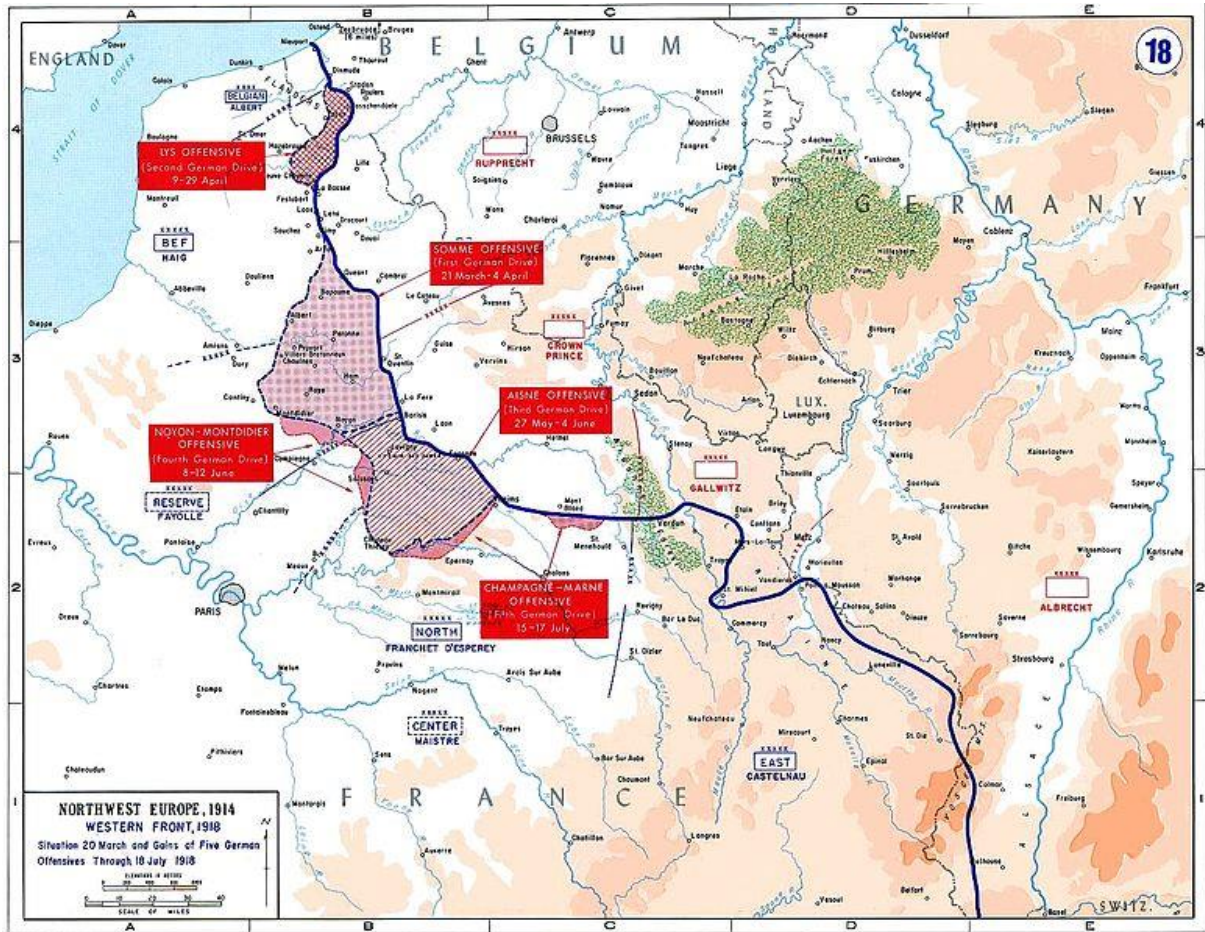




## Resource E

### The German Spring Offensive “Operation Michael” – March 1918

- The German Commander, General Ludendorff chose the weakest part of the British front line for an attack, on the Somme using some of the extra 500,000 German soldiers transferred from Russia.
- There had been no German attack there for two years, the British were not expecting one and the trenches were incomplete and undermanned.
- At 04.40 am on 21<sup>st</sup> March the Germans started firing around 10,000 guns at once along a 40 mile front, pouring high explosives and gas shells into the British front line for five hours.
- At the same time German engineers blew up explosives under the British barbed wire.
- There were no massed infantry attacks. Instead, small groups of highly trained storm troopers armed with light machine guns, grenades and flame throwers moved carefully from crater to crater across no man’s land. There was thick fog. The British defenders could not always see a clear target.
- The large numbers of storm troopers overwhelmed the few British defenders, bypassing pockets of resistance.
- Later ‘waves’ of German infantry forced the remaining pockets of resistance to surrender. By the evening of 23<sup>rd</sup> March the Germans had broken through the British trench system and advanced 12 miles. There were not enough British soldiers in the area to stop the Germans.
- Over the next few weeks the British were pushed back behind their front line. They lost 178,000 soldiers and the French 77,000.
- The Germans advanced quickly to within 35 miles of Paris.
- A gigantic German weapon ‘the Kaiser’s Gun’ shelled Paris every day.



Map of the Western Front in 1918 showing German gains in territory from March to July