

A Short History of World War 1

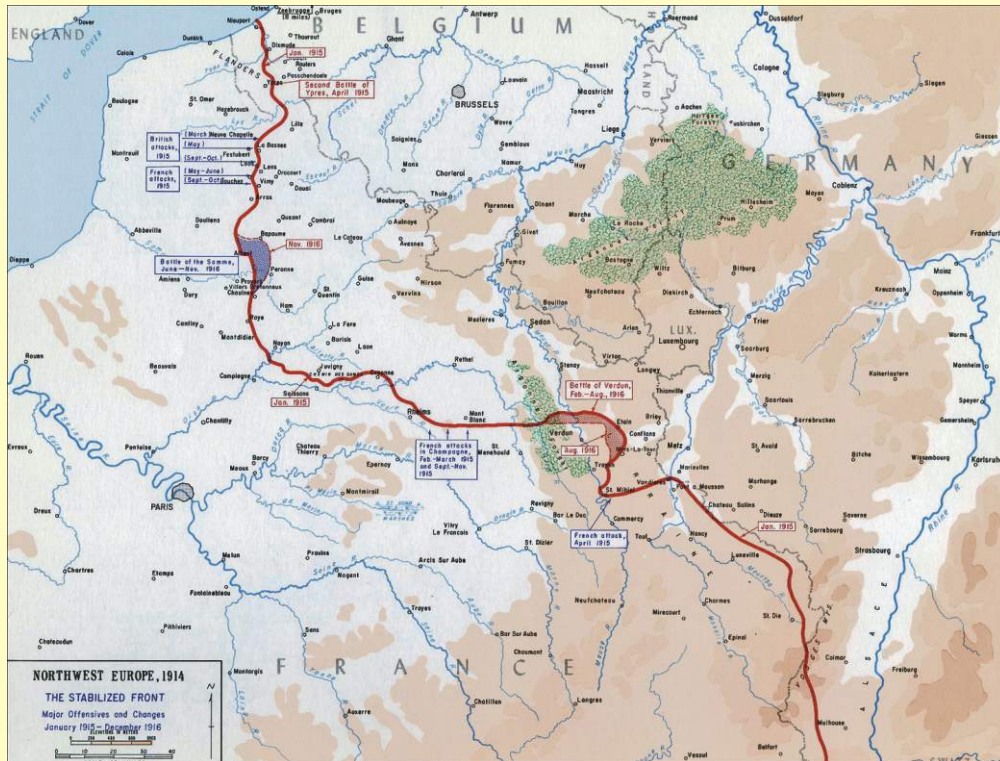
The First World War was a global war centred in Europe that began on 28 July 1914 and lasted until 11 November 1918. More than 9 million of the 70 million combatants were killed making it one of the deadliest conflicts in history.

When Germany invaded neutral Belgium and Luxembourg seeking European domination before moving onwards towards France, Britain declared war. After the German march advance was halted, what became known as the Western Front (a 600 mile line from Holland to Switzerland) settled into a stalemate, with a trench line that would change little until 1917.

The war drew in all the world's economic great powers which were in two opposing alliances: the Allies (United Kingdom, France and the Russian Empire) and the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. These alliances were both reorganised and expanded as more nations entered the war: Italy, Japan and the United States joined the Allies, and the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria the Central Powers.

After a 1918 German offensive along the western front (following an armistice with Russia on the Eastern Front) the Allies, now including the United States, drove back the Germans in a series of successful offensives and began gaining ground. Germany, now economically crippled, agreed to an armistice on 11th November 1918, ending the war with victory for the Allies.

The Western Front



The Centennial Commemoration of the Great War 1914 - 1918

Saturday 8th November 2014

Willow Grove Cemetery
Central Drive, South Reddish

10.00 Stockport Silver Band

10.30. Arrival of Mayor of Stockport

10.40 Arrival of Deputy Lord Lieutenant

10.50 Parade by serving, ex-serving and cadet forces.

11.00 Last post - reveille - blessing

Mayor's Speech

11.20 Military Trail Walk.

11.45 Refreshments
at 1804 Squadron Air Cadets Headquarters

1.30 Military Trail Walk

Each year from 2014 - 2018 we are highlighting the life of one person buried at Willow Grove Cemetery with a story to tell of World War 1. In 2014 we honour -

Jean Francois Vermeulen Died 28th October 1914. Age 23

Private Soldat Jean Francois Vermeulen 59694 served with Infantry 1 Linie Regiment 2nd Battalion 1st Company of the Belgian Army.

Christened Joannes Francius Vermeulen and born on 13th June 1892 he was one of nine children, having 2 brothers and 6 sisters. His father was Josephus Vermeulen (18/03/1852 - 13/08/1929) and his mother was Maria Elisabeth Van Haesendonc (19/04/1856 - 25/02/1934). They were farmers from Hofstade, near Brussels where his father also worked as a forester. His relatives still live in the same house today.

After being injured by shrapnel on 21st October 1914 at Kaaskerke near Diksmuide during the Battle of the Yser, Jean was rushed to England for treatment but sadly died on 28th October 1914 at Stockport Infirmary of tetanus from his wounds.

It has recently been learned that his parents never knew where he was buried, such was the sadness and complexity of the war.

The Battle of Yser

The River Yser (Ijzer or Yzer) originates in northern France before entering the Belgian province of West Flanders then flowing through Diksmuide and into the North Sea at the town of Nieuwpoort. This was the northern extent of the Western Front, a 600 mile ribbon of land from Belgium to Switzerland, which at its maximum width was just a few dozen miles and at its minimum a few yards, mostly defended by trenches. During the Battle of the Yser in the First World War, the river was deliberately flooded between Nieuwpoort and Diksmuide to provide an obstacle to the advancing German Army and keep westernmost Belgium safe from German occupation.

The Battle of the Yser took place from 18 - 30 October 1914 between the towns of Nieuwpoort and Diksmuide along a 22 mile long stretch of the Yser river and Yperlee canal in Belgium. The front line was held by a large Belgian force which succeeded in halting the German advance, though only after heavy losses with the Belgian army sustaining 20,000 casualties and even higher German casualties. Victory in the battle allowed Belgium to retain control of a sliver of its territory while making King Albert a Belgian national hero, sustaining national pride, and providing a venue for commemorations of heroic sacrifice for the next century.

World War 1 was the first war to involve not just professional armies but the average citizen. It began as a war with cavalry in brightly-coloured tunics wielding lances and foot soldiers with rifles, deployed in open warfare formations that would be recognised a century before. It ended with the use of battleships, fighter aeroplanes, poison gas, barbed wire, machine guns and howitzers that could fire a shell the weight of a car fifteen miles.

It was against this awful backdrop that Jean Francois Vermeulen fought and died for his country.

*The Yser Tower Memorial and Museum
and the Death Trench Museum at Diksmuide*

