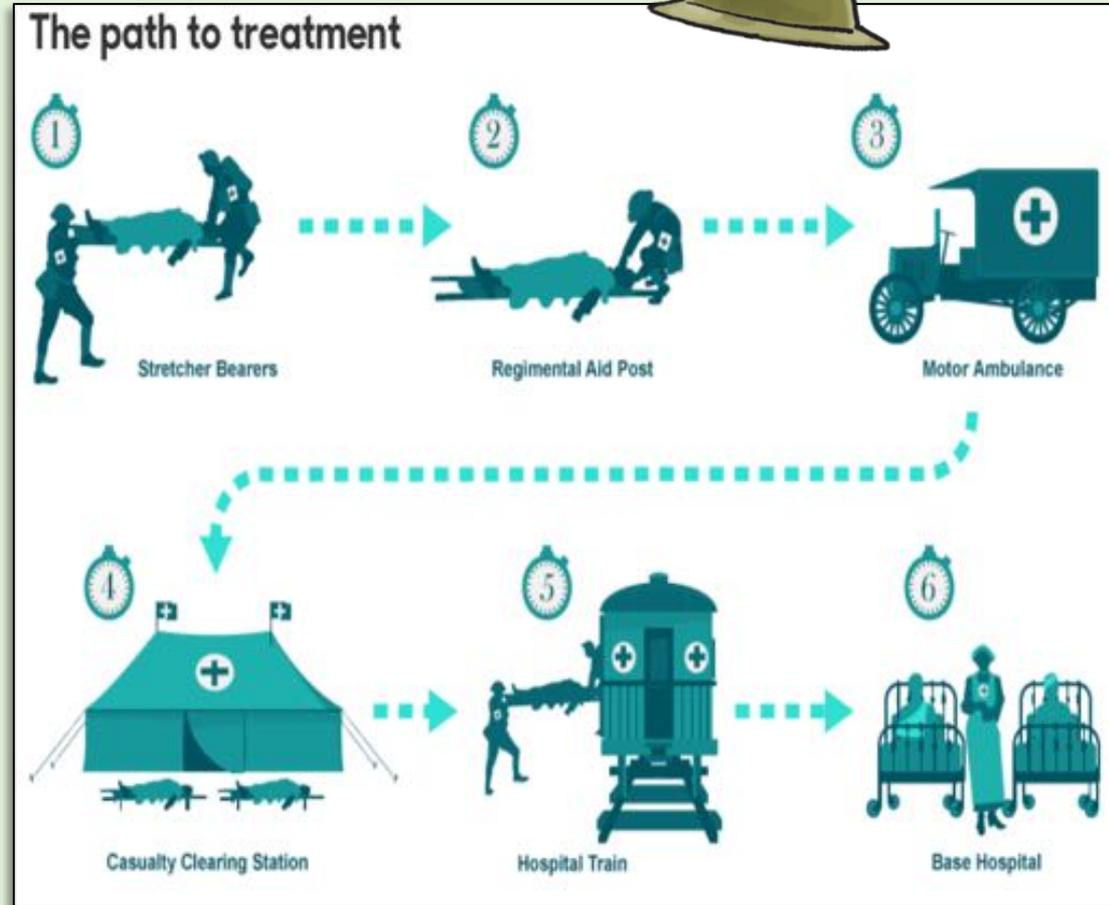


Impact of the environment on the Evacuation Chain:



We've now looked in detail at the work of the Evacuation Chain and the RAMC / FANY, but now we need to consider the **environment and terrain** that would play a significant part in movement along the chain of evacuation.



Stretcher Bearers:

- **Constant shelling and the type of terrain that the soldiers were fighting on left the landscape full of craters and holes destroying many roads**
- **This led to problems transporting injured men away from the frontline**
- **Before the war this region had been used as farmland, using **fertiliser** which meant there was lots of **bacteria** in the soil leading to infected wounds**



What can you learn about transporting troops from Source E?
(CONTENT)

Source E

From Edward Munro's *Diaries of a Stretcher Bearer*. This entry comes from 7 November 1916, when Munro was in the Somme.

We commenced to carry down the wounded of whom there were a considerable number. The 7th Brigade had made an attack on the German line the previous night and had suffered many casualties. The country over which we have to carry is most difficult to traverse [walk across], being pitted with shell holes, mostly waterlogged. Fritz [a reference to the Germans] keeps up a fairly constant shelling. Yesterday he caught some of the 6th Ambulance bearers, killing two. In this area was started the system of carrying the stretchers shoulder high – four to a stretcher, this being much less fatiguing than the old method of two carrying with slings... The carrying at night is very trying as there are no clearly defined tracks. The landmarks that serve to guide one in the daytime are not visible at night.

Stretcher Bearers:

- Men who were injured on the Western Front needed to be moved away in stages, as soon as they were stable enough.
- **Stretcher Bearers** like Edward Munro would carry away the large numbers of wounded from the frontline (**day and night**) exposing themselves to shelling and gunfire
- **Further away** from the frontline it was possible to carry out **more advanced medical procedures** and provide some protection from shelling
- The faster they could be treated the more likely they would survive

Source F

Stretcher bearers carrying a wounded man to safety at the third battle of Ypres in August 1917. This photograph was taken by Lieutenant John Brooke, an official photographer for the British army on the Western Front.



Describe what is happening in Source F

- How could a historian use this source for an enquiry into the problems faced by stretcher bearers?
- What other sources would be helpful in considering the work and problems faced by stretcher bearers

Horse drawn wagons / ambulances

- When the BEF was sent to France in August 1914, it was decided not to send any motor ambulances with them – a mistake!
- Instead they relied on horse drawn ambulances

What issues or problems might this lead to?

- Men who were transported in these wagons were **shaken about**, which made their **injuries worse**
- Soldiers **were left to die** or be **captured** due to lack of suitable transport
- When news of this reached Britain, the Times newspaper ran a public appeal for donations, in 3 weeks they raised enough for 512 ambulance wagons which really helped in transporting the wounded and not making them worse



Remember Passchendaele? What issues would this cause?

Motor vehicles still couldn't operate in the muddy terrain, so horse-drawn wagons continued to be used throughout the war, often up to 6 horses in particularly bad conditions

What else might be used for transport...

Source G

A photograph of a wagon belonging to the Field Ambulance service, in use in the Somme region, September 1916.



NOPCAT analyse Source G

Remember strengths and weaknesses

Train, Barges and Ships



- Wounded men might be transported by **train or canal** in the final stage of their evacuation **to the Base Hospital**.
- The RAMC (Royal Army Medical Corps) had to initially use French goods trains.
- The first ambulance train arrived in November 1914.
- Some trains even contained operating theatres.



Train, Barges and Ships



- There was concern that there were **too many wounded** being moved on the railways was affecting the war effort due to the sheer number of trains on the rail network
- As a result they moved to using barges (canal) to the Base hospitals
- Although it was slow, it was comfortable
- Some wounded went straight on the ships home to Britain



Source F

From the autobiography of Geoffrey Keynes, *The Gates of Memory* (1981). This account was originally published in 1968. Keynes was important in developing blood transfusions during the war.

On 6 February 1915 I was detailed for duty on an ambulance train. The numbers of patients carried on each journey varied between 100 and 400. During my turn of duty in the train we carried nearly 19,000 patients. Medical duties were usually restricted to ensuring that the wounded men, who had already been attended in a Dressing Station or Casualty Clearing Station travelled as comfortably as possible with the help of sedative and pain-killing drugs. Frequently they had to suffer violent jolts during shunting operations.

Usually the patients had been fully cared for before being sent on by train to the base hospitals, but on one occasion (12 March 1915), the train was ordered to go close to the frontline and take on casualties who had barely received first aid.

What can you learn from Source F about the ambulance trains and the difficulties faced by the medics?

Train, Barges and Ships

Source G

From a speech made by Walter Roch in Parliament, 23 June 1915. Roch was a Liberal MP and was taking part in a debate on how the government should spend its money.

I want to bring to the notice of the House information in connection with the treatment of the wounded in Flanders. The information is not my own personal knowledge, but from several very close personal friends who have been connected with this, although I cannot give their names. I am told that it is of the utmost importance that the men who are wounded should be treated as quickly as possible, and that their wounds should have the best possible attention as soon as may be. The suggestion I have to make is that there should be many more of these evacuation hospitals than there are in France at the present moment, that they should be much better equipped with operating theatres and other appliances, and that they should be more sanitary and hygienic in their nature.

NOPCAT Source G, paying particular attention to the **CONTENT** and **CONTEXT**



If you haven't already, add the transport to your evacuation chain sheets.

Stretcher Bearers /
Field Ambulance



RAP (Regimental Stretcher Bearers)
ADS (RAMC Stretcher Bearers)

Horse drawn
ambulances



CCS / Base Hospitals

Motor ambulances



CCS / Base Hospitals

Canal barges



Base Hospitals

Ambulance Trains



Base Hospitals

Hospital ships



Hospital back in Britain



Summary

- Trench warfare had begun on the Western Front by the end of 1914.
- As the trench system developed, a complex network of trenches was created in which men could live and fight.
- Tunnels and caves at Arras were used as part of the defensive system.
- Chlorine gas was first used by the Germans at the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915.
- The first motorised ambulances sent to France were provided by public donations and organisations such as the British Red Cross.
- Wounded men were moved away from the frontline by trains and canal boats.

Checkpoint

Strengthen

S1 In what ways were the problems of transporting wounded men dealt with?

Think about the types of sources you've seen in this section – Make a table with the following headings:

Example of source

Strengths

weaknesses

Fill in this table using all of the sources in this presentation