The World Gone Mad
A First World War Military History
Big Battles: Little Gain

Europe

1915 – 1916
First World War Generalship

- “The Donkeys” (Clark, 1961)
- Generals killed
  - 71 German, 55 French, & 78 British
- Problems:
  - Technology way out in front of tactics
  - Trenches have no flanks
- Constantly trying new things
First World War Generalship (2)

- Constantly failing for 4 good reasons
  - Poorly understood problem
  - Constantly updated defenses
  - Poor Communications
  - Inexperienced soldiers

- When to call off the attack

- Both sides finally figured it out (1918)
Tactics

- Large unit to small units
  - Loss of officers and/or communications

- Artillery
  - Massive bombardment
  - “Hurricane bombardment”
  - Creeping barrage
  - Feurwalze

- Riflemen to specialized soldiers

- Improving defenses & concrete

- Hutier tactics and combined arms
  - “Bite & Hold”
Tactics (2)

- Example of one British Battalion
  - On the Somme (1916)
    - 1000 men, 4 machine guns, 1 trench mortar
    - Division level objectives
    - >900 riflemen
  - At Amiens (1918)
    - 500 men (In 10 man sections)
    - 40 machine guns
    - 8 trench mortars
    - 6 tanks in support
    - Section level objectives
    - < 250 riflemen
Trenches

- A rational response to modern warfare
- Became highly complex cities
  - 250,000 Chinese laborers
- Inverted A-Frames & Railroads
- German “high ground” and permanent
- Allied “low ground” and temporary
- A life of rats, bugs, boredom, & mud
- Rotation schemes
Von unseren Feinden
Drahtverhaue vor den engl. und franz.
Stellungen bei Saloniki.
Firing line – 4 (55)     Support – 3 (37)
Reserve – 8 (120)      Behind the lines – 13 (160) (Includes leave to visit home)
A typical day in the trenches:

5am - 'Stand-to'
5.30am - Rum ration
6am - Stand-to until half an hour after daylight
7am - Breakfast (usually bacon and tea)
After 8am - Clean themselves, clean weapons, tidy trench
Noon - Dinner
After dinner - Sleep and downtime (one man per ten on duty)
5pm - Tea
6pm - Stand-to half an hour before dusk
6.30pm - Stand-down half an hour after dusk
6.30pm onwards - Work all night with some time for rest (patrols, digging trenches, putting up barbed wire, getting stores, replacement of unit of soldiers)
Note the consecutive lines of defence on the German side with "switch" trenches incorporated to compartment any Allied intrusion. By comparison, the British system was simpler and somewhat haphazard. British names for German trenches are utilized on this map.
Aircraft can warn of the build-up of enemy troops before an attack.

Concrete blockhouse for a machine-gun.

Reserve trench.

Support trench.

Front-line trench.

Communication trenches allow reserves to be brought forward without exposing them to enemy fire.

Barbed wire: metres deep and an impassable obstacle for any troops able to reach it.

No Man's Land (the stretch of land between the trenches of the opposing sides) has already been churned up by shell fire. In wet weather it becomes a mass of mud, making it even harder for troops to cross.

Front-line dug-outs provide protection but not against a direct hit from an artillery shell.

A deep dug-out. German ones could be 15 m below ground and too well constructed to be damaged by shell fire.

Long-range artillery is placed about 10 km behind the front line. These guns fire at advancing enemy troops.

PROBLEMS FACING ATTACKING TROOPS
Bunkers & Pillboxes
Trenches (2)

- Normalcy was only a few miles away
  - Informal Trench Support Area (The 3 B’s)
  - American reaction
- Informal truces
- Snipers
- Question: Did trench warfare save lives or cost lives?
Why Not Stop Now?

- Obviously not going to be a short war.
- Except for France, Belgium, & Austria everyone is where they started or better.
- Reasons they just can’t call it quits:
  - Justify the losses
  - Regain lost territory (France)
  - Hang on to gains (Germany)
  - Punish “evil wrongdoers”
The Italian Front

- Italy joins the Allies in May 1915
- Austrians stay on defensive here
- The Battle of the Isonzo River
  - And again and again and again
- 11 of these between May 1915 and Sept 1917
  - 1.5M Italian casualties
  - Almost no gain
- Asiago – May/June, 1916
  - Italians saved by the Brusilov Offensive
- These are mountain battles
- Italian Army is being worn down
THE ITALIAN FRONT 1915-1918

1 The Battleground

KEY
- Land over 3,000 feet.
- Railways.

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

STONE PASS

TYROL

CARNIA

Plave di Cadore

JULIAN ALPS

Caporetto (Karfreit)

SARS

MONTENEGRO

TRIESTE

Asiago

Main Italian objective.
Mountain Warfare
Eastern Front

- “Theater of Decision” (12/14)
- 2d Masurian Lakes (2/15)
  - Casualties: 200K vs. 16K
- Przemysl surrender (3/15)
- Gorlice -Tarnow (May-June 1915)
  - “Embedded” Germans
  - The Russian “Great Retreat” until Sept.
  - Casualties: 2M vs. 500K
- The Czar takes over (Aug 1915) (Dumb!!)
1. 2d Masurian Lakes (February)

2. Gorlice – Tarnow &

The Great Retreat (May – Sept)

German Problem: Tactical Victories, Strategic Failure
Eastern Front (2)

- Bulgaria enters the war (Sept 1915)
- Serbia gets overrun (Oct 1915)
- The Salonika Front (Oct 1915)
- Winter 1915-1916
  - Germany shifts strategic emphasis again!
  - Back to the west as the decisive theater