

Essay on the first world war

[Countries](#), [England](#)



“ The First World War was eventually resolved not by any discovery or application of

new military technique by the high commands but by the relentless attrition of

manpower by industrial output. The fact that it was Germany which went down to

defeat in this Materialschlacht [“ battle of resources”] was almost fortuitous; it might

as [equally] well have been any of her enemies.” (John Keegan, The First World

War). Is this an accurate and adequate explanation of the outcome of the war?

Provide at least six specific examples to support your answer.

Introduction:

The First World war was a battle of attrition which provided much source for aggravation amongst nations for no real or apparent reason. First of all, nether nation which participated was actually prepared for war, neither were they prepared for the mass slaughter which characterized the whole campaign. Initially the war was rather quiet and calm with lots of small skirmishes but after a few months the scale of the battles grew to such an extent that the death and casualty rate rose to almost unbelievable levels. Generals and leaders were actually totally unprepared for the scale of the war and this obviously showed in the results which they managed to get which amounted to nothing less than total confusion in every department. The French and English quarreled between them on the specifics of the

conflict whilst the Germans were also confounded by the scale of territory which they had to cover. Although Germany appeared to be rather more ready than her counterparts for war, she was still primarily a peasant society with little industrialized might and this was obviously a hampering question in the conducting of the struggle. Let us now analyze each nation one by one and their particular strengths and weaknesses in this regard.

Great Britain

The United Kingdom came to war totally unprepared to fight primarily due to the fact that it had just been shrinking its armies and fresh from various conflicts including the Boer War and the administration of its colonies, it was feeling out of sorts to take on another global conflict. The British expeditionary Force was primarily made up of young inexperienced soldiers who were volunteering simply for adventure or to escape unemployment but they actually did not know what they were letting themselves in for. This was further exacerbated by their incompetent commanders such as Haigh and Kitchener who had absolutely no regard for the lives of their men but were only interested in promoting their image as warlords. Britain was also not the industrialized nation which it pretended to be and it was very slow in applying technology to the battlefield although the Lee Enfield rifle and Lewis sub machine gun initially afforded it great success. Still, mass disorganization and bad planning led the war to be far more dragged out than was actually necessary.

France:

France was also hampered by weak governance and an army which was ill equipped, badly fed and generally mutinous. Although it had a formidable system of fortifications, the whole campaign was conducted extremely badly and wastage was immediately apparent in every department. The appalling rate of slaughter continued unabated and changes in command were so regular and unannounced that hardly had one appointment been made, than another one came through resulting in derision and ridicule amongst the ordinary troops. France also suffered from a chronic lack of indecision and poor industrial production with the result that most of its armies were completely clueless on how the war should be conducted.

Italy:

Italy hardly knew why it was in the war in the first place but due to the proximity of Serbia, it obviously had to get involved at some point. However, a country which had been unified just around 40 years before was still trying to come to terms with its identity and this obviously put pressure on its organizational capabilities which were actually next to nothing. It tried to establish itself in the Balkans and in other mountainous regions but suffered heavy losses while attempting to do so against the Austrians who were technically much better equipped. Its contribution to the war has to be seen as minimal.

Russia:

Russia looked to be the basket case of all the nations who were fighting out the First World War. It was faced with huge problems from a Tsarist regime

which was actually in its death throes and its armies had little experience of warfare with several commanders and crack troops having perished in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 and little having been replaced since then. This led the Russians to lose considerable numbers of their manpower throughout the conflict and eventually the revolution of 1917 put paid to any of the country's ambitions to strut it out on the world stage. Russia was certainly one of the peripheral players in the war and could not really be considered as one which could have had the spoils of victory in its grasp.

Austria Hungary and Turkey

Although both countries were co-belligerents, it would be good to analyze what they contributed to the conflict. Austria Hungary aided Germany in its forward thrusts but was severely hampered by lack of manpower and other issues. Turkey was also passing through a period of independence procedures and nationalism but it acquitted itself extremely well especially against the British in the Dardanelles campaign where it fought back savagely and inflicted heavy losses. However both nations did not really have any territorial ambitions and did not really gain anything out of the conflict.

General discussion:

The First World War was a conflict where no real nation was the victor but Germany was certainly the loser in terms of territory. However it is ironic to note that the Germans were actually much closer to victory than they thought they were during the great Spring Offensive in 1918. The other British and French armies were technically in disarray and if it was not

without the help of the United States, they would certainly have foundered. The British had been technically bled white and could take no further losses while the French had also suffered severely in manpower terms also. Still it was apparent that the Germans who had made considerable territorial gains could easily hold their own accordingly and they were not really in any danger of losing the war at this very late stage.

Great Britain was in a disastrous state in 1918 with most of its best officers and troops gone and with little strategy on what it was going to do in the future. It could easily have lost the war itself if it had known the actual strength of the German forces opposing it but decided to fight on. Technical and mechanical innovations were also quite retarded in those days and these certainly did not have any effect or bearing on the outcome of all proceedings. Several strategic decisions were also disastrous such as Ludendorff's decision to do battle when his forces were not yet well prepared enough. If he had managed to gain a strategic victory in that battle then the outcome might perhaps have been considerably different than what actually happened. Foch's masterstroke was perhaps one of the finest decisions of the war and the element of tactical surprise which it caused could have said to be the final real great turning point of the war. However no one of the allies really knew how close they were to defeat at the very end and it was only the intervention of the United States which really saved everything.

Conclusion – everyone could have lost the war

As already observed, Germany was in a much better state than it professed before the war ended and it lost everything including a large chunk of its territory. The other nations were certainly in a comparable state when the

war ended and one wrong decision could easily have gone either way with the result that the map of Europe would have been shaped substantially differently at the final curtain. Definitely the war was not won due to any technological invention or through some sort of strategic brilliance or coup with the end result being a Germany which ended its days in disgrace and with a seething and festering hatred which eventually culminated in the rise of Adolf Hitler.

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