

The First World War

World War I (1914–1918) **devastated the economic, social, and political order of Europe**. People at the time, *overwhelmed* by the size of the war's battles and the number of *casualties*, simply called it the Great War. The war was all the more disturbing to Europeans because it came after a **period that many believed to have been an age of progress**. World War I is often considered as the first stage in the crisis of the twentieth century.



[Royal Irish Rifles in a communications trench, first day on the Somme, 1916.](#) Public Domain

1 Causes

Nationalism, internal conflicts, and militarism all played a role in starting World War I.

- The growth of **nationalism** in the nineteenth century had many serious results. Competition for **colonies** and trade increased. Europe's great powers were soon divided into two alliances, the *Triple Alliance* and the *Triple Entente*. This period is called the armed peace.

TRIPLE ALLIANCE	TRIPLE ENTENTE
Germany	France
Austria - Hungary	Great Britain
Italy	Russia

- **Crises in the Balkans** between 1908 and 1913 made many European nations angry with each other. They were willing to go to war to *preserve the power* of their national states.
- Conscription, a military draft, was used by most Western nations before 1914. It caused the size of European armies to double between 1890 and 1914.
- **Militarism** (aggressive preparation for war) was growing. Military leaders became more powerful



historicair Military alliances leading to World War I CC BY-SA 2.0

2 The outbreak of war: summer 1914

It was a **crisis in the Balkans** in the summer of 1914 that led directly to war.

By 1914, **Serbia**, supported by **Russia**, was determined to create a large **Slavic state** in the Balkans. Austria- Hungary was determined that this would not happen. Many Europeans anticipated war. (*Serbia&Rus vs Austria*)

On June 28, 1914, **Archduke Francis Ferdinand**, the heir to the throne of Austria- Hungary, visited the Bosnian city of *Sarajevo*. Members of the **Black Hand** made plans to kill him. The Black Hand was a *Serbian terrorist organization that wanted Bosnia to be free of Austria- Hungary*. An attempt to kill the archduke with a bomb was unsuccessful. Later in the day, however, **Gavrilo Princip**, a 19-year-old Bosnian Serb, shot and killed both the archduke and his wife.

Austrian leaders wanted to attack Serbia, but they feared that **Russia** would intervene on Serbia's behalf

The Austrians asked their **German allies** for help. Emperor William II of Germany agreed to give Austria- Hungary his full support. Austrian leaders sent an **ultimatum to Serbia** on July 23. Many of the demands were so extreme that Serbia had no choice but to reject some of them. On **July 28, Austria- Hungary declared war on Serbia**. Russia was determined to support Serbia

On July 29, The German government warned Russia that it must stop its mobilization. When Russia refused, Germany declared war on Russia on August 1 *Austria&Germany vs Serbia&Russia*

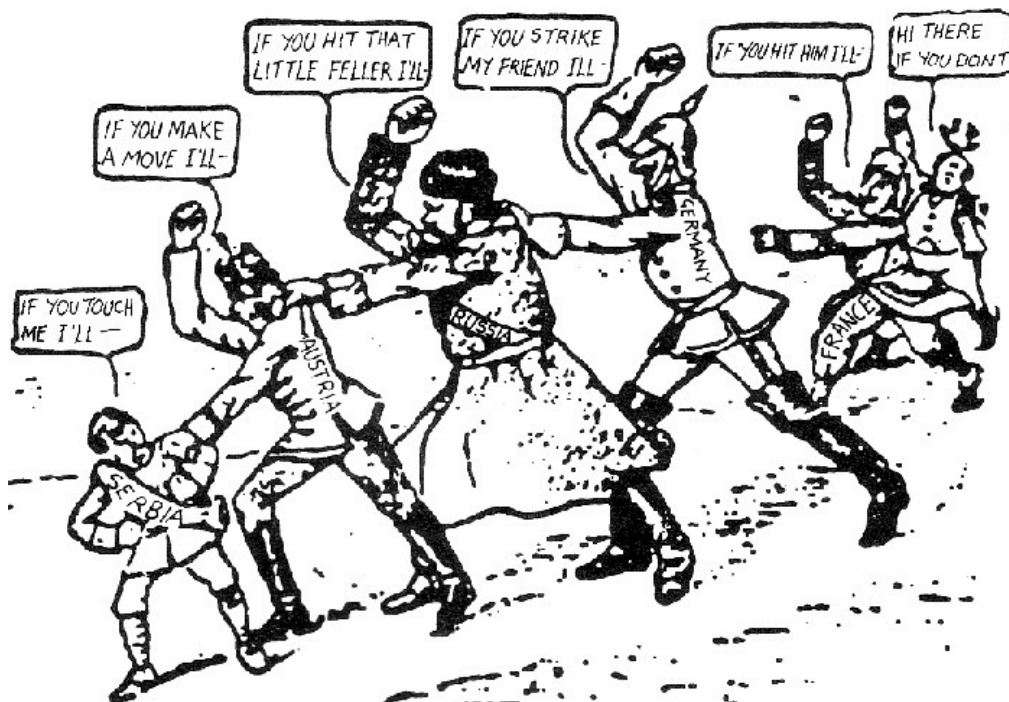
The Schlieffen Plan

Alfred von Schlieffen had drawn up a plan that called for war against both Russia and France.

According to the Schlieffen Plan, Germany would conduct a small holding action against Russia while most of the German army would carry out a **rapid invasion of France**.

According to the Schlieffen Plan, Germany would invade France by *moving quickly* along the level coastal area through Belgium. After France was defeated, the German invaders would move to the east *against Russia*.

On August 4, **Great Britain declared** war on Germany for violating Belgian neutrality

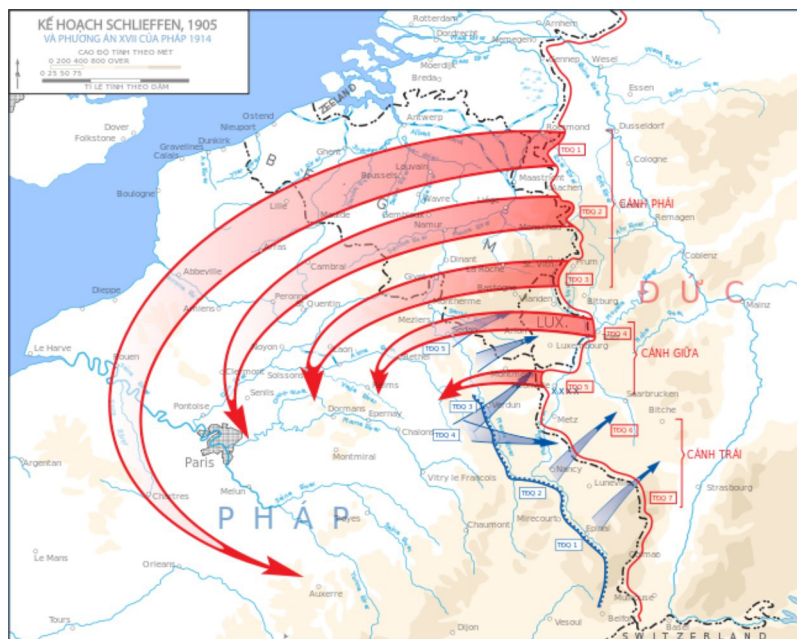


[Chain of Friendship Cartoon](#) Dominio público

3 1914 – 1915: Illusions and stalemate

A. Government **propaganda** (*ideas spread to influence public opinion for or against a cause*) had been also used to obtain their citizens' support for the war effort. Most people were truly convinced that their nation's cause was just. Most people also believed that the war would end in a few weeks

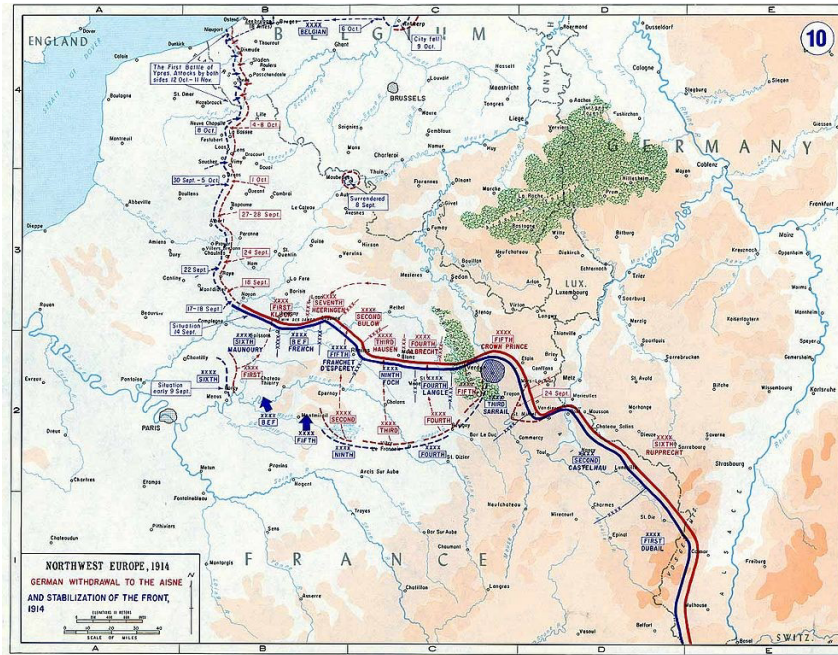
B. The German hopes for a quick end to the war rested on a military gamble (The Schlieffen Plan). The German army would then sweep around Paris and surround most of the French army. However, the German advance was halted a short distance from Paris at the **Battle of the Marne** (September 6-10). To stop the Germans, the French military leaders loaded 2,000 *Parisian taxicabs* with fresh troops and sent them to the front



Tinodela. [Schlieffen Plan and French XVII Plan](#) (Dominio público)

C. **Trenches in the Western Front.** The war turned into a **stalemate**, with both sides taking *shelter* in their trenches. Trenches were *ditches protected by barbed wire*. These trenches soon stretched from the English Channel to the border of Switzerland. This trench warfare kept both sides in virtually the same positions for four years.

D. The war on **the Eastern Front** was fought much differently. There was a great deal of movement by the various armies on this front. As the war began, Russia moved into eastern Germany but was defeated at the **Battle of Tannenberg** on August 30 and at the **Battle of Masurian Lakes** on September 15. These defeats ended the Russian threat to Germany. Italy joined France, Great Britain, and Russia, who were now called the **Allies**



Western Front 1914 (Dominio público)



Eastern Front 1914 (Dominio público)

4 The Great Slaughter

By 1916, **the trenches** on the Western Front had become elaborate systems of defence. Barbed wire, *machine-gun nests*, and *heavy artillery* protected the trenches on both sides. The **troops lived in holes** in the ground. A strip of land, known as **no-man's-land**, separated the opposing forces. The leaders believed that if they could break through enemy lines, they could return to the type of fighting that they understood. World War I had turned into a **war of attrition**, a war based on wearing the other side down by constant attacks and heavy losses.

For the first time in history, **airplanes** appeared over battlefields in 1915. The Germans also used their giant airships, the zeppelins, to bomb London and eastern England. The zeppelins were filled with hydrogen gas



[Recuerdos de Pandora. German Troops. Verdun 1916 \(CC BY\)](#)

5 Widening the war

The **Ottoman Empire** had already joined the war on Germany's side in August 1914. After a disastrous campaign at **Gallipoli**, the Allies were forced to withdraw.

In the Middle East, a British officer known as **Lawrence of Arabia** encouraged *Arab princes to revolt against their Ottoman rulers*. In 1918, British forces from Egypt destroyed the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East.

Entry of the U.S.A.: At first, the United States tried to remain *neutral*. The United States finally entered the war as a result of the naval war between Great Britain and Germany. On May 7, 1915, German forces sank the British ship **Lusitania**. 1,100 civilians were killed, including over *100 Americans*. By 1918, large numbers of American troops had arrived in Europe. **The entry of the United States in the war boosted the Allies psychologically and gave them a new source of money and supplies.**

"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

EXTRA 8:30 A.M.

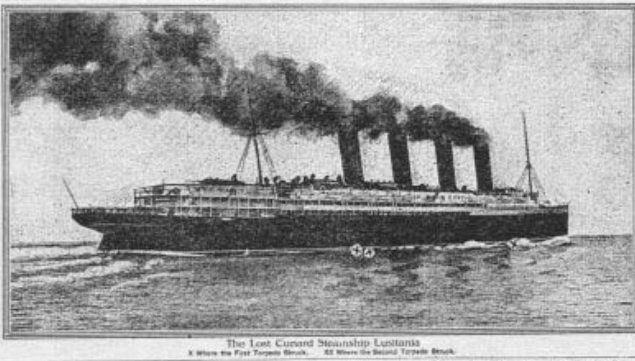
LUSITANIA SUNK BY A SUBMARINE, PROBABLY 1,260 DEAD; TWICE TORPEDOED OFF IRISH COAST; SINKS IN 15 MINUTES; CAPT. TURNER SAVED, FROHMAN AND VANDERBILT MISSING; WASHINGTON BELIEVES THAT A GRAVE CRISIS IS AT HAND

SHOCKS THE PRESIDENT
Washington Deeply Stunned by the Loss of American Lives.

BULLETINS BY TWENTY HOURS
When Roads Three Days, Not to Start on the Nation's Course.

WITS OF CONGRESS CALL
Sake of Lusitania Revive First Step of our First Whaling in Germany.

CAPITAL FULL OF MOURNERS
Mourners Thrust Lives in to the Water Before the Ship's Sinking.



SOME DEAD TAKEN AHEAD
Several Hundred Survivors of Queenstown and Kinsale.

STEWARD TELLS OF HAZARD
One Torpedo Causes Loss to Second Line's Ship, Another into the Single Row.

SHIP LISTS GIVEN TO PUP
Might Be Responsible for Loss of King's Men, the Warships Must Have Done Death.

ATTACKED IN BROAD DAY
Photograph of Lusitania-Sinking Had Been Given for German to Have the Ship Lost New York.

Only 650 Were Saved, Few Cabin Passengers
REUTERS' LONDON, Sept. 18 (AP)—The Lusitania, which was attacked Sept. 17, was sunk about 11:30 a.m. about 170 miles off the coast of Ireland. The ship was carrying about 1,900 passengers and crew.

New York Times. Lusitania Sunk. 1915

On March 3, 1918, Lenin signed the **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk**, the Russian Revolution led to Russia's withdrawal from the War. *Between 1914 and 1916, two million Russian soldiers were killed.*



[Brest Litovsk](#) (Dominio público)

6 1918 the last year of war

The entry of the United States into the war gave the Allies a much-needed psychological boost. In 1918, fresh American troops would be crucial.

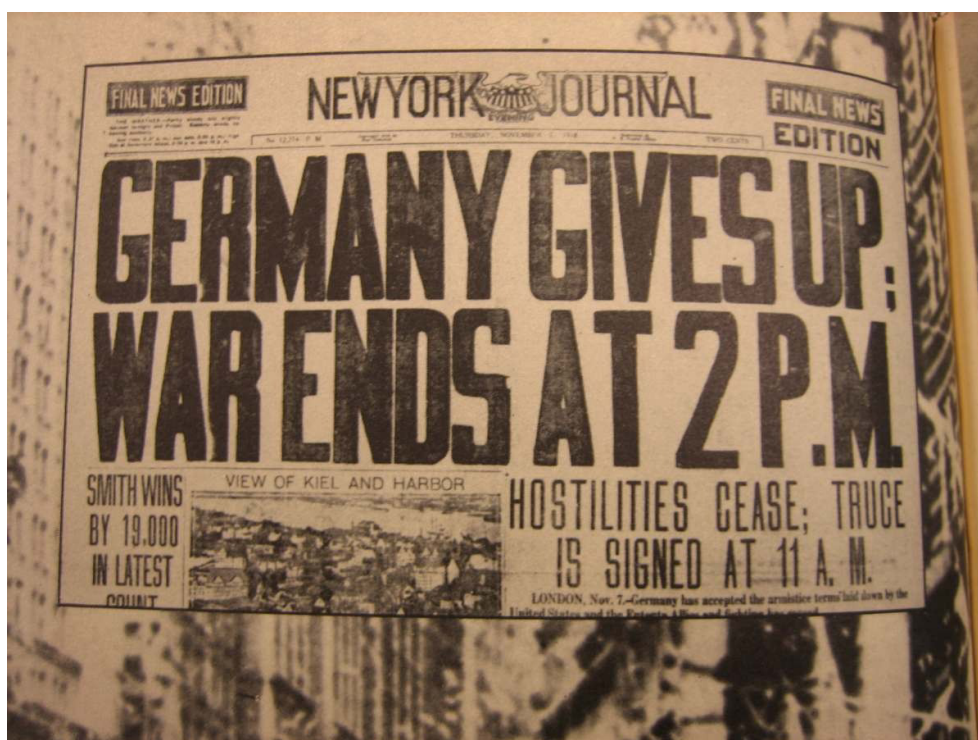
With Russia out of the war, Germany was free to concentrate entirely on the Western Front. Erich von **Ludendorff**, who guided German military operations, decided to make a **grand offensive to break the stalemate**. The German attack began in March 1918. The Germans were stopped at the Second **Battle of the Marne** on July 18. Allied forces, supported by hundreds of tanks, threw the Germans back over the Marne. **The German offensive had failed**. On September 29, 1918, General Ludendorff informed the German leaders that the war was lost.

The exhausted German people were unwilling to wait more for peace:

- **Sailors** in the town of Kiel mutinied
- **William II** was forced to leave the country
- The Social Democrats under Friedrich **Ebert** announced the creation of a democratic republic

By the end of the war, the **Austro- Hungarian Empire no longer existed**. The independent republics of Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, along with the monarchical state called Yugoslavia, replaced it.

New York Journal 1918



7 Peace Settlements

Victorious Allied nations met in **Paris** to make a final settlement of the war.

The U.S. president, **Woodrow Wilson**, had presented his **“Fourteen Points”** to the U.S. Congress. These points were his basis for a peace settlement. His proposals included:

- Reaching the **peace agreements openly** rather than through secret diplomacy
- **Reducing armaments** (military forces)
- Ensuring self-determination (the right of each people to have its own nation) The Prime Minister of Great Britain was determined to make Germany pay for the war.

The Premier of France wanted Germany to be stripped of all weapons. He also wanted German reparations (payments to cover the costs of the war).

On January 25, 1919, the conference accepted Wilson’s idea of a **League of Nations**.

The final peace settlement consisted of five *separate treaties* with the defeated nations (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey). The most important treaty was the **Treaty of Versailles** with Germany who was declared the sole country responsible for the outbreak of the war. Germany was forced to pay out large amounts of money in compensation, to disarm and dismantle its army, to cede huge areas of territory and to renounce its colonial empire. For the Germans, this was a total humiliation (diktat), which only increased their sense of nationalism and desire for future revenge..

As a result of the war and the peace treaties, the map of Europe was redrawn. Both the German and Russian empires lost much territory. **The Austro-Hungarian Empire disappeared**. New nations emerged: Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Hungary. Romania acquired additional lands from Russia, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Serbia became part of a new nation, called Yugoslavia. **The Ottoman Empire was also broken up** by the peace settlement.



FluteFlute Map of territorial changes in Europe after World War I CC BY 2.0

8 Social and economic consequences

10 million soldiers died during the war. For the first time in History there were a large number of civilian casualties.

The widespread destruction left the warring nations completely impoverished. The huge debts made economic recovery very difficult and produced high levels of inflation.

However, the war benefitted a few neutral countries (Spain), which supplied raw materials and food to the warring nations. But above all, the conflict consolidated the dominance of the USA.

With the death or absence of the primary wage earner, women were forced into the workforce in unprecedented numbers. At the same time, industry needed to replace the lost labourers sent to war. This aided the struggle for voting rights for women

Webgrafía

“Prof.Rosa Liarte – 4 ESO” , , fecha de consulta 24 octubre 2016, en

<http://leccionesdehistoria.com>

[/4ESO/author/prof-rosa-liarte/](http://leccionesdehistoria.com/4ESO/author/prof-rosa-liarte/).

"Prof. Jorge E. de la Peña" "History I. From Enlightenment to WWI.pdf", *Google Docs*, fecha de consulta 18 octubre 2016, en [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bwe1dU-](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bwe1dU-54DkeZXRIVVI0X19xdkk/edit?pli=1&usp=embed_facebook)

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