

Stalemate on the western front essay

[Business](#), [Strategy](#)



There are several reasons for stalemate on the Western Front by December 1914, which include numerous faults in the strategies and implementation of the Schlieffen Plan, tactical and strategic problems, problems in communications and the incapability of the commanders. There was also a changing in offensive to defensive, poor trench conditions, poor equipment and supplies, and also low morale amongst both armies. Faults in the strategies and implementation of the Schlieffen Plan were a major reason for the formation of a stalemate on the Western Front. The Schlieffen Plan was held up unexpectedly by strong Belgian resistance, taking the Germans two weeks to take Brussels. Instead of sweeping around in a wide arc and approaching Paris from the west, the Germans found themselves heading to Paris just east of the city.

They got within 32 kilometers of Paris, as the French government retreated to Bordeaux, yet closer they got the slower they went. This was thanks to several problems, including poor supplies and equipment. In Source C German General von Kuhl blames the “ new telephone systems were much too weak and were not sufficiently equipped with the new apparatus” for their failure. Communications were a major hassle; with telephone lines constantly being cut by artillery and poor communications was maintained between infantry. There were also problems in keeping the armies supplied with food and ammunition and the troops became exhausted in the long marches in the August heat. The Schlieffen Plan was mainly flawed in its design as it depended on a strict timetable, dependent on the speed of railways rather than the speed of foot soldiers.

Railways were often sabotaged and there was not enough rail tracks laid throughout Europe. German military commanders also departed from the Plan, which further undermined its success. The invasion of Belgium led to the involvement of the British, who were very important at Ypres, Mons and Marne. The German switching to the defensive was a drawback because the German Army was not trained for it.

Also, the Schlieffen Plan relied upon numerical superiority over France, from its reserve troops. However, the reserves lacked the fitness and tactical skill that the Plan had anticipated, and hence stalemate grew closer as the hope for the Plan's success weakened. In September, the French attacked the Germans in the vitally important Battle of the Marne. It ruined the Schlieffen Plan; France would not be knocked out in six weeks, and now the Germans must fight a two front war. It was at times like these, after such a successful Allied victory that morale was high, but often morale was at dangerous lows. Such low morale can be seen in Source D, where a French soldier sees no use of going on, as "we'd be mowed down by machine guns".

It was at this stage that the war of movement was over; stalemate had set in. The commanders on all sides were 'incapable of successfully pursuing an offensive. However, they could organize a counter attack leading to a successful defence, the recipe for stalemate was set'. Source B shows this change in tactics; Marshall Foch writes that retreat was impossible, and a 'defence' strategy must now be taken; "the men must dig in wherever they find themselves and hold onto the ground they now occupy". The war of movement now quickly changed into a war of fixed positions, where the

opposing armies 'dug in' creating trench fortifications from the Atlantic Coast to the Alps. From these fixed positions the rival armies then hammered away at each other, yet the industrial and manpower resources of both sides were so balanced that no ground was taken or given, and stalemate endured for four years.

The trenches in which the Front was all made up of can be clearly shown in a cross section diagram of a trench in Source A. A soldier's life was hard with poor clothing and food, despite having to live in the trenches for months. Conditions in the trenches and on the Front saw mainly very muddy conditions in October-November. As troop movement depended on horse or foot, apart from rail, this saw horse-drawn wagons and cavalry slow considerably.

The era of cavalry mobility was over. The rapid pace required by the war plans took its toll on soldiers and lowered their morale, and offensive and defensive capabilities. Soldiers would often have to walk 30 – 40 kilometers a day, for two or three months. This led men to actually welcome the chance to dig in, further lengthening the time of the stalemate.

One major problem strategically was the fact that the training and education that the generals had received made them believe that simple strategies, moral fortitudes and a big heart would overcome any obstacles. Tradition was everything and innovation nothing. The British soon discovered that even their high morale and patriotism in battles could do nothing in face of German machine guns. In conclusion, the formation of a stalemate on the western Front by December 1914 was due to mainly the failure of the

Schlieffen Plan, but also tactical and strategic problems on both sides and poor supplies and equipment, especially in communications. Worsening conditions on the Front led to lower troop morale, which led to 'digging in' being welcomed and a stalemate not being minded by the soldiers, who just wanted a rest.

The incapable commanders and the war of movement ending also created and prolonged the stalemate. There several reasons stalemate western front december which include numerous faults strategies implementation schlieffen plan tactical strategic problems, problems in communications, incapability of commanders there also changing offensive defensive poor trench conditions poor equipment supplies also morale amongst both armies faults strategies implementation schlieffen plan