# Timeline

This timeline is for the Western Front of the Great War between 1914 and 1918. It is drawn primarily from John Keegan’s *The First World War* (Pimlico, 1999) and Hew Strachan’s *The First World War* (Simon & Schuster, 2003). For details of the Eastern Front, see Norman Stone’s *The Eastern Front: 1914–1917* (Penguin, 1998), and for the Italian Front see Mark Thompson’s *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front 1915–1919* (Faber and Faber, 2008).

In 1914, Europe divided into two coalitions. The Triple Entente comprised Russia, France and Great Britain. Germany was allied with the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire. The main parties in the coalitions also had treaties with smaller European countries whose safety they guaranteed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 June</td>
<td>Assassination in Serbia of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, nephew to the Emperor of Austria.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26–27 July</td>
<td>Serbia mobilises its army in response to Austrian diplomatic activity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 July</td>
<td>Russia mobilises in defence of Serbia.</td>
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<td>28 July</td>
<td>Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia.</td>
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<td>1 August</td>
<td>Germany mobilises against Russia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 August</td>
<td>France mobilises against Germany.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 August</td>
<td>Germany invades Belgium. Britain declares war on Germany in support of Belgium at midnight, after German failure to withdraw.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 August</td>
<td>The Battle of the Frontiers begins: Britain, France and</td>
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Germany engage each other along the French border.

21 August
Belgian army retreats to the entrenched camp at Antwerp.

23 August
Battle of Mons: British and French troops defeated.

24 August
French and British armies begin retreating along the entire length of the front. The end of the Battle of the Frontiers.

6 September
Retreat halted. Battle of the Marne begins. British and French troops hold the line and stop the German advance towards Paris.

9 September
German armies retreat back to a line along the River Aisne and begin to entrench. They hold most of Belgium and part of north-west France. This becomes known as the Flanders Position, where most of the fighting will take place over the next four years.

12 September
The ‘Race for the Sea’ begins as both sides turn north towards the Channel to secure a route to the coast. Entrenchment begins along the line.

22 September
No. 1 Belgian Field Hospital opens in Antwerp.

9 October
No. 1 Belgian Field Hospital evacuated from Antwerp.

10 October
Belgium surrenders, except for a small corner of territory behind a loop in the River Yser.

12 October
First battle of Ypres. Entrenched positions lengthen towards the coast. British and French forces plug the gap in the front, and German offensive fails.

21 October
No. 1 Belgian Field Hospital re-established at Furnes. Henry Souttar and Sarah MacNaughtan are on the staff.

10 November
Jentie Patterson writes her first letter to her sister, describing how No. 5 Casualty Clearing Station has become a front-line field hospital.

22 November
End of the battle of Ypres. High casualties on all sides and dreadful winter weather stop any significant offensive plans. Defensive positions ordered by both sides and trenches are dug in deep. The Western Front, as we now know it, is created.

29 November
Turkey attacks Russian Black Sea ports, joining the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary.
8 December  Sarah MacNaughtan receives her specially made trolley from Harrods for her work at Furnes station.
14–24 December  First battle of Artois – inconclusive.
20 December  Smaller winter offensives are begun in Champagne by the French – inconclusive.

1915

Publication of the Oxford War Manuals begins.
3 January  Gas used by Germans at Bulimov on the Eastern Front.
10 March  Battle of Neuve Chapelle, first of the spring offensives.
12 March  Mickey Chater injured on last day of Neuve Chapelle. Battle ends inconclusively, but sets the pattern for future British and French offensives.
22 April  Germans use gas for the first time on the Western Front during the second battle of Ypres.
9 May  William Kelsey Fry wins Military Cross for bravery under fire retrieving casualties at Festubert.
23 May  Italy joins the war on the side of Britain, France and Russia.
25 May  End of second battle of Ypres.
May–June  Renewed offensives in Artois and Champagne.
1 June  Sarah MacNaughtan leaves Furnes and returns to England.
July  British troops reinforced.
25–28 September  Battle of Loos, part of the second offensive in Champagne. Frank Pierce, one of William Kelsey Fry’s bearers, wins the Distinguished Combat Medal. Father John Lane Fox buries men killed at the battle during the night. First British use of gas weapons.
13 October  Padre Charles Doudney killed by a shell.
6 November  End of British and French offensives on the Western Front.
6–8 December  Entente military commanders meet at Chantilly to
plan the great offensive for the forthcoming year, known as the Big Push.

1916

7 January  William Kelsey Fry refuses to leave his front-line RMO post for a casualty clearing station.

2 February  Charles McKerrow asks his wife to send him twenty pairs of medical scissors for his stretcher bearers.

21 February  German army begins new offensive at Verdun. It will grind on until December.

20 June  RMO Alfred Hardwick of 59th Field Ambulance charged extra for beer at the mess and told about the forthcoming Big Push by a local worker.

30 June  Padre Ernest Crosse builds medical posts with his RMO in preparation for the British and French offensive at the Somme.

1 July  Battle of the Somme begins. Bert Payne, the scout, injured at Montauban. The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, with Charles McKerrow as RMO, are involved in the first day of the attack at La Boiselle: 2,440 men of the Northumberlands are killed, seventy from one small mining village alone.

7 July  RMO Alfred Hardwick notes ‘Dead men + +’ in his diary.

21 July  Padre Ernest Crosse leaves the Somme front line. Completes his grave map.

22 July  Charles McKerrow reports to his wife that three of his stretcher bearers have been given the Military Medal for their service during the Somme.

24 July  Sarah MacNaughtan dies in London.

29 August  William Kelsey Fry injured when his medical post is hit by a shell. Pearce and Sheasby from his bearer team are both killed.

19 November  End of the battle of the Somme. The two sides together have lost over a million men.
18 December  End of the battle of Verdun. German offensive pushed back.
20 December  RMO Charles McKerrow killed by a shell.

1917

6 April  America declares war on Germany.
9–15 April  Battle of Arras – inconclusive.
16 April–19 May  French offensives on the Aisne. All are inconclusive.
17 April  59th Field Ambulance hit by a shell. RMO Alfred Hardwick survives along with five bearers, but three others are killed. Padre John Murray takes up his front-line posting.
18 May  America enacts selective conscription for her armies.
7 June  British attack on Messines. German armies driven back and British armies gain a foothold.
4 July  First American units to arrive in France parade in Paris.
7 July  Air raid on No. 11 Casualty Clearing Station near Bailleul. Four doctors and twenty-three patients are killed; five doctors, sixty-three patients and the chaplain injured.
31 July  Third battle of Ypres begins (often called Passchendaele) to consolidate British gains.
26 October  Russia, under her new communist leadership, leaves the war. German troops free to reinforce other fronts.
10 November  Dreadful weather and inconclusive results force the end of the battle of Passchendaele.
20–30 November  Battle of Cambrai. First significant use of tanks does not bring about a breakthrough.
23 December  Ambulance-train Nurse Morgan visits a battlefield and climbs a tank whilst her train spends Christmas in sidings in the middle of the trenches.
21 March First German offensive using reinforced Western Front army. Operation Michael attacks British army units on the old Somme battlefield.

1 April Britain establishes the world’s first independent air force, the RAF.

5 April End of Michael offensive.

9 April Germans launch Georgette offensive. Collapses after twelve-mile gain.

27 May German Blücher offensive on the Aisne towards Paris begins.

6 June Blücher offensive halted.

9 June German Gneisenau offensive along River Matz.

14 June Gneisenau offensive halted. American troops fight alongside French at Château-Thierry and Belleau Wood.

15 July Last German offensive along Champagne–Marne line.

18 July French and American troops halt the offensive in the second battle of the Marne.

19 July German army begins retreat.

8 August Battle of Amiens – significant victory for the Entente. German troops begin to surrender in large numbers.

30 August First American Army fights near Verdun.

12 September First all-American offensive of the war. German army falls back to 1914 positions.

26 September Huge Entente offensive along the entire Western Front. German army retreats continually back into Germany.

30 October Turkish Government asks for ceasefire.

3 November Austrian Empire asks for ceasefire. Germany is the only power left fighting.

11 November Armistice signed by Germany and Entente powers. The war is over.

12 November Private Joseph Simpson dies in Nurse Elizabeth Boon’s ward.