

Whose Fault was the First World War

4. So Who Were the Culprits?

- In his memoirs published in 1925 Grey gave his retrospective analysis of the causes of the war:
- More than one true thing may be said about the causes of the war, but the statement that comprises the most truth is that militarism and the armaments inseparable from it made war inevitable....After 1870 Germany had no reason to be afraid, but she fortified herself with armaments and the Triple Alliance in order that she might never have reason to be afraid in the future. France naturally was afraid after 1870, and she made her military preparations and the Dual Alliance (with Russia). Britain, with a very small Army and a very large Empire, became first uncomfortable and then (particularly when Germany began a big-fleet programme) afraid of isolation. She made the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, made up her quarrels with France and Russia, and entered the Entente. Finally, Germany became afraid that she would presently be afraid and struck the blow while she believed her power to be invincible.
- This may have been the reason for a war but it wasn't the reason for this war. We are only concerned with the war we actually got.

- The Anzac Portal offers a number of reasons for the war
 - British German Naval arms race
 - Economic rivalry of the great powers
 - Regional tensions
 - Alliance System/Balance of power
 - War Planning.
 - Rise of Militarism
- To these I would add
 - The rise of Empires as Entertainment
- But we are not looking for reasons
- **We are looking for the culprits.**

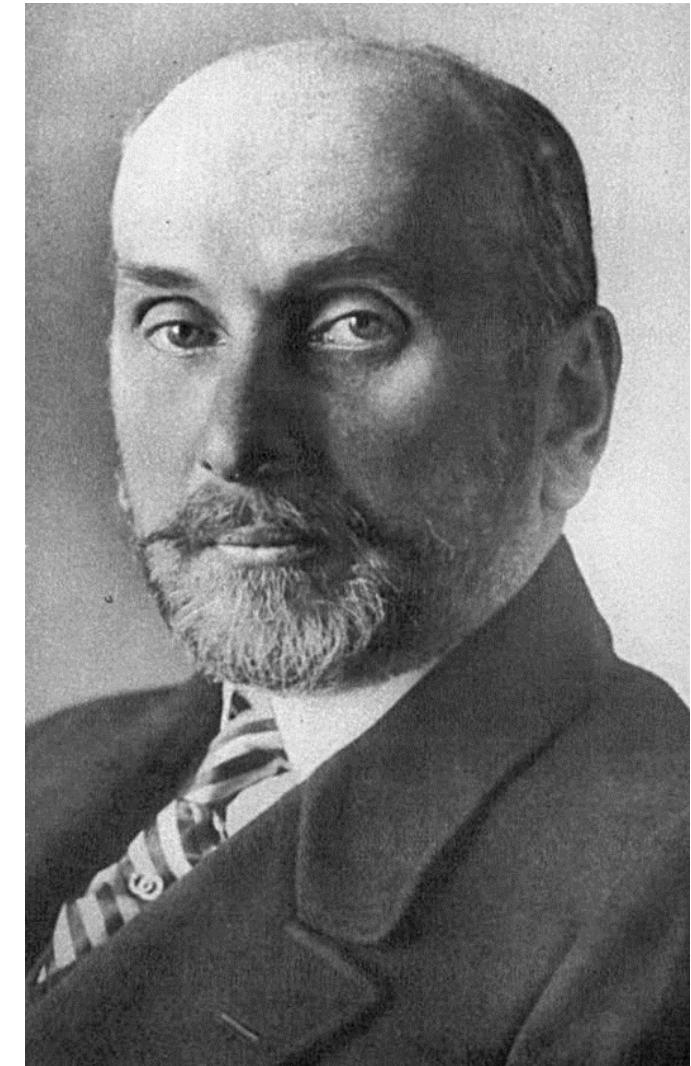
There are Plenty of Suspects.

- The Generals - for
 - Creating mobilisation plans which could not be stopped or reversed.
 - Totally failing to identify the technical capacity for a successful defence.
- Apis – For organising the Assassins
- The Assassins – For Killing the Archduke
- The Archduke – For stalling his car in front of an Assassin
- Berchtold, Conrad & the Emperor – for starting a war with no sensible objective reckless of the strong probability of sparking a Europe wide war and for deliberately evading efforts to preserve the peace by other Powers.
- Wilhelm – for the blank cheque and stoking the resentments in Morocco.
- Bethman-Holweg et al – for not shutting the blank cheque down and sabotaging subsequent Diplomatic efforts.
- Sazonov – for lack of directness in his statements to Germany and Austria.
- Asquith and Grey for allowing a little local difficulty in Ireland to distract them from the need to confront a much more serious danger and for failing to clarify for Germany the consequences of violating Belgium's neutrality.
- Grey for incoherence when he did start work.
- Buchanan for idleness.
- Autocratic Monarchs generally
- The Serbs and the Irish for being at the root of all the trouble in Europe for the past two centuries

- It seems to me that the key questions to ask to identify the culprit is:
- When did the toothpaste get squeezed irretrievably out of the tube?
- Who was it who squeezed the tube just before that?
- It wasn't the Assassination itself, any number of people or events could have stopped the process after that.
- It wasn't Wilhelm and his blank cheque. Bethman Holweg could have walked that back and the Austrians didn't have to cash the cheque.
- It seems to me that the delivery of the ultimatum to Serbia was the point when the toothpaste left the tube.
- The clandestine way the dispute had been handled over nearly a month, the lack of preceding protests or negotiations the short time limit and fierce terms persuaded the Russians that the Austrians had no interest in a resolution and were going to attack Serbia.

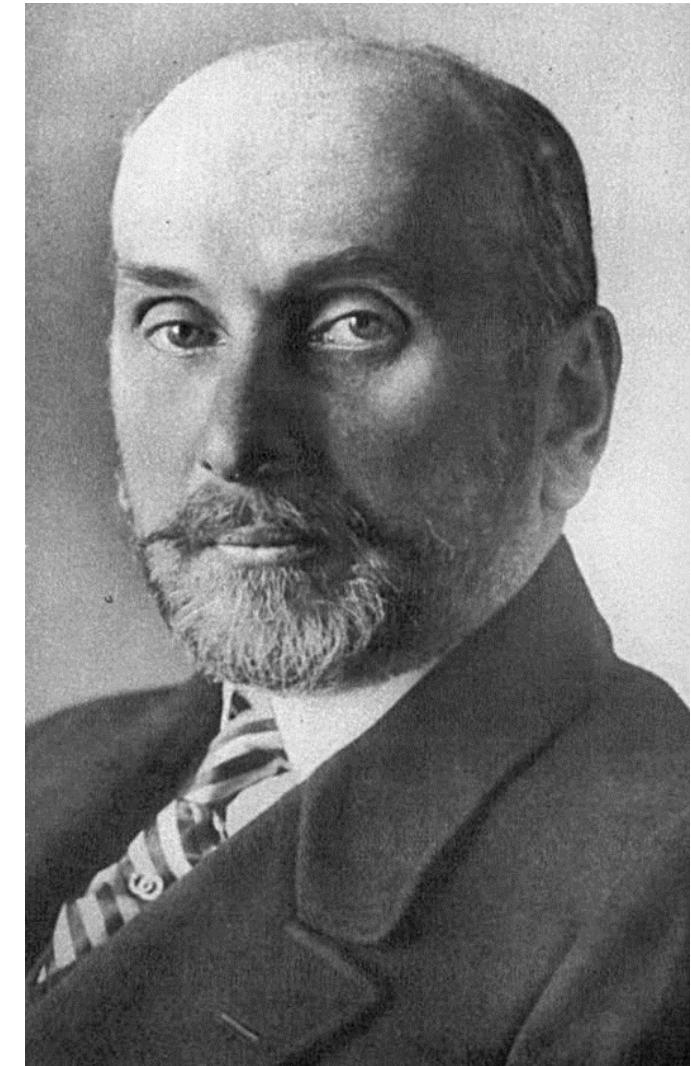
21 July

- Sazonov had a meeting with the German ambassador, Pourtale, on Tuesday night the 21st.
- If Austria Hungary was determined to break the peace Sazonov warned Pourtale she should realise that this time she would have to reckon with Europe.
- To ensure that Pourtale and through him Berlin and Vienna got the message Sazonov now issued a threat of his own to Vienna: “whatever happens there must be no talk of an ultimatum”



23 July

- Sazonov had rushed back to town to send off a strong message to ambassador Shebeko in Vienna wired off at 4:00 AM on Thursday the 23rd of July.
- Sazonov instructed his ambassador to warn Vienna cordially but firmly of the dangerous consequences which must follow any measures incompatible with the dignity of Serbia.
- He informed his ambassador that from my discussions with Poincare it clearly emerges that also France will not tolerate a humiliation of Serbia.
- The French ambassador to Austria, Sazonov told Shebeko, would shortly make an identical warning to Vienna.



23 July

- Sazonov's warning was deciphered by the Russian embassy in Vienna at 3:00 PM on Thursday 23rd of July.
- The Russian charge d'affaires rushed over to the Ballplatz to present Sazonov's antiultimatum ultimatum to the Austrian foreign minister.
- Berchtold's secretary brushed off the Russian telling him the foreign minister was busy and could not see him that afternoon, might the Russian come back at 11 the next morning.
- By 11 Friday morning the ultimatum would have been delivered to Belgrade on schedule on Thursday evening and Europe's governments would have been formally notified of it.
- The plan was to tell them at 10:00 AM on Friday.



Austrian Federal Chancellery at Ballhausplatz

23 July

- Giesl arrived at the Serbian foreign ministry shortly before 6:00 PM on Thursday the 23rd of July.
- Giesl displayed a copy of the ultimatum, informed the finance minister that the time limit would expire at 6:00 PM on Saturday 25th of July and that if a satisfactory reply were not received by then he would leave Belgrade with the entire staff of his legation.
- Pacu scarcely needed an interpreter to figure out what this meant: war.
- Pacu refused to take the documents in hand and protested to Giesl, because there were elections on and many of the ministers were absent he was afraid that it would be physically impossible to convene a full cabinet meeting in time to decide on a matter of such evident importance.
- Pacu simply would not accept the ultimatum.
- Giesl decided to simply leave it on the table saying that Pacu and Serbia could do what they liked with it.



Baron Wladimir Giesl von Gieslingen (1860–1936)

- This episode must have looked to Sazonov like a deliberate effort to stick an Austrian finger in his eye.
- Within an hour of receiving the official Austrian advice of the Ultimatum at 10.am 24 July he had abandoned diplomacy and was organising a military response.

24 July

- Shortly after 11:00 AM on Friday 24th July Sazonov asked the chief of staff, Yanushkevich (photo), to draw up a partial mobilisation directive against Austria.
- The chief of staff then summoned the chief of the Russian army's mobilisation section general Sergei Dobrorolskii.
- Dobrorolskii explained it was physically impossible to mobilise effectively against Austria without extensively using the Warsaw railway hub.
- Deploying against Austria via the Warsaw hub was unavoidable but doing so would inevitably alarm German commanders in east Prussia, defeating the point of partial mobilisation.



24 July

- At 3:00 PM 24 July the Council of Ministers convened for a special session.
- The ministers approved three policy resolutions drafted by Sazonov (photo)
- One. Russia promised to work with the other powers to request that Austria extend the ultimatum deadline
- 2. Russia advised Serbia to announce that she would not resist any Austrian invasion but would rather entrust her fate to the powers
- 3. that the Army & Navy chiefs would ask the Tsar at a formal crown council the next day to approve in principle the mobilisation of the four military districts (a partial mobilisation against Austria alone)



25 July 1914

- On the morning of the 25th in a session presided over by Nicholas himself resolutions went even further than those taken on Friday.
- First the Tsar approved the previous day's decision in principle to undertake partial mobilisation against Austria alone.
- 4th a state of war (that is martial law) was proclaimed in Moscow, St Petersburg, all towns in European Russia containing fortresses and in the frontier sectors facing Austria and Germany.
- Finally and most important the council issued top secret orders to inaugurate the Period Preparatory to War in all lands of the empire, beginning at midnight. This was a pre-mobilisation directive, which immediately preceded mobilisation.



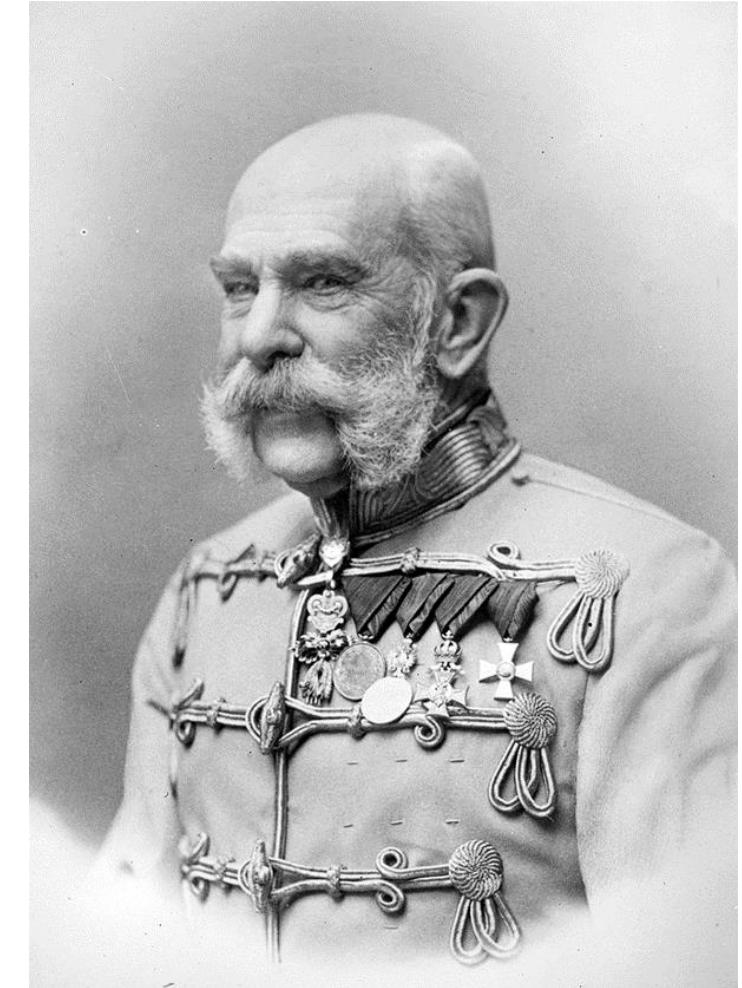
26 July

- In St Petersburg Russian preparations as part of the Period Preparatory to War were visibly in train and were viewed with alarm in Vienna and Berlin. By Sunday afternoon there was no doubt that some kind of mobilisation was underway.
- So confident of this were the Germans that late Sunday afternoon Ambassador Lichnowsky lodged a formal complaint, about hostile Russian mobilisation measures near the German frontier, with Whitehall.
- He noted that if this mobilisation took place on the German frontier Germany would be compelled to mobilise - and France naturally would follow suit.
- Lichnowsky requested that Britain urge the Russian Government not to mobilise.
- Nicholson, the PUS at the Foreign Office, denied the Russian mobilisation in stronger terms than could be justified and declined to make any representations to Russia.

26 July

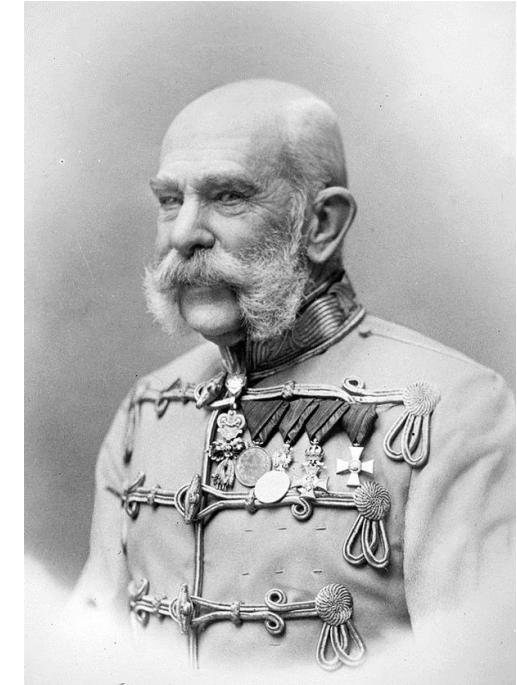
- Three days after the delivery of the Ultimatum and only 24 hours after its expiry the mutual paranoia of the European militaries is fully engaged and they are all desperate not to come second in the race to mobilise.
- The War is going to happen.
- There is plenty of blame to go round for other things, like building mobilisation plans with no reverse gear but:

These are the Culprits for World War 1



They knew or should have known that their ultimatum to Serbia would cause a Europe wide war but they went ahead anyway.

These are the Culprits for World War 1



In addition to killing millions of soldiers, the war they started in an attempt to preserve the Hapsburg monarchy, also resulted in the complete disintegration of the monarchy, the successor to the Holy Roman Empire, which dated back to 1282.

Franz Joseph's new heir Charles, his grand-nephew, was compelled to resign as both Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary at the end of the war. The areas he ruled over have now dissolved into seven separate countries.

The two areas which these three clowns were apparently keen to secure for the Hapsburgs, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia have continued to be a nightmare for whoever was left in possession and all their neighbours ever since.

What they should have known

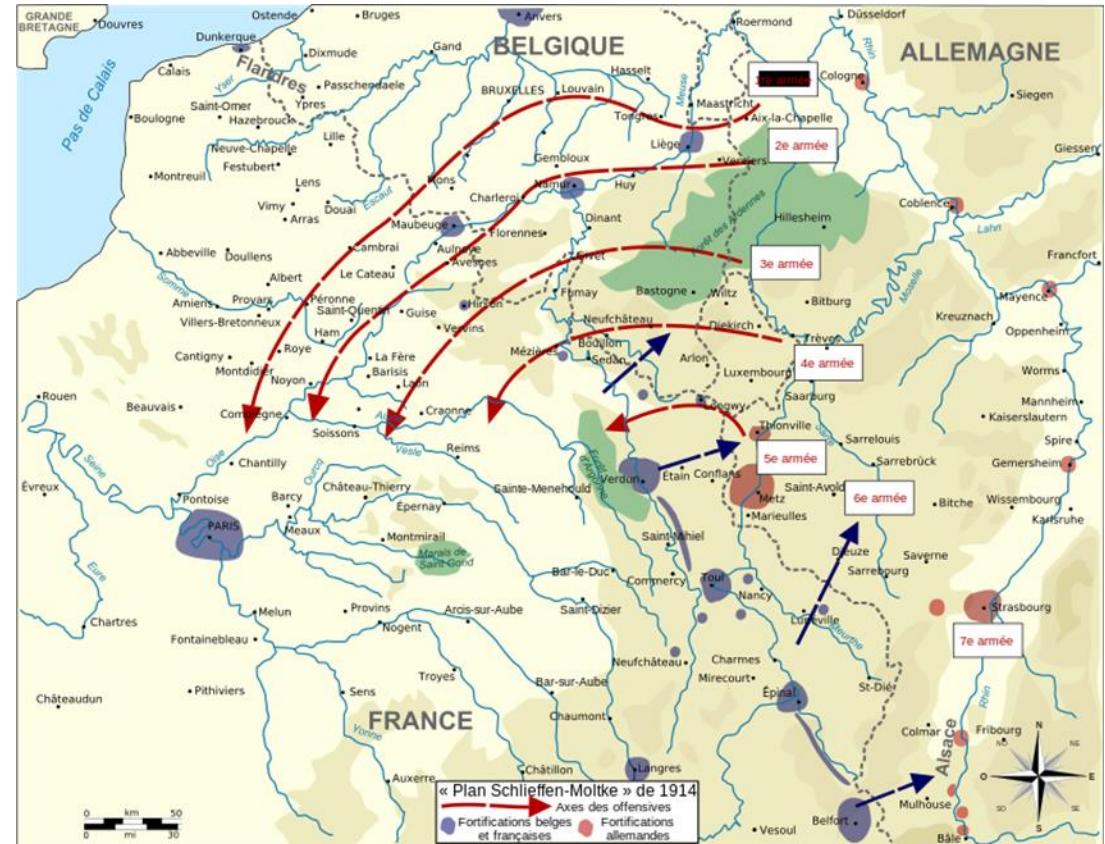
- Rupert Smith (photo), the outstanding British General of the late 20th century, in his book “The Utility of Force” makes the useful point that the employment of military force can only do two things for you, it can kill people and destroy things. He goes on:
- “Whether or not this death and destruction serves to achieve the overarching or political purpose the force was intended to achieve depends on the choice of targets or objectives within the broader context of the operation. That is the true measure of its utility.
- It follows that to apply force with utility implies an understanding of the context in which one is acting, a clear definition of the result to be achieved, an identification of the point or target to which the force is being applied and as important as all the others, an understanding of the nature of the force being applied.”
- There is no evidence in the historical record that Conrad, Berchtold or the Emperor ever considered any of these issues. They just wanted a war.



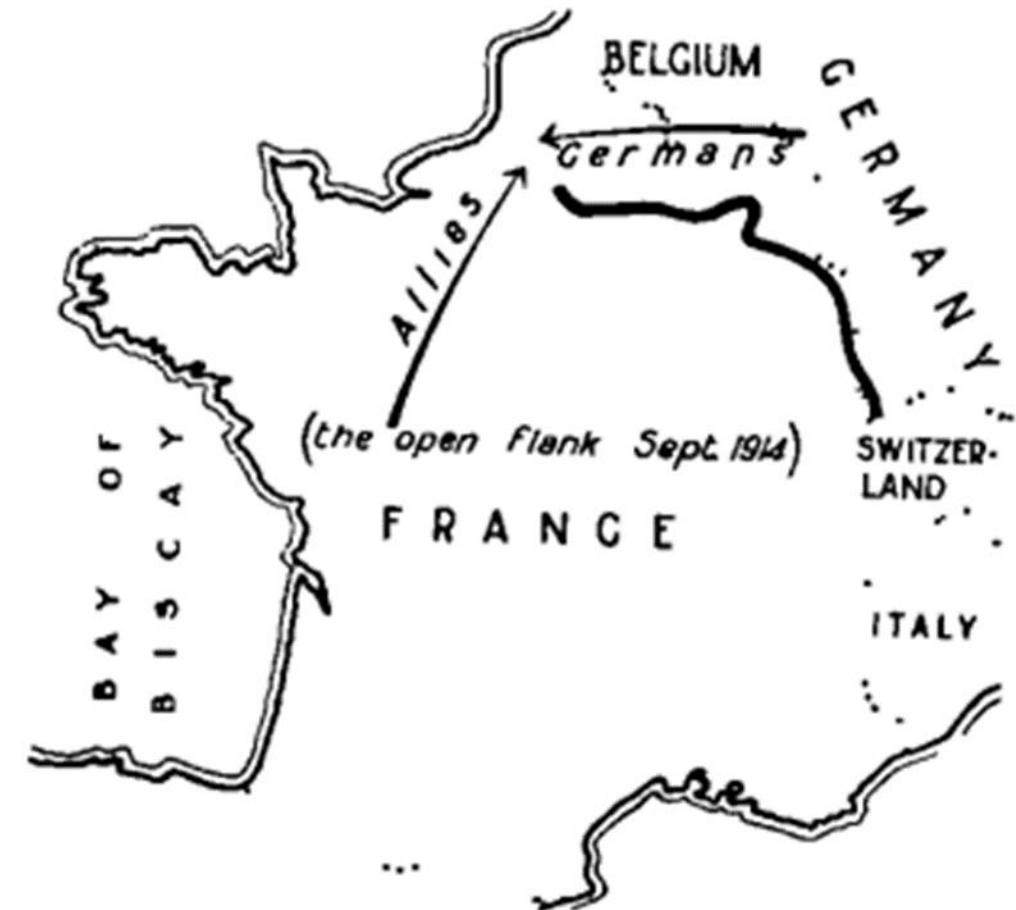
Further errors of omission

- “IN the September of 1914 there occurred on the Western front a change in the conditions of war.
- Most previous wars had been fought by armies moving along roads or railways against other armies moving similarly. Those armies were capable of ranging over a continent in the manner of other living things, provided they found food wherever they went. Napoleon equipped himself with huge supplies to render his Moscow army more mobile, and the use of railways allowed the Prussians in 1870 to move rapidly, provided they went along the routes on which their supplies were organised.
- All these armies had marched with their flanks “in the air,” that is to say, detached from the other forces of their side. Strategy-the art of moving armies before they reach the presence of the enemy- consisted mainly in concentrating a superior force of your own against one of the enemy’s inferior forces and crushing it before others could render help.
- Tactics-the art of moving forces when once they are in the presence of the enemy-was largely a matter of “containing” or holding the enemy in the front while striking at him unexpectedly from one of his two open flanks.

- But, even at the beginning of the Great War, so large were the forces poured into the old battle-grounds of France and Belgium. that the front of each combatant stretched across most of the possible theatre of war.
- By the first week in September the huge arm which the Germans extended through Belgium in order to encircle the left flank of the FrancoBritish army had failed in its task.
- In the next fortnight the Franco-British forces, after hopefully pressing the rearguards of the retiring Germans, found themselves held up by a continuous line of entrenchments crowning the hills which faced them across the river Aisne.
- They attacked day after day, expecting the Germans to give way, but making little impression.



- A new conviction began to grow—that if once an opponent can fortify himself in a continuous trench line, he can make the forcing of that line impossible.
- The one obvious course was to strike him beyond the end of his trench line, where the country was still open. This the Franco-British commanders strove to do in the country between the Aisne and the Belgian coast, which was not as yet crossed by entrenchments.
- But as fast as the Franco-British divisions moved round to attack the German right, they found German divisions hurried to meet them. The struggle developed into an unsuccessful effort by each side to extend its line until it overlapped the other's flank.
- By October the lines extended to the sea, and the open flank had disappeared."



- After the description on the last 3 slides the Australian Official Historian wrote:
- “All the training and education of soldiers took it for granted that armies would move in this manner.”
- “Both men and leaders, trained under the old conditions, at first found the situation difficult to grasp.”
- If the German and French Generals really took for granted that armies could continue to manoeuvre about with their flanks in the air they can never have actually thought about what all their millions of men would actually do when their mobilisation plans had degenerated into action.
- If your enemy has 7 men per metre of frontier, armed with spades and magazine breech loading rifles and a sprinkling of machine guns even the most trivial amount of war gaming would have revealed the nature of the next European War.
- To continue to believe that such a war would be over by Christmas and even that such a war could be won in any meaningful sense demonstrates criminal negligence on the part of the Generals, mainly German, who pressed a European War as if it was a rational national policy.

German Army in 1897	
Regulars	545,000
Reserves	3,400,000
Total	3,945,000
France's Eastern Border	
Kilometres	540
Soldiers per Kilometre	
Men per Kilometre	7,306
	1,000
Soldiers per Metre of French Border	
Men per metre	7