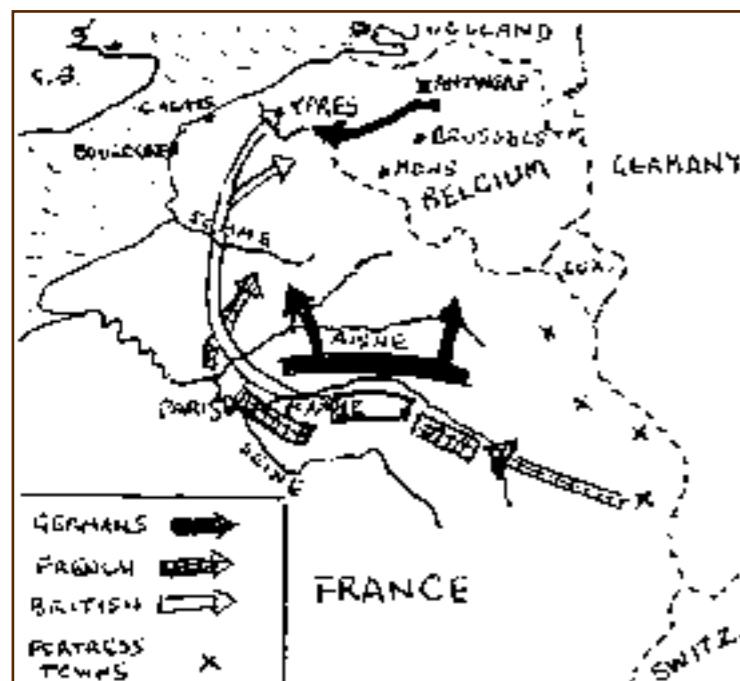


THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WESTERN FRONT

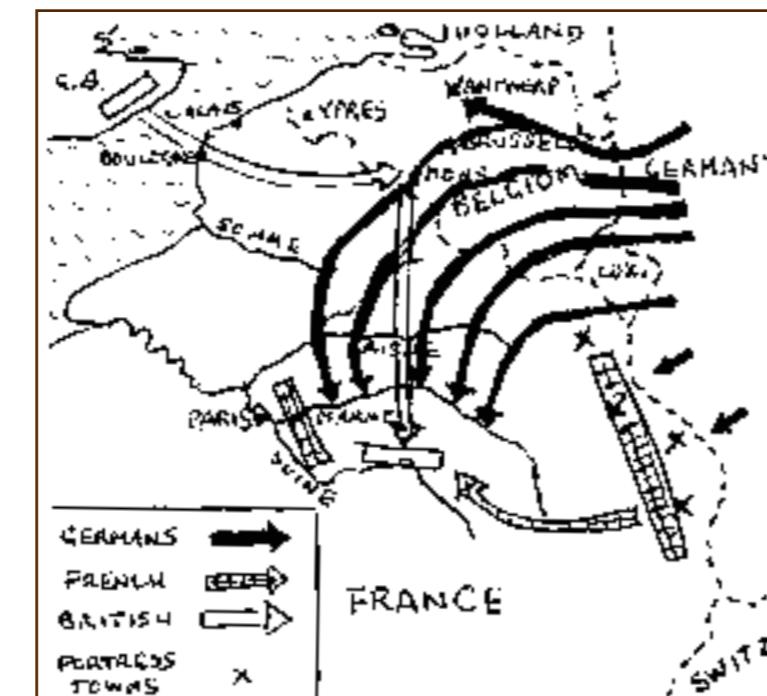
Germany had long planned for the coming war. Fearing to fight a war on two fronts, she aimed to strike a crushing blow at France, before turning all her forces against Russia. Under the **Schlieffen Plan** the main part of the German army would attack through neutral Belgium, where the French had few defences and sweep through northern France to surround Paris before turning back to trap the French armies against their own frontier forts. It nearly worked; the French were caught on the hop. But the Belgians refused to let the Germans through without a fight, and their stubborn resistance slowed down the advance.

The **British Expeditionary Force** rushed to their help and fought their first battle with the Germans at **Mons**. However they had to retreat into France to keep in contact with the French. Meanwhile the French rallied their forces and, with the help of the B.E.F., halted the German advance at the **Battle of the Marne**. The Germans retreated to the river Aisne where they dug in.



The Race to the Sea

There was now a race to see who would control the Channel ports. If the Germans had seized Calais and Boulogne, this would have been a big problem for the British so the B.E.F. hurried north and took control of Ypres in Belgium, which commanded the routes to the coast, while the Belgian army flooded the area between Ypres and the Channel to stop the Germans. Despite fierce German attacks, the British held on to Ypres, at the cost of 8,000 casualties. It would become one of the most fought over areas of the Western Front.



Map of German Attack 1914



The Western Front [Source Macdonald – 1915]



Ypres before the fighting of 1914



Ypres after the fighting of 1914

By the end of November and the onset of winter the war of movement had ended in a stalemate as both sides dug in. Soon the trenches of the **Western Front** stretched from the Channel coast to the Swiss border.