

# The British Sector of the Western Front, 1914 - 1918.



The First Battle of Ypres - 1914	Hill 60 - man made hill, British mined through it and blew it up. Gun shot wound to the head most common cause of death.
The Second Battle of Ypres - 1915	First use of chlorine gas (Germans)
The Battle of the Somme - 1916	Nearly 60,000 British casualties first day alone, known as one of the bloodiest battle of WW1. first use of tanks.
The Battle of the Arras - 1917	Underground tunnels and hospital.
The Third Battle of Ypres - 1917	Huge amount of casualties, last attempt to break out of Ypres Salient
The Battle of Cambrai - 1917	Use of <u>stored blood</u> for the first time. Saved 11/20 soldiers that it was used on.



## Key words

**FANY:** First Aid Nursing Yeomanry. Founded in 1907 by a soldier who hoped they would be a nursing cavalry to help the wounded in battle.

**RAMC:** Royal Army Medical Corps. This organisation organised and provided medical care. It consisted of all ranks from doctors to ambulance drivers and stretcher bearers.

**Triage:** A system of splitting the wounded into groups according to who needed the most urgent attention.

**No Man's Land:** Land between Allied and German trenches in WW1.

**Trenches:** Long, narrow ditches dug during the First World War.

**Ypres Salient:** Area around Ypres where many battles took place in WW1.

**Compound Fracture:** Broken bones pierces the skin + increases risk of infection in wound.

**Debridement:** Cutting away of dead and infected tissue from around the wound.

**Gas Gangrene:** Infection that produced gas in gangrenous wounds.

**Mobile X-ray unit:** Portable X-ray unit that could be moved around the Western Front.

**Radiology department:** Hospital department where X-rays are carried out.

**Blood transfusions:** Blood taken from a healthy person and given to another person.

**General anaesthetic:** Putting a patient to sleep during an operation.

**Local anaesthetic:** Area being operated on is numbed to prevent pain + patient awake.

**Gangrene:** When a body decomposes due to a loss of bloody supply.

**Shrapnel:** A hollow shell filled with steel balls or lead, with gunpowder and a time fuse.

## Conditions requiring treatment on the Western Front

**Ill health:** Trench fever: caused by body lice and included flu-like symptoms including high temperature. Treatment: Passing electric current through infected area was effective. Prevention: Clothes disinfected and delousing stations were set up. Affected 0.5 million.

**Trench foot:** caused by soldiers standing in mud/waterlogged trenches. Treatment: soldiers advised to keep clean but worst cases, amputation. Prevention: Changing socks + keeping feet dry and rubbing whale oil into feet. Affected 20,000 in winter of 1914-1915.

**Shell-shock:** caused by stressful conditions of war and symptoms included tiredness, nightmares, headaches and uncontrollable shacking. Treatment: Not well understood. **Prevention:** rest and some received treatment in UK. Affected 80,000 and some were shot!

**Weapons of war:** Rifles: fired one at a time/loaded from cartridge case creating rapid fire.

**Machine guns:** Fired 500 rounds a minutes. Pierced organs and fracture bones.

**Artillery:** Bombardments were continuous, Artillery fire caused half of all casualties.

**Shrapnel:** Caused maximum damage exploded mid-air above enemy. Killed/injured.

**Chlorine Gas:** Led to death by suffocation. 1915, gas masks given to all British soldiers.

**Phosgene Gas:** Faster acting than Chlorine but with similar effects. Could kill within 2 days.

**Mustard Gas:** Odourless gas, worked in 12 hours. Caused blisters, burn the skin easily.

## The impact of the Western Front on Medicine

**The Thomas Splint:** Stopped joints moving and increased survival rates from 20 to 82%. Reduced infection from compound fractures.

**X-rays:** Developed in 1895, X-rays used to diagnose issues before operations. But there were some problems: X-ray could not detect all problems, were fragile and overheat.

**Mobile X-rays:** 6 operated on the front line, used to locate shrapnel and bullet wounds. Transported around in a truck and enabled soldiers to be treated more quickly.

**Blood Transfusions:** Blood loss = major problem. Blood transfusions used at Base Hospitals by a syringe and tube to transfer blood from patient to donor. Extended to CCS from 1917.

**Blood bank at Cambrai:** Adding Sodium Citrate allowed blood to be stored for longer. Blood was stored in glass bottles at a blood bank and used to treat wounded soldiers.

**Brain surgery:** Magnets used to remove metal fragments from the brain. Local anaesthetic.

**Plastic surgery:** Harold Gillies developed new techniques, skin drafts developed for grafts.

## Helping the wounded on the Western Front

**Evacuation route:** Survival depended on speed of treatment. Care improved as war progressed. 1914 - 0 motor ambulances but by 1915, it was 250. Ambulance trains were introduced, as well as, ambulance barges used along River Somme.

**Stretcher bearers:** Collect wounded, 16 in each battalion + 4 for each stretcher.

**Regimental Aid Post:** Always close to the front line and staffed by a Medical officer selected those who were lightly wounded/needed more attention.

**Field Ambulance and Dressing Station:** Emergency treatment for wounded.

**Casualty Clearing Station:** Large, well equipped station, 10 miles from trenches.

**Base Hospitals:** X-ray, operating theatre and areas to deal with gas poisoning.

**Underground hospital at Arras:** Running water, 700 beds and operating theatre.

**RAMC:** Involved medical officers and learnt about wounds never seen before.

**FANY:** Volunteer nurses, who helped the wounded and also drove ambulances.

Western Front  
Medicine A5

1. Describe two conditions that cause injury in WWI.

2. Describe two battles of WWI.

3. Explain two injuries caused by WWI.

4. Which two individuals most helped WWI treatments?

5. Describe 2 WWI treatments..

6. Explain the impact of WWI on treatments.

7. Sum up the evacuation process on the Western Front.

12. Sum up WWI medicine in no more than 20 words.

11. Give a judgement on plastic surgery on the Western Front.

10. Explain the strengths and weaknesses of mobile x-rays..

9. Assess which helped injured soldiers more: improvements in blood transfusions or mobile x-rays. Explain.

8. Explain the role of the FANY on the Western Front.