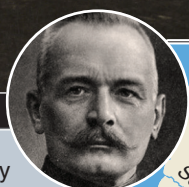


# Verdun and the Somme: 1916 remembered

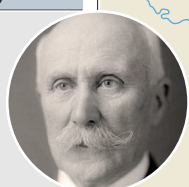
The great World War I battles of Verdun and the Somme have come to symbolise the horrors of trench warfare on the Western Front, but the sacrifice of more than two million men was a decisive factor that eventually helped to bring an end to the conflict



**1916**

**Feb 21:** German army, commanded by **Erich von Falkenhayn**, launches attack on Verdun, aiming to "bleed" French army to death by forcing it to defend historic city

**Feb 26:** German advance slows as French rush in reinforcements and strengthen defences under command of **Philippe Pétain**, who vows to save Verdun



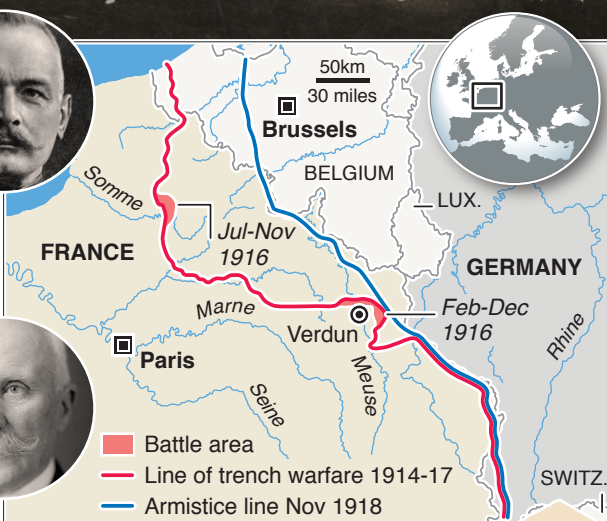
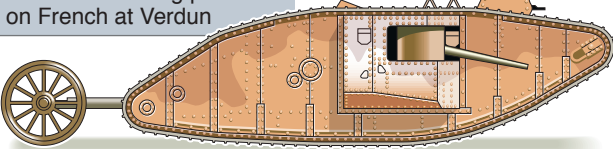
**Mar-July:** Germans make several advances towards Verdun but fail to take city in face of fierce French resistance



French soldiers advance during battle for Verdun

**Jun 4:** Four Russian armies under General **Alexei Brusilov** launch offensive on Eastern Front, forcing Germany to send four divisions from Verdun to assist Austria-Hungary

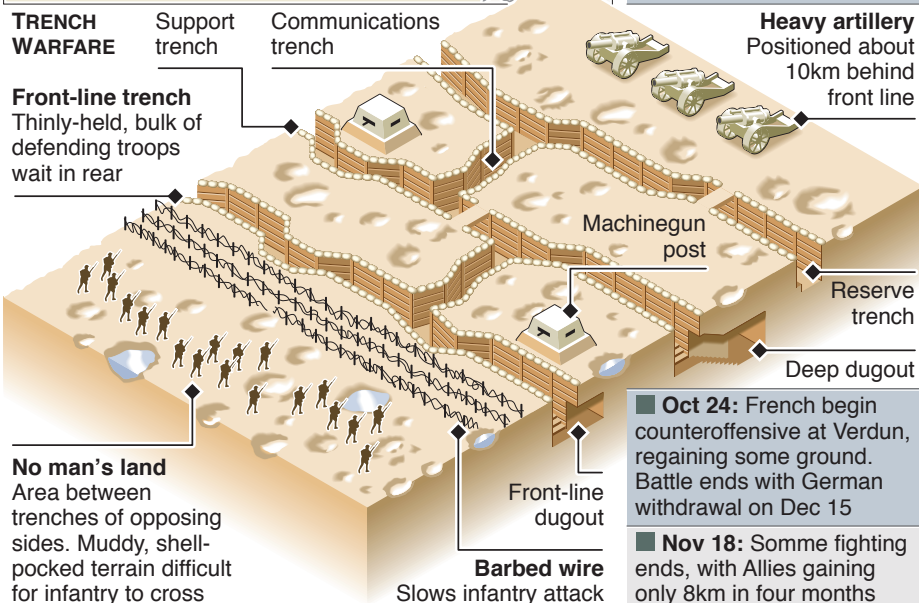
**Jun 24:** Allies begin week-long bombardment of German defences on Somme River to prepare for British-led offensive, aimed at relieving pressure on French at Verdun



**Jul 1**  
Somme offensive begins under direction of British commander **Douglas Haig**. His army suffers 57,000 casualties on first day, and offensive quickly becomes battle of attrition as Allies make marginal gains but fail to breach German lines

**Jul 12:** Falkenhayn calls off German offensive at Verdun in response to Somme fighting and situation on Eastern Front

**Sep 15:** Britain uses tanks in action for first time during Somme offensive



▼ **British Mark I tank**  
Used to clear path through barbed wire for infantry  
**Armament:** Two 57mm guns, four machineguns

## BATTLE AFTERMATH\*

► **Verdun:** Both sides suffer huge losses – up to 976,000 in total – but battle serves as symbol of French determination and sacrifice

► **The Somme:** Losses become unsustainable – over one million combined. Offensive inflicts serious damage on German army

**Oct 24:** French begin counteroffensive at Verdun, regaining some ground. Battle ends with German withdrawal on Dec 15

**Nov 18:** Somme fighting ends, with Allies gaining only 8km in four months

