	French	Small gains. No major breakthrough
Mar/May 1915	Neuve Chapelle	British	No breakthrough
April 1915	Ypres	German	Initial breakthrough soon stopped
May 1915	Vimy	French	Some small gains No breakthrough
Sept 1915	Loos	British	No breakthrough
Sept 1915	Champagne	French	Initial advance soon stopped
Feb/Sept 1916	Verdun	German	Massive casualties Fails to take the town
July/Nov 1916	Somme	British	Massive casualties Attack fails
Spring 1917	Champagne	French	No success, some French troops mutiny
June 1917	Messines Hill	British	Hill taken
Aug/Oct 1917	Passchendaele	British	Fails to free the Belgian coast

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Germans' new method of attack on enemy trenches. Men trained in these methods were known in Germany as *Sturmmann* (literally "assault man" but usually translated as Stormtrooper).

