

Notes on world war i



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World War I (1914-1918) involved more countries and caused greater destruction than any other war up to its time. An assassin's bullets set off the war. A system of military alliances (agreements) plunged the main European powers into the fight. The war lasted four years. It took the lives of about 9 million troops and more than 6 million civilians. World War I was originally called the Great War.

Picture Weapons of World War I Several developments led to the awful bloodshed of the Great War. Military drafts raised larger armies than ever before. Industries arose to equip those armies with advanced weapons. Each nation believed it was fighting a war of self-defense. Government propaganda whipped up support by making the enemy seem villainous.

On June 28, 1914, an assassin gunned down Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary in Sarajevo. Sarajevo was the capital of Austria-Hungary's province of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The killer had ties to a terrorist organization in Serbia. Austria-Hungary believed that Serbia's government was behind the assassination. It seized the opportunity to declare war on Serbia and settle an old feud.

Within weeks, the assassination of Franz Ferdinand sparked the outbreak of World War I. But historians believe that the war had deeper roots. The unification of Germany in 1871 created a powerful and fast-growing new state in the heart of Europe. In the decade before the war, Germany's quest for power caused a series of crises. Armed forces expanded. Military organizations became increasingly powerful. When the fighting began, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom—known as the Entente—backed

Serbia. They opposed the Central Powers, made up of Austria-Hungary and Germany. Other countries later joined each alliance. The Entente and its allies came to be known as the Allies.

Map World War I: Battlefronts Germany won early victories on the main European battlefronts. On the Western Front, France and the United Kingdom halted the German advance in September 1914. The opposing armies then fought from trenches that stretched across Belgium and northeastern France. The Western Front hardly moved for 3 1/2 years in spite of fierce combat. On the Eastern Front, Russia battled Germany and Austria-Hungary. The fighting seesawed back and forth until 1917. In that year, a revolution broke out in Russia. Russia soon asked for a truce.

The United States remained neutral at first. But many Americans turned against the Central Powers after German submarines began sinking unarmed ships. In 1917, the United States joined the Allies. The support of the United States gave the Allies the resources and resolve they needed to win the war. In the fall of 1918, the Central Powers surrendered.

Tables World War I: the warring nations Important dates during World War I World War I had results that none of the warring nations had foreseen. The war helped topple emperors in Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia. The peace treaties after the war carved new countries out of the defeated powers. The war left Europe exhausted. The continent never regained the controlling position in world affairs that it had held before the war. The peace settlement also created conditions that helped lead to World War II (1939-1945).

Background to the war The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand triggered World War I. But the war had its origins in developments of the 1800's. The chief sources of tension in Europe before World War I were the rise of nationalism, a build-up of military might, competition for colonies, and a system of military alliances.

Print “ Background to the war” subsection

The rise of nationalism. Europe avoided major wars in the 100 years before World War I began. Although small wars broke out, they did not involve many countries. But during the 1800's, a force swept across the continent that helped bring about the Great War. The force was nationalism.

Nationalism is the belief that loyalty to a person's nation comes before any other public loyalty. Loyalty to a nation included loyalty to the nation's political and economic goals. That exaggerated form of patriotism increased the possibility of war because a nation's goals could conflict with the goals of one or more other nations. In addition, nationalistic pride caused nations to magnify small disputes into major issues. A minor complaint could lead to the threat of war.

During the 1800's, nationalism took hold among people who shared a common language, history, or culture. Such people began to view themselves as members of a national group, or nation. Nationalism led to the creation of two new powers—Italy and Germany—through the uniting of many small states. War had a major role in achieving national unification in Italy and Germany.

Nationalist policies gained support as many countries in Western Europe granted the vote to more people. The right to vote gave citizens greater interest and greater pride in national goals. As a result, parliamentary governments grew increasingly powerful.

On the other hand, nationalism weakened the eastern European empires of Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Ottomans. Those empires ruled many national groups that clamored for independence. Conflicts among national groups were especially explosive in the Balkans—the states on the Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe. The peninsula was known as the Powder Keg of Europe. Tensions there threatened to ignite a major war. Most of the Balkans had been part of the Ottoman Empire. First Greece and then Montenegro, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania won independence between 1821 and 1913. Each state quarreled with neighbors over boundaries. Austria-Hungary and Russia also took advantage of the Ottoman Empire's weakness to increase their influence in the Balkans.

Rivalry for control of the Balkans added to the tensions that erupted into World War I. Serbia led a movement to unite the region's Slavs. Russia, the most powerful Slavic country, supported Serbia. But Austria-Hungary feared Slavic nationalism, which stirred unrest in its empire. Millions of Slavs lived under Austria-Hungary's rule. In 1908, Austria-Hungary angered Russia and Serbia by adding the Balkan territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina to its empire. Serbia wanted control of this area because many Serbs lived there.

Print “ The rise of nationalism” subsection

A build-up of military might occurred among European countries before World War I broke out. The quick victories achieved by the Germans in their wars of unification made the German army a model for others. A military draft helped create a sense of nationalism. Overseeing the military was a general staff. Its task in peacetime was to plan for the army's use in war.

At first, the United Kingdom remained unconcerned about Germany's military build-up. The United Kingdom, an island country, relied on its Navy for defense. It had the world's strongest navy. But in 1898, Germany began to develop a naval force big enough to challenge the British Navy.

Germany's decision to become a major sea power made it a bitter enemy of the United Kingdom. In 1906, the British Navy launched the Dreadnought. The vessel was the first modern battleship. The heavily armed Dreadnought had greater firepower than any other ship of its time. Germany rushed to construct ships like it.

Advances in technology—the tools, materials, and techniques of industry—increased the destructive power of military forces. Machine guns and artillery fired more accurately and more rapidly than earlier weapons. Steamships and railroads could speed the movement of troops and supplies. By the end of the 1800's, technology enabled countries to fight longer wars and bear greater losses than ever before. Yet military experts insisted that future wars would be short.

Print “ A build-up of military might” subsection

Competition for colonies. During the late 1800's and early 1900's, European nations carved nearly all of Africa and much of Asia into colonies. Europe's

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industrialization fueled the race for colonies. Colonies supplied European nations with raw materials for factories and markets for manufactured goods. They also supplied opportunities for investment. The competition for colonies strained relations among European countries. But none of the clashes actually led to war.

Print “ Competition for colonies” subsection

A system of military alliances gave European powers a sense of security before World War I. A country hoped to discourage its enemies by entering into a military agreement with one or more other countries. In case of an attack, other members of the alliance would come to the country’s aid or at least remain neutral.

Although military alliances provided protection for a country, the system created dangers. Because of its alliances, a country might take risks in dealings with other nations that it would hesitate to take alone. If war came, the alliance system meant that a number of nations would fight, not only the two involved in a dispute. Alliances could force a country to go to war against a nation with which it had no quarrel. A country could also be forced to fight over an issue in which it had no interest. In addition, the terms of many alliances were secret. The secrecy increased the chances that a country might guess wrong about the consequences of its actions.

Print “ A system of military alliances” subsection

The Triple Alliance. Germany was at the center of European foreign policy from 1870 until the outbreak of World War I. German Chancellor Otto von

Bismarck formed a series of alliances to strengthen his country's security. He first made an ally of Austria-Hungary. In 1879, Germany and Austria-Hungary agreed to go to war if either country were attacked by Russia. Italy joined the agreement in 1882. It then became known as the Triple Alliance. The members of the Triple Alliance agreed to aid one another in the case of an attack by two or more countries.

Bismarck also brought Austria-Hungary and Germany into an alliance with Russia. The agreement, known as the Three Emperors' League, was formed in 1881. The three powers agreed to remain neutral if any of them went to war with another country. Bismarck also persuaded Austria-Hungary and Russia to recognize each other's zone of authority in the Balkans. The two countries were rivals for influence in the region. He thus reduced the danger of conflict between Austria-Hungary and Russia.

Germany's relations with other European countries worsened after Bismarck left office in 1890. Bismarck had worked to prevent France, Germany's neighbor on the west, from forming an alliance with either of Germany's two neighbors to the east—Russia and Austria-Hungary. In 1894, France and Russia agreed to mobilize (call up troops) if any nation in the Triple Alliance mobilized. France and Russia also agreed to help each other if either were attacked by Germany.

Print “ The Triple Alliance” subsection

The Triple Entente. During the 1800's, the United Kingdom had followed a foreign policy that became known as “ splendid isolation.” But threats to its empire and Germany's military build-up persuaded the United Kingdom to

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end its isolation. In 1904, the United Kingdom and France settled their past disagreements over colonies and signed the Entente Cordiale (Friendly Agreement). Although the agreement contained no pledges of military support, the two countries began to discuss joint military plans. In 1907, the United Kingdom and Russia settled their differences in Asia. Russia joined the alliance. It then became known as the Triple Entente.

The Triple Entente did not obligate its members to go to war as the Triple Alliance did. But the alliances left Europe divided into two opposing camps.

Print “ The Triple Entente” subsection

Beginning of the war World War I began in the Balkans. The area had a long history of conflict. In the early 1900's, the Balkan states fought the Ottoman Empire in the First Balkan War (1912-1913). They battled one another in the Second Balkan War (1913). The major European powers stayed out of both wars. But they did not escape the third Balkan crisis.

Print “ Beginning of the war” subsection

Picture Archduke Franz Ferdinand The assassination of an archduke.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand was the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. He hoped that his sympathy for Slavs would ease tensions between Austria-Hungary and the Balkans. He arranged to tour Bosnia-Herzegovina with his wife, Sophie. As the couple rode through Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, an assassin jumped on their automobile and fired two shots. Franz Ferdinand and Sophie died almost instantly. The murderer, a Bosnian Serb named Gavrilo Princip, was linked to a Serbian terrorist group called the Black Hand.

The assassination of Franz Ferdinand gave Austria-Hungary an excuse to crush Serbia, its long-time enemy in the Balkans. Austria-Hungary first gained Germany's promise of support for action against Serbia. It then sent a list of humiliating demands to Serbia on July 23. Serbia accepted most of the demands. It offered to have the rest settled by an international conference. Austria-Hungary rejected the offer and declared war on Serbia on July 28. It expected a quick victory in a local war.

Print “ The assassination of an archduke” subsection

How the conflict spread. Within weeks of the archduke's assassination, the chief European powers were drawn into World War I. A few attempts were made to prevent the war. For example, the United Kingdom proposed an international conference to end the crisis. But Germany rejected the idea, claiming that the dispute involved only Austria-Hungary and Serbia.

Russia had backed down before in supporting its ally Serbia. In 1908, Austria-Hungary had angered Serbia by taking over Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Russia had stepped aside. In 1914, Russia vowed to stand behind Serbia. Russia had been assured of support from France. The czar approved plans to mobilize along Russia's border with Austria-Hungary. But Russia's military leaders persuaded the czar to mobilize along the German border, too. On July 30, 1914, Russia announced it would mobilize fully. The country began to do so on July 30, 1914.

Germany declared war on Russia on Aug. 1, 1914, in response to Russia's mobilization. Two days later, after France called up its troops to support Russia, Germany declared war on France. The German army swept into

Belgium on its way to France. The invasion of neutral Belgium caused the United Kingdom to declare war on Germany on August 4. Through the course of the war, few parts of the world remained unaffected.

Print “ How the conflict spread” subsection

Map World War I: Western Front 1914-1917 The Western Front. The main ideas of Germany’s war plan had been developed by Alfred von Schlieffen. Schlieffen had retired as chief of the German General Staff in 1905. The plan assumed that Germany would have to fight both France and Russia, although outnumbered by them. It aimed at a quick defeat of France while Russia slowly mobilized. But after 1910, Russian mobilization times improved. Germany came to rely on Austria-Hungary to cover the east. If war came, speed would be of the essence for Germany. Once it mobilized, it would have little option but to go to war.

The frontier between France and Germany was heavily fortified. To bypass these defenses, the plan called for a strong right wing to invade France from the north, through Belgium. The movement would pivot on a fixed central position. Schlieffen’s hope was that the right wing could get behind the French army. The wing would thus pin the French against German forces on the eastern frontier.

Schlieffen’s successor, Helmuth von Moltke, directed German strategy at the outbreak of the war. Moltke recognized that the French army might react by attacking the pivot in the center. Or it might move against Germany’s invading right wing. In either case, a German victory might come with a

breakthrough elsewhere along the line. The breakthrough might even occur on the heavily fortified border between France and Germany.

Belgium's army fought bravely but held up the Germans for only a short time. By Aug. 16, 1914, the right wing of the German army began its advance. It drove back French forces and a small British force in southern Belgium and swept into France. One part of the right wing pursued retreating French troops southeast across the Marne River. The pursuit left the Germans exposed to attacks from Paris.

Meanwhile, General Joseph Joffre, commander in chief of all the French armies, stationed his forces near the Marne River east of Paris. Joffre prepared a counterattack. Fierce fighting began on September 6. The conflict became known as the First Battle of the Marne. On September 9, German forces started to withdraw.

The First Battle of the Marne was a key victory for the Allies. It ended Germany's hopes to defeat France quickly. Moltke was replaced as chief of the German General Staff by Erich von Falkenhayn.

The German army halted its retreat near the Aisne River. From there, the Germans and the Allies fought a series of battles as each tried to outflank the other. In the last of the battles, the two sides fought to a standstill. That struggle was the First Battle of Ypres in Belgium. It lasted from mid-October until mid-November.

In late November 1914, the Germans decided to establish deep defensive positions along the high ground they had captured in Belgium and

northeastern France. Falkenhayn's aim was to free up troops for use elsewhere. But the effect was to create a deadlock on the Western Front. The front extended more than 450 miles (720 kilometers) from the coast of Belgium to the border of Switzerland. The deadlock lasted nearly 3 1/2 years.

Print " The Western Front" subsection

Map World War I: Eastern Front The Eastern Front. Russia's mobilization on the Eastern Front moved faster than Germany expected. By late August 1914, two Russian armies had thrust deeply into the German territory of East Prussia, but along separate paths. The German army inserted itself between the two. By August 31, the Germans had encircled one Russian army in the Battle of Tannenberg. They then chased the other Russian army out of East Prussia in the Battle of the Masurian Lakes. The number of Russian casualties totaled about 250, 000 in the two battles. Casualties consist of the number of troops killed, captured, wounded, or missing. The victories made heroes of the commanders of the German forces in the east—Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff.

Austria-Hungary had less success than its German ally on the Eastern Front. By the end of 1914, Austria-Hungary's forces had attacked Serbia three times. Austria-Hungary had been beaten back each time. Meanwhile, Russia had captured much of the Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia (now part of Poland and Ukraine). By early October, a humiliated Austro-Hungarian army had retreated into its own territory.

Print " The Eastern Front" subsection

Fighting elsewhere. The Ottoman Empire entered the war at the end of October 1914 as an ally of Germany. Ottoman ships bombarded Russian ports on the Black Sea. Ottoman troops then invaded Russia. Fighting later broke out in the Ottoman territories on the Arabian Peninsula and in Mesopotamia (now mostly Iraq), Palestine, and Syria.

The United Kingdom stayed in control of the seas following two naval victories over Germany in 1914. The British then kept Germany's surface fleet bottled up in its home waters during most of the war. As a result, Germany relied on submarine warfare.

World War I spread to Germany's overseas colonies. Japan declared war on Germany in late August 1914. The Japanese drove the Germans off several islands in the Pacific Ocean. Troops from Australia and New Zealand seized other German colonies in the Pacific. By mid-1915, most of Germany's empire in Africa had fallen to British forces. However, fighting continued in German East Africa (now Tanzania) for two more years.

Print " Fighting elsewhere" subsection

The deadlock on the Western Front By 1915, the opposing sides had dug themselves into a system of trenches that zigzagged along the Western Front. From the trenches, they defended their positions and launched attacks. The Western Front remained deadlocked in trench warfare until 1918.

Print " The deadlock on the Western Front" subsection

Trench warfare. The typical front-line trench was about 6 to 8 feet (1.8 to 2.4 meters) deep and wide enough for two men to pass. Dugouts in the sides of the trenches protected men during enemy fire. Support trenches ran behind the front-line trenches. Off-duty soldiers lived in dugouts in the support trenches. Troops and supplies moved to the battlefield through a network of communications trenches. Barbed wire helped protect the front-line trenches from attacks. Field artillery was set up behind the support trenches. Between the enemy lines lay a stretch of ground called “no man’s land.” No man’s land varied from less than 30 yards (27 meters) wide to more than 1 mile (1.6 kilometers) wide. In time, artillery fire tore up the earth, making it difficult to cross no man’s land during an attack.

Soldiers served at the front line from a few days to a week and then rotated to the rear for a rest. Life in the trenches was miserable. The smell of dead bodies lingered in the air. Rats were a constant problem. Soldiers had trouble keeping dry, especially in water-logged areas of Belgium. Except during an attack, life fell into a dull routine. Some soldiers stood guard. Others repaired the trenches or kept telephone lines in order. Still others brought food from behind the battle lines or did other jobs. At night, patrols fixed the barbed wire and tried to get information about the enemy.

Artillery—large, mounted guns that hurl explosive shells—killed more soldiers than any other weapon in World War I. Trench warfare gave artillery gunners fixed targets. Bombarding the enemy’s front-line trenches before an offensive (assault) helped clear the way for the infantry. But it also gave away the advantage of surprise. As attacking infantry pressed deeper into

enemy territory, the troops drew farther away from their supporting artillery and closer to the enemy's artillery.

Picture Gas masks Both the Allies and the Central Powers developed new weapons, which they hoped would break the deadlock. For example, in April 1915, the Germans released poison gas against Allied troops during the Second Battle of Ypres. The Allies also began to use poison gas. Gas masks became necessary equipment in the trenches. Another new weapon was the flame thrower, which shot out a stream of burning fuel.

Print “ Trench warfare” subsection

The Battle of Verdun. As chief of the German General Staff, Falkenhayn decided in early 1916 to concentrate on the defeat of France. He believed Germany might secure a separate peace with Russia. He hoped that, without France, the United Kingdom would be unable to continue the land war. Falkenhayn chose to attack the French city of Verdun. Verdun was near Germany and easy to supply.

The attack began on February 21. Joffre decided to hold Verdun, although he and his officers had considered abandoning it. Through spring and summer, the French forces held off the attackers. Falkenhayn intended to kill as many French soldiers as possible, and thus weaken the French forces. France aided this goal by continuing to pour troops into the battle. However, Falkenhayn had not expected the battle to take nearly as many German lives as French lives. Having failed to break through the line of defense, he reduced his efforts. By the end of the war, the French had regained Verdun.

The next month, Hindenburg and Ludendorff—the two German heroes of the Eastern Front—replaced Falkenhayn on the Western Front. Hindenburg became chief of the General Staff. Ludendorff, his top aide, planned German strategy.

General Henri Philippe Petain had organized the defense of Verdun. France hailed him as a hero. The Battle of Verdun became a symbol of the destructiveness of modern war. French casualties totaled about 315, 000 men. German casualties numbered about 280, 000. The city itself was practically destroyed.

Print “ The Battle of Verdun” subsection

The Battle of the Somme. The Allies planned a major offensive for 1916 near the Somme River in France. The Battle of Verdun had drained France. Thus, the Somme offensive became mainly the responsibility of the British under General Douglas Haig.

Picture British tank The British and French attacked on July 1, 1916. Within hours, the United Kingdom had suffered nearly 60, 000 casualties—its worst loss in one day of battle. Fierce fighting went on into the fall. In September, the United Kingdom introduced the first primitive tanks. But the tanks were too unreliable and too few in number to make a difference. Haig finally halted the useless attack in November. At terrible cost, the Allies had gained about 7 miles (11 kilometers). The Battle of the Somme caused more than 1 million casualties. They included over 600, 000 Germans, over 400, 000 British, and nearly 200, 000 French. In spite of the tragic losses at Verdun and the Somme, the Western Front stood as solid as ever at the end of 1916.

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Print “ The Battle of the Somme” subsection

The war on other fronts During 1915 and 1916, World War I spread to Italy and throughout the Balkans. Activity also increased on other fronts. Some Allied military leaders believed that the creation of new battlefronts would break the deadlock on the Western Front. But the first effect of the war’s expansion was to give the Central Powers additional conquests.

Print “ The war on other fronts” subsection

Map World War I: Italian Front The Italian Front. Italy had stayed out of World War I during 1914. Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany. But Italy claimed that it was under no obligation to honor the agreement because Austria-Hungary had not gone to war in self-defense. In May 1915, Italy entered World War I on the side of the Allies. In a secret treaty, the Allies promised to give Italy some of Austria-Hungary’s territory after the war. In return, Italy promised to attack Austria-Hungary.

The Italians, led by General Luigi Cadorna, hammered away at Austria-Hungary for two years. They fought a series of battles along the Isonzo River in Austria-Hungary. Italy suffered enormous casualties but gained little territory. The Allies hoped that the Italian Front would help Russia because Germany came to the aid of Austria-Hungary.

Print “ The Italian Front” subsection

The Dardanelles. After World War I began, the Ottoman Empire closed the waterway between the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea. The closing blocked the sea route to southern Russia. French and British warships attacked the

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Dardanelles, a strait that formed part of the waterway, in February and March 1915. The Allies hoped to open a supply route to Russia. However, underwater mines and shore-based artillery halted the assault.

Map Gallipoli Peninsula In April 1915, the Allies landed troops on the Gallipoli Peninsula on the west shore of the Dardanelles. The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) played a key role in the landing. Ottoman and Allied forces soon became locked in trench warfare. A second invasion in August at Suvla Bay to the north failed to end the standstill. In December, the Allies began to evacuate their troops. They had suffered about 250, 000 casualties in the Dardanelles.

Print “ The Dardanelles” subsection

Eastern Europe. In May 1915, the armies of Germany and Austria-Hungary broke through Russian lines in Galicia. Galicia was the Austro-Hungarian province that Russia had invaded in 1914. The Russians retreated about 300 miles (480 kilometers) before they formed a new line of defense. In spite of the setback, Czar Nicholas II staged two offensives. The first, in March 1916, achieved little.

The second Russian offensive was planned in conjunction with the Battle of the Somme in the West. It began in June 1916 under General Alexei Brusilov. Brusilov’s army drove Austria-Hungary’s forces back about 50 miles (80 kilometers). Within a few weeks, Russia captured about 200, 000 prisoners. To halt the assault, Austria-Hungary had to shift troops from the Italian Front to the Eastern Front. The Russian offensive nearly knocked Austria-Hungary

out of the war. But it also exhausted Russia. Each side suffered about a million casualties.

Bulgaria entered World War I in October 1915 to help the Central Powers defeat Serbia. Bulgaria hoped to recover land it had lost in the Second Balkan War. In an effort to aid Serbia, the Allies landed troops in Thessaloniki (Salonika), Greece. But the troops never reached Serbia. By November, the Central Powers had overrun Serbia. Serbia's army had retreated to Albania.

Romania joined the Allies in August 1916. It hoped to take advantage of Brusilov's victory and to gain some of Austria-Hungary's territory if the Allies won the war. By the end of 1916, Romania had lost most of its army. Germany controlled the country's valuable wheat fields and oil fields.

Print " Eastern Europe" subsection

The war at sea. The United Kingdom's control of the seas during World War I caused problems for Germany. The British Navy blockaded German waters, preventing supplies from reaching German ports. By 1916, Germany suffered a shortage of food and other goods. Germany combated British sea power with its submarines, called U-boats. In February 1915, Germany declared a submarine blockade of the United Kingdom and Ireland. Germany warned that it would attack any ship that tried to get through the blockade.

Thereafter, U-boats destroyed great amounts of goods headed for the United Kingdom.

On May 7, 1915, a U-boat torpedoed without warning the British passenger liner Lusitania off the coast of Ireland. Among the 1, 201 passengers who

died were 128 Americans. The sinking of the Lusitania led U. S. President Woodrow Wilson to urge Germany to give up unrestricted submarine warfare. In September, Germany agreed not to attack neutral or passenger ships.

The warships that the United Kingdom and Germany had raced to build before World War I remained in home waters during most of the war. There, they served to discourage an enemy invasion. The only major encounter between the two navies was the Battle of Jutland. The battle was fought off the coast of Denmark on May 31 and June 1, 1916. Admiral Sir John Jellicoe commanded a British fleet of 150 warships. He faced a German fleet of 99 warships under the command of Admiral Reinhard Scheer. In spite of the United Kingdom's superior strength, Jellicoe acted cautiously. He feared that he could lose the entire war in a day because the destruction of the United Kingdom's fleet would give Germany control of the seas. Both sides claimed victory in the Battle of Jutland. Although the United Kingdom lost more ships than Germany, it still ruled the seas.

Print “ The war at sea” subsection

The war in the air. The Allies and the Central Powers both made advances in aviation during World War I. Each side competed to produce better airplanes than the other. At first, airplanes were used mainly to observe enemy activities. The pilots began carrying guns to shoot at enemy planes. But a pilot risked shooting himself if a bullet bounced off the propeller.

Picture Military aviators In 1915, Anthony Fokker, a Dutch designer working for Germany, developed a machine gun timed to fire between an airplane's

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revolving propeller blades. The invention made air combat more deadly. It led to dogfights—clashes between enemy aircraft. A pilot who shot down five or more enemy planes was called an ace. Many aces became national heroes. Germany's Baron Manfred von Richthofen shot down 80 planes, more than any other ace. He was known as the Red Baron. Other aces included Billy Bishop of Canada, René Fonck of France, Edward Mannock of the United Kingdom, and Eddie Rickenbacker of the United States.

In 1915, Germany began to bomb London and other British cities from airships called zeppelins. By 1917 both sides planned major bomber offensives. But aerial bombing remained in its early stages during the war.

Print “ The war in the air” subsection

The final stage Allied failures. At the beginning of 1917, Allied military leaders hoped that simultaneous offensives on all fronts could win the war. But German leaders accepted the deadlock on the Western Front and improved German defenses. In March 1917, German troops were moved back to a strongly fortified new battle line in northern France. It was called the Siegfried Line by the Germans and the Hindenburg Line by the Allies. The Siegfried Line shortened the Western Front. It placed German artillery and machine guns to best advantage. It also led to the failure of an offensive planned by France.

General Robert Nivelle had replaced Joffre as commander in chief of French forces in December 1916. Nivelle planned a major offensive near the Aisne River. He predicted it would smash through the German line within two days. Germany's pullback to the Siegfried Line did not shake Nivelle's confidence.

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A week before Nivelle's offensive began, the British Army launched an attack at Arras, farther north. The attack was designed to pull German reserves away from the Aisne River. Canadian troops seized Vimy Ridge. The ridge was a commanding height that previous French attacks had failed to take. Nivelle's offensive opened on April 16, 1917. By the end of the day, it was clear that the assault had failed. But fighting continued into May.

Mutinies broke out among the French forces after Nivelle's offensive collapsed. The troops had had enough of the pointless bloodshed and the horrid conditions on the Western Front. Petain, the hero of Verdun, replaced Nivelle in May 1917. Petain improved the soldiers' living conditions and restored order. He promised that France would remain on the defensive until it was ready to fight again. Meanwhile, any further offensives on the Western Front remained the United Kingdom's responsibility.

General Haig hoped that a British offensive near Ypres would lead to victory. The Third Battle of Ypres, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele, began on July 31, 1917. For more than three months, British troops and a small French force pounded the Germans in an especially terrible campaign. Heavy Allied bombardment before the infantry attack destroyed the drainage system around Ypres. Drenching rains then turned the water-logged land into a swamp. The disastrous battle was finally halted in mid-November on the Passchendaele ridge.

In late November, the British tried a surprise attack farther south, at Cambrai. Artillery was followed by the first use of massed tanks. But the

Germans regained the ground they lost with a counterattack a few days later.

In late 1917, the Allied position looked bleak. In October, Italy had been driven back by a combined German and Austro-Hungarian attack in the battle of Caporetto. In November, a revolution threatened to take Russia out of the war.

Print “ Allied failures” subsection

The Russian Revolution. The Russian people suffered greatly during World War I. By 1917, many of them were no longer willing to put up with the enormous casualties and the shortages of food and fuel. They blamed Czar Nicholas II and his advisers for the country’s problems. Early in 1917, an uprising in Petrograd (now St. Petersburg) forced Nicholas from the throne. The new government continued the war.

To weaken Russia’s war effort further, Germany helped V. I. Lenin return to his homeland in April 1917. Lenin was a Russian revolutionary who had been living in Switzerland. Seven months later, Lenin led an uprising that gained control of Russia’s government. Lenin immediately called for peace talks with Germany. World War I had ended on the Eastern Front.

Germany dictated harsh peace terms to Russia in a peace treaty signed in Brest-Litovsk, Russia, on March 3, 1918. The treaty forced Russia to give up large amounts of territory . Russia lost Finland, Ukraine, and Bessarabia (now mostly in Moldova). It also gave up the part of Poland that had been ruled by Russia and the Baltic States—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The end of the

fighting on the Eastern Front freed German troops for use on the Western Front. The only obstacle to a final German victory seemed to be the entry of the United States into the war.

Print “ The Russian Revolution” subsection

Picture Zimmermann note The United States enters the war. At the start of World War I, President Wilson had declared the neutrality of the United States. Most Americans opposed U. S. involvement in a European war. But the sinking of the Lusitania and other German actions against civilians drew American sympathies to the Allies.

Picture Decoded Zimmermann telegram Several events early in 1917 persuaded the United States government to enter World War I. In February, Germany returned to unrestricted submarine warfare. German military leaders knew this might bring the United States into the war, but they believed they could win the war by cutting off British supplies. They expected their U-boats to starve the United Kingdom into surrendering within a few months, long before the United States had fully prepared for war.

Tension between the United States and Germany increased after the British intercepted and decoded a message from Germany’s foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, to the German ambassador to Mexico. The message, known as the “ Zimmermann note,” revealed a German plot to persuade Mexico to go to war against the United States. The British gave the message to Wilson. It was published in the United States early in March. Americans were further enraged after U-boats sank several U. S. cargo ships.

Picture War against Germany On April 2, Wilson called for war. He stated that “ the world must be made safe for democracy.” Congress declared war on Germany on April 6. Few people expected that the United States would make much of a contribution toward ending the war.

Print “ The United States enters the war” subsection

Mobilization. The United States entered World War I unprepared for battle. Strong antiwar feelings had hampered efforts to prepare for war. After declaring war, the government worked to stir up enthusiasm for the war effort. Government propaganda pictured the war as a battle for liberty and democracy. People who still opposed the war faced increasingly unfriendly public opinion. They could even be brought to trial under wartime laws forbidding statements that might harm the successful progress of the war.

During World War I, U. S. government agencies directed the nation’s economy toward the war effort. President Wilson put financier Bernard M. Baruch in charge of the War Industries Board. The board turned factories into producers of war materials. The Food Administration, headed by businessman Herbert Hoover, controlled the prices, production, and distribution of food. Americans observed “ meatless” and “ wheatless” days so that food could be sent to Europe.

Troop strength was the chief contribution of the United States to World War I. The country entered the war with a Regular Army of only about 128, 000 soldiers. It soon organized a draft requiring all men from 21 through 30 years old to register for military service. The age range was broadened to 18 through 45 in 1918. A lottery determined who served. Many men enlisted

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voluntarily. Women signed up as nurses and office workers. The U. S. armed forces had almost 5 million men and women by the end of the war. Of that number, about 23/4 million men had been drafted. Few soldiers received much training before going overseas because the Allies urgently needed them.

Before U. S. help could reach the Western Front, the Allies had to overcome the U-boat threat in the Atlantic. In May 1917, the United Kingdom began to use a convoy system. In this system, cargo ships went to sea in large groups escorted by warships. The U-boats proved no match for the warships. Allied shipping losses dropped sharply.