

A War of Attrition



When World War I broke out, it looked like Germany might achieve an easy victory. The Germans surprised France by invading through Belgium, a neutral country. In September of 1914, the French stopped the Germans just 37 miles from its capital, Paris. If Paris had been captured, that would have meant defeat. Instead the Germans retreated and formed a battle line by digging deep trenches in the ground, stretching from the coast of

Belgium all the way to the Swiss mountains. The French and British built a similar line just a few miles away. So by the spring of 1915, the two armies faced each other in deeply dug trenches, unable to find a way to cross the space between them to break the enemy's line.

The fighting in World War I turned into a war of attrition, as quick and decisive victory seemed impossible. Each side tried to wear down the other by inflicting as many casualties as possible. The hope was that, eventually the other side wouldn't be able to take it anymore and surrender. From time to time, one side would charge "over the top" at the other, by sending foot soldiers running through "no man's land," as the area between the trenches was called. As the troops approached, enemy soldiers in the trenches would mow them down with high powered machine guns, a new weapon that could shoot off several rounds quickly. The efforts of charging troops were seen as suicidal since it was highly unlikely they would successfully make it to the other side. Life inside the trenches was not much better; rats, disease, filth, and constant noise and fear, made it unbearable for many.

The casualties suffered from the failed military tactics of trench warfare were terribly high. Hundreds of thousands of troops and medics died with little to no ground gained from either side. It wasn't until the arrival of American tanks in 1917, that the Allies were able to break through the German lines. Knowing all this, as German military advisors planned for World War II, they knew they needed to figure out a way to avoid another **stalemate**.

Which of these statements is **NOT** supported by passage information?

- A. Soldiers in WWI suffered worse conditions than in other wars.
- B. Machine guns made charging "over the top" a suicide mission.
- C. Warfare constantly changes due to new weapons and tactics.
- D. A war of attrition will usually result in high casualty numbers.

A likely synonym for the word "stalemate" in the last paragraph is

- A. tragedy.
- B. trench.
- C. deadlock.
- D. defeat.

Based on passage information, what do you think the Germans will do to avoid another war like this? _____

A War of Attrition-Answers and Explanations



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(No information is provided to compare casualty figures from other wars to WWI.)

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- D. defeat.

(The passage describes how the war became "deadlocked" until U.S. tanks arrived.)

Based on passage information, what do you think the Germans will do to avoid another war like this? *Answers will vary, but students may predict that the Germans would make more use of tanks, since they were successful in breaking the deadlock in World War I.*