

# Knowledge Organiser: The British Sector on the Western Front, 1914-1918

## Key Battles

### The First Battle of Ypres (Oct-Nov 1914)

Ypres was a salient – an area surrounded on 3 sides by the enemy. The British lost over 50,000 troops during this battle, but crucially kept control of the important English Channel ports.

### Hill 60 (April 1915)

Hill 60 was a man-made hill near Ypres that was captured by the Germans in December 1914. Its height gave them a strategic advantage. In April 1915, the British tunnelled under the hill, placed five mines under it, then blew the top off to recapture it.

### The Second Battle of Ypres (April-May 1915)

The Germans used chlorine gas for the first time. British soldiers were unprepared for gas and often used urine-soaked cloths as makeshift gas masks. The British lost 59,000 men and the Germans moved 2 miles closer to Ypres.

### The Battle of the Somme (July-Nov 1916)

Around 20,000 British soldiers died on the first day alone. The British tried out two new tactics:

- The creeping barrage: This was where artillery was launched from the trenches just ahead of the British troops as they advanced forwards.
- Tanks: These were unsuccessful because of their low speed and unreliability.

In total, the Somme cost the British over 400,000 lives.

### The Battle of the Arras (April-May 1917)

Tunnelling companies from Britain and New Zealand dug a network of underground caves at Arras, where the ground was chalky and soft. In April 1917 24,000 men attacked from the tunnels.

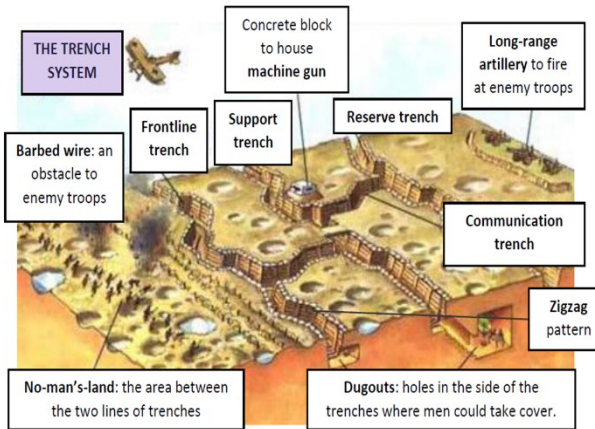
The British advanced 8 miles, but their progress slowed and by the end of the battle there were nearly 160,000 British and Canadian casualties.

### The Battle of Passchendaele (Third Battle of Ypres) (July-Nov 1917)

The aim of this battle was for the British to break out of the Ypres Salient. Bad weather made the ground waterlogged and many men drowned in the mud. By the end the British had regained about 7 miles, at a cost of about 245,000 casualties.

### The Battle of Cambrai (Nov-Dec 1917)

Cambrai saw the first successful large-scale use of tanks – nearly 500 were used. They could move easily over the barbed wire and their machine guns were very effective.



## Treatments & Surgery

- **Dealing with infection:**
  - Debridement
  - The Carrel-Dakin method
  - Amputation
- **Thomas Splint**
- **Mobile X-Ray units**
- **Blood transfusions**
- **Blood banks**
- **Brain surgery**
- **Plastic surgery**

## RAMC and FANY

Medical treatment was mainly provided by the **Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC)**, the branch of the army responsible for medical care.

The **First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY)** was an organisation which sent women volunteers to help out on the Western Front. The first six FANY nurses arrived in France in October 1914.



FANYs provided emergency first aid and from 1916 they also **drove ambulance wagons**. There were never more than 450 FANYs in France, but they opened the way for more women (e.g. the Voluntary Aid Detachments [VAD]) to take part in the war.

## Medical Conditions on the Western Front

Below are some of the common medical conditions experienced by soldiers on the Western Front.



### Trench fever

Caused by: Body lice, which thrived in the dirty trench conditions

Symptoms: Flu-like (high temperature, headache, aching muscles)

Solutions: Delousing stations were set up



### Trench foot

Caused by: Standing in cold water or mud for long periods of time

Symptoms: Painful swelling of the feet, eventually leading to gangrene (decomposition)

Solutions: Rubbing whale oil on the feet, keeping dry and changing socks regularly. Once gangrene set in amputation was the only solution.



### Shellshock

Caused by: Psychological damage as a result of the horrific war environment

Symptoms: Tiredness, nightmares, headaches, loss of speech, shaking, mental breakdown

Solutions: In some cases, men were treated back in Britain. Generally, shellshock was misunderstood and sufferers were often accused of cowardice

### Gas gangrene

Caused by: Open wounds infected by bacteria from soil

Symptoms: Dead tissue and a build-up of gas in the wound

Solutions: Amputation of infected areas was the only way to stop it spreading



### Gas injuries

Caused by: Chlorine, phosgene and mustard gas. First used by the Germans at the Second Battle of Ypres, April 1915

Symptoms: Burning skin, internal and external blisters, death by suffocation. Massive psychological impact – fear and panic

Solutions: Gas masks were given from July 1915 onwards, but before then soldiers would use urine-soaked cloths to cover their faces

### Shrapnel and bullet injuries

Caused by: Being hit by bullets or shrapnel from rifles/explosions. 58% of wounds were caused by shells and shrapnel; 39% were caused by bullets. Head injuries were a major problem at the start of the war, because soldiers only wore soft caps

Symptoms: Pieces of metal would penetrate the body, taking with them dirt and pieces of uniform

Solutions: Steel Brodie helmets were introduced in 1915



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## Exam Questions

### 1. Describe two features of... (4 marks)

P - Identify a feature/point	P – Identify another feature/point
E - Supporting detail/evidence	E – Supporting detail/evidence

P – One feature of ..... was.....

E – For example.....

P – A second feature of.....was.....

E – For example.....

### 2. Study Sources A and B in the Sources Booklet.

**How useful are Sources A and B for an enquiry into .....?**  
**Explain your answer, using Sources A and B and your knowledge of the historical context. (8 marks)**

**How useful are Sources A and B for an enquiry into... (8 marks)**

**S – SAY/SHOW** – What does the source say? What does the source show? What useful information does the source tell me? What facts does it give? What views or opinions does it give?

**N – NATURE** - What is the source? A photo, a speech, a cartoon, a letter, a diary. Does this affect its reliability? Is it likely to give honest views, be complete, be one-sided?

**A – AUTHOR** - Who wrote/created it? Does this affect its reliability? Do they know what they are talking about? Will they have a complete picture? If there is not author, is that a problem? Why?

**P – PURPOSE** - Why was it made? Does this affect its reliability? Are they trying to gain support? Are they trying to influence others? Are they writing to inform?

**CHAT** – Talk about each aspect using your own knowledge.

*The source is useful because it tells/shows me...*  
*The source is useful because it is....*  
*It's was written by.... This means...*  
*It's purpose was.... This means that...*

### 3. How could you follow up Source B to find out more about..... (4 marks)

1. Find a detail related to the topic of the question – it could be a **problem or an event** that has no reason given for it or something which has changed with no explanation.
2. Think of a **question** to ask which would give you that reason or explanation.
3. Think of **one** specific source to use that should give you an answer
  - If the answer is going to be a **number** – specific records – **Hospital records** about...
  - If it is about a **medical problem or development** – **British medical Journal** where doctors tell each other about issues they are facing and steps forward.
  - If it is a **personal experience** – **diaries and journals** that tell personal stories
4. Explain why this type of source would be useful – what would it tell you? Or – would you expect the source to be reliable?

*Detail in Source B that I would follow up: .....*

*Question I would ask: .....*

*What type of source I could use:.....*

*How this might help answer my question: .....*

.....