

The Schlieffen Plan: The War Begins

The *Schlieffen Plan* was the first major campaign of the war in August, 1914. Germany was in a difficult position – they were stuck between Russia and France who were allies and who were both mobilizing their armies for war. In order to avoid fighting on two fronts (two borders of Germany) at the same time, Alfred von Schlieffen developed a plan. It called for a quick attack on France to capture Paris, thereby knocking France out of the war (supposed to take six weeks). In this way, Germany could concentrate on fighting just one country at a time. The following was assumed in order to be successful:

1. The Russians would take a long time to mobilize due to its size and lack of technology.
2. Austria-Hungary would easily defeat Serbia
3. Two German armies would contain the anticipated French attack in the Voges Mountains, while five armies would sweep through Belgium and then France to capture Paris.
4. Britain would remain neutral.

However, the plan did not work. Here's why:

1. Russia mobilized quickly and challenged Germany on their eastern front.
2. Serbia held out against Austria-Hungary for over a year.
3. Germany was not strong enough on the northern advance.
Many problems with this part of the plan:
 - »» moved in the wrong direction to capture Paris
 - »» German soldiers travelled 30-40 km/day, therefore exhausted
 - »» extended line of supply could not keep up
 - »» bad communication - armies did not know what to do
4. When Belgium was invaded, Britain immediately took up arms and declared war on Germany.

The failed Schlieffen Plan led to a “race to the English Channel” and ended in stalemate and trench warfare that would last the entire war.

