

FOR THE PRIME MINISTER:

REPORT ON THE PROGRESS
OF THE WAR

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STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

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REPORT ON THE PROGRESS OF THE WAR

1 Background information

As you know, the Great War started in 1914 when the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated by the Serb, Gavrilo Princep. The first assault launched by the Germans was the Schlieffen Plan, an attempt to invade France through Belgium. This attack did not go well and was eventually headed off at the Battle of Marne in September 1914. Since then, the Germans have made only one major attack on the western front, which took place at Verdun earlier this year. This attack also failed, but only at the cost of hundreds of thousands of French lives. Allied forces have launched two major attacks, one at Gallipoli in 1915, and one on the Somme also this year. Both attacks have failed.

2 How well are we doing?

2.1 The western and eastern fronts

See Appendix A.1 for a map of the Western front.

We have gained much less land than we originally thought we would. Winston Churchill said at the Battle of the Somme: “We have not gained in a month’s fighting what we thought we would gain in the first attack.” Although we have gained very little land, neither have our enemies, and the situation is still very much a stalemate.

On the eastern front we are losing ground; however, with the growing certainty that Russia will be defeated, this will soon be irrelevant.

2.2 The fighting

The recent battle of the Somme was a huge blow to English resources and morale. Field Marshal Haig was mainly responsible for this, having, quite frankly, showed not a shred of leadership or battlefield sense. I strongly suggest that this man be stripped of his rank to prevent him from making any further blunders. Due to the countless lives lost at the Somme, we now have a desperate shortage of troops, despite the recent introduction of conscription. How long can we continue to throw men’s lives away? Not much longer as already the male population of Britain is drastically reduced (see Appendix A.2). Not only is the war costing us men, it is also inflicting a severe blow upon our economy (see Appendix A.3).

One notable victory by us was at the Battle of Jutland, a naval engagement with the Germans. Although both sides claim victory, the Germans were the ones who retreated and so the British Grand Fleet still has supremacy on the waters, a fact that will surely help to heighten morale.

2.3 The home front

The main effect that the war is having on the home front is that there are far fewer young men around. This means that women are having to do jobs (such as working with metals) that before only young men would do. Surprisingly, many women find this freedom to work in these types of jobs enjoyable. Could this lead to a revolutionary change of thinking in our country? Perhaps women should be given the vote after all?

3 How well are our allies doing?

3.1 Russia

On the eastern front, Russia is not faring too well. They have been retreating for the best part of a year and any attacks they have launched have been quickly stopped by German and Austro – Hungarian forces. One particularly disastrous battle for them was the Battle of Tannenburg; although victory was claimed, it was extremely costly for the Russians. I fear that they may not last much longer as there is threat of revolution in Russia. Should this occur it will have serious repercussions for us. The Germans will be able to pull troops away from the East to fight in the West and they will undoubtedly force Russia to give up large amounts of resources, which will give the enemy a huge advantage.

3.2 France

The recent Battle of Verdun has essentially crippled the French. They have lost huge numbers of men and are having problems with supplies. Although they are not ready to give up, they cannot afford to launch another main offensive without external aid.

3.2 Italy

Italy are not going to make a significant difference to the outcome of the war. They are having problems with supplies of munitions and lack of men. Added to this is the fact that Italy's generals are somewhat less than competent.

4 How long is the war likely to last?

Unfortunately the popular phrase 'It'll all be over by Christmas' was wrong and we are now three years into the war without either side making a breakthrough. The Germans have launched several major offences in an attempt to break through our front line; however, neither these, or our own attacks, have been successful. This is largely due to the introduction of trench warfare, making defending very much easier than attacking. Because the war has become a war of attrition it is likely to last a long time. It is possible that the war will continue until either us, or the enemy, run out of money, resources or men, which will not occur for at least a couple more years. Another possibility is that the Russians will be knocked out of the war soon and Germany will launch a new offensive on the western front using all of the troops at their disposal. The outcome of this could decide the war.

5 How might we achieve a swift victory?

5.1 Proposals

This is my proposal of a method to bring the Central Powers swiftly to their knees:

I suggest that we put much more effort into the development of tanks. We need to develop a tank that is invulnerable to, or able to withstand, prolonged machine gun fire, yet is much more reliable than the tanks used at the Somme. Using these we will be able to punch a whole in the enemy's trenches. One vital mistake at the Somme was that there was not enough infantry to fill the gap afterwards, so the land was quickly retaken. In our next offensive we must make sure that the tanks are followed up by some infantry. The tank also needs to be fast on all terrain so that it will be able to traverse no mans land quickly and without difficulty. As well as developing new technology, and despite the recent introduction of conscription, we need more men. I think the best way to increase troop numbers would be to convert the Americans to our cause. They are already halfway there and are sending us supplies. Their anger is growing by the minute as they watch the Germans sinking their boats. Perhaps a letter to the US Congress would tip the balance in our favour...

Until we make a breakthrough in either of these areas, however, I do not recommend making any more offensives. The disaster of Gallipoli, and the tremendous loss of life on the Somme have shown that trying to attack trenches with just infantry does not work.

I would also recommend that considerable effort is spent trying to improve life in the trenches. This would help to improve the morale of the soldiers and consequently they will fight better. Improved sanitation would also reduce death or casualties from disease (see Appendix A.4). This could be accomplished by lining the dugouts with concrete, so that living conditions are more comfortable and drier. Also, food is often rotten by the time it arrives in the trenches. We need to devise a way to transport it more quickly so that this does not happen.

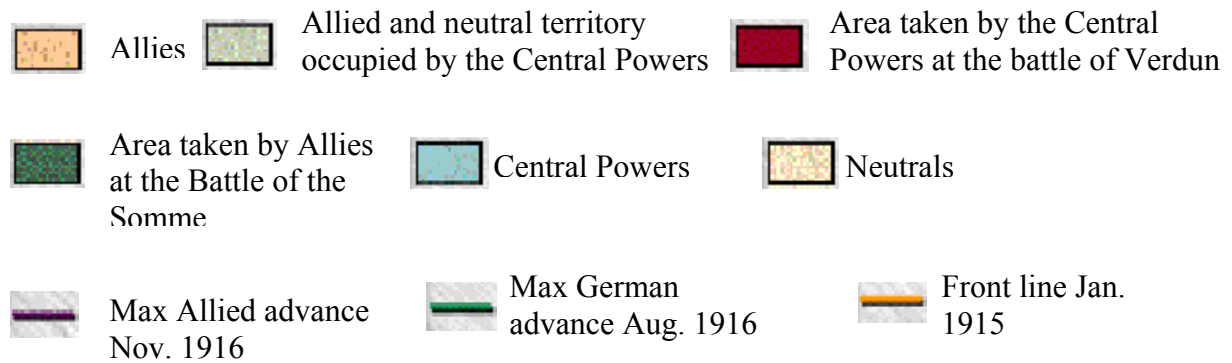
My final piece of advice is to keep the newspapers full of propaganda. This will give the troops more fighting spirit.

5.1 Summary

The war has been going on for nearly three years now and neither side has made a breakthrough. If my proposals are carried out, then maybe we can be the first to break the stalemate.

Appendix A

Sect. A.1 Map of the Western Front

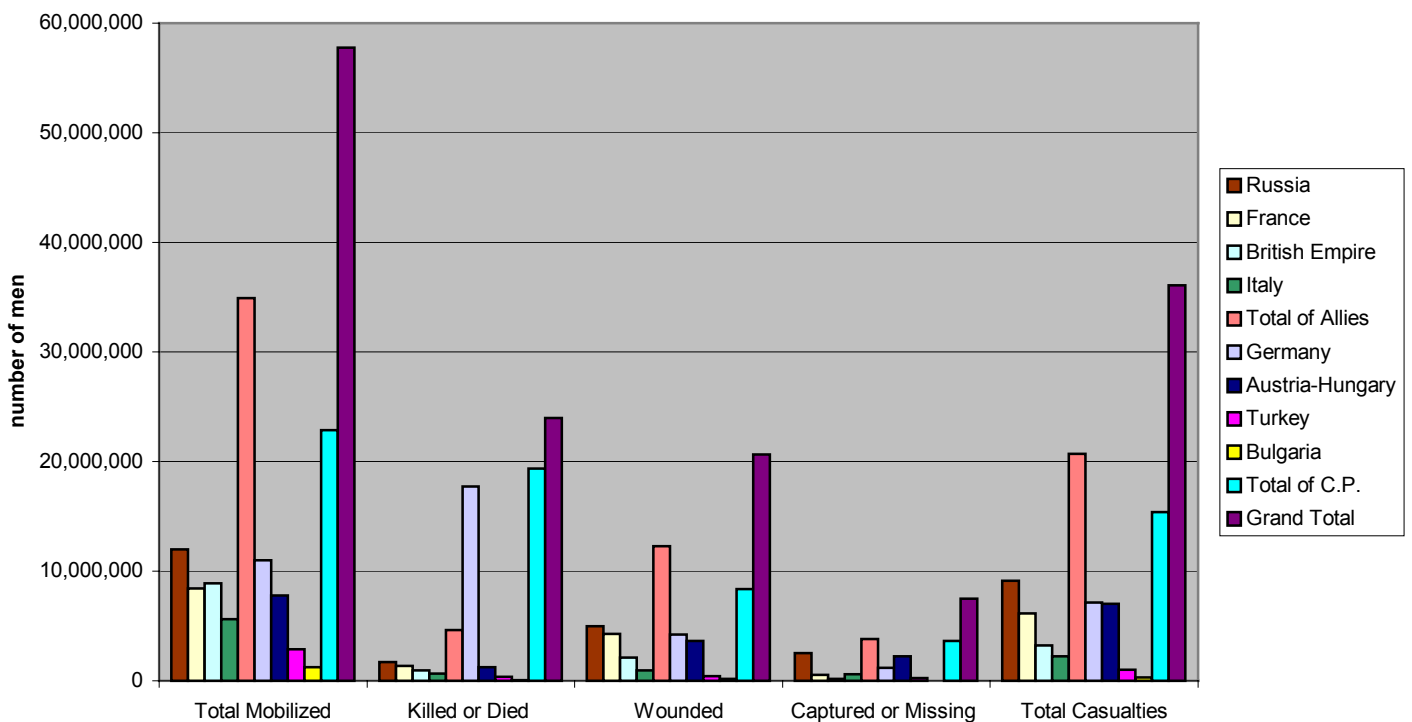


Sect. A.2 Financial cost of the war

YEAR	COST (in £s)
1914 - 1915	362,000,000
1915 - 1916	1,420,000,000
Total	1,782,000,000

How long can we keep this up?

Sect. A.3 Predicted casualties should the war continue for two more years



Sect. A.3 Conditions in the trenches

Picture this: You wake up one morning to find two rats crawling on your legs. You kick them away and try to stand up. It is too painful. You take off your boots to discover that both of your feet have been completely eaten away by a strange fungus. You go to the medic and he says that you have trench foot (see fig. A.3.1) and both your feet must be amputated. You get carried away from the front line with the sound of gunfire ringing in your ears. You think to yourself: At least now if they send me home I will be able to eat food that hasn't gone mouldy.

If you had to live in these conditions would you have high morale?

October 1916 – Progress of the War Effort

Fig A.3.1



A soldier with trench foot.