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Opening extract from

# See Inside First World War

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# Over the top

Desperate to break the deadlock on the Western Front, Allied army leaders ordered their soldiers to go 'over the top', and attack enemy trenches.

From 1915 to 1918, many battles raged along the Western Front. The bloodiest was the Battle of the Somme, where nearly a million soldiers were killed or wounded in ferocious waves of Allied attacks.

'Battle police' in the trenches made sure that every soldier went over the top when he was ordered.

Stretcher-bearers battled to save wounded soldiers' lives.

The Allies hoped that artillery blasts would clear a path through German barbed wire. But the tactic didn't always work.

In no man's land, attacking soldiers were horribly exposed to enemy guns. To make things worse, they were often slowed down by heavy kit, smoke, and sometimes thick mud.

Soldiers hurled grenades into enemy trenches.

Soldiers carried wire cutters, to cut through barbed wire.

German soldiers fiercely defended their trenches with rifles and machine guns.

# In the skies

As fighting continued on the ground, battles raged in the sky too. Hulking airships loaded with bombs loomed over cities, while agile fighter planes clashed in deadly dogfights.

At the start of the War, aircraft were only used for spying on enemy positions, or directing artillery guns. But, by 1916, speedy fighter planes also fought over the Western Front.

Any pilot that shot down five enemy planes was known as an 'ace'.

German airships (often called zeppelins) were massive balloons powdered by engines and propellers. They had crew cabins, known as gondolas, fixed to the bottom.

Most fighter planes had two wings, and were known as 'biplanes'. The wings were wooden frames, covered in canvas.

Fighter planes attacked with machine guns.

The most famous air ace was German pilot Baron von Richthofen. Known as the Red Baron because he flew in a red triplane – a plane with three wings – he shot down 80 Allied aircraft.

From 1917, German bomber planes raided British towns, while Allied bombers attacked German industrial sites and railway lines.

Some airships hung 'observation cars' from wires.

The British *Sopwith F1 Camel* shot down more aircraft than any other type of fighter plane during the war.

German *Zeppelin-Staaken* bombers were the biggest planes of the war.

Pilots sat in cramped, open cockpits.

The *Fokker DVII* fighter was the most successful German aircraft of the war.