

Attacking the enemy

Different military tactics were used during the war. When the decision was made to try and capture enemy ground and attack the enemy, it usually followed this plan:

- 1 Large guns behind the trenches would fire shells (large bombs) at the enemy positions. The aim was to smash the enemy trench system and blow holes in their barbed wire so that the attackers could run through.
- 2 The attacking soldiers would 'go over the top', which meant climbing out of their trenches with their guns and grenades and heading towards the enemy trenches, across no man's land.
- 3 The soldiers would jump into the enemy trenches and shoot (or fight in hand-to-hand combat) any soldiers that had not been killed by the earlier shellfire.

However, this plan rarely worked. In reality, the shells hardly ever destroyed the enemy trench system in the way it was hoped. German trenches were especially strong with many built using concrete. As a result, the enemy lay in wait for the attacking soldiers and shot them down easily. Also, instead of tearing gaps in the enemy barbed wire, the shellfire often made it more tangled and even harder to get through.

▼ **SOURCED** Adapted from a book called *All Quiet on the Western Front*, written in 1929 by a German soldier, *Erich Maria Remarque*, who fought in the trenches

We can see the attackers coming. Our big guns fire, machine guns rattle, rifles crack. They are working their way towards us. They are French, we recognise their helmets. They have already suffered badly before they reach our trench. Our machine gun wipes out a whole line of them, but then it starts to jam, and they move in.

We retreat, and throw grenades at them as we leave. We get to the protection of the support trench and turn to face the enemy.

Our artillery fires furiously, stopping the enemy attack. We counterattack and drive them back through our original trench and beyond it. We are on the heels of our retreating enemy and reach their trenches almost at the same time as they do. But we cannot stay there long and we retreat back to our own position



◀ SOURCE E

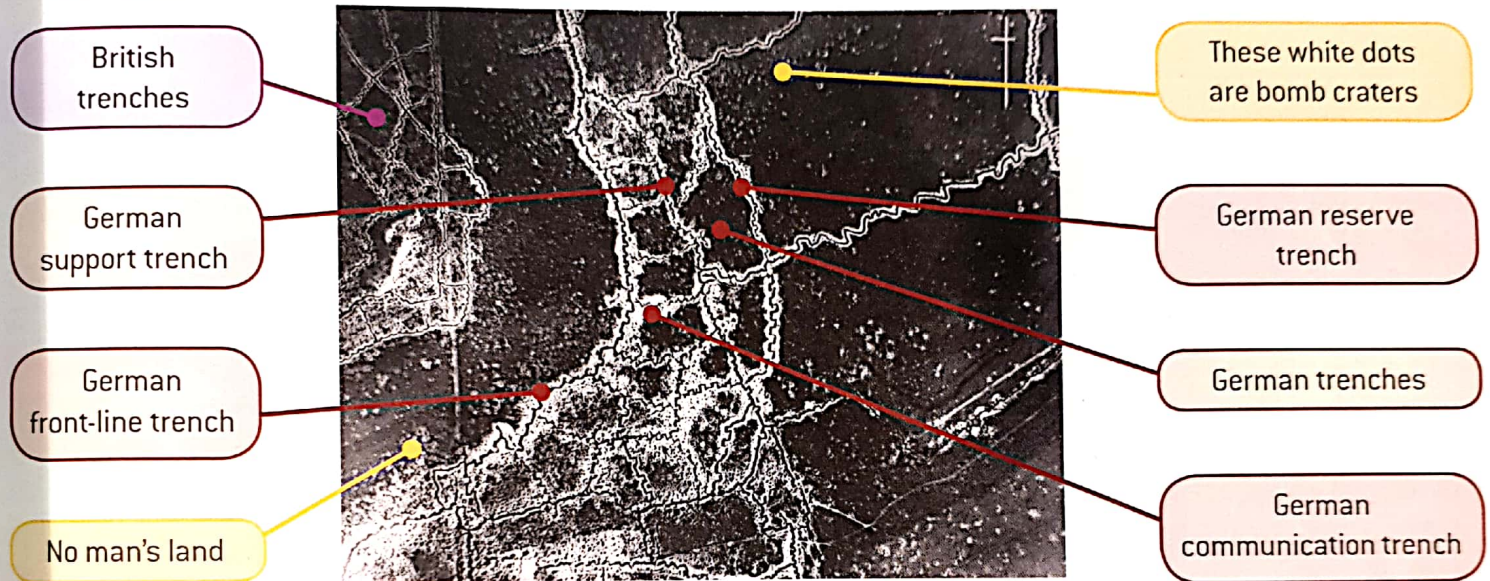
A painting by the Canadian artist William Barnes Wollen, of Canadian troops fighting on the Western Front in May 1915; when all the other officers had been killed, Lt Hugh Niven, in the centre of the painting, took command to beat back repeated German attacks; at the end of the day only 150 Canadian soldiers remained alive

War of attrition

The First World War is often referred to as a 'war of **attrition**'. 'Attrition' means to wear away. Attrition warfare is an attempt to win a war by wearing down the enemy to the point of collapse through their continuous losses in men, equipment and supplies. The war is usually won by the side with the greater resources.

On the Western Front, there were occasional breakthroughs where a large group of soldiers (at a cost of many thousands of lives) might push an enemy back a few hundred metres, or even several miles.

▼ **SOURCE F** An aerial view of British and German trenches



Key Words

attrition

counter-attack

But the retreating forces usually just withdrew to another set of trenches that had been built further back. Then, perhaps a week or a month later, the enemy might **counter-attack** and re-occupy their original trench. This was stalemate. At the end of 1915, the man in charge of the British Army, Earl Kitchener, summed up the stalemate when he said, 'I don't know what is to be done, but this isn't war.'

Work

- 1 Define the following terms:
 - a 'go over the top'
 - b counter-attack
 - c war of attrition.
- 2 Describe the plan that was followed when one side decided to attack the other.
- 3 Using information from pages 46–49, suggest as many reasons as you can why there was a stalemate on the Western Front.
- 4 Read **Source D**.
 - a Draw a simple diagram to show what happened in this attack.
 - b Why do you think it was easy for the Germans to win their trench back quickly?
- 5 What do you think Kitchener meant when he said '...this isn't war'?

Practice Question

Study **Sources D** and **E**. How useful are these sources to a historian studying trench warfare?

Explain your answer using **Sources D** and **E** and your contextual knowledge.

12 marks

Study Tip

Explain why it is valuable to have both German and Allied accounts about trench fighting that were produced at different times. How does the text source help when combined with the visual source?

Extension

Trench warfare was mainly fought on the Western Front, but there were other areas of conflict where trenches were built. Carry out some research on other areas of the world where trench warfare was fought between 1914 and 1918.



Many of the soldiers were in their early twenties and none had experienced anything like trench warfare before. The trenches were probably the dirtiest, unhealthiest, most frightening and most dangerous places in the world. What was life like in the trenches? What did the soldiers do when they weren't fighting? How did they cope with their day-to-day lives?

Objectives

- Examine the everyday routine of trench life.
- Consider how soldiers coped with life in the trenches.

The everyday routine

When soldiers were not fighting, they lived a rather boring life in the trenches. They rotated duties in front-line trenches which meant that one third of the men were on guard duty while another third repaired the trench and collected food, water, letters, ammunition and first aid supplies. The other third would rest, write letters, draw, paint, play cards or cook.

The monthly routine

In a typical month, a soldier might serve four days in the front-line, four days in a support trench, eight days in the reserve trenches and the remainder of his time behind the lines in the local town. Life in the trenches varied – in some places there was little fighting while in others there were regular attacks and counterattacks. The type and nature of the trenches varied too, depending on the local conditions. For example, the ground around the River Somme in France is chalky and easily dug, but trench sides would crumble easily after it had rained. So, the soldiers would build up the sides with wood and sandbags to keep the trench stable.

Stand to

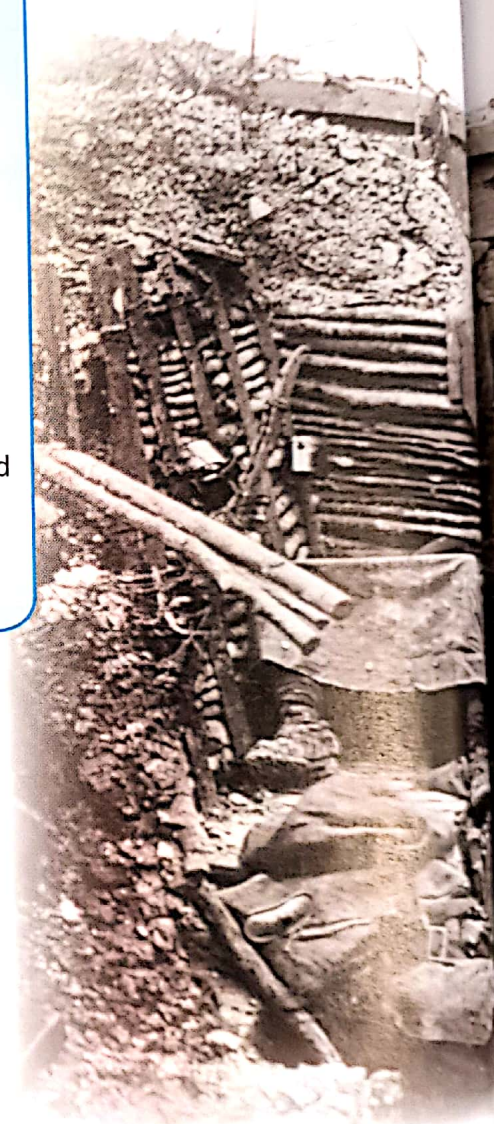
Soldiers on both sides were up before sunlight for a time known as **stand to**. They were on their highest state of alert, with guns loaded, and on the lookout for enemy attacks. It was thought that dawn and dusk were the most dangerous times of day because the changing light made it difficult to spot attacks.

Trench humour

Some soldiers used humour to cope with the stress they were under. They made up rude songs, told naughty jokes and drew funny pictures and cartoons. *The Wipers Times* is a good example of this. In 1916, in the bombed-out ruins of the Belgian town of Ypres (pronounced 'Wipers' by British troops), a group of British soldiers found an old printing press and started an 'unofficial' newspaper for the ordinary soldier. At 12 pages long, it was full of funny stories and cartoons, and lots of cleverly disguised criticisms of the senior commanders.

Health

The trenches could be boiling hot in the summer and freezing cold in the winter. Many soldiers suffered from illnesses like pneumonia, tuberculosis, bronchitis and diarrhoea. Spending weeks on end with cold, wet feet could lead to **trench foot**, a painful condition where the foot swells up and develops open sores.



Luxuries

Soldiers looked forward to the arrival of letters and parcels from home. Every week, around 12 million letters and parcels were sent by family, friends and girlfriends. The parcels contained toiletries, tobacco and sweets, for example. The soldiers sent letters home too, but would usually not mention the horrors of trench warfare to avoid upsetting their loved ones. Most letters sent home were first read by a commanding officer, who checked that the contents of the letters did not give away any army secrets or show low morale. This was a precaution taken in case letters were intercepted by the enemy.

▼ **SOURCE** A British look-out in a captured German trench in 1916; note the other soldiers asleep in the trench



Mental health

A condition known as **shell shock** was common. This was caused by the constant fear of death, the relentless noise of the bombs and witnessing close friends being killed in terrible ways. Some people shook uncontrollably while others became paralysed despite suffering no physical injury.

Key Words

stand to trench foot shell shock

Hygiene

Keeping clean was almost impossible, and almost all soldiers were infested with lice. There were no toilets, so a bucket was used and emptied whenever possible. Rats were a constant problem too, trying to get at food supplies and feeding off the dead corpses in no man's land.

Food

Food was basic: stew, bread and hard biscuits. However, for the soldiers from very poor backgrounds, this was the best they had ever had. Bacon, cheese and jam were treats. The water tasted of chlorine, which killed most germs. British troops received a drink of rum in harsh weather and the Germans drank beer and brandy.

Work

- 1 What word or phrase does each of these definitions describe?
 - a A time at dawn and dusk when all soldiers were on high alert
 - b A painful condition of the feet caused by prolonged exposure to cold and wet
 - c Mental illness caused by experiences of war
- 2 Choose five adjectives to describe life in the trenches. For each word, write a sentence or paragraph to explain your choice.
- 3 Suggest reasons why *The Wipers Times* was so popular.

5.3 The weapons of trench warfare

In the years leading up to the outbreak of war, there had been major advances in science and technology. Trains, motorcars and aeroplanes had been invented and there were great breakthroughs in physics and chemistry. However, this scientific knowledge and understanding was now used to create terrifying new weapons of war, the aim of which was to kill and maim as many of the enemy as possible.

Objectives

- Identify the most commonly used weapons on the Western Front.
- Explain why the weapons were so deadly.

Artillery

Artillery is the name given to the large guns that fire bombs (or shells) over long distances. It was used extensively in the war as a way of 'softening up' the enemy before a big attack. The enemy trenches would be pounded for hours, even days, before an assault, in the hope of destroying their positions. In 1915, 400,000 artillery shells (some as big as men) were fired every month on the Western Front. There were different types of artillery shells – some contained high explosives, other contained gas or smoke. Shrapnel shells, when they exploded, contained red-hot pieces of metal (shrapnel) that could cut an enemy soldier to pieces. Artillery was responsible for about 60 per cent of all wounds.

▼ **SOURCE A** *British artillery in action in France in 1916; note the soldiers on the left preparing the shells before taking them to the gun*



Machine guns

Machine guns, invented in the mid-1800s, became well-known as deadly weapons during the First World War. They could fire up to ten bullets per second and, in the first two weeks of the war, the French reported losses of over 200,000 men, mostly through machine gun fire. Although they were heavy and needed a crew of

between two and four, one machine gun was equivalent to around a hundred rifles. According to British estimates, machine guns caused around 40 per cent of all wounds inflicted on British troops during the war.

Gas attacks

The first use of poison gas was in April 1915, when the Germans released gas from cylinders and allowed the wind to carry it over French soldiers on the front-line. The French panicked and ran, and a six-kilometre gap opened up in the French front-line. However, the Germans did not have enough troops ready to mount a serious attack, the gas soon died down, and soldiers moved back to fill the gap. An opportunity like this never happened again, and despite being an unreliable weapon because it often changed direction with the wind, gas proved its worth as a weapon of terror. Soon both sides were using gas. There were several different types; one would suffocate a victim's lungs and leave them gasping for air while another would burn, blind and eventually kill a soldier over a period of days.

▼ **SOURCE B** *German soldiers with a machine gun, waiting for a British attack, in 1916*



▼ **SOURCE C** From a poem by Wilfred Owen, one of the best-known war poets; he served on the Western Front

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.
If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori. [How sweet and proper it is to die
for your country]

Rifles, bayonets, grenades and flamethrowers

A **rifle** was the standard weapon given to all soldiers. It was lightweight and deadly accurate up to a distance of about 600 metres. A soldier could fire between 15 and 20 bullets per minute. A 40-centimetre knife, called a **bayonet**, was fitted to the end, and could be used in close combat if a soldier ran out of bullets. Soldiers also carried small, hand-held bombs called grenades that could be thrown into enemy trenches or at advancing troops. Some soldiers were also trained to use flamethrowers to create a wall of fire that could reach about 15 metres. These were deadly in small spaces like dugouts.

Tanks

A British invention, tanks were bulletproof vehicles that could travel over rough ground, crush barbed wire and cross trenches. They were first used in 1916 and by the end of the war the British had produced 2636 and the French 3870. The Germans were not convinced of their value and only produced 20. Part of Germany's unwillingness to make tanks was the issue of reliability. Although tanks caused panic and terror, they could only

Key Words

machine gun rifle bayonet

travel at around five miles per hour and broke down easily. It was not until the Second World War that tanks became a battle-winning weapon.

▼ **SOURCED** A broken down British tank stuck in a trench in France in 1917; troops are attempting to dig it out



Work

- 1 Rank the weapons used in the war from most effective (or deadliest) to least effective. Give some reasons for your ranking decision.
- 2 Do you think the weapons used in the war made it easier for an army to attack or defend? Explain your answer.
- 3 **a** Read **Source C**. What were the effects of gas on the victim in this poem?
b Gas attacks only accounted for around 4 per cent of all combat deaths in the war. So why do you think that gas was one of the most feared weapons?
c What point do you think Owen was making when he wrote the lines 'Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori'?

Practice Question

Write an account of how effective the weapons of trench warfare were.

8 marks

Study Tip

Explain how different weapons would be effective in different situations.

5.4B Key battles on the Western Front: the Somme

The Somme: the largest battle

The Battle of the Somme (also known as the Somme Offensive) took place between 1 July and 18 November 1916. It was fought near the River Somme in northern France by the armies of the British and French against German forces. It was the largest battle of the First World War on the Western Front, with more than three million men taking part. Around one million men were wounded or killed, making it one of the bloodiest battles ever to have taken place in human history.

The plan

Since the summer of 1915, the British and French had been planning a coordinated attack in the hope of breaking the stalemate and pushing the Germans back. The French and British lines of trenches met around the River Somme and this was selected as where the attack would take place. In December 1915, Sir Douglas Haig took command of British forces and warned British politicians that the country needed to prepare for heavy losses if it was going to win the war. As a result, there had been a major recruitment campaign and the British Army had gained about one million fresh recruits.

In February 1916, the Germans attacked Verdun. Instead of sending troops directly to help the French at Verdun, the British decided to lead an attack at the Somme to gain ground and draw German troops away from Verdun to relieve the pressure on the French.

The bombing begins

On 24 June 1916, British and French artillery began a huge bombardment of German trenches. The idea was to destroy their front-lines, allowing the attacking soldiers to walk across no man's land and into German-held territory. Over 1,500,000 shells were fired in eight days. However:

- The Germans knew that an attack was coming because their spotter planes, flying overhead, had seen soldiers and artillery moving into the area.
- The Germans had secretly pulled back from their front-lines and taken shelter in concrete dugouts deep underground.
- The Germans had stretched barbed wire in a 30-metre-wide band in front of their trenches. The French and British shells had simply lifted the wire and dropped it back down in an even more tangled mess.

- Some of the British shells were of poor quality and failed to explode.

As soon as the bombing stopped, the Germans left their well-protected shelters, dragged their machine guns to the front-lines and waited for the attack on foot to begin.

The attack

At 7.30am on 1 July 1916, the first wave of British soldiers went 'over the top'. Several French divisions joined the British attack. They were told there would be no survivors in the German trenches so they could walk safely across no man's land towards the enemy. They carried heavy backpacks and tools, so they could repair the captured German trenches when they got there.

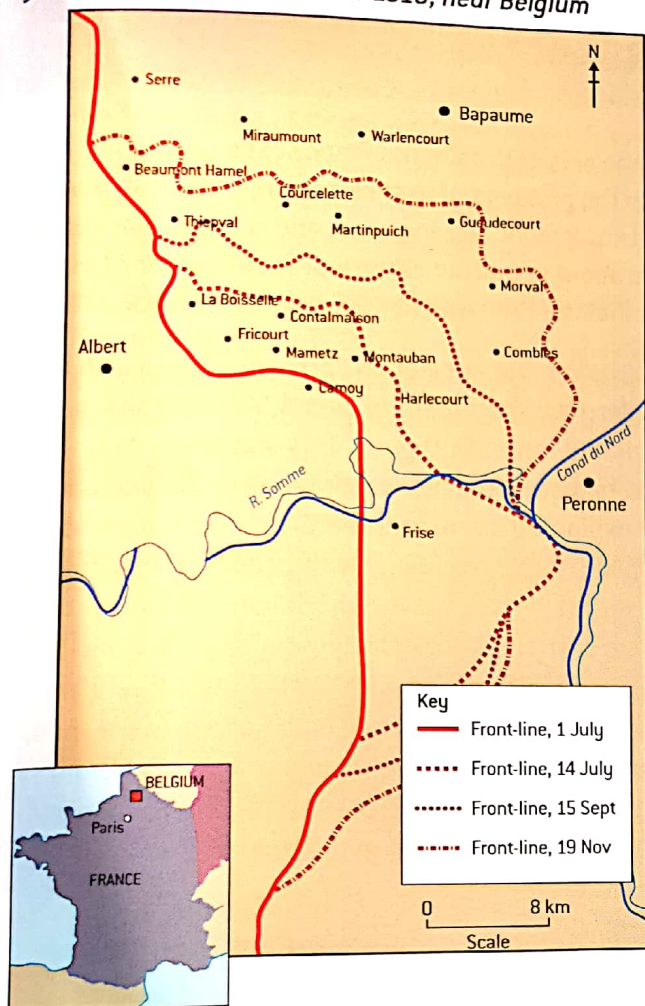
But German machine guns cut down the attacking forces easily. On the first day alone, the British suffered around 60,000 casualties including 20,000 dead – the highest number of casualties and deaths ever recorded in a single day by the British Army.

Despite heavy losses, Haig continued to send men 'over the top' through the summer. He was confident of victory – and knew he had to relieve the pressure on French forces at Verdun. Some gains were made (see Map E), and plans were changed that meant other areas of the Somme were attacked. The 'creeping barrage' was first used in the battle too (see page 80 for a detailed look at this new tactic). However, the major breakthrough that Haig hoped for never happened.

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



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



Results of the battle

In November, with winter approaching, the attacks were stopped. British and French troops had gained a strip of land about 25 kilometres long and 6 kilometres wide, and had lost around 620,000 men. The Germans lost around 500,000 soldiers.

After the battle, Haig was widely criticised by politicians, soldiers, and newspapers. He was nicknamed 'The Butcher of the Somme'. Historians have disagreed as to whether Haig deserved such criticism. He certainly misjudged the effectiveness of the eight-day bombardment and continued to send men into battle for months on end. But Haig's actions must be put in the context of the time. None of the military leaders had any experience of trench warfare on this scale. Haig had served in the Boer War (1899–1902) when completely different military tactics were used. Haig himself would also argue that the Battle of the Somme achieved some of its main aims: Verdun had been saved, and hundreds of thousands of German troops had been killed, seriously weakening the German Army.

▼ **SOURCE F** Adapted from a Daily Express newspaper report on 3 July 1916; this report would have been checked by the British military and government before it was printed, and the reporter would have been given limited information from the military

The energy and eagerness of the first assault were worthy of the best tradition of the British Army. We had not to wait long for news, and it was satisfactory and encouraging: 'On a front of twenty miles north and south of the Somme, we and our French allies have advanced and taken the German first line of trenches. We are vigorously attacking Fricourt, la Boisselle and Mametz. German prisoners are surrendering freely, and a good many already fallen into our hands.'

▼ **SOURCE G** Written by George Coppard, a machine gunner at the Battle of the Somme

The next morning (July 2nd) we gunners surveyed the dreadful scene in front of us. It became clear that the Germans always had a commanding view of no man's land. Hundreds of dead were strung out like wreckage washed up to a high water-mark. Quite as many died on the enemy wire as on the ground. Machine gun fire had done its terrible work.

Work

- 1 Why was the attack at the Somme planned?
- 2 Why were British and French troops told they would be able to walk across no man's land?
- 3 Why did the plan fail?
- 4 Why are there different opinions about General Haig?
- 5 a Read **Sources F** and **G**. In what ways are the sources different?
b Suggest reasons why the sources are different.

Practice Question

Write an account of how the Somme Offensive earned General Haig the nickname 'The Butcher of the Somme'.

8 marks

Study Tip

Try to give several reasons why so many men died.

2A The war at sea

In the years leading up to the outbreak of war, both sides had spent vast sums of money building up their navies. By the time war broke out, Britain had nearly two hundred large battleships and submarines while the Germans had built over a hundred. How were these weapons used? What major battles happened at sea? How important was the war at sea?

Objectives

- Explore the key events and developments in the war at sea.
- Evaluate the impact of the Battle of Jutland.

The importance of control

Both sides knew it was vital to try to control the seas. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, countries do not always have all the supplies they need within their own country (such as food and oil), so they have to import from abroad. So, control of the seas is important for protecting boats bringing supplies in. Secondly, controlling the seas allows a country to stop supplies getting to its enemy, in the hope of starving them into surrender. This tactic is known as a **blockade**.

Impact of the blockade

Germany's coastline is in the northern part of the country and supply ships can only get to it through the North Sea. In November 1914, the British declared that the North Sea was a 'War Zone' and that any ships entering it did so at their own risk. British sailors would stop any ships in the area and confiscate their cargo. Stopping supplies reaching Germany had a devastating effect on the country.

- Coal, oil and steel supplies could not get through, so industry suffered.
- Fertilisers for the crops were in short supply, so there were food shortages. It has been estimated that around 420,000 Germans starved to death during the war.
- A lack of vital medicines and drugs meant that soldiers (and civilians) suffered.
- The impact of the blockade saw a decline in support for the war. There were major protests against the war as early as 1915.

Early clashes

Despite the importance of trying to control the seas, both sides were very cautious with their navies. They had cost so much money to build that neither side wanted to risk losing them in a large-scale sea battle. One of Britain's leading naval commanders, Admiral Jellicoe, even said that 'the war could be lost in an afternoon' if the British Navy was destroyed.

However, this did not prevent sea battles in the early years of the war, although these were only small clashes between a few ships. In August 1914, three German ships were destroyed in the North Sea (Battle of Heligoland), while in November the Germans sank two British ships off the coast of Chile. The British hit back two weeks later and sank four German warships near the Falkland Islands, off the coast of Argentina. Over 2000 German sailors drowned, including the admiral in command and his two sons. Early in 1915, another German warship was destroyed in the North Sea at Dogger Bank.

Stalemate at sea

Despite these few clashes, in the first two years of the war the British Navy spent most of its time patrolling the North Sea or at its main base at Scapa Flow (in the Orkney Islands), while the German ships remained safe in their ports. A measure of the success of the British Navy at this time is the fact that dozens of ships sailed across the English Channel from Britain to France and back every day – and not one was sunk by enemy ships.

A new German approach

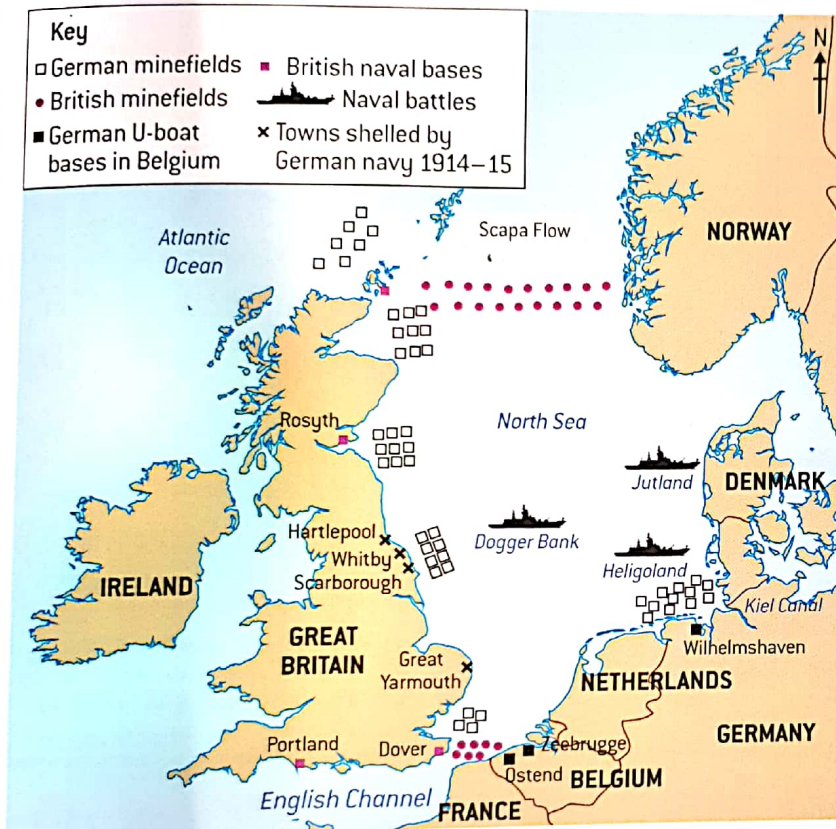
There was one major sea battle in the war, at Jutland (near Denmark), in May 1916. In January 1916, Admiral Reinhard Scheer had been put in charge of the German Navy. He felt that the Navy had been too timid in the way they dealt with the British so far – and was eager for action. So, he hatched a plan that aimed to bring the British out into the open, so he could take them on.

- A few German ships would sail into the North Sea to act as bait, commanded by Admiral Hipper.
- The British Navy, as they had done in the past, would sail out to attack the German ships.
- The rest of the German fleet, leaving port an hour and a half after Admiral Hipper, would sail up behind the British ships and attack them.
- The British Navy would be caught in a trap and destroyed by the German fleet.

Fact

In November 1914, German warships sailed close to the British coast and opened fire on the seaside towns of Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft. Houses were destroyed, and several people were killed. In December, Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby were also shelled. There were nearly 600 casualties, mostly civilians, of whom 137 died. These attacks caused public outrage and damaged Germany's reputation in world public opinion. There was also much criticism of the British Navy for its failure to prevent the raids.

▼ A War in the North Sea



▼ SOURCE B British ship HMS Inflexible picking up sailors from a sunken German ship after the Battle of the Falkland Islands



Practice Question

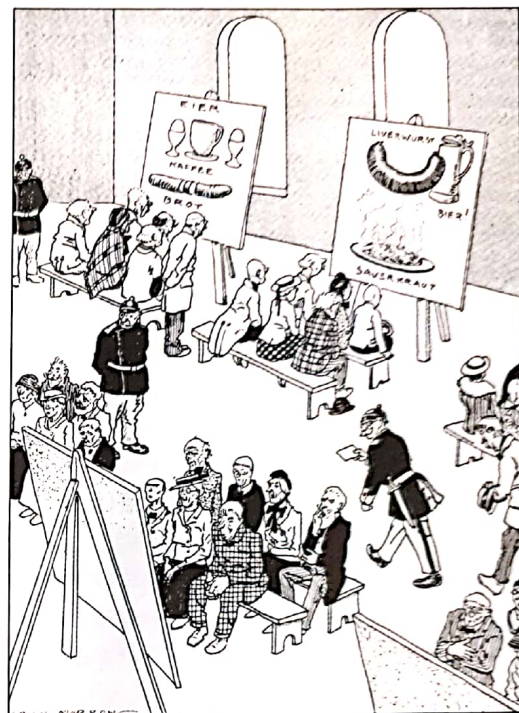
Study **Source C**. The source supports the British naval blockade of German ports. How do you know? Explain your answer using **Source C** and your contextual knowledge.

4 marks

Key Word

blockade

▼ **SOURCE C** A British cartoon from 1917 about the naval blockade of German ports, drawn by the Northern Irish cartoonist, Edwin Morrow, for Punch magazine; the title said that it showed the ordinary Germans enjoying their Christmas dinner



Work

- What is a blockade?
 - What was the impact of the British blockade on Germany?
 - Why do you think some historians argue that the war at sea was just as important as the war on the Western Front?
- Why were the Germans and British so cautious with their navies?
- Why do you think Admiral Reinhard Scheer, was so keen to attack the British Navy?

Study Tip

How does the cartoonist suggest that the naval blockade has had an impact? Why would he say this?

The Battle of Jutland

On 31 May, in line with their plan, the Germans sent out a small group of ships into the North Sea under the command of Admiral Hipper. An hour later, Admiral Scheer followed with the rest of the German Navy. However, unluckily for the Germans, the British had captured a German code book in 1914 so could listen in and decode all the radio messages that the German ships were sending to each other.

- The British sent a small fleet of ships from Rosyth, under the command of Admiral David Beatty, to meet Admiral Hipper's 'bait' ships. The two fleets opened fire at a range of 15 kilometres.
- A British ship was destroyed within 20 minutes of the start of the battle.
- Three more British ships were sunk before the rest of the German ships arrived under Admiral Scheer. Another British battleship was destroyed before the rest of the British fleet arrived.
- When the main British fleet arrived from Scapa Flow, the Germans sailed north. Fearing it was another trap, the British did not follow, but instead tried to intercept the German ships on the route they thought the German ships would take home.
- Twice more the two sides opened fire on each other before the Germans finally fled back to their naval base.

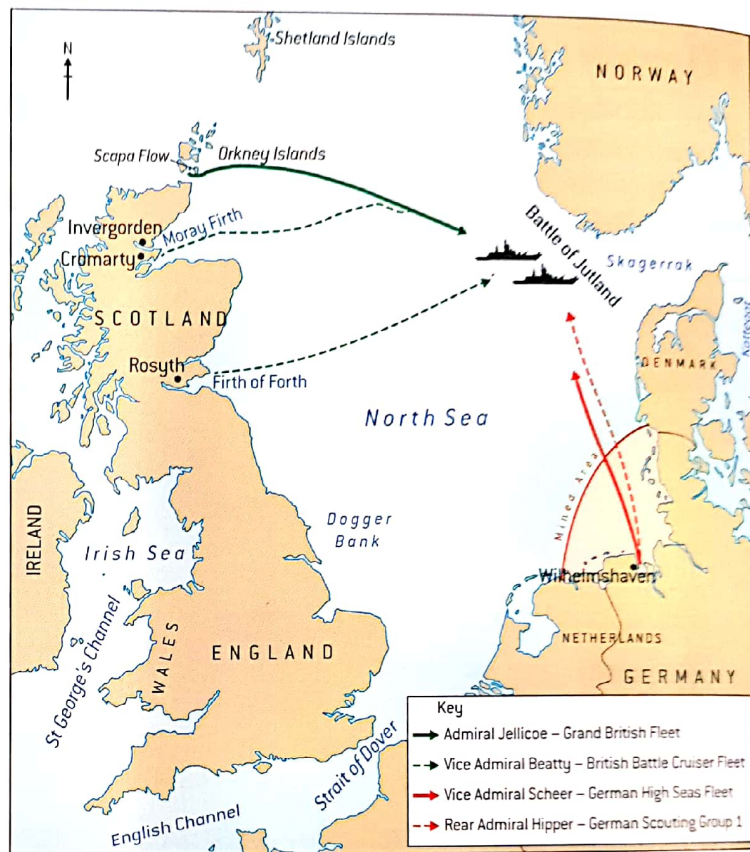
Who won the Battle of Jutland?

The Germans immediately claimed victory based on the number of ships destroyed and the casualties inflicted (see Chart D).

However, the British pointed out it was the Germans who fled the area of battle first, and that the British

fleet was ready to sail again immediately, whereas the German fleet needed major repairs. The Germans also failed to make any impact on the blockade and Germany's warships stayed in their ports for the rest of the war.

▼ E The Battle of Jutland



War under the sea

After Jutland, there were no more large naval battles for the rest of the war. Instead, the Germans relied more and more on their submarines (**U-boats**) to wage an underwater war against their enemy.

In the early stages of the war, the Germans announced that all ships entering British waters would be attacked by one of Germany's U-boats. They called this 'unrestricted submarine warfare'. The British responded by laying minefields around Britain to protect the coast and prevent U-boats from using the English Channel. The British also used **Q-ships** to trick the Germans. These were heavily armed warships disguised as supply ships that lured U-boats into attacking before firing upon them.

However, despite the use of minefields and Q-ships, the German U-boat campaign had an important impact on Britain. U-boats sank an average of two supply ships a day and hundreds of thousands of tonnes of supplies failed to get through to Britain.

▼ D Total losses at the Battle of Jutland

	Britain	Germany
Battleships	0	1
Battle cruisers	3	1
Cruisers	3	4
Destroyers	8	3
Sailors killed	6100	2550

The sinking of the *Lusitania*

In May 1915, a German U-boat sank a British passenger liner, the *Lusitania*, sailing from New York to Liverpool. Over 1000 passengers drowned, including 128 Americans. The Germans (perhaps correctly) said that the ship was carrying military supplies but there was a huge outcry over the sinking, and tension between the US and German governments increased. The Germans scaled back their U-boat attacks for a while after this but the USA remembered this attack, referring to it when declaring war on Germany in 1917.

A second U-boat campaign

By February 1917, the Germans had built over a hundred U-boats, and another series of U-boat attacks began. Five hundred supply ships heading for Britain were destroyed in eight weeks. By April, the U-boat campaign had been so successful that Britain was said to only have six weeks' food supply left.

The convoy system

The British responded to the renewed threat by introducing a **convoy system**. This meant that supply ships sailed close together in large groups, protected by British warships. **Depth charges** (bombs dropped into the water that exploded at certain depths) were used to attack the U-boats. Also, long-range aircraft had also been developed that could fly overhead looking for U-boats near to the surface of the water. This was so successful that between July and August 1917 only five of the eight hundred ships bringing supplies to Britain were sunk.

► SOURCE F

This appeared in a newspaper five days before the *Lusitania* set sail

NOTICE!

TRAVELLERS intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or of any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY
WASHINGTON, D. C., APRIL 22, 1915.

Key Words

U-boat

Q-ships

convoy system

depth charge



◀ SOURCE G

A cartoon from Italian satirical weekly magazine *Il Pasquino*; it has the caption of Uncle Sam (the US) saying to Germany's Kaiser, 'To make you look closely at your victory, I must hold your head under water.'

Work

- a** Why do you think both the British and the Germans claimed they had won the Battle of Jutland?

b Who do you think won the battle? Give reasons for your answer.
- a** What did the Germans hope to achieve with their policy of 'unrestricted submarine warfare'?

b How did the British try to fight 'unrestricted submarine warfare'?
- What does **Source G** suggest will be America's reaction to the sinking of the *Lusitania*?

Practice Question

'The main result of the war at sea was the naval blockade of Germany'. How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

16 marks

SPaG: 4 marks

Study Tip

You should also refer to other results of the war at sea, for example the Battle of Jutland, U-boat war, and the convoy system.

Russia leaves the war

In November 1917, a new government in Russia announced that they would make peace with Russia's enemies. In early December, a peace conference began between Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary and, on 15 December, the fighting stopped on the Eastern Front. Why was there a new government in Russia? How did Russia's withdrawal from the war affect Germany's strategy?

Objectives

- ▶ Examine why Russia withdrew from the war.
- ▶ Explore the effect of Russia's withdrawal on Germany's strategy.

The early stages of the war

To begin with, the Russians won some important battles against both Germany and Austria-Hungary. But a shortage of decent military equipment and poor leadership meant they suffered two major defeats in the battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes [see pages 44 and 45].

The effects of war on Russia

Russia's Tsar made things worse by going to the front to lead the Army – he was a poor leader, and was personally blamed for the Army's defeats. With the Tsar away from Petrograd (the Russian capital's name was changed from St Petersburg during the war), the government was now in the hands of his German wife (the Tsarina) and her divisive and unpopular adviser, a monk called Rasputin.

Ordinary Russians were soon suffering. Over 15 million men had joined the Army and left fields, mines and factories without workers. This led to shortages of food and fuel. Russia's railway system also couldn't cope with the extra demands of war, and fuel could not get to the cities, leading to power failures. Neither the Tsar, his wife, her adviser, or the government seemed to have any solutions to these problems. By 1916, over a million Russians had been killed in the fighting, and both soldiers and civilians had completely lost their enthusiasm for the war.

Revolution

By the beginning of 1917, discontent had turned to open opposition. Riots and strikes broke out all over Russia. When the Tsarina ordered soldiers to fire at the rioters, they refused and joined the protests. Soldiers on the front-lines were also refusing to follow orders, and many **deserted**. In the capital city, workers and soldiers set up their own council – the Petrograd Soviet – to coordinate what was now a revolution. In March, the Tsar returned from the front and saw the chaos in Petrograd, but it was too late for him to do anything about it.

No soldiers were loyal to him and he **abdicated** on 15 March. Immediately, the Tsar and his family were seized and imprisoned.

▼ **SOURCE A** Adapted from the diary entry of an English nurse, Florence Farmborough, who worked at the Russian Front during the war; she describes events taking place during the revolution in Russia

23 Jan 1917: Sabotage – railroads destroyed, workshops looted. Mobs shouting, 'Peace and bread'. They are aware that the war is at the root of their hardships. The Tsar wishes to please everybody and pleases no one. We are amazed at newspapers criticising the government. A few months ago the writers would have been arrested. Things cannot continue as they are.

A new leadership

A provisional (or temporary) government replaced the Tsar. The new leaders promised to hold elections and divide the land among the peasants. But they did not promise to end the war. In fact, they ordered a new attack on Germany in July 1917, which ended in a heavy defeat for the Russians. After this, whole sections of the Russian Army deserted.

Another revolution

Meanwhile, the Germans were quietly smuggling a man named Vladimir Lenin back into Russia. He had been exiled by the Tsar for many years because of his revolutionary ideas. The Germans thought that getting him back into Russia might destabilise the weak provisional government and start another revolution. They were right.

In November 1917 Lenin and his supporters (the **Bolsheviks**) staged a second revolution, overthrew the provisional government, and set up a new government. Lenin declared that Russia was going to make peace with its enemies.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

In March 1918, the Russians signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany and its allies. The treaty was harsh on Russia, which lost some of its best farmland and natural resources. The British and French were angry that the Russians had broken the alliances made before war broke out. And the treaty gave the Germans a sudden advantage.

Advantages to Germany

Russia's withdrawal from the war meant that the Germans could pull their troops away from the Eastern Front and move them to the Western Front. Germany no longer had to fight a war on two fronts. They could concentrate all their military power into beating the British and French. Also, the Germans had gained valuable farmland and raw materials in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, so this would help ease the shortages in Germany that had been caused by the British blockade.

▼ **SOURCE B** From British magazine Punch, 12 June 1918; the title was, 'A German "Peace" (For the instruction of our pacifists)'; it comments on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; German troops were stationed in the territory Russia had to give up



Practice Question

Study **Source B**. This source supports the continued fighting by British and French armies on the Western Front. How do you know? Explain your answer using **Source B** and your contextual knowledge.

4 marks

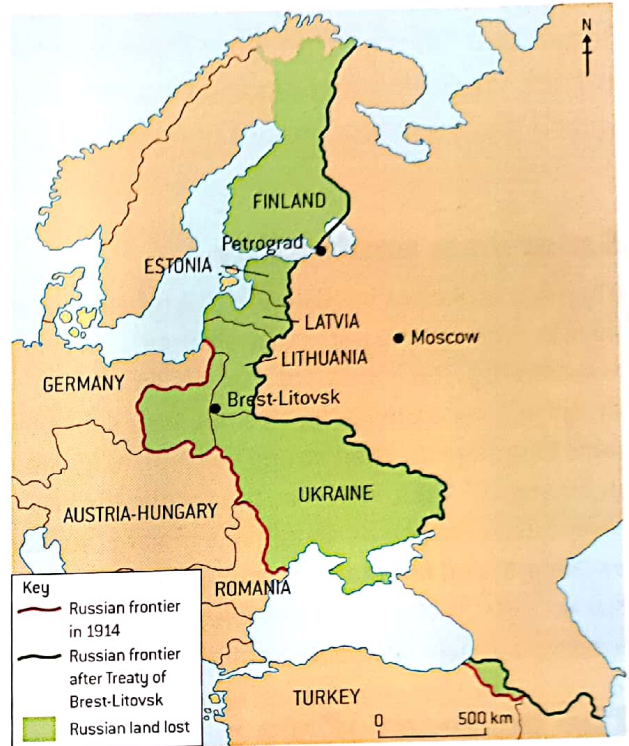
Key Words

desert

abdicate

Bolshevik

▼ **C** The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; Russia lost some of its richest areas, totalling 26% of its population, 27% of its farmland, 26% of its railways, and 74% of its coal and iron ore



Work

- Describe the impact of the war on:
 - ordinary Russians
 - the Tsar.
- Why were there two revolutions in Russia in 1917?
- Read **Source A**. How does this source help you understand:
 - the effects of the war
 - a method the Tsar used to control Russia before the revolution?
- Look at Map C. What land had Russia lost?
 - What impact do you think these losses would have had on Russia?
 - What advantages would they give to Germany?

Study Tip

After four years of fighting, many people in Britain wanted, like the Russians, to end the war. How does this cartoon warn against that?

The USA enters the war

Russia's exit from the war was a major blow to Britain and France. It meant that German troops would no longer be needed to fight the Russians, so they could be sent to strengthen the German Army on the Western Front. However, the loss of Russia was balanced when the USA entered the war on the side of Britain and France. What were the reasons for America's entry into the war? Why had America avoided the conflict up to this point? What was the impact of America's entry?

Objectives

- ▶ Outline the reasons for the USA's entry into the war.
- ▶ Assess the impact of the USA's entry into the war.

American neutrality

When war broke out in 1914, the USA refused to take sides or support any particular alliance. This is known as **neutrality**. The British felt that the Americans should join in on their side; after all, they spoke the same language and had strong cultural, religious and historical links. However, the Americans had never been involved as an ally in a major European war before, and felt that this was a distant European conflict. Also, many Americans were of German descent and approved of the policy of neutrality.

The business of war

American neutrality did not mean that the USA remained totally unconnected to the war. American companies sold food, weapons and other goods to Britain and its allies. This created many jobs in America and made lots of business people very rich. American banks also lent money to Britain and its allies (around two billion dollars), which was used to buy weapons and food, mainly from the USA. So, in the first three years of the war, the USA was financially involved in the war.

Submarine attacks

Ships transporting American weapons, foods and other goods to Europe were a target for German submarines (U-boats). In America, anti-German feeling grew as increasing numbers of ships were sunk by German U-boats. In May 1915, the Germans sank the passenger liner *Lusitania*, sailing from New York to Liverpool, killing over a 1000 passengers, including 128 Americans. There was a huge outcry over the sinking, and tension between the US and German governments increased. Many Americans

demanded that the USA declare war on Germany, but President Woodrow Wilson refused to get drawn into the war. In fact, the Germans decided to cut back their U-boat attacks for a while after this.

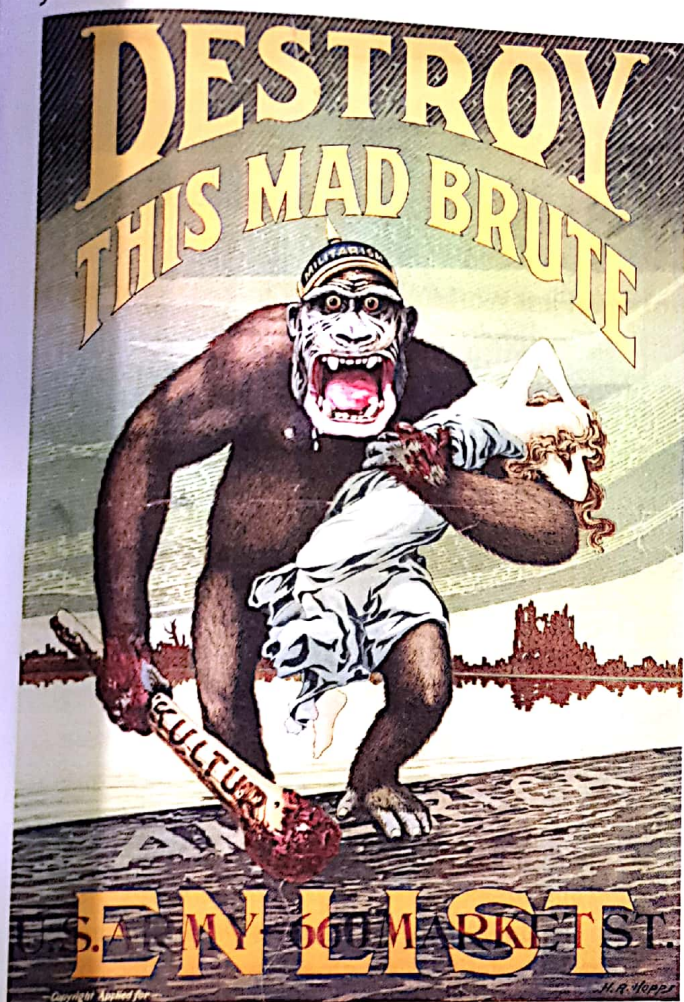
The end of neutrality

By 1917, the Germans were in a desperate situation and felt that one of their best chances of victory was to starve Britain and France into surrender. To do this, they needed to attack ships of any country that were sailing in British waters. Within a few months, German U-boats had sunk eight American ships, and the demands in America to declare war on Germany grew louder once again.

Then, in March 1917, the Americans discovered that the Germans were trying to forge a secret alliance with Mexico. The plan was that Germany would provide money and weapons to the Mexicans, so they could attack the USA. Mexico would then claim the US states of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. This was the final straw and America declared war in April 1917.

▼ **SOURCE A** Adapted from President Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war, 2 April 1917

Germany has committed repeated acts of war against the people of the USA; therefore, we declare that a state of war exists between the United States and the Germany. This war has been thrust upon the United States. The President is authorised and directed to use the entire naval and military forces of the United States and the resources of the Government to carry on war against Germany



Impact of the entry of the USA

The entry of America was a great boost for Britain and France. They were one of the richest countries in the world with huge supplies of coal, oil, iron, cotton and wheat. And even though it would take a few months for the American soldiers to arrive, the news came at a time when Russia's commitment to the war was in doubt. There had been a revolution, the Tsar had abdicated, and Russian soldiers were deserting. The arrival of US troops would help to balance the loss of the Russians.

For the Germans, Russia's withdrawal from the war would be good news, but America's entry was a devastating blow. Although Germany would no longer be fighting a war on two fronts, it was racing against time to mount a concentrated attack on the Western Front against Britain and France before the American troops arrived.

Fact

By the end of the war, America had sent nearly 90,000 tonnes of meat and 600,000 horses to Europe.

Key Words

neutrality

Work

- 1 a Define 'neutrality'.
b Do you think America was really a neutral country in the first three years of the war?
- 2 Read **Source A**. What do you think Wilson was referring to when he said, 'Germany has committed repeated acts of war against the people of the USA'?
- 3 Look at **Source B**. What impression of Germany does the artist give?
- 4 What happened in 1917 that made the USA abandon its neutrality?
- 5 What benefits did the USA bring to its new allies after April 1917?

Extension



The President who took America into war was named Woodrow Wilson. Prepare a fact file on him. Summarise the President's reasons for entering the war on the Allied side. What were his ideas for the post-war world? What role did he play in the peace conferences after the war? Interestingly, when Wilson was elected in 1916, he campaigned with the slogan 'He Kept Us Out of War'.

Practice Question

Study **Sources A** and **B**. How useful are these sources to a historian studying why Americans fought in the First World War?

Explain your answer using **Sources A** and **B** and your contextual knowledge.

12 marks

Study Tip

Make sure you use both sources in your answer. Try to think about the impact of these sources on American citizens.

Ludendorff's Spring Offensive

In late 1917, the Russians dropped out of the war. The Germans were no longer fighting a war on two fronts. They could now send all the soldiers that had been fighting the Russians on the Eastern Front to fight the British and French on the Western Front. By now, however, the USA had entered the war on the side of Britain and France. But the USA needed time to build up its army and transport the soldiers to Europe. So, before the Americans arrived in huge numbers, the Germans decided to gamble everything on an all-out attack to win the war.

Objectives

- ▶ Examine the plan for Ludendorff's Spring Offensive.
- ▶ Assess the reasons for the failure of the offensive.

The German plan

General Ludendorff devised a plan to attack at several points along the British and French lines. The main attack would happen near Arras, where the British had recently taken over a section of the front-line from the French. Here, the trenches were not particularly well built, and the Germans hoped to exploit this weak spot.

The attack would start with an intense, five-hour artillery bombardment, known as a **hurricane bombardment**. The Germans planned to fire one million artillery shells at the British lines – over three thousand shells per minute.

▼ **SOURCE A** *Early success for the Germans; here, a group of German soldiers stand in front of several captured British tanks*

- The Germans would then use their specially-trained, elite stormtroopers to burst through the enemy lines and create panic amongst the enemy troops.
- Attacks would take place in three other places, and the gaps in the lines would allow a larger German force to break through and surround the British, forcing their surrender.
- The French would also surrender because they could not fight on without British support.

The Germans had high hopes for their plan. They named it '*Kaiserschlacht*', the 'Emperor's Battle'. It is sometimes known as the Spring Offensive because the attack would begin on the first day of spring, 1918.



Ludendorff's Spring Offensive begins

The artillery bombardment began at 4.40am on 21 March 1918. An area of 150 square miles was hit by one million shells, fired from six thousand guns in five hours; it was the heaviest bombardment of the entire war. This was followed by the release of poison mustard gas, and then a massive attack by thousands of stormtroopers. These fast-moving soldiers were not weighed down with heavy kit – they carried only light machine guns, grenades and flamethrowers.

The British were totally outnumbered and confused. Thousands fled or surrendered. By the end of the first day, 20,000 British soldiers had been killed, 35,000 had been wounded, and another 21,000 had been taken prisoner. This was to become the biggest breakthrough on the Western Front for three years. The stalemate had been broken.

▼ **SOURCE B** A cartoon from Punch magazine on 31 July 1918; it shows General Ludendorff and had the title, 'A Champagne counteroffensive'



Practice Question

Study **Source B**. The source supports the Allies. How do you know? Explain your answer using **Source B** and your contextual knowledge.

4 marks

Key Words

hurricane bombardment

▼ **SOURCE C** A report from the British newspaper, the Daily Express, 22 March 1918

An attack which appears to be the beginning of the great German offensive, was made against the British front west and south-west of Cambrai today.

If this battle proves to be the real German effort against the British front we must expect hard and continuous fighting. The enemy has trained his troops well in open warfare, and they are well supported by light and heavy artillery and a host of trench mortars intended to move forward steadily with the advancing infantry.

Work

- 1 Explain why the Germans were so keen to mount an attack on the Western Front in the spring of 1918.
- 2 When asked to describe his plan, Ludendorff said, 'We chop a hole. The rest follows.' Explain what he meant.
- 3
 - a Write a brief report, from either a British or German point of view, describing the early stages of the Spring Offensive.
 - b In what ways would your report be different if you were writing it from the other point of view?

Extension

Stormtroopers played a major role in Germany after the war. Carry out some research into the role of the post-war stormtroopers.

Study Tip

What do you think the pliers and the bottle label mean?

Ludendorff's Spring Offensive

Unstoppable?

The German advance had been spectacular. In some places, they had pushed forward over 60 kilometres. The Germans regained control of the region around the River Somme – where so many soldiers had been killed in the great battle of 1916 – and reached as far as the River Marne. But they had paid a high price. Between March and April 1918, the Germans had lost over 220,000 men and did not have enough soldiers in reserve to replace those that had been killed or injured. At this rate, before long, the Germans would run out of men.

▼ **SOURCE E** Adapted from the notice issued by British Army leader General Haig on 11 April 1918

In spite of throwing already 106 Divisions into the battle and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, the enemy has as yet made little progress.

We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops. Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered all ranks of our Army under the most trying circumstances.

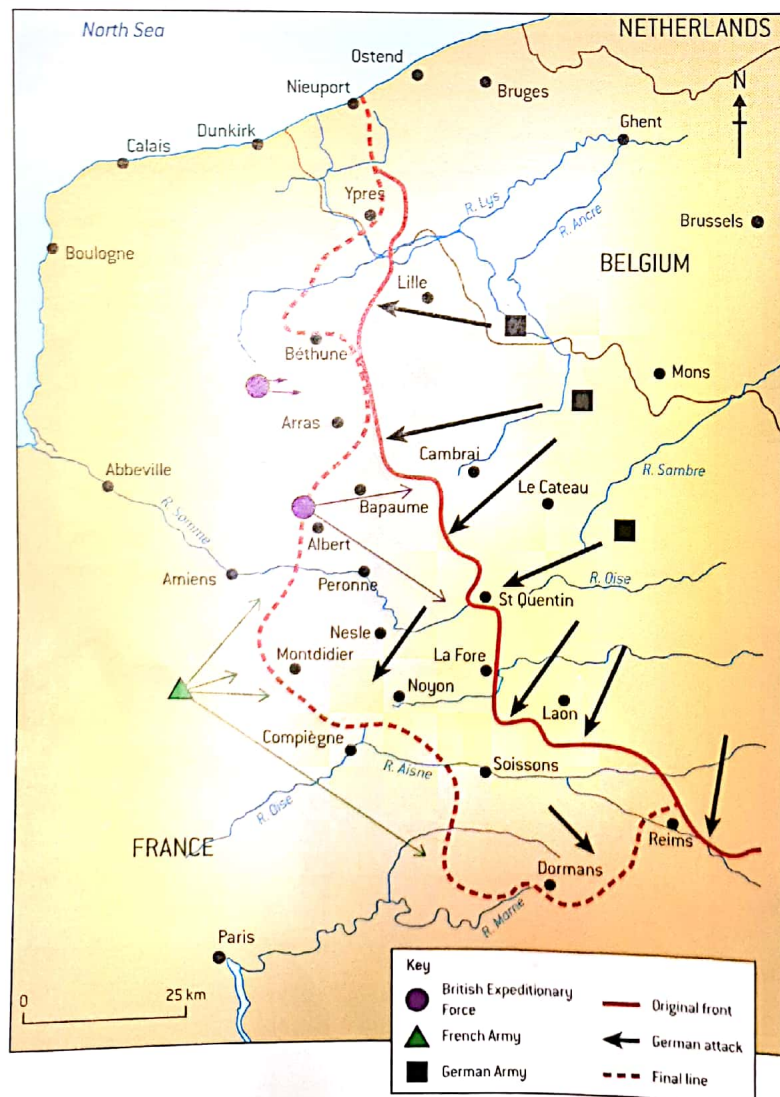
Many amongst us now are tired. To those I would say that Victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest. The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our support.

There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the Freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment.

Problems with the rapid advance

Another problem for the Germans was that the stormtroopers had performed too well! Put simply, Ludendorff had sent too many men deep into French territory. As a result, supplies of food and weapons were taking too long to get to the troops, and they were running out of both. The German advance began to slow down as troops stopped in captured French villages to loot for supplies. The British and French forces also began to fight back, and finally the first American troops began to arrive.

▼ **D** Ludendorff's Spring Offensive, March – July 1918; at the River Marne, the advance got to within 120 km of Paris; this meant that the German Army could fire shells at the French capital from the world's largest artillery gun; in total, 183 shells hit Paris and many Parisians fled the city in fear



The response

In the panic and confusion of the German advance, the British and French military leaders had decided to place their armies under the command of one person, French general Ferdinand Foch. Before this, the British and French armies had acted independently of each other, but now the plan was to act as a unified force. It was to be an inspired decision.

The fightback

As you can see from Map D, the German advance meant there was a bulge in their front-lines. In warfare, this is often called a **salient**. It meant that they could be attacked from different sides – and this is exactly what Foch did. By June, American soldiers were arriving at a rate of 50,000 per week, and Foch had also kept other soldiers in reserve. On 15 July, Ludendorff ordered one final attack, which ended in disaster. The Germans advanced only two miles before once again running short of supplies. At this point, Foch ordered his fresh troops to counterattack, and they soon pushed the Germans back to the River Marne. The German attack on 15 July was their last major attack of the war. The Ludendorff Offensive had cost the Germans around half a million men – and now the Allies were about to launch their own huge attack.

Key Biography

Erich Ludendorff (1865–1937)

- Born in 1865, in Prussia.
- He helped revise the Schlieffen Plan.
- Together with another military leader he masterminded Germany's victories over the Russians at the battles of Tannenberg (1914) and the Masurian Lakes (1915).
- He supported the policy of 'unrestricted submarine warfare' – a major reason why America entered the war in 1917.
- He played a key role in organising the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk after Russia's withdrawal from the war.



Practice Question

'Appointing General Foch as the Supreme Allied Commander was the main reason for the failure of Ludendorff's Spring Offensive.' How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

16 marks

SPaG: 4 marks

Key Words

salient

▼ **SOURCE F** Adapted from an account by a German officer, Hartwig Pohlmann, 1918, describing the last days of Ludendorff's Spring Offensive

In July 1918 we tried to cross the River Marne but after three days we had to fall back. The resistance of the enemy was too heavy and there we met first American troops. We knew more and more American troops will come to the front-line and the enemy will become overwhelming for us. But we knew that we had to do our duty as soldiers for as long as we could. We had very heavy losses in that year and the units became smaller and smaller, we had to combine to form one company out of two and so on. The number of our guns diminished.

Work

- a Read **Source E**. In what ways does Haig praise the British and French soldiers?
 - b This notice was issued on 11 April. Haig wrote that the Germans had 'made little progress' in their attack. Do you agree with Haig?
 - c Why do you think Haig did not tell the soldiers how far the Germans had advanced?
 - d Why do you think Haig issued this notice?
 - e Do you think it had a positive or a negative effect on the morale of the troops? Explain your reason.
- a Write a brief report, from either a British or German point of view, describing the later stages of the Ludendorff Offensive.
 - b Why did the Ludendorff Offensive fail? List as many reasons as you can.

Study Tip

As well as the appointment of General Foch for the Allies, why did the German plan fail?

On 9 November the Kaiser abdicated and secretly left Germany. On 11 November 1918 German representatives, led by Matthias Erzberger, were told to sign a piece of paper which officially ended the First World War. How did the war end for Germany, and why did it end this way?

Objectives

- ▶ Examine the reasons why Germany surrendered in November 1918.
- ▶ Outline the terms of the armistice.

The impact of war on Germany

By September 1918, Germany was close to collapse. The British naval blockade (see page 89) had stopped vital supplies getting into the country. German people were so short of food that they were surviving on turnips and bread – and a deadly ‘flu epidemic was sweeping the country, killing thousands already weak from a poor diet.

On the battlefields, Germany and its allies were close to defeat. On 29 September, General Ludendorff told shocked German politicians and generals that he thought Germany should ‘abandon the war as hopeless’. In response, the Kaiser reluctantly allowed the main political parties to form a new government, which took away some of his powers and gave them to the German parliament. But the changes came too late to satisfy the German people. Large demonstrations were held against the war and some protesters even talked of overthrowing the Kaiser in a revolution.

Mutiny, revolution and abdication

On 28 October, the German Navy, based in Kiel, northern Germany, was ordered out to sea to attack British ships. Sailors on the ships refused to follow orders – they just did not want to fight any more. News of their mutiny began to spread. In ports nearby, other sailors refused to follow orders. Workers in the towns supported them. Soldiers, sent to deal with the protests, joined in with the sailors and workers. Soon they began to take over more towns and set up special councils to run them. In just six days, workers’ and soldiers’ councils were governing towns and cities all over

Germany, such as Hamburg, Cologne, Frankfurt, Munich, and finally, Berlin. The country was in chaos and there was little the Kaiser could do; he had lost control and his army generals refused to support him. On 9 November 1918, he abdicated and secretly left Germany. He went to live in Holland, never to return.

▼ **SOURCE A** Adapted from a letter written by General Hindenburg to a member of the German royal family in October 1918

The Supreme Command demands an immediate despatch of a peace offer to our enemies. There no longer exists any hope of forcing peace on our enemies. The enemy can bring in new and fresh reserves. The German army holds fast and repulses all attacks with success. But we must stop fighting to save the German people further useless sacrifices.

The end of the war

Friedrich Ebert, one of the leaders of Germany’s largest political party (the SDP), took the Kaiser’s place as leader of Germany on a temporary basis. He promised to hold elections soon. If ordinary German people wanted him as their leader, they would get the chance to vote for him if they wished. Meanwhile, he gave the people what they really wanted – an end to the war.

The armistice: Germany surrenders

Ebert sent a small group of representatives, led by Matthias Erzberger, to France to negotiate an **armistice** (ceasefire). The Germans hoped to sort out a fair deal but the British, French and Americans were in no mood to negotiate. Marshal Foch, the Allied Commander-in-Chief, met the Germans in a railway carriage at Compiègne, northern France, and instructed them to agree to the terms of the armistice. The main terms included:

- all fighting on land, sea and in the air, should end within six hours
- all land occupied by German troops in Belgium, Luxembourg, and France (plus Alsace-Lorraine, held since 1870 by Germany) were to be evacuated within 15 days
- the Allies were to occupy land in Germany to the west of the River Rhine up to a distance of 30 kilometres

Key Words

armistice

- German troops had to withdraw from Austria-Hungary, Romania, and Turkey
- Germany must immediately hand over ten battleships, six battle cruisers, eight cruisers and submarines, give up its largest weapons and hand over railway trains, railway carriages and rail trucks
- the naval blockade would continue
- Germany would pay a financial settlement for all damage caused.

When the terms of the armistice were read out, one of the German representatives began to cry. But Erzberger had been told that they must sign, whatever was placed in front of them, because the situation back in Germany was so chaotic and the new German government needed an end to the war. So, at 5.10am on 11 November 1918, the German representatives signed to agree to the terms. The war was to end at 11.00am later that day. Immediately after the paper was signed, Foch left the carriage, without shaking hands. The First World War was over.

▼ **SOURCE B** *From a speech made in the German parliament by General Hindenburg in November 1919*

In spite of the superiority of the enemy in men and materials, we could have brought the struggle to a favourable conclusion if determined and unanimous cooperation had existed between the army and those at home. The Germany Army was stabbed in the back. It is plain enough on whom the blame lies.

Practice Question

Study **Sources B** and **C**. How useful are these sources to a historian studying the reasons why Germany asked for a ceasefire in 1918?

12 marks

► **SOURCE C** *In 1919, Hindenburg gave evidence to a German government enquiry about why Germany lost the war; this cartoon from the humorous German magazine Simplicissimus, November 1919, comments on his evidence; the cartoon shows him revealing a theatrical performance*



Work

- Explain what is meant by the word 'abdicate'.
 - In your own words, explain why Germany's Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm, decided to abdicate.
- Read **Source A**. Who was General Hindenburg?
 - Sum up his view of Germany's current situation in October 1918.
- Read **Sources A** and **B**. In what ways do the two sources differ?
 - Can you explain why Hindenburg might be saying different things about the end of the war?
- Describe the role played in the armistice by:
 - Matthias Erzberger
 - Friedrich Ebert
 - Marshall Foch.
- Why do you think one of the German representatives cried when the terms were read out to him? Explain your answer.

Extension

In January 1919, the winning nations in the war met up in Paris to discuss what to do with the defeated countries. The result was a series of treaties which severely punished Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey. Prepare fact files on each of these treaties, detailing the main points and punishments and the long-term impact each had.

Study Tip

What does the magazine think of Hindenburg's explanation of why Germany lost the war?

9.3A Why was Germany defeated?

The First World War came to an end at 11am on 11 November 1918. By this time, Germany was fighting alone because its allies – Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey – had all withdrawn from the war in the weeks before. But there is no clear single reason (or factor) why Germany was defeated in November 1918. Instead, there are several reasons that combined to contribute to its defeat. It is the role of a historian to explore and assess these reasons, in order to draw conclusions as to why Germany surrendered in 1918.

Objectives

- ▶ Assess the factors that contributed to Germany's defeat in November 1918.
- ▶ Explore the contribution of Haig and Foch to Germany's defeat.

The war at sea and the British naval blockade of Germany

As early as 1915, Germany was only able to import half the amount of goods as before the war. This severely damaged both the German war effort, and the living standards of ordinary Germans. For example, German industry ran short of fuel and chemicals for explosives and gas, and agriculture was severely hit due to a lack of fertilisers for the crops. There were food riots in German cities in 1916 because so many people were going hungry. It has been estimated that about 120,000 people died of starvation in 1916, rising to as many as 420,000 by 1918. The continued shortages and hunger gradually eroded support for the war and, by 1918, there were riots and strikes as civilians demanded an end to the conflict.



The USA enters the war

The USA's decision to enter the war was a great morale boost for the Allied soldiers in the trenches. Also, the economic and military strength of America meant that around 2 million soldiers and millions of tonnes of food, equipment and weaponry arrived in support of the Allies, while German supplies and forces were weakening. The arrival of the USA also forced the Germans to put a huge effort into Ludendorff's Spring Offensive [see pages 82–85], which ultimately failed.



Failure of the Ludendorff Spring Offensive

The failure of Germany's last major attack was the sign to their military leaders that they could not win the war. The Germans lost around 800,000 troops during the whole course of the attack, and Ludendorff calculated that he needed 200,000 fresh troops each month to continue the war. However, he was told that he could only be supplied with about 300,000 for the whole of the next 12 months. At this point, the German war leaders knew that defeat was near. The Allied counterattack that followed quickly pushed the Germans back, and it was clear that an armistice needed to be agreed upon soon.



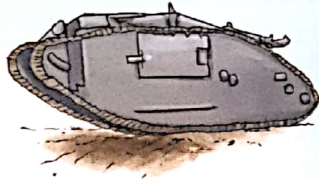
Impact of the Bolshevik (Russian) Revolution

Russia's withdrawal from the war was a bonus for Germany to begin with. It allowed Germany to pull together all its forces and concentrate them on one huge attack on the British and French (before the US troops arrived). But Ludendorff's Spring Offensive failed, and the revolution in Russia began to have an impact on Germany. Some Germans with the same political ideas as the Russian revolutionaries wanted to remove the Kaiser, just as the Russians had removed their tsar. There was an increasing number of riots and strikes in 1918, and like in Russia, workers' and soldiers' councils were set up across Germany. This chaos across Germany was one of the factors that led the Kaiser to abdicate – and the government that replaced him ended the war.



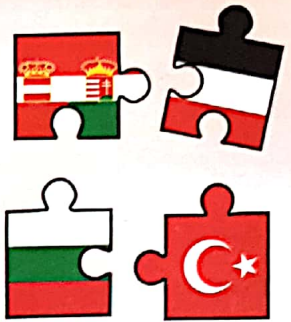
The development of the tank

The Germans were not convinced of the value of the tank, and only produced 20. The British and French, on the other hand, believed tanks could help to break the stalemate on the Western Front, and so they produced thousands. They were first used to great effect at the Battle of Cambrai in November 1917, and then on a larger scale at the beginning of the Battle of Amiens on 8 August 1918. Success on that day marked the beginning of the final attack that led to the military defeat of Germany.



The defeat of Germany's Allies

During September and October 1918, Germany's allies collapsed. The Bulgarian Army surrendered on 29 September after being driven back by Serbian and French forces. In late October, Turkish forces surrendered to combined British and Arab troops, and on 3 November Austria-Hungary pulled out of the war after a devastating defeat against Italian troops at the Battle of Vittorio Veneto.



▼ **SOURCE A** A cartoon drawn in 1916 by a Dutch artist Louis Raemaekers; it shows the Kaiser (in the centre) hand-in-hand with war (on the left) and hunger (on the right)



Work

- 1 How is the time and date of the end of the First World War remembered every year?
- 2 a Look at **Source A**. Describe what you can see in the cartoon. In your description, write about the way the cartoonist has drawn the images.
b What do you think the cartoonist wanted people to think about Kaiser Wilhelm II? In your answer, think whether the image shows the Kaiser in a positive or a negative way.

Fact

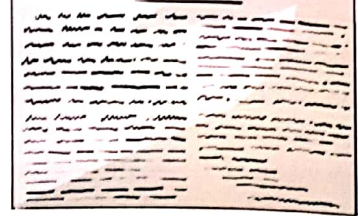
The last soldier to be killed during the war was an American named Henry Gunther. He was shot whilst charging at a German machine gun post at 10.59am, one minute before the armistice was to take effect at 11am. He was the grandson of German immigrants to the USA.

9.3B Why was Germany defeated?

The German Revolution

When news of the failure of the Ludendorff Spring Offensive and the advance of the Allies reached Germany, the morale of the German people dropped quickly. This, combined with the worsening food shortages and a deadly flu epidemic which killed thousands led to a revolution in Germany. German sailors at the Kiel naval base mutinied and refused to follow orders, and soon the rebellion spread over Germany. It was clear that the Kaiser had lost control of his country as workers and soldiers began to set up their own councils to run the different German states. The Kaiser left Germany on 9 November and the war was over by 11 November.

KAISER ABDICATES: REVOLUTION IN GERMANY



The role of Foch and Haig in Germany's defeat

▼ B Ferdinand Foch



There are different views about Ferdinand Foch and Douglas Haig, the two best-known French and British generals. Some argue that they were reckless with their troops' lives and stubbornly followed their plans when alternative ideas were possible. Others argue that no matter what you think about their tactics, they did, after all, win the war. The following interpretations demonstrate a variety of views.

▼ C Douglas Haig



▼ **INTERPRETATION D** From an article by S Warburton in *Hindsight* magazine, 1998

Blaming Haig the individual for the failings of the British war effort is putting too much of a burden of guilt on one man. Haig was the product of his time, of his upbringing, education, training and previous military experience. One argument goes that he was, ultimately, victorious and, even if he had been replaced, would there have been anyone better for the job? Even on the Somme a German officer called the battlefield 'the muddy grave of the German army'. This was the same battle in which Haig's numerous mistakes contributed to the half a million casualties suffered by the Allies.

▼ **INTERPRETATION E** Adapted from a biography about Haig by Alfred Duff Cooper, 1935

Was it stupid to fight at the Somme? Surely there can be only one opinion. If we had not attacked at the Somme, the Germans would have beaten the French at Verdun and the French and British alliance could have been broken.

▼ **INTERPRETATION F** From a 2017 article by Kennedy R Hickman, a historian specialising in military and naval history

As fighting continued into 1915, [Foch] oversaw French efforts during the Artois Offensive that [Autumn]. A failure, it gained little ground in exchange for a large number of casualties. In July 1916, Foch commanded French troops during the Battle of the Somme. Severely criticised for the severe losses sustained by French forces during the course of the battle, Foch was removed from command in December.

Key Biography

General Sir Douglas Haig (1861–1928)

- Born in Edinburgh in 1861 into a wealthy family, he went on to study at Oxford University and at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst.
- In 1906, he became director of military training for the British Army. He was responsible for organising the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in case of war with Germany.
- He successfully commanded troops at the battles of Mons and Ypres in 1914 and was promoted to commander of the whole British Army in December 1915.
- In July 1917, another attack at Ypres resulted in more heavy casualties, but in 1918 he oversaw a series of victories against German forces.
- He helped set up the Royal British Legion (known for its Poppy Appeal).
- He retired from the military in 1921 and died in 1928.



Extension

Recently, historians have suggested that General Haig's reputation as 'The Butcher of the Somme' is undeserved. Research the reasons for this reinterpretation.



Practice Question

'The failure of Ludendorff's Spring Offensive was the main reason for Germany's surrender in the First World War.' How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

16 marks

SPaG: 4 marks

Work

- 1 Write a brief summary of the way in which the following contributed to Germany's defeat in the war:
 - a the war at sea and the British naval blockade of Germany
 - b the Bolshevik Revolution
 - c the USA entering the war
 - d the failure of Ludendorff's Spring Offensive
 - e the tank, and the use of new technologies and tactics
 - f the defeat of Germany's allies
 - g the German Revolution
 - h General Haig
 - i Commander-in-Chief Foch
- 2 Which three factors do you think played the most important role in Germany's defeat? Explain your choices.
- 3 Read **Interpretations D** to **F**.
 - a Make two lists, one outlining positive ways in which Haig and Foch contributed to Germany's defeat and the other outlining criticisms.
 - b Why do you think historians have disagreed so much about the roles of Haig and Foch in Germany's defeat? Explain your answer.

Study Tip

Write a paragraph about the failure of Ludendorff's Spring Offensive and other factors that influenced Germany's surrender in 1918.