

# THE WAR 1917

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

plus a little bit about the  
Australian Artillery in 1917

# POINTS TO BE COVERED

- The War generally (and briefly)
- Political developments
- Military developments
- And finally
  - - a few words about the Australian Artillery

# HOW WAS THE WAR GOING?

- ❑ The Allies were going bankrupt
- ❑ The Central Powers were bankrupt!!
- ❑ Civilian populations were beginning to suffer severe privations
- ❑ The unrestricted U-Boat campaign

# POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

- The Russian revolution and Russia's surrender
- The situation in Italy
- French politics
- British Politics
- The Americans finally commit to War

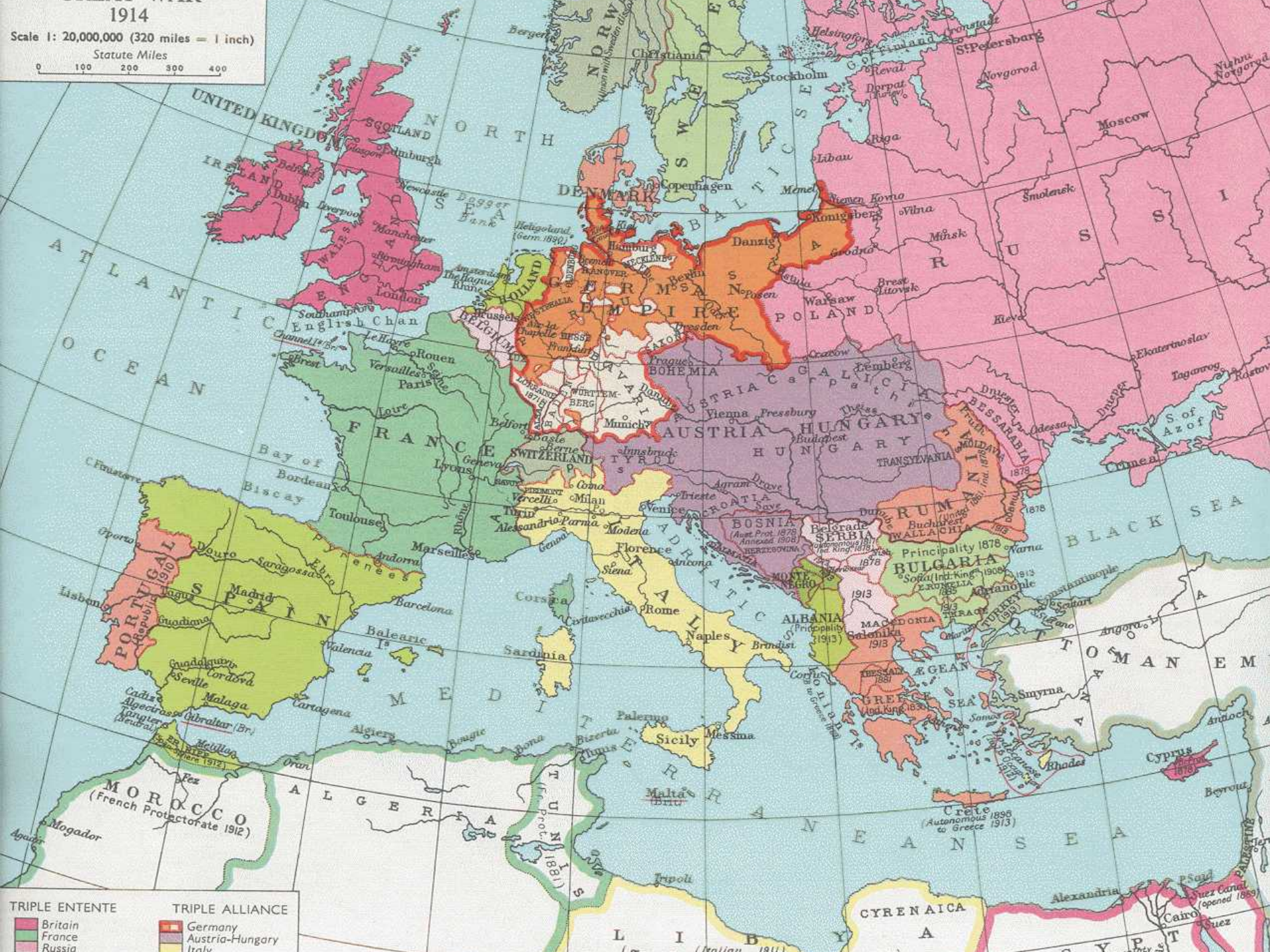


1914

Scale 1: 20,000,000 (320 miles = 1 inch)

Statute Miles

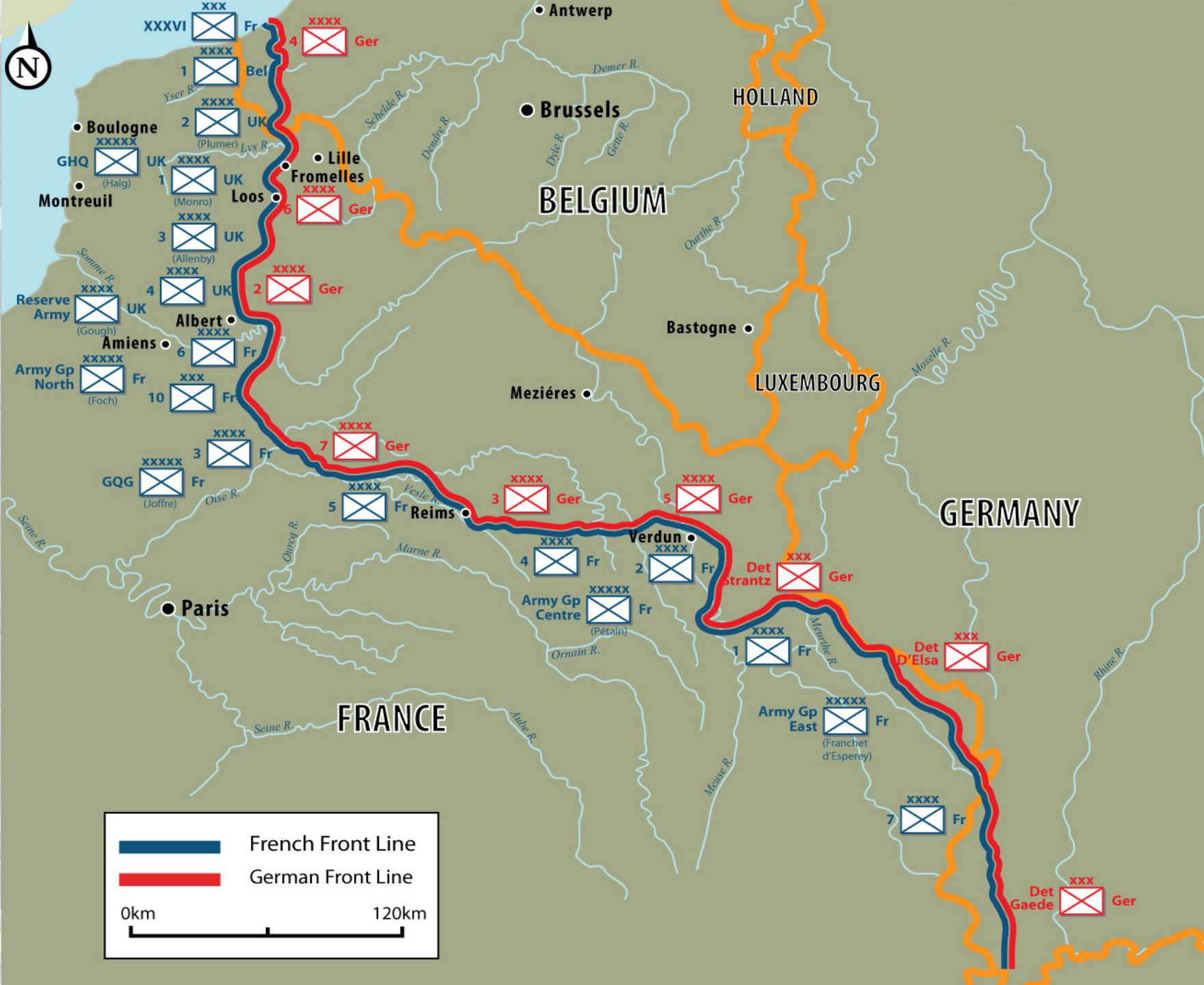
0 100 200 300 400






**TRIPLE ENTENTE**      **TRIPLE ALLIANCE**

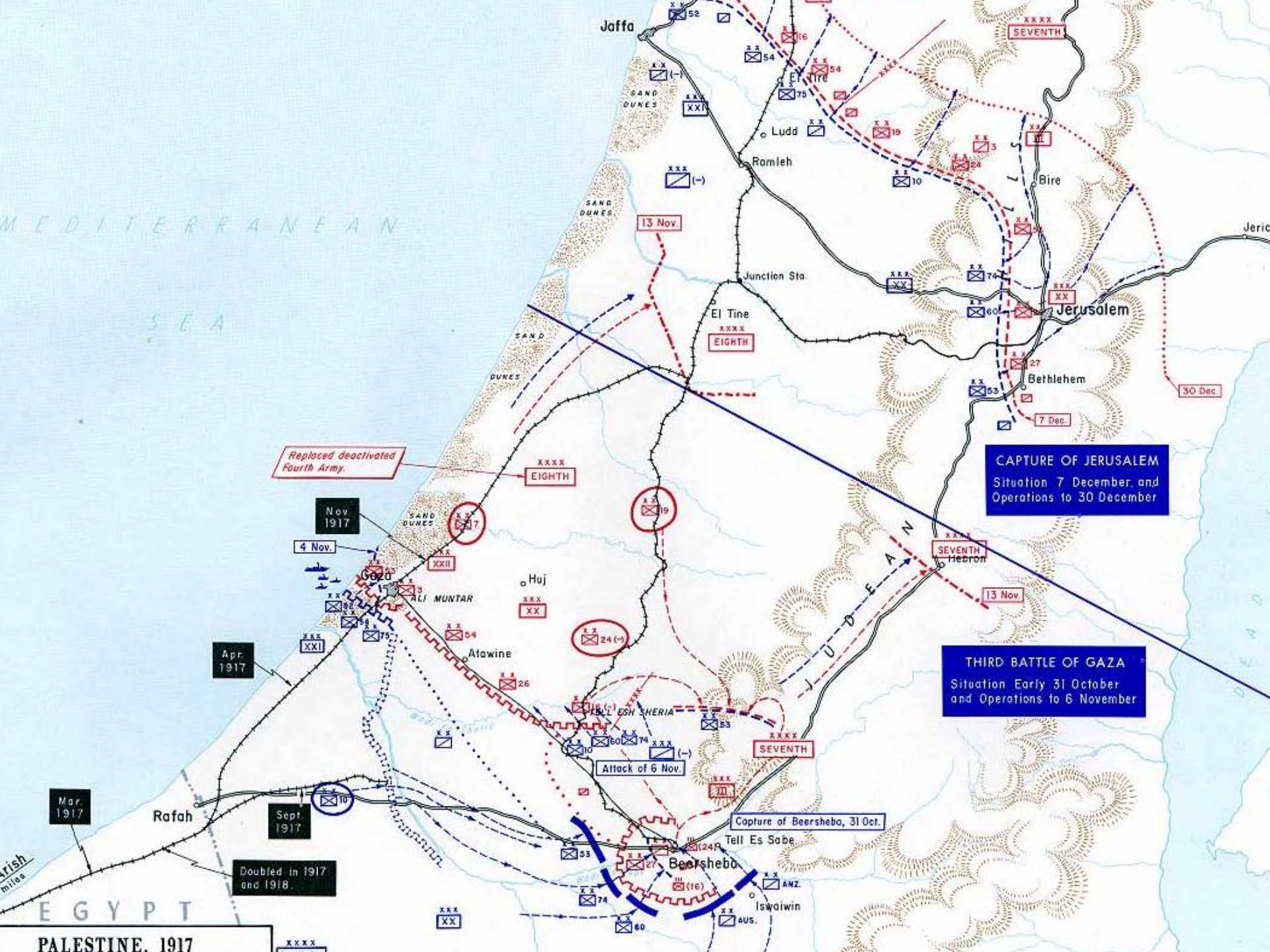
- Britain
- France
- Russia
- Germany
- Austria-Hungary
- Italy





	French Front Line
	German Front Line
	





MEDITERRANEAN  
SEA

EGYPT  
PALESTINE, 1917

Replaced deactivated  
Fourth Army.

**CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM**  
Situation 7 December, and  
Operations to 30 December

**THIRD BATTLE OF GAZA**  
Situation Early 31 October  
and Operations to 6 November

Apr. 1917

Sept. 1917

Doubled in 1917  
and 1918.

Mar. 1917

Nov. 1917

4 Nov.

13 Nov.

7 Dec.

30 Dec.

13 Nov.

Attack of 6 Nov.

Capture of Beersheba, 31 Oct.

British  
miles

Jaffa

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

SAND  
DUNES

Ludd

Romleh

Junction Sta.

El Tine

Bethlehem

Huj

Atawine

ESHERIA

Tell Es Sabe

Beersheba

Iswaiwin

Rafah

Gaza

ALI MUNTAR

ANZ.

AUS.

52

(-)

XXI

(-)

XXI

(-)

XXI

(-)

XXI

(-)

XXI

(-)

XXI

(-)

XXI

(-)

XXI

54

75

19

10

74

60

55

17

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

54

19

10

74

60

55

17

19

XXII

54

26

18 (-)

10

60

74

60

16

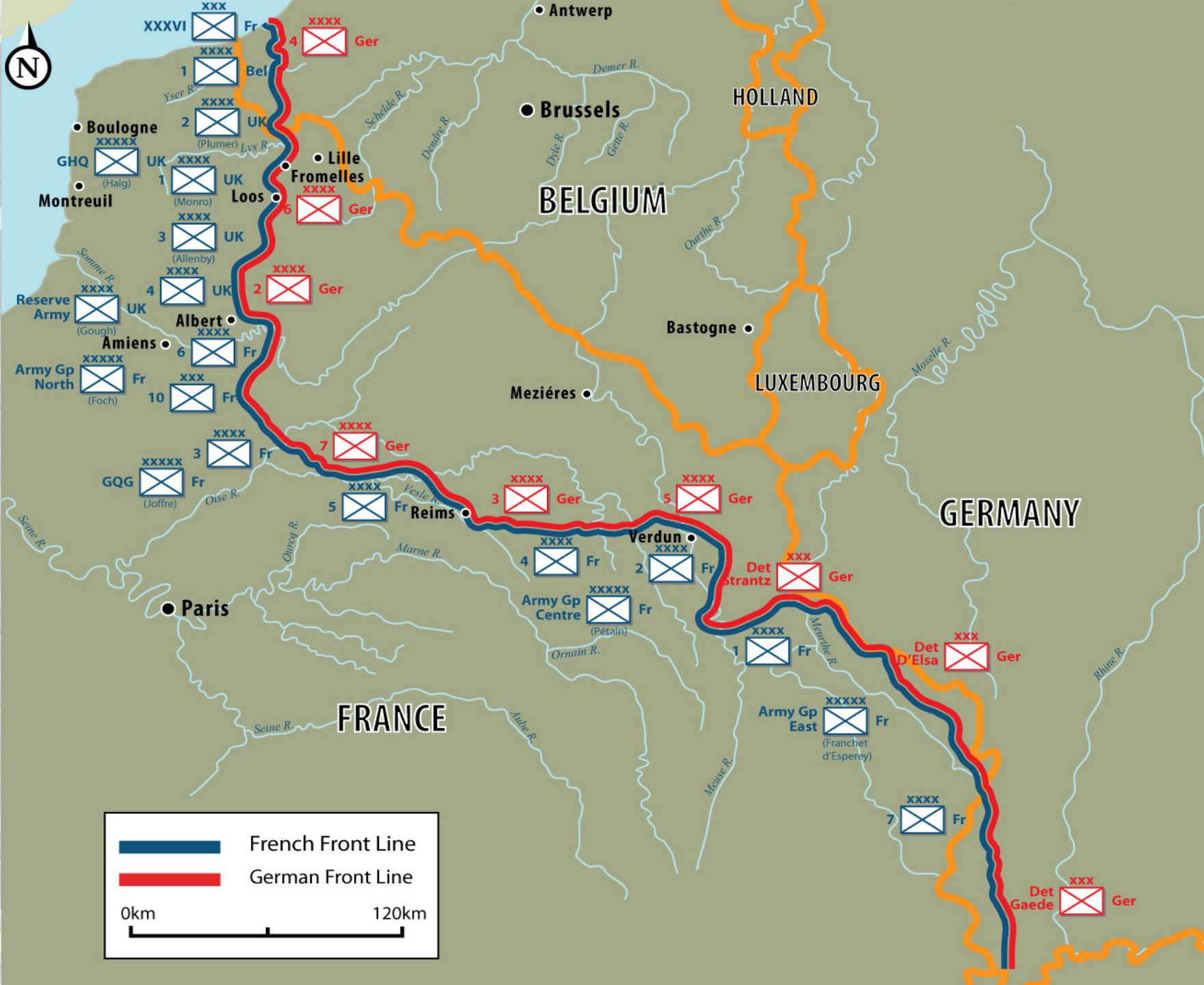
54




19

10

74





	French Front Line
	German Front Line
	



# WESTERN FRONT - 1917

- Germany begins unrestricted submarine warfare (1 Feb)
- Germans surprise Allies by move back to new Hindenburg Line (16 March) (between Vailly in south and Neuville Vitasse in north)
- British begin major offensive at Arras (not in area of German withdrawal)
- Intended to draw German strength away from main attack by French on the Aisne
- Canadians finally capture Vimy Ridge (9 April)
- Australians not so lucky at Bullecourt (11 April)
- **The French (Nivelle) offensive on *Chemin des Dames* fails disastrously – 187,000 casualties**
- **French troops subsequently mutiny**
- To offset the French failure, the British continue the Arras offensive

# WESTERN FRONT - 1917

- British begin major offensive in the north at Messines (7 June)
- First stage of an operation to capture the heights above Ypres and then drive to the coast
- Third battle of Ypres (often called Passchendaele) begins (31 July)
- Canadians finally capture Passchendaele (6 Nov)
- Passchendaele costs both sides approx 250,000 casualties each
- Bolsheviks seize power in Russia (7 Nov)
- British use new tactics at Cambrai (20 Nov)



# PALESTINE - 1917

- The Palestine Campaign begins in early 1917 – by end 1917, 600 km advance into Turkish Palestine and Jordan
- Key part of the advance: the construction of a fresh water pipeline and railway from the Canal to Rafa
- Battles:

1st Gaza	26 March 1917*
2nd Gaza	17-19 April 1917*
Beersheba	31 October 1917
Jerusalem	9 December 1917

  - \*The first was a partial success but General Murray (EEF Commander) believed it was a failure and withdrew his forces. The second, even though supported by tanks, was a failure and Murray was relieved of his command.

**Table 3.1: Standardised British Expeditionary Force (BEF) artillery equipment, 1916–1918**

Category	Equipment				Det.*	Traction	Ammunition		
	Ordnance (Mk)		Calibre	Weight			Maximum Range	Weight	Natures
Divisional	18-pounder QF Field Gun	I–II	3.3 inch (84 mm)	2912 lb (1321 kg)	6500 yds (5940 m)	10	horse	18 lb (8.2 kg)	HE, shrapnel, smoke, star, chemical
		IV		3531 lb (1602 kg)	10900 yds (9970 m)				
	4.5-inch QF Field Howitzer		4.5 inch (114 mm)	3009 lb (1365 kg)	7300 yds (6675 m)	10	horse	35 lb (15.9 kg)	HE, shrapnel, smoke, star, chemical, incendiary
Corps	6-inch BL Field Gun	VII	6 inch (152.4 mm)	56 502 lb (25 629 kg)	13700 yds (12527 m)	9	tractor	100 lb (45.4 kg)	HE, shrapnel, chemical
		XIX		22 791 lb (10 338 kg)	18750 yds (17 145 m)				
	60-pounder BL Field Gun		5 inch (127 mm)	11 228 lb (5093 kg)	12 300 yds (11 247 m)	10	tractor	60 lb (27.2 kg)	HE, shrapnel, chemical
	6-inch 26 cwt <sup>†</sup> BL Howitzer		6 inch (152.4 mm)	8141 lb (3693 kg)	9500 yds (8700 m)	10	horse or tractor	100 lb (45.4 kg)	HE, shrapnel, chemical
	8-inch BL howitzer	I–V	8 inch (203.2 mm)	30 683 lb (13 918 kg)	10 500 yds (9600 m)	12	tractor	200 lb (90.7 kg)	HE, shrapnel
VI		19 107 lb (8667 kg)		10 760 yds (9838 m)	11				
VII–VIII		19 879 lb (9017 kg)		12 300 yds (11 247 m)					

Army	9.2-inch BL Railway Gun	X	9.2 inch (234 mm)	202 944 lb (92 054 kg)	21 000 yds (19 202 m)	12	railway	380 lb (172.3 kg)	HE, shrapnel
		XIII–XIV		194 824 lb (88 371 kg)	22 600 yd (20 665 m)				
	9.2-inch BL howitzer <sup>‡</sup>	I	9.2 inch (234 mm)	29 932 lb (13 577 kg)	10060 yd (9200 m)	12	tractor	290 lb (132 kg)	HE
		II		36 288 lb (16 460 kg)	13935 yd (12740 m)				
	12-inch BL Railway Howitzer	I	12 inch (304.8 mm)	129 611 lb (58 791 kg)	11 132 yds (10 179 m)	14	railway	750 lb (340.2 kg)	HE
		III		136 080 lb (61 725 kg)	15 000 yds (13 716 m)				
		V		170 141 lb (77 175 kg)	14 350 yds (13 122 m)				
	12-inch BL Siege Howitzer	II		81 983 lb (37 187 kg)	11 340 yds (10 369 m)	14	tractor		
IV		82 880 lb (37 594 kg)		14 350 yds (13 122 m)					

Shaded area denotes guns operated by AIF artillery.

\* Detachment

<sup>†</sup> Hundredweight

<sup>‡</sup> In practice the 9.2-inch howitzer formed part of both corps and army artillery.

Source: I Hogg and L Thurston, *British Artillery Weapons and Ammunition, 1914–1918*, Ian Allan Limited, 1972; SN Gower, *The Guns of the Regiment*, Australian War Memorial, 1981.



# ARTILLERY DEVELOPMENTS

- Major changes in organisation (but not in Heavy Artillery until end of 1917:
  - - Australian artillery not an independent arm – integral part of British assets
- Bulk of Aust arty 18 pounder field guns and 4.5 inch howitzers – only one mixed Siege Battery
  - organic to Infantry Divisions but usually treated as a Corps or Army asset and often deployed away from owning Division
- Artillery organised into a three-tiered structure:
  - - level one: lightest and most mobile but limited range and effectiveness (Divisional arty)
  - - level two: heavier, longer ranged and more effective, more limited mobility (Corps arty)
  - - level three: heaviest, longest range and largest shells, slower firing, very difficult to redeploy quickly, often railway mounted (Army artillery)

# ARTILLERY DEVELOPMENTS

- Two reorganisations of the field artillery
  - in late 1916, composite brigades formed
  - in early 1917, artillery was more centralised: Divisional arty assets reduced to two composite brigades
  - surplus arty combined into ‘Army’ field arty brigades



**Table 3.2: AIF field artillery brigade allotments, 1917–1918**

		Brigades	Batteries
Divisional Field Artillery Brigades	1st Division	1st	1, 2, 3, 101
		2nd	4, 5, 6, 102
	2nd Division	4th	10, 11, 12, 104
		5th	13, 14, 15, 105
	3rd Division	7th	25, 26, 27, 107
		8th	29, 30, 31, 108
	4th Division	10th	37, 38, 39, 110
		11th	41, 42, 43, 111
	5th Division	13th	49, 50, 51, 113
		14th	53, 54, 55, 114
Army Field Artillery Brigades		3rd	7, 8, 9, 103
		6th	16, 17, 18, 106
		12th	45, 46, 47, 112

Source: David Horner, *The Gunners: A History of Australian Artillery*, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p. 138.

# THE WAR IN 1917 – AN OVERVIEW

- Any questions?