Movies had not been invented when Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace*, but the author does “cut” back and forth across time and space just like a film, and the effect can be a bit disorienting sometimes.

The following information is not meant to be a comprehensive summary of the plot action in Volume I of *War and Peace*, but it should help you to keep track of events and characters.

**Highlights of War and Peace, Volume I**

**Part One**

**Chapters 1-7:** Introduction of Pierre Bezukhov and Prince Andrei Bolokonsky at the St. Petersburg soiree given by Anna Scherer. Tolstoy sketches Pierre and Andrei physically and psychologically, emphasizing their friendship despite their opposite temperaments. Both young men’s problems and character issues are revealed: Pierre’s naïve idealism and dissolute behavior; Andrei’s cynicism and disillusionment with his marriage.

**Chapters 8-10:** Introduction of the Rostov family, especially the children. Natasha Rostov, who will become more and more important to the story, gives, rather than accepts, her first kiss.

**Chapters 15-17:** The Rostovs’ “name-day” party—the vibrancy and lack of pretense of the Moscow Rostovs’ social life is implicitly contrasted with the stiff and artificial social life of St. Petersburg. Marya Dmitrievna, the “grande dame,” openly rebukes Pierre for his bad behavior in St. Petersburg and dances the “Daniel Cooper” with old Count Ilya Rostov.

**Chapter 21:** The affair of the “inlaid portfolio” containing Old Count Bezukhov’s Last Will—Pierre’s inheritance is thus secured by the machinations of Anna Mikhailovna.

**Chapters 22-25:** The Bolkonsky household at “Bald Hills” is introduced, especially the “Old Prince” Nikolai Bolkonsky and his autocratic, but supposedly “Enlightened” regimen, which his meek and pious daughter Princess Marya must endure with her carefully cultivated Christian fortitude. Prince Andrei and his wife, the “Little Princess” Liza arrive. Andrei rather coldly leaves the pregnant Little Princess in order to join General Kutuzov’s staff as Russia goes to war against Napoleon in 1805.

**Part Two**

**Chapter 3:** The Austrian army, the ally the Russians were supposed to join against Napoleon, has been defeated at the battle of Ulm, and the Russian army is now in grave danger of being overwhelmed by Napoleon’s superior forces.

**Chapters 4-5:** Young Count Nikolai Rostov’s inexperience and immaturity are painfully on display when he breaks an “unwritten rule” by reporting a theft by a fellow officer to his commander. He does not realize that publically complaining of dishonorable behavior on the part of one of its members is tantamount to disparaging the honor of the whole regiment. Rostov’s friend and mentor Captain Denisov is introduced.
Chapters 16-19: The Battle of Schongraben—Nikolai Rostov’s first combat action is less than glorious.

Chapters 20-21: The climax of Schongraben and the heroism of Captain Tushin, Prince Andrei, and Dolohkov in holding off a much larger French force so that the bulk of the Russian army can escape Napoleon’s trap. Dolohkov gains “trophies” and assures that he will be promoted back to officer; Prince Andrei comes to Captain Tushin's defense when the commander of their force, Prince Bagration, questions the abandonment of artillery pieces by Tushin's battery.

Part Three

Chapters 1-2: Made even more muddle-headed over his sudden ascension to wealth, title, and property, the now Count Pierre Bezukhov falls under the influence of the unscrupulous Prince Vassily Kuragin, who maneuvers him into marriage with his daughter Helene Kuragin, a woman of voluptuous beauty but questionable morals.

Chapter 3-5: Prince Kuragin also wants a wealthy mate for his dissolute son Prince Anatole Kuragin, so he takes him to Bald Hills to arrange a match with Princess Marya Bolkonsky. Princess Marya secretly wants to be married, and finds Anatole handsome, but the young seducer cannot resist a dalliance with Mademoiselle Bourienne, Marya’s “lady’s companion,” so Marya of course turns him down.

Chapter 6: The Rostov family ecstatically receives a letter from Nikolai, assuring them of his safety. Count Ilya sends his son 6,000 rubles through Boris Drubetskoy, with whom Natasha now realizes that she is not really in love, despite having given him that first kiss.

Chapter 7: Prince Andrei rebukes Nikolai Rostov for telling “tall tales” about his battle experience. Nikolai is seriously offended, but realizes that he likes Prince Andrei despite the “put down.”

Chapter 8: The emperors of Austria and Russia review their troops; Nikolai Rostov goes into ecstasies of adoration for Tsar Alexander.

Chapters 11-16: The fateful Battle of Austerlitz begins, with Tolstoy using one of his most extensive epic similes (pp. 257-258) comparing the movement of an army into battle to all the gears of a great clock that must move in order for one hand to move. Prince Andrei witnesses the disagreement and unhappiness over the attack plan at the council of war, but believes that battle will offer him the chance for the glory and recognition that he seeks. He does behave heroically, but he falls with a serious head wound. His “vision of the sky” as he lies on the field is an important turning point for the development of his character.

Chapters 17-18: Prince Bagration sends Nikolai Rostov as a messenger to either Kutuzov or the Tsar. Rostov rides across the entire battle line and witnesses the disastrous consequences for the allied army, including seeing the Tsar in despair and being unable to offer any comfort.

Chapter 19: Napoleon himself finds Prince Andrei lying seemingly dead, and comments on his “good death.” When Andrei shows signs of life, Napoleon calls for medical attention, and Andrei is carried off the field. The French medical staff, assuming that he will die, leave him behind when the French move out. Thus, his name will not appear on the list of those killed, wounded, or captured.