

# 11

# The First World War

## Focus

America's involvement in World War I helped end the war but had lasting effects on the American people.





limit the number of military men and warships it could have.

On June 28, 1919, German leaders met with the Allies in the Palace of Versailles in Paris. They signed the treaty in the Hall of Mirrors. The treaty became known as the Treaty of Versailles.

Some people, including Lloyd George and Foch, thought that the treaty was too harsh to Germany. They did not believe the treaty had settled matters in a way that would keep peace. They were concerned that Europe would have to fight another war. Time would prove them to be right.

## After the Treaty

President Wilson returned to the United States. He was eager for Congress to ratify the treaty. But some congressmen were not pleased with it. They did not believe that the United States should be involved in a League of Nations. They felt that being in the league would threaten America's independence. Wilson traveled and made many speeches promoting the league. But the United States never ratified the treaty, and it never joined the League of Nations.

With the war over, most Americans wanted nothing more than for life to return to normal. But they would feel the impact of World War I for a long time to come. In the next decade, American author Ernest Hemingway wrote about the "lost generation." He was not only speaking of the young men who had died in the war. He was also referring to the war's effect on the hearts and minds of those who had lived through it. Many American young people struggled to recover a feeling of hope and purpose in life after the terrible war. More than ever, Americans needed the peace of God to keep their hearts and minds secure.

Why did the United States never approve the Treaty of Versailles?





## The Treaty of Versailles

Christmas came and went. In America, the celebration was a mixture of joy and sorrow. Yet many Christians thanked God for the new peace on the earth and prayed that it would last.

In January of 1919, the peace conference began in Paris, France. Leaders from many different nations gathered to discuss the peace treaty. The most important leaders at the conference were Georges Clemenceau of France, David Lloyd George of Britain, Vittorio Orlando of Italy, and Woodrow Wilson of the United States. They were known as the “Big Four.”

Germany’s leaders were not part of the discussion. Most of the Allied nations blamed Germany for the war. Many wanted to see the treaty punish Germany. But not all the leaders agreed on the treaty’s terms.

Clemenceau wanted the treaty to be severe on Germany. He did not want the Germans ever to be a threat to other nations again. Lloyd George did not want to be quite so harsh. He wanted to decrease Germany’s power, but he did not want to leave it powerless. Lloyd George saw that Communism was growing in Russia. He wanted Germany

to be able to stand in the way of its growth.

President Wilson had given the treaty much thought. He had formed fourteen points that he wanted it to include. These points were meant to keep the world at peace. Wilson cared most about one of his points concerning a League of Nations. This



The “Big Four” met in France in the Hall of Mirrors to discuss and sign the peace treaty.

league would be an international organization that would work together for peace and security.

In the end, the treaty did not include most of Wilson’s fourteen points, but it did include the League of Nations. The treaty also required Germany to pay enormous costs for damages to the Allied nations. It took away large portions of Germany’s territory. It forced Germany to greatly





## The End of the War

### Armistice

The fighting officially ended on **November 11, 1918**. After the Meuse-Argonne offensive, the Germans agreed to an armistice. Germany was in a desperate state. Its ruler, Kaiser Wilhelm II, had fled to Holland and was about to give up his reign. The Allies had cut off supplies to Germany, and the German people were starving. Historians estimate that nearly 65 percent of Germany's forces had been wounded, taken prisoner, or killed by the end of the war. Weary German leaders met with Foch in a railroad car in a forest of France. They signed the armistice, putting an end to four years of warfare.

The armistice ended the fighting. But the war was not over yet. The leaders of the nations involved still needed to work out the details of the peace treaty. Even so, the day of the armistice was a holiday for the Allies. Allied soldiers laid down their weapons, took off their gas masks, and climbed out of their trenches. They cried and laughed and slapped each other on the back. In Allied nations around the world, people went wild with joy. They ran out into the streets, cheering, singing, dancing, and waving flags. Armistice Day became a national holiday in the United States. Later it became known as Veterans Day.

"We shall never shake the world together,  
you and I,  
For you gave your life away;  
And I think my heart was broken by war,  
Since on a summer day  
You took the road we never spoke of"

—May Wedderburn Cannan,  
from "Lamplight"



Cannan was a British nurse who served in France. Her fiancé fought in the war. He survived the war but died shortly after from influenza.

But for many families, there was sadness too. Millions of wounded were coming home. They would need special care. Many would have disabilities for the rest of their lives. And more than 115,000 American soldiers would never come home. Rows and rows of white crosses on European battlefields were silent reminders of the high cost of peace.



Women served in many roles during World War I.



women became nurses. Some worked in hospitals at home, and some were shipped overseas to work on the war front. Some women enlisted in the navy as yeomen. They were not allowed to join the men in active service, but they could be in the reserves at home. Most of these women, nicknamed “yeomanettes,” held office jobs.

When the war ended and the men returned home, many women left the work force and returned to their roles in the home. Some continued to work outside the home. An important result of the war was that women were highly respected for the part they had played. Many had accepted new responsibilities or bravely tackled new jobs. Some had even put their lives in danger to help others. The respect they earned helped American women gain the right to vote shortly after the war.

produce more items for the war, such as uniforms and guns. Many people took new jobs to fill the needs in the work force.

During World War I, American women were employed in new roles. Women who had never worked outside the home now took jobs in offices or factories. Wages increased because of the shortage of workers. Many women earned a higher income than they had been able to earn before.

Some women worked more directly in helping with the war. A number of

In what ways did American women and children support the war?

## Activity

### Conserving Food

Label three separate sheets of paper with the headings “Meatless Day,” “Wheatless Day,” and “Sweetless Day.” Plan a menu for each day. Be sure to avoid meat, flour and bread, and

desserts on the appropriate days.

Choose one menu to take home. Ask for help to prepare the foods listed for a meal one day this week.





The Fuel Administration was set up to help manage the use of the nation's fuel. It worked to conserve the amount of coal used in factories, homes, and businesses. Americans were also urged to have "gasless days" once a week. On these days, Americans who owned cars walked instead of driving.

The Food Administration oversaw the rationing of America's food. President Wilson chose **Herbert Hoover**, who was later a United States president, to lead this organization. Hoover encouraged Americans to have victory gardens where they grew their own food. He also asked Americans to set aside certain days as "meatless," "wheatless," and "sweetless." Conserving food allowed the government to greatly increase the amount of food it shipped to Europe. This food helped people who were hungry in other Allied nations.

Another way that people supported the war was by buying bonds. The money people spent on bonds went to help the war effort. Later the government paid these people back with interest. Calling these bonds "liberty bonds" helped people feel good about giving. They

knew that the money was going toward the cause of freedom.

Many Americans joined in volunteer efforts to help the war. Women rolled bandages and knitted socks for soldiers. Some opened their homes to help care for wounded soldiers who had returned. Even children helped support the war. They could buy a savings stamp for as little as twenty-five cents to help with war costs. Schoolchildren tended victory gardens and sold the produce. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts ran errands, passed out war propaganda, and helped sell war bonds.



Propaganda posters inspired Americans to support the war.

## Working New Jobs

When a large percentage of America's men joined the military, thousands of jobs were left with no one to work them. Factories needed to



## The War at Home

World War I was fought in Europe, but Americans at home felt the effects of the war too. Though some Americans opposed the war, most were proud of the courageous young men who had gone to fight. They wanted to do everything they could to help at home.

## Getting the Word Out

President Wilson created a new committee to be in charge of the information given out about the war. It was called the Committee on Public Information. The committee helped the American people feel more united in the cause of the war. Artists and writers designed posters and ads that promoted the war and urged people to support it. One famous poster from the war was a large picture of Uncle Sam pointing at the viewer. “I want you for U.S. Army,” it read.

The committee also published a large amount of propaganda about the Germans. The information was meant to influence Americans to hate the enemy. Germans were called “Huns” after an ancient tribe known for their cruelty. Pictures in the ads portrayed Germans as evil and inhuman. Unfortunately, these posters and ads were hurtful to Americans of German descent. Anti-German feeling was so strong in America that German Americans sometimes feared for their safety.



Propaganda posters were designed to make a person think or feel a certain way.

## Saving and Supporting

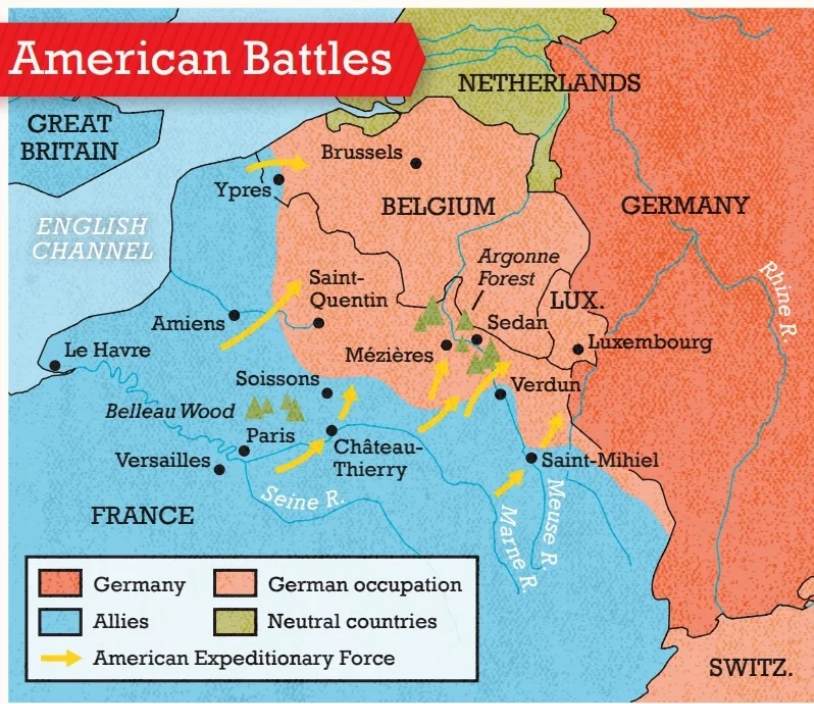
The war was expensive for the United States, just as it was for the other nations involved. The government encouraged the American people to support the war in various ways. Several new committees and boards were created to lead Americans in helping with the war.

One way that Americans helped the war effort was by **conserving**. The government encouraged people to save money, gas, and food at home. Then more of these supplies could be shipped overseas to the Allies.





## American Battles



With all the hardships of war, the Russians listened to Lenin. Many Russian soldiers left the war and returned to help set up the new government. In 1918 Lenin signed a peace treaty with Germany. Russia's part in the war had officially ended. Germany now had to fight only on the western front.

### The Final Battles

By this time, hundreds of thousands of American soldiers had arrived in France. Pershing commanded more than 500,000 American soldiers in an attack on the Germans at a town called Saint-Mihiel. This **offensive** was one of the strongest in the war. Tanks moved in first, followed by the AEF's foot soldiers. The French and the British also gave support from the air,

forming a force of nearly 1,500 planes. The Allies took thousands of German prisoners. The Saint-Mihiel offensive was over in four days. The Allies had won a great victory.

The last major offensive of the war began about two weeks later. It was named the **Meuse-Argonne offensive** after its location. The Allies were attacking German troops along the Meuse River and in the Argonne Forest.

Just as at Saint-Mihiel, the AEF played the major role in the attack. Once again, the Americans combined forces of tanks, foot soldiers, and airmen. The fighting went on for several weeks. Although the Allies suffered heavy losses, they refused to give up. German resistance grew weaker. Many soldiers were now also suffering from a terrible outbreak of influenza. In many cases, soldiers who had survived the long years of hardship and the strain of battle died of the flu.

The fighting finally stopped in early November of 1918. Millions of soldiers on both sides had died. Weary of the war, the Germans finally had to admit defeat.

Why did the coming of Americans to the war front encourage the Allies?



## The Second Battle of the Marne

The first major action for the AEF took place along the Marne River. This was the same river where the Allies had stopped the Germans in the early months of the war. The Germans were making another advance toward the city of Paris. American machine gunners were stationed in the French town of Château-Thierry. Their steady fire on advancing German troops kept these soldiers from crossing the Marne and marching on to Paris. Once again, the Germans had been stopped at the Marne

"They went with songs to the battle,  
they were young,  
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady  
and aglow.  
They were staunch to the end against  
odds uncounted;  
They fell with their faces to the foe."

—Laurence Binyon,  
from "For the Fallen"

Binyon was a British poet and art scholar. He was too old to enlist in World War I, but he volunteered in a war hospital in France.

River. This was the last major attempt by the Germans to take the city of Paris.

## The Battle of Belleau Wood

At the same time, American troops were trying to stop the Germans in the nearby Belleau Wood. American soldiers entered the wood to attack German troops. The large number of trees made it difficult to see the enemy. The Germans used mustard gas to defend themselves. After three weeks of combat, more than 1,800 US soldiers had died, and thousands more were wounded. But the Americans had taken more than 1,500 German prisoners.

American forces now controlled Belleau Wood. They had proven that they were serious about their part in the war.

## Trouble in Russia

Not all the Allied nations continued to fight in the war. At the time America joined the war, Russia was changing politically. There had been unrest in Russia for several years. During 1917, the Russian people forced their czar, Nicholas II, to give up his throne. A new government took over under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin and his political party, the Bolsheviks, also called Communists. Lenin promised the Russian people bread, land, and peace.





## John J. Pershing

**Who:** commander of the AEF

**When:** 1860–1948

**Where:** Europe during World War I

John Joseph Pershing was born in Missouri. He attended a small school and helped on his father's farm. As a young man, he worked first as a teacher. He then trained at West Point in the 1880s and became a soldier. After his graduation, he led a regiment of African American soldiers against the Apaches and the Sioux. He often expressed appreciation for the courage of his men, earning himself the nickname "Black Jack." Pershing was known for being calm under fire. He received awards for his bravery in several conflicts before World War I. Shortly before America entered this war, Pershing lost his wife and three of his four children in a fire. Even after this great personal tragedy, he went on to command the American forces with courage and skill. For his courageous leadership during the war, he was promoted to the highest rank in the US armed forces.



### US Soldiers in Europe

American soldiers marching onto French soil were a welcome sight for the Allies. These new soldiers in the war were nicknamed "doughboys." The Allies were counting on the Americans to help turn the tide of the long war.

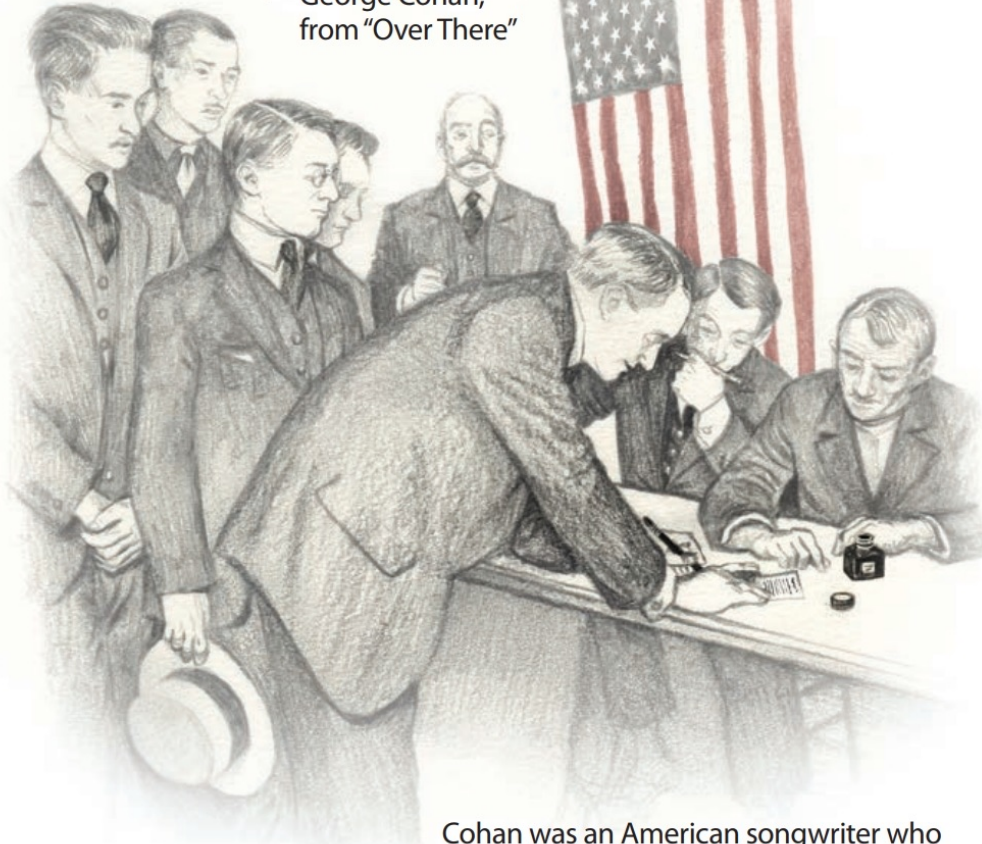
The American army that went to fight in Europe was called the **American Expeditionary Force (AEF)**. The force was under the command of General **John J. Pershing**. Pershing worked under Marshal **Ferdinand Foch**, the commander of all the Allied troops.

Pershing did not allow American soldiers to be placed in European regiments. He kept American troops together and made sure they fought under American officers. By this time in the war, the French and British troops were weary of fighting. Many French soldiers banded together and refused orders from their officers. Some left the battlefield and never returned. Pershing did not want his soldiers to become discouraged by fighting alongside the Europeans.



"We'll be over, we're coming over,  
And we won't come back till it's over  
Over there!"

—George Cohan,  
from "Over There"



Cohan was an American songwriter who wrote "Over There." It became one of America's most popular wartime songs.

a draft system for the first time since the Civil War. At first, men twenty-one years of age or older had to register for the draft. Later, men as young as eighteen had to register. The draft caused great excitement across the nation. Many Americans were eager to fight in the war. About four million Americans joined the army during World War I.

All over the United States, families said their goodbyes as soldiers headed off to training camps. The soldiers would train in the United States

## America Declares War

On April 2, President Wilson went before Congress once again. He persuaded the members that America needed to make the world "safe for democracy." Then he asked for a declaration of war. Congress declared war on Germany four days later on **April 6, 1917**. The United States would enter the war on the side of the Allies.

America did not have a large trained army in 1917. So the government used

before boarding ships to sail to Europe. Americans also began preparing to help the Allies in Europe with war supplies. Along with soldiers, they would ship food, clothing, and weapons to the Allied nations. The Great War was no longer just a European war. It was now America's war too.

What two events finally convinced America to declare war on Germany?





most effective strategy at sea was to use their U-boats. Once again, they resumed unrestricted submarine warfare. Two years before, the Germans had promised to stop using this type of warfare. Many Americans were angry that the Germans had broken their promise.

### America's Growing Concern *Peace Without Victory?*

It was now 1917, the third year of the war. The war had cost millions of lives. The nations at war had suffered heavy financial costs as well. Every country was tired of fighting. But the Allies and the Central Powers were still deadlocked. Neither side was winning.

President Wilson had won re-election in the United States. His supporters reminded Americans that "he kept us out of war." At the beginning of his second term, the president gave a speech before Congress. His message was actually directed toward the leaders of the warring nations. He encouraged the European leaders to settle for peace

without victory. But neither the Allies nor the Central Powers were willing to do that.

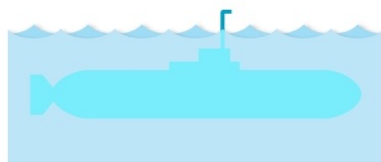
During February and March, German U-boats sank several US ships. President Wilson called for all American merchant ships to be armed. Americans watched the situation with growing anger and concern.

### *The Zimmermann Telegram*

Also early in 1917, the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, sent a telegram to Mexico. Germany feared that the United States would enter the war on the side of the Allies. Zimmermann's telegram said that if this happened, Germany would reward Mexico to fight against the United States. Germany would give Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona back to Mexico.

British spies secretly got a copy of the telegram and sent the message to the United States. When Americans found out Germany was trying to make a deal with Mexico, they were outraged. President Wilson no longer wanted to talk about peace.

## CAUSES LEADING AMERICA TO JOIN THE WAR



Unrestricted  
Submarine Warfare

+



Sinking of the *Lusitania*

+



Zimmermann Telegram



## America Enters the War

### Battles and Bravery

#### *Verdun*

Early in 1916, the Germans on the western front decided it was time to break the deadlock. They planned to capture Verdun. Verdun was a French city surrounded by three rings of fortresses. But its defenses had been weakened. The French had sent some of Verdun's weapons to be used in the fighting on the front. The Germans thought that Verdun would be defeated quickly.

For two days in February, the Germans bombarded Verdun's fortresses. They used shells, machine guns, and poisonous gas. Then German foot soldiers began marching forward. They expected to find all the French defenders dead. Instead, French soldiers rained gunfire on them. The French continued to defend Verdun for ten months. Their brave efforts saved the city. But hundreds of thousands of French soldiers were killed or wounded during the **Battle of Verdun**. German losses were almost as great. Verdun was the longest battle of the war.

#### *The Somme*

In July of 1916, British soldiers tried to draw Germans away from the fighting at Verdun. They attacked the German soldiers at a point along the Somme River. The **Battle of the Somme** lasted four months. The Germans finally retreated. But even more soldiers had been killed or wounded than in the Battle of Verdun.



The Battle of Somme was fought between British and French against the Germans with trenches that stretched from the English Channel across France to the Swiss border.

#### *Jutland*

The largest sea battle happened in May of 1916. The **Battle of Jutland** was fought in the North Sea off the coast of Denmark. It was a quick and bitter battle. It lasted fewer than thirty minutes. The British lost fourteen ships, and the Germans lost eleven.

The battle did not affect the course of the war. But it did have an important result. The Germans decided that their





A German submarine torpedoed a British passenger ship, the *Lusitania*, causing the deaths of over one thousand people, including 128 Americans.

ships from bringing supplies to Britain. U-boats were equipped with torpedoes. Torpedoes were explosives that traveled underwater to their targets. When a torpedo exploded, it could badly damage or sink a ship.

German U-boats attacked any ships that came into a war zone, even if they were not warships. It was against the law to attack a neutral ship without giving it a warning and a chance to remove its passengers. People in other nations, including America, believed this policy of **unrestricted submarine warfare** was wrong.

## The Sinking of the *Lusitania*

The German embassy put announcements in American newspapers. Americans traveled on British ships at their own risk. On May 7, 1915, a British passenger ship called the *Lusitania* was traveling from New York to Liverpool, England. Both American and British passengers were onboard. Suddenly a torpedo from a German U-boat struck the ship. Over one thousand people were drowned when the ship sunk. One hundred twenty-eight Americans were among those who died.



Americans were outraged. The ship had been unarmed and had carried defenseless passengers. But the Germans said that since the ship was carrying ammunition as part of its cargo, it was a fair target. President Wilson demanded that Germany apologize and stop unrestricted submarine warfare. Germany agreed to do so for a time. But some Americans were beginning to change their minds about being neutral. Many now believed the United States should become involved in the war.

Why were Americans angered over the sinking of the *Lusitania*?



Another new weapon of World War I was poisonous gas. This chemical weapon was contained in canisters called shells. The gas spread through the air when the shell exploded. At first, only tear gas was used. Tear gas caused crying, coughing, and breathing problems, but it did not kill. Then the Germans introduced more deadly gases, such as chlorine, phosgene, and mustard gas. These gases were poisons that choked the victims and burned their skin. Mustard gas was especially difficult for soldiers to defend themselves against because it was invisible and had no odor. To protect themselves during a gas attack, soldiers wore large gas masks that covered their entire heads.

### *In the Air*

For the first time, war was carried out in the air as well as on land. Planes were used mainly for observation early in the war. The first combat aircraft

in the war were large German blimps called zeppelins. The Germans used them to drop bombs. Heavy planes were also used as bombers.

Later in the war, fighter planes were introduced. Fighter planes were lightweight, quick, and dangerous. These planes were equipped with machine guns. A Dutchman named Anthony Fokker had invented a device for airplanes. His invention allowed a machine gun to shoot between spinning propeller blades. Pilots on opposing sides tried to shoot each other down. A battle in the air between two planes was called a dogfight. A pilot who shot down at least five enemy planes during the war was called a “flying ace.”

### *At Sea*

War was also fought at sea. The Germans used submarines called **U-boats** to patrol the seas. Their main purpose was to stop British merchant



“Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.”

—Wilfred Owen,  
from “*Dulce et Decorum Est*”

Owen was a British soldier who was killed in action one week before the armistice.





# War in Many Places

## The Eastern Front

The western front was only one part of the war. Battles were also being fought in eastern Europe. The major nations fighting in the East were Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Germany. The Russians attacked the Central Powers along the borders of Germany and Austria-Hungary. The Russians had some successful battles but were repeatedly driven back.

Turkey, part of the Ottoman Empire, had joined the Central Powers early in the conflict. In 1915 the British and French launched an attack there from the Mediterranean Sea. The Allies hoped to control a water route into the Black Sea. A fleet of Allied ships sailed into a strait called the Dardanelles off the Turkish coast. They later fought on the Turkish peninsula of Gallipoli.

Turkish defenses were fierce. The Allied attacks failed, and the Allies were forced to pull back.

By May of 1915, both sides in the war had lost hundreds of thousands of men. Many thousands more were wounded. As the United States followed the war news from across the Atlantic, its people were shocked and grieved. President Wilson had declared the United States neutral. Most Americans wanted no part of the brutal European war. However, many Americans felt loyal to the Allies.

## The Weapons of World War I *On Land*

Machine guns had only been in use since the late 1800s. These new guns were the most important weapons of World War I. A soldier with a machine gun could fire 400–600 shots a minute.

The tank was first introduced by the

Allies in this war. Tanks were armored vehicles equipped with guns. The Allies called them tanks because they wanted the Germans to think that these weapons were water carriers. But the Germans soon learned that tanks could crush anything in their paths. They could even drive over the tops of trenches.

### World War I Action







German and British soldiers celebrate Christmas in no man's land.

were ready to help the frontline at a moment's notice. A reserve trench was farther back. After spending time in the other trenches, men rotated to the reserve trench for rest. Soldiers could move between the trenches through narrow connecting trenches.

The land between the frontline trenches was called no man's land. This area was littered with dead bodies, barbed wire, and muddy shell holes. It was hard for soldiers to cross no man's land during an attack.

## Christmas Truce

On Christmas Eve 1914, a dusting of snow covered the muddy battlefields of the western front. Lighted candles glowed along the trench lines. Some soldiers even decorated Christmas trees.

A familiar sound reached the Allies in the hushed darkness. The Germans were singing a Christmas carol in their trenches. First a few, then many more of the Allied soldiers joined in.

On Christmas Day, the guns were silent. Soldiers held signs up over their trenches saying "Merry Christmas." Men climbed over the parapets and walked out into no man's land. German soldiers in pointed caps shook hands with British soldiers in khaki berets. Some men exchanged gifts of tea, nuts, or chocolate. For just one day, the men put war aside and celebrated a holiday.

Many officers on both sides were angry with their troops. Officers did not want their men making friends with the enemy. Calling a truce could result in a charge of **treason**, or betraying one's country. After 1914, Christmas truces were forbidden.

In 1915 it became clear that the trench warfare would last a long time. The men were in mostly defensive positions. Direct attacks were too risky to be tried often. The fighting went on.

Why were Christmas truces forbidden after 1914?





the ports along the English Channel. If Germany could control these ports, it could prevent the British from sending help to France.

At the Belgian city of Ypres, the Allies finally stopped the German advance toward the channel. The battle lasted an entire month. Thousands of soldiers died. Today Flanders, Belgium, has fields dotted with white crosses. Many of these soldiers were buried there.

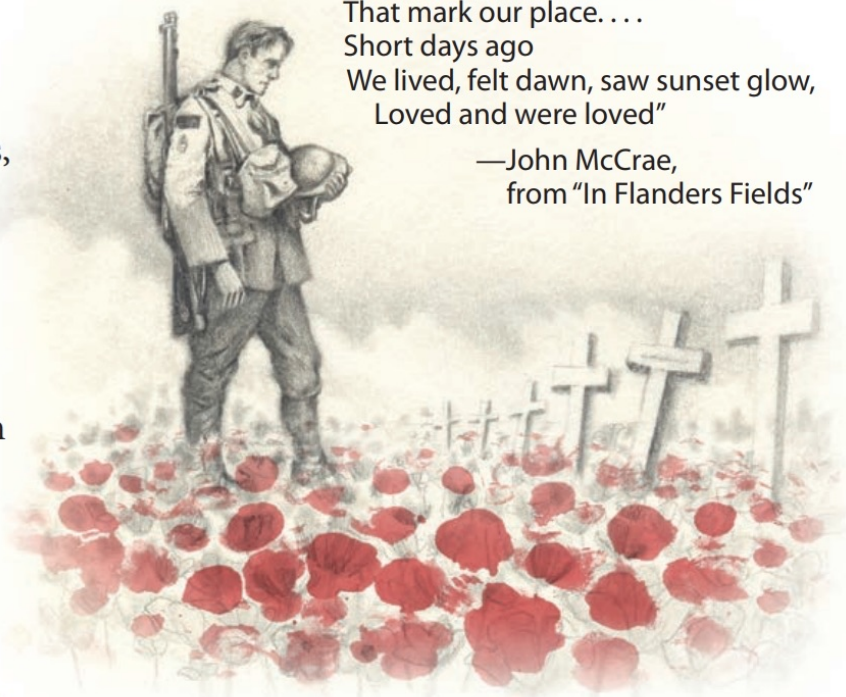
By the end of November, both sides had dug trenches. Soldiers used these trenches for protection from enemy fire. The longest trench line was called the **western front**. Two parallel trench systems snaked from the North Sea to Switzerland. The Germans occupied one trench system. The Allies settled themselves in the opposite one. On the western front, the war had reached a deadlock. Neither side was gaining ground. Many of the soldiers had hoped to be home again by Christmas. But now it seemed unlikely that the war would end soon.

## Life in a Trench

Trenches were about six and a half feet deep and only wide enough for two men to stand side by side. Sometimes soldiers tried to cover the muddy ground with boards. But mud was often

"In Flanders Fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place. . .  
Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved"

—John McCrae,  
from "In Flanders Fields"



McCrae was a physician and a soldier who died near the end of the war. The poppy, common in France, has become the symbol of those who died in World War I.

knee-deep on the floor of a trench. Most soldiers slept in crude dugouts cut into the trench walls. They had to go without bathing for days at a time. Lice and bad smells were problems. Rats ran around the soldiers' feet.

At the top of the trenches were parapets. Parapets were walls made of dirt, sandbags, and tangles of barbed wire. The parapets held off enemy attacks. Soldiers in the trenches fired their guns over the parapets.

Each army had a system of several trenches. There was a frontline trench with one or two support trenches behind it. Men in a support trench



## How It Was



A British officer sat up against the rough, muddy wall of his trench. He smoothed out the damp sheet of paper in his lap and picked up his pen.

"My dear children," he wrote. "I cannot say how sorry I am that I will not spend Christmas with you. Albert, as the tallest, you will have to hang the holly wreath on the door. Emily, be a good girl and help your mother with the Christmas pudding. And Henry, don't eat too much cake. When you go to church to sing carols, please pray. . . ." He paused and listened to a distant crackle of gunfire. "Please pray that God will bring your papa home. Love to all." He folded the letter and bowed his head.

## War Begins

### The Schlieffen Plan

The Great War, later called World War I, had begun. Germany and Austria-Hungary called themselves the **Central Powers**. The German army was larger and better trained than that of Austria-Hungary. The Germans did most of the actual fighting. Russia, Serbia, France, and Britain called themselves the Allied powers, or **Allies**.

The Central Powers had a plan to conquer the Allies. The plan was named the **Schlieffen Plan** after the man who thought of it. The plan called for the Germans to attack France and quickly capture the capital, Paris. Then the Germans planned to march east and defeat Russia. If the plan worked, the

Germans could take Paris in about six weeks before moving east. With France defeated, the war would be almost over.

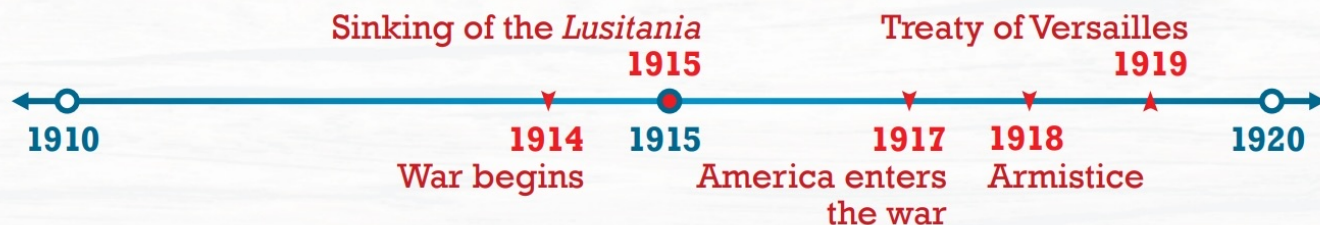
But events did not go as planned for the Germans. Before they got to Paris, they met French troops at the Marne River. The French soldiers fought fiercely. In the end, the German troops had to retreat. After the **Battle of the Marne**, the Germans realized they would not be able to use the Schlieffen Plan. The Allies were not going to be defeated quickly. Now Germany had to fight in both western and eastern Europe at the same time.

### The Western Front

The Germans and the Allies began what was called the Race to the Sea. Both sides wanted to take control of







## Peace or Power?

The year was 1914. In the United States, life was good for most people. Nearly everyone had a job and plenty of food to eat. People everywhere—bankers, factory workers, farmers, and college students—talked about President Woodrow Wilson’s recent election.

But across the ocean in Europe, life was not so peaceful. Several nations wanted to become more powerful. They wanted to enlarge their boundaries. Often this meant taking land that other countries already owned. They wanted to have the strongest armies and navies. They were all competing with each other to make and sell the best products. The people of each nation thought that their nation was the best one in Europe. Their strong patriotic feelings for their own nation were called **nationalism**. Some of these people would stop at nothing to advance their nation’s goals.

## The European Powder Keg

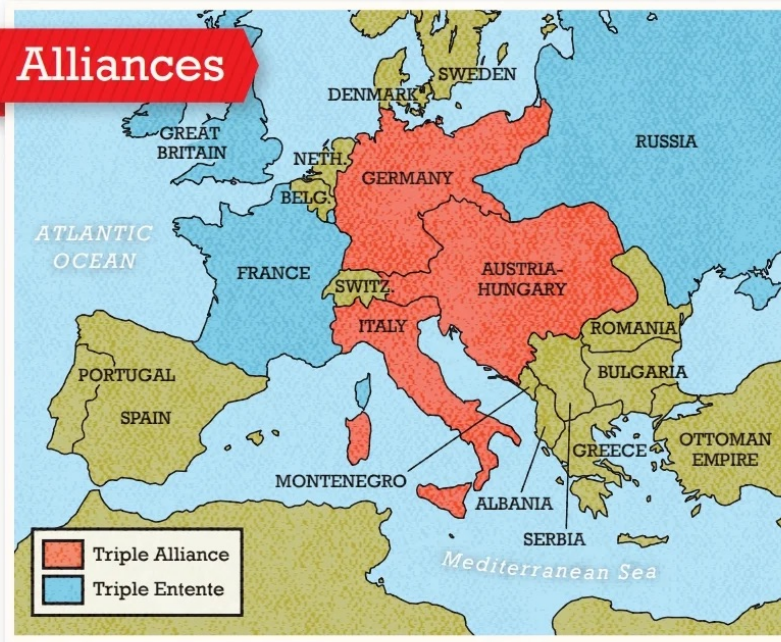
Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and France were four of these powerful nations. Each country had a strong military force. Great Britain was also powerful. For many years the British navy was the strongest navy on the seas.

## The Triple Entente

Britain wanted to stay out of the tension in Europe. It was separated from the rest of Europe by the English Channel. Britain wanted there to be a balance of power among the countries of Europe. But Britain would not be able to avoid tension for long. Several years earlier, it had made an alliance with France and Russia. An alliance is an agreement between nations to help each other if any one of them goes to war. France, Russia, and Great Britain named their alliance the Triple Entente.



## Alliances



### The Triple Alliance

Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy had also made an alliance. They called their group the Triple Alliance. However, Italy later made a secret agreement with France. It promised to remain neutral if another nation attacked France.

Some people referred to Europe in 1914 as a powder keg. A powder keg is a small container that holds gunpowder. Gunpowder will explode the moment a spark touches it. In Europe it would take only a “spark” of a problem for the nations to explode into war. The spark came on June 28, 1914.

### The Powder Keg Ignites

In 1914, Serbia was a small independent kingdom. Bosnia had been independent too, before it became part of Austria-Hungary. The Serbs, people

of Serbia, thought Bosnia should belong to them. They considered Austria-Hungary their enemy.

On June 28, Archduke Francis Ferdinand was traveling in Bosnia’s capital. Ferdinand was the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. A young man fired shots into the archduke’s car. Both Ferdinand and his wife died.

The government of Austria-Hungary was outraged. The leaders

learned that the young man, Gavrilo Princip, was part of a Serbian terrorist group called the Black Hand. Kaiser Wilhelm II, the ruler of Germany, urged Austria-Hungary to attack Serbia. Instead, Austria-Hungary’s foreign minister sent Serbia a letter. The letter had some harsh demands. Austria-Hungary wanted Serbia to give up most of the rights it had as an independent country.

### Nations Declare War

Serbia agreed to some, but not all, of Austria-Hungary’s demands. That was not good enough for Austria-Hungary. It took Germany’s advice and declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914.

Serbia could not fight Austria-Hungary alone. It had to have allies. Russia prepared its army to help Serbia. When Russia’s army began preparing





for war, Germany declared war on Russia. Shortly afterward, Germany also declared war on Russia's ally, France.

Italy had promised to side with Germany and Austria-Hungary in a war. But Italy also had a secret agreement with France. Now Italy decided to withdraw from the Triple Alliance. Later, it would join the France's side of the conflict.

As part of the Triple Entente, Britain had promised to help France and Russia. The British did not want a war. But they became angry when the Germans invaded Belgium, a small neutral country under Britain's protection. A neutral country does not take sides in a war. So the British declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary. It seemed as though an entire continent had gone to war.

"If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England."

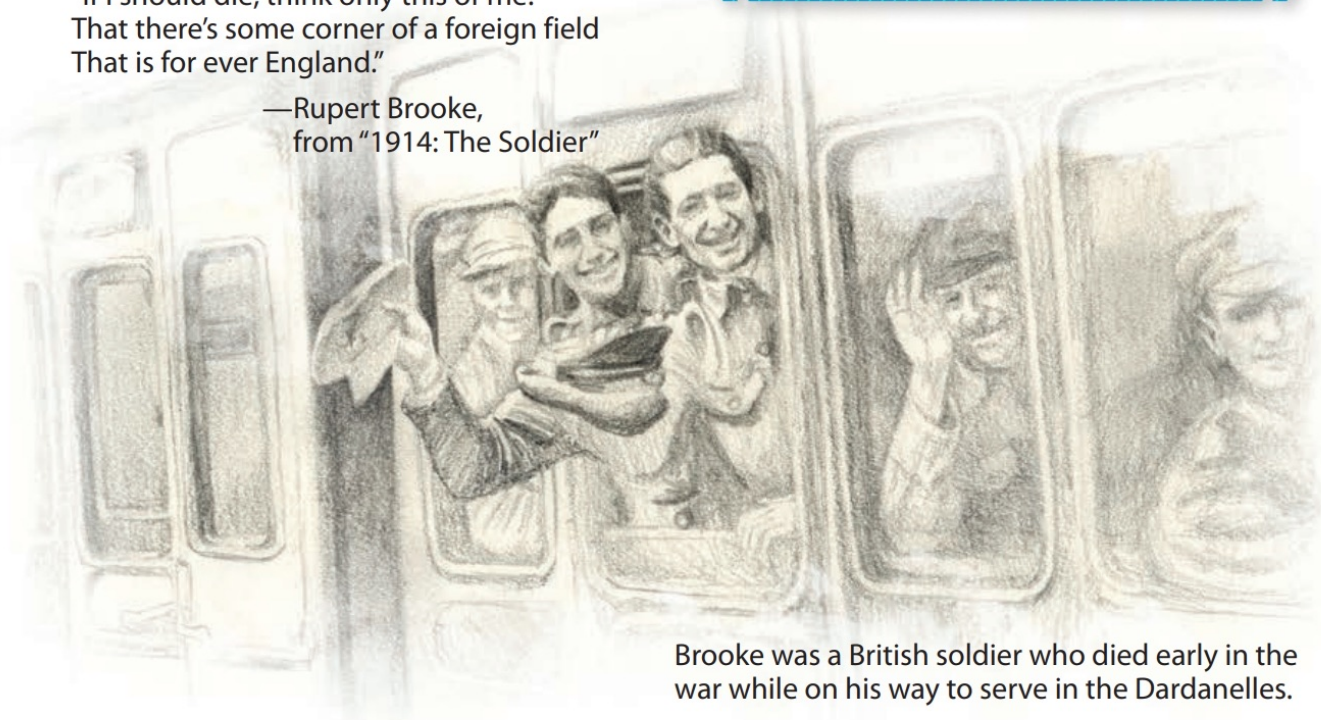
—Rupert Brooke,  
from "1914: The Soldier"

In each nation at war, the level of excitement was high. It was almost like a holiday. Crowds of people swarmed the streets. Bands played and people sang. Long lines of volunteers waited to join the army. Posters went up in every city, urging men to join. Newspapers and magazines published cartoons that mocked the enemy.

"War is a glorious thing," many people thought. "How noble to fight for one's country!" Hardly anyone expected the war to last very long.

But Sir Edward Grey, the British secretary for foreign affairs, had a different opinion. "The lamps are going out all over Europe," he told a friend. "We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."

Why was Europe called  
a powder keg in 1914?



Brooke was a British soldier who died early in the war while on his way to serve in the Dardanelles.