

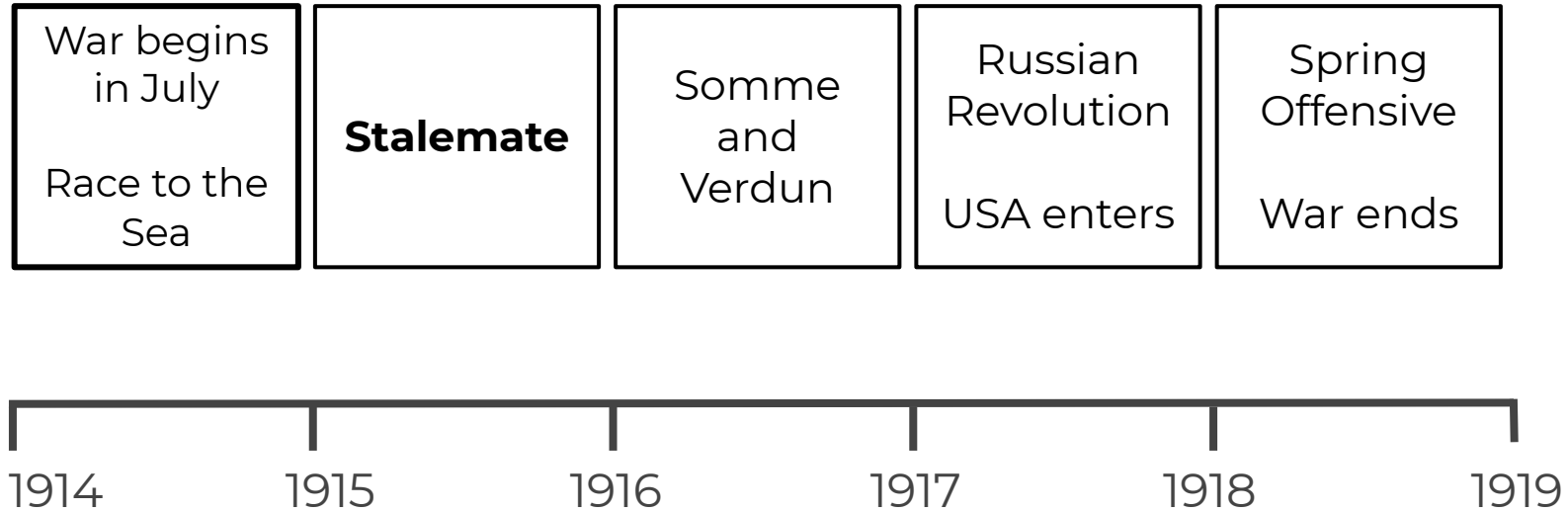
Algerian soldiers

History

Lesson 3 of an enquiry of 6 lessons

Enquiry: What do the stories of the 'often forgotten armies' reveal about the Western Front?





Situation in Spring 1915

After the Race to the Sea, the two sides began to dig in. A **Stalemate** started to occur.

Neither the German army or the French and British armies could make any clear and lasting progress.

The German army was looking for a way to break through the French and British lines at Ypres. Many of the soldiers at Ypres were Canadian, Indian, Moroccan and Algerian.



French imperial soldiers

The French Army on the Western Front included soldiers from all over its empire. There were men from Algeria and Morocco, Senegal and from what was then called French Indochina.

They were often referred to as 'Tirailleurs' (riflemen).



What does the story of the Algerian soldiers reveal about the Western Front?

Weapons and technology	Military strategy
Treatment of troops and life on the front line	The psychological effects of war



The story of the Algerian soldiers at Ypres



The story of the Algerian soldiers at Ypres

It is 22 April, 1915. It is a glorious spring day in Ypres. Birds sing. The day wears on in cigarettes and quiet talking. It is almost boring. If the clock in Ypres town square could still chime, it would ring four times: 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The Germans begin shelling the British and French lines. The men retreat to their dugouts.

Then the shelling stops. Some soldiers from Algeria – now part of the French army - hear a 'hissing' noise. They watch as yellowish green clouds drift towards them across no man's land.



The story of the Algerian soldiers at Ypres

The Algerians and Moroccans fighting with the French are both North Africans and white colonialists. They watch as the clouds come closer. They think it is smoke and prepare for attack. There are no gas masks in their packs. No enemy appear. The soldiers not realise that the clouds are the enemy. Not until the heavy vapour slides down into their trench.

Then the gargled screams and desperate splutters begin.



The story of the Algerian soldiers at Ypres

Many collapse, others cough up a burning yellow fluid. The chlorine gas attacks tissue and membranes: most are temporarily blinded, while others die with frothing bubbles gurgling in their throats.

The French and North African troops who leave their trenches to escape this new weapon are struck down by old ones – machine guns and rifles. As the gas spreads, birds literally fall from the skies. The rats die, too.



The story of the Algerian soldiers at Ypres

The Africans try to communicate their distress and desperation in broken French and in their own languages. They are without officers, and many are without weapons. They rush backwards through gas and bullets.

A French soldier later wrote: 'It was impossible to understand what the Africans said, but from the way they coughed and pointed to their throats, it was evident, if not suffering from the effects of gas, they were thoroughly scared.'



The story of the Algerian soldiers at Ypres

Meanwhile, the Germans advance into the four-mile-wide gap opened up by the gas attack. The Germans advance two miles, capturing a large portion of the Ypres Salient.

Although they broke the stalemate with the gas attack, the Allies fought back and stalemate soon returned...



The story of the Algerian soldiers at Ypres

Chlorine gas was first used on the Western Front by the Germans in the Second Battle of Ypres. The heaviest part of the gas cloud hit the Algerians. Other troops, including Canadian soldiers, were also affected. On this day (22 April 1915), 6,000 men fell victim to poison gas. Britain and France used chlorine gas against the Germans later that year.

During the war, around 30,000 Africans died fighting on the side of France alone.



Questions

1. Which battle did we learn about today?
2. Which soldiers fought in that battle?
3. What weapon did the German Army use at Ypres?
4. What effect did it have on the soldiers?
5. What effect did it have on the war?



What does the story of the Algerian soldiers' at Ypres reveal about the Western Front?

Use the sentence starters below to write a paragraph answering this question.

Sentence starters	Key words
The traditional presentation of the Western Front is...	chlorine gas
On the 22 nd April (give a summary of the story)	stalemate
What this reveals to us about the Western Front is...	



Glossary

Dugouts- underground shelter

Stalemate- military situation in which neither side can win a clear victory

Salient- a bulge in a line, like a “U” shape in an otherwise straight line

