

How did stalemate develop on western front essay sample



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In this essay I will look on the case of stalemate and reasons for its development. Stalemate is a stop in fighting during a war. Enemies usually are unable to advance. It usually occurs when trenches are building, in the case of World War One they had been build because of advanced technology, and failure of battle plans. The battle plans that had failed where mainly Plan 17- French plan to attack Germany through Alsace- Lorraine and German's Schlieffen Plan which was supposed to knock France out of the war by attacking it through Belgium and Luxemburg.

To make matter worse there was new advanced technology introduced during this war such as Machine Guns, Aircrafts, Gases ; Chlorine, Mustard Gas, Hand Grenades, Lee Enfield Rifle, Artillery(Heavy Guns) as well as Tanks. All this new technology had put strain on the soldiers, who for their own protection had build trenches. Trenches Welfare was dig outs in the ground usually connected with each other, taking a shape of corridors. They were dirty, smelly and absolutely disgusting. Trenches were usually full of dead bodies and rats who were finding them as a great food.

Soldiers spend half of their time fighting with rats that sometimes were as big as cats, as well as with fleas and all sorts of different horrible insects. Both Germany and France had their own war plans, which had both, went wrong leading to the stalemate on Western Front. Germany's war plan was called Schlieffen Plan. The main priority of this plan was to deliver a massive knock out on France to quickly get them out of the war and then to transport the soldiers back to Germany to protect the country form Russia's war power.

Germany wanted to attack France through Belgium and Luxembourg, as quickly as possible. They had given themselves 42 days/6 weeks as they thought that this was the time that Russia would take to get ready. However Russia needed only 10 days and then delivered the first attack. They naively thought that their invasion would be easy, and there was a nasty surprise waiting for them. They got held back by fighting Belgium which was backed up by BEF.

By this time Russia had sent their first soldiers to attack Germany and German army had to send 160,000 soldiers to defend their country which seriously decreased their strength in Belgium. For some reason Germany have not taken a chance to attack Paris and they were met by the French at the battle of Marne (5- 11 Sept) which had held their advance even more. How did this lead to stalemate? Well, The Schlieffen Plan relied upon the destruction of the Western Allies within a very short period of time, allowing Germany to focus on Russia and avoid war on two fronts.

When the German attack of the West failed, they were forced to split the attentions of their military and were rendered incapable of delivering decisive blow to the Allies. This resulted in stalemate. The start of the war for France also went really badly. Their war strategy was called Plan 17 which was basically French plan to attack Germany through Alsace- Lorraine. It went totally wrong for French. . Plan 17 failed because it was exactly what the Germans wanted France to do. the French attacked Alsace and Lorraine to recover them , as they lost them to Germany after the Franco-Prussian war of 1871.

The Germans counted on the French doing this and left only a small army to defend Alsace and Lorraine with the idea the Germans would retreat into Germany and battle the French army as far from Paris as possible so when the German main army invaded France via Belgium the French Army would be unable to get back to Paris fast enough to stop the Germans capturing it. Unfortunately for the Germans the French were unable to penetrate Germany far enough, so that they were able to get back in time to save Paris.

Also the Belgians put up a lot more resistance than the Germans had expected so the German advance was slowed down just enough to save the Allies. During this event France had lost 200,000 soldiers in just 12 days. It is being believed that the Battle of Marne had really started the stalemate. With remarkable speed the first army, which had already crossed the Marne, turned around and engaged the French sixth army in a fierce battle that after three days of fighting practically assumed German superiority.

But by swinging north the first army had opened a gap thirty miles wide between itself and the second German army to the left, a gap that was only superficially screened by cavalry. The British carefully advanced between the two armies. In this way the German positions became somewhat uncertain. This in effect had led to the stop of the world and trenches. After stalemate had developed there was an important event that had taken place. It was called "Race to the sea".

The "Race to the sea" was a name given to a period during the World War One in which generals of both armies had realised that they need to get the

sea to keep control of the channel ports. During this race both armies had lost a lot of soldiers in Ypres where a fight had taken place, however Britain's well organised army had managed to move one and keep control of the channel ports. It was vital to keep control of the ports as the food and artillery could be delivered.

This had helped to end the trench warfare as the new improved artillery could be delivered as well as food for the soldiers. The British and French army had more food which gave them strength to fight and meant that German powers food will be radically rationed. There were many new weapons developed during the First World War such as Machine Guns. They were good source of rapid fire and a lot of bullets could have been fired in no time. However the load time was really long, the guns were overheating very quickly as well as being heavy.

Another invention was Mustard/ Chlorine Gas. This was a really nasty, nasty way of killing enemy soldiers. It was spreading really quickly, and soon become known as " silent killer ". It was able to kill millions of soldiers at one go and had stayed in soil for weeks! Another invention was heavy guns. These could shoot from huge distances and caused lot of damage when fired at the enemy. However these were quite inaccurate so it was quite easy to hit your own trench by mistake (this was known as " friendly fire").

These weapons made it really hard for soldiers to move forward and attack the enemy because as soon as the soldiers would step out on no-man's land they would get shot by one of these new guns. It is important to highlight that the condition of no-man's land was absolutely appalling. It was full of

mud as the rain was falling heavily on the soil covered in mines, grenade holes and dead bodies. It was so bad that sometimes soldiers had just sunk into the mud and were unable to get out.

These conditions had remarkably slowed the soldiers down making them easier target for a killing fire of the enemy. British soldiers were especially slowed down as they had to carry their heavy backpacks with them and march in a special formation which slowed them down and make them even easier target to hit. If the conditions of no-man's land were better and soldiers were able to attack enemy quicker than stalemate would be broken much quicker and there is a chance that loss of lives would have been lower. Not only condition of no-man's land was terrible.

Condition of trenches was even worse. Trenches was the best place for rats and kingdom of diseases. Everyday soldiers would have to fight rats which after couple of months would become so friendly with the soldiers that they would no longer eat dead bodies, they would also try to eat living soldiers! The rats would not only eat dead bodies, they would also steal soldier's food. Dead bodies were a big problem not only they did attract rats, the smell and sight of rotting body was seriously revolting as well as it would bring lot of diseases to soldiers that were not really healthy.

The wet conditions and often lack of clothes to get changed into if you got wet would be a good opportunity to get a " trench foot " a disease which might end up in leg amputation if not death. As soldiers were living in cold, wet conditions with not heating or shelter they were easy target for any viruses. The health issue was not the only problem. Many soldiers also got

mental issues from being in constant fear of being gasses, which meant an awful, long and painful death, which soldiers were absolutely terrified of.

This and the loneliness that the soldiers must have felt, as well as being tired of these bad conditions lead to serious mental problems in some cases. In these conditions the morale of the soldiers was really low. As well as being physically unable to fight they were also unable to fight mentally. They felt constantly low and depressed. I think that one of the most important reasons for which stalemate had developed was the failure of both plans Plan 17 and Schlieffen Plan on which both armies had heavily relied.

The new artillery as well as the poor conditions and morale had also kept soldiers from moving. The conditions of no-man's land and trenches surely did not help the situation. Overall I think that there were many reasons for which the stalemate had developed and had not broken for a long time and they are equally important, as they had all played a part and if one was to be deleted or excluded the stalemate would probably last for a shorter period of time or might not have developed in the first place.