

## **1. Before the War: Secret Alliances and Powerful Empires**

World War I was one of the deadliest and most destructive wars in human history. Although the war officially began in August 1914, many events led up to the final breaking point. In the years before World War I, several countries made secret alliances with each other as a means of protection against any possible invasion or violence. An alliance is an agreement to help another “ally” country when it is in need. Countries involved in an alliance promise to provide military aid if an enemy country decides to attack the “partner” nation.

Between 1879 and 1914, European nations and Russia were involved in seven secret alliances. Before the turn of the 20th century, Germany and the empire of Austria-Hungary agreed on an alliance against their shared enemy, Russia. Russia, which was very powerful at the time, agreed to the Triple Entente alliance with Britain and France. This meant that all three countries would support one another against the rise of Germany. Russia was allied to Serbia as well. During the Age of Imperialism, Britain and France had also expanded and conquered lands in Africa, India, and Australia, which angered Germany.

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## **2. The Assassination of Franz Ferdinand**

Before the declaration of war, the many secret alliances became less of a backup plan and more of a reality. Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Britain, and France all detected the rising global tension and strengthened their militaries. Meanwhile, the “nationalism” movement grew, dividing citizens and neighboring countries into opposing camps. Nationalism is the belief that citizens should fight for only *their* country’s individual power, success, and independence.

In 1908, the Austria-Hungary Empire acquired the province of Bosnia. Many Serbians believed this land actually should have been given to them. Then, between 1911 and 1912, the Balkan States (Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro) fought a war to oust the Ottoman Empire of Turkey from the area. Austria-Hungary intervened and forced Serbia to give up even more of its land.

All of these conflicts contributed to extremely high tensions between Serbia and the empire that controlled it. On June 28, 1914, an angry Serbian nationalist and revolutionary named Gavrilo Princip took revenge by assassinating the heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife. This violent act could not be ignored by either side, and both countries began to prepare for war.

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## **3. The Division of Nations: Central Versus Allied Powers**

The assassinations of Franz Ferdinand and his wife were an enormous blow to the Austria-Hungary Empire. It was certain war was coming, and the many secret alliances formed decades earlier were about to come to light. In July 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm II, the leader of Germany, promised to support Austria-Hungary in their conflict with the Serbians. Russia, meanwhile, promised to fight with Serbia. On July 28, 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Shortly thereafter, France and Great Britain honored their alliance with Russia, and all three nations declared war on Austria-Hungary for their attacks on Serbia.

Within just a few months, the members of the two opposing forces in the war grew. By the end of 1914, The Central Powers consisted of Austria-Hungary, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire. Bulgaria would also join their ranks. The Allied Powers, on the other hand, included France, Britain, Russia, and eventually Italy and the United States. The U.S. remained neutral for three years before entering the war, however.

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#### **4. The Schlieffen Plan and the Two Fronts**

In 1905, General Count Alfred von Schlieffen had already developed what was known as the “Schlieffen Plan.” He foresaw the great war, and he intended to protect Germany and its allies at all costs. He had written a detailed plan of action for the German military once Russian troops began to move toward the German border. In August 1914, that is exactly what they were doing.

Following the Schlieffen plan, German troops split into two groups. One headed east to defend German land against Russian attack, and the other headed west to attack Russia’s ally, France. General Schlieffen assumed the Germans could defeat France in just six weeks and that the Russians would take at least six weeks to reach the German border.

However, in order to attack France, the Germans had to invade Belgium, a nation with guaranteed neutrality. Once they began assaulting Belgian citizens in August 1914, the British were enraged. They had an alliance with France and had already agreed to grant Belgium its neutrality in 1839. Therefore, on August 4, 1914, as German troops entered France, Britain declared war on Germany. British troops headed toward what was called the “Western Front,” which stretched from the North Sea to the Swiss border in France. Meanwhile, the Russian army fought the Germans on the Eastern Front, located between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea.

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#### **5. The Beginning of Trench Warfare**

The German attack on the French was almost successful. The Allies almost suffered an enormous loss right at the beginning of the war. But General Schlieffen had underestimated the mobility of the Russian army as well as the strength of the German army. In September 1914, the French, British, and Belgian troops defended against the German enemy in the First Battle of the Marne.

The Germans had already reached an area nearly 30 miles outside of Paris when the French decided to attack near the River Marne. Poor communications between Berlin and German military officials contributed to an eventual breakdown, and the Germans retreated. They began digging trenches near the River Aisne, where they could wait for the French to attack. These trenches were long, narrow ditches about the height of two men, and they became the primary battlegrounds for the remainder of the war. This was the beginning of Trench Warfare.

Although the French lost nearly 250,000 soldiers, the Germans had been forced to retreat. That bought the Allies some time before their next battle.

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## **6. War at Sea: The Naval Battles of WWI**

Before World War I, the British Royal Navy was considered the most powerful navy in the world. Still, by the beginning of the 20th century, Germany had built up its navy a great deal. They had developed a submarine called the "U-boat," which was a lethal torpedo boat that could sneakily attack enemy ships from a great distance away.

While German troops invaded France and Belgium by land, the Imperial German Navy led an attack on Great Britain by sea. The first great German victory occurred when a U-boat hit the British HMS *Pathfinder* with a torpedo. By 1915, the German Navy had declared all the waters around the British Isles a war zone. Any ship that entered the area, regardless of the nation it came from, would be attacked.

Then, in May 1916, the British Navy won the naval Battle of Jutland. They instigated their own blockade on the Germans from the north, starving the country of food and resources. Germany did not successfully lift the blockade for the rest of the war. Many neutral countries' ships were also denied entry to Europe. The British said that they were carrying "contraband" for the Central Powers.

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## **7. War by Air: The Technological Transformation of Airplanes**

In 1903, the Wright Brothers successfully flew the first propeller plane in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Just 11 years later, fighter planes were crucial for both the Allied and Central forces. They passed important information to the troops on the ground after flying over enemy lines. Once the French perfected the technology to attach machine guns to the front of their propeller planes, these fighter planes became far deadlier. The Germans also developed artillery planes as well as two-engine bombers such as the now-historic model, the Gotha G.V. The Central Powers used these deadly airplanes to raid and bomb the city of London. By the end of the war, however, the Allies were producing nearly five times more aircrafts than the Germans. In fact, the first military branch consisting solely of airplanes and fighter pilots was created in April 1918 in England. They called it Royal Air Force.

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## **8. The Allies Take On the Ottoman Empire**

The Ottoman Empire aligned itself with the Central Powers when they launched the Black Sea Raid against Russian ports on October 29, 1914. Their participation in the war would primarily take place around the Black Sea, including areas in and around Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania. This first attack caused the Allies to declare war on the Ottoman Empire in November 1914.

In the summer and fall of 1914, while both the French, Russian, German, and British armies were suffering enormous casualties on the Eastern and Western Fronts, the Allies decided to attack Ottoman Turkey. They attempted to bombard Constantinople through the Dardanelles Strait, on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The attack began in April 1915, but by January 1916, the Allies retreated. German U-boats, along with the Ottoman and Central forces, had led a fierce defense operative, and the Allies simply could

not advance. Winston Churchill, who at the time was the first lord of the British Admiralty, resigned from his post after this defeat.

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## **9. The Global War: Africa, The Middle East, South America, and Asia**

Throughout the 19th century, many imperial nations, including Britain, France, Germany, and Belgium, had invaded and taken over lands all over the world. By the early 1900s, Britain ruled over nearly 30 percent of Africa's population. Both the French and British extended and conquered areas in Africa and Southeast Asia with little to no restraint. In WWI, the Central and Allied Powers used these colonized lands to exert power over the enemy, and many indigenous people were forced to fight.

In Africa, for example, German troops invaded British colonies in modern-day Kenya, Tanganyika, and Togoland. They waged a bloody guerrilla war against British and indigenous troops. In return, the British captured German South Africa as well as several territories in the north. In South America, German ships sank two British cruisers off the coast of Chile. They continued around the strait of Magellan and up north until they were eventually sunk as well.

Asian and Middle Eastern countries were involved in the war as well. In 1914, Japan declared war on Germany, honoring an alliance they had with Britain. They seized German colonies and naval bases in Samoa, New Guinea, and Tsingtao. Then in October 1914, the British invaded various regions in Persia in order to have greater control over the oil fields that fueled the British fleet.

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## **10. 1915: The End of the Year**

By the end of the year 1915, the world had seen just how horrific and absorptive World War I would be. However, the bloody war was far from over, as both sides refused to surrender or make peace. Millions of soldiers had lost their lives on the battlefield, and more people were dying to starvation because of the food shortages across Europe. Germans also began using chemical warfare, or poisonous gasses like mustard gas, to kill off their enemies. The introduction of trench warfare resulted in a long, deadly stalemate on the Western Front. In the East, the Russian Army was slowly losing moral, suffering defeats in Poland, the Caucasus Mountains, and Prussia. The Serbian army had been defeated, and those remaining had retreated through the Albanian mountains.

Italy had also joined forces with the Allies, hoping for territorial gains in Austria-Hungary. Bulgaria, on the other hand, joined the Central Powers, and helped them overrun Serbia completely.

## **11. The Armenian Genocide in Modern-Day Turkey**

During the war, the Ottoman Empire fought the Allied powers in the Caucasus region, which is located just north of Turkey in modern day Armenia. One group of people, the Armenians, had lived there for over 3,000 years when the Muslim Ottomans took control. The Armenians were Christians, so they were allowed to remain in the region, but were often forced to pay higher taxes and were discriminated against.

Over the centuries, the Armenians and Ottomans grew to resent one another. The Ottoman Turkish government began to sack Armenian villages in the late 1890s, and many Armenians were killed. Then, when the nationalist Young Turks rose to power things got worse.

When the Turks sided with the Germans and Austro-Hungarians in WWI, Ottoman religious leaders declared a holy war on Christians. In response, some Armenians began volunteering for the Russian army as a display of their Christian faith. Then, in April 1915, the Turkish government began executing Armenian intellectuals. Thousands more were taken from their homes and sent on death marches in the months after. By the end of the war, as many as 600,000 to 1.5 million Armenians had been wiped out in the tragic genocide.

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## **12. The Battle of Verdun**

On February 21, 1916, the Germans launched another attack on France. They were hoping to finally end the months-long stalemate in the trenches on the Western Front. However, things did not go according to plan. The French were determined not to let the Germans pass, declaring “Ils ne passeront pas,” meaning “they shall not pass.” The British unleashed a new weapon: the tank. The tank allowed them to advance against their enemy farther and with better protection. The determination of the French and the British technological advancement helped the Allies to win the battle. The Germans surrendered.

The Battle of Verdun changed the tides of the war for the Allies. Although almost 600,000 soldiers died in battle, the Allied forces found new hope. By the end of summer 1916, Russians had also found new steam on the Eastern Front. The Allies finally believed that victory was possible.

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## **13. The Irish and the Easter Rising**

On April 24th, 1916, members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood launched an insurrection against the British government in Dublin, Ireland. Although it was intended to be a national movement, the British found out about it early on, and contained the revolt. However, the Citizen Army, led by Patrick Pearse and Tom Clarke, took over the General Post Office and various other important buildings in the city center. They were forced to surrender after a week of fighting in the streets, and then were executed.

Although many Irish people did not support the revolution at first, the executions stirred up a lot of discontent with British rule. The Easter Rising was the first event that led to the formation of the Irish Republican Army. The IRA was one of the sides that fought in the eventual Irish War of Independence, which took place between 1919 and 1921. In 1922, Ireland seceded from the United Kingdom and became the independent Irish Free State. Northern Ireland remained within the UK.

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## **14. The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916)**

Throughout the war, it became increasingly obvious that the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse. The Allied powers referred to the once-great empire as the “sick man of Europe.” In May 1916,

the British, French, and Russian governments penned the Sykes-Picot Agreement. In the accord, they divided up various territories owned by the Ottoman Empire between themselves. Russia would gain control of Constantinople, or modern-day Istanbul, while France would take over Syria, Lebanon, and a few other territories. Great Britain would take Baghdad, the Suez Canal, and areas throughout the Persian Gulf. Palestine would remain under an international regime, due to its holy status.

The Arabs in the region were shocked by the agreement. They had been promised independence, and resented being overtaken by European powers again. Much of this anger represented the beginning of many 20th and 21st century anti-western sentiments and eventual conflicts in the Middle East.

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### **15. America Joins the War**

Until April 1917, the United States had maintained its neutrality in the great European war. They continued to trade with Allied powers but refused to enter the war themselves. When a German U-boat sank the passenger ship *Lusitania* in 1915 with more than 100 American citizens on board, the United States was outraged but still did not declare war.

However, when American intelligence officials found out about the Zimmerman Telegram in January 1917, they started to strongly push Woodrow Wilson to declare war on Germany. In the telegram, German military leaders encouraged Mexico to form an alliance with them and lead an attack on the United States. As a consequence, congress passed a \$250 million arms deal preparing the U.S. for eventual war. Just a few months later, the Germans sank the H.H. Housatonic. On April 6th, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson had no other choice but to declare war against Germany and the Central Powers.

American involvement brought much-needed assistance to the Allies, who had already lost millions of soldiers in the previous two years. This was another event that turned the war in favor of the Allies.

### **16. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia**

The Russians were already fighting a losing battle by the beginning of 1917. However, conditions worsened throughout the year. They were losing ground on the Eastern Front. For centuries, Russia had been led by a king-like czar who made all military and governmental decisions. At the time of WWI, this czar was Czar Nicolas II. Although he was popular before the war, Russian involvement in the violent ongoing conflict had led to general discontent among Russian people. Food was scarce, the economy was unstable, and many people did not trust the czar's wife, Alexandra, as she was German-born. Although she was incredibly loyal to the Russian people, nationalist sentiments stirred fear and suspicion.

In early November 1917, Vladimir Lenin led a revolt against the provisional government and succeeded. Czar Nicolas and his entire family were killed, and Lenin became the Bolshevik leader of the new Soviet Russia. Shortly thereafter, in March 1918, Russia signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In exchange for a great amount of territory, they agreed to stop fighting with the Central Powers. They were officially out of the war.

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## **17. November 11, 1918: War Ends After Three-and-a-Half Years**

By the beginning of 1918, the world had completely transformed. The war had been more catastrophic than anyone had predicted, and every country involved suffered great losses.

In Russia, the new Bolshevik Regime began enforcing harsh laws to execute Lenin's vision for the nation. After they signed the armistice with the Central Powers, Russia was also completely removed from the war. In the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire was also struggling. Even though they had defeated several British invasions, including the battle at Gallipoli, the empire was greatly weakened. The Ottoman Turks were forced to sign a treaty with their enemy, the Allies, in October 1918.

Meanwhile, in Austria-Hungary, many people turned to nationalism to express their discontent. As a result of several fierce nationalist movements, Austria-Hungary dissolved on November 4, 1918. They signed an armistice with the Allies, which means they agreed to stop fighting. Just one week later, after losing the Second Battle of Marne on the Western Front, Germany signed its own armistice. On November 11, 1918, World War I was finally over.

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## **18. The Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles**

More than a year after the war finally ended, the nations that had fought for both the Allied and Central Powers gathered in Paris to sign a peace treaty in June 1919. At the conference, they created the League of Nations. This league was intended to prevent future wars from becoming as bloody and horrific as WWI ever again.

In his proposed 14 points, Woodrow Wilson called for "peace without victory." He wanted to avoid laying the blame on any one country. However, many leaders at the Paris Peace Conference disagreed. They wanted Germany to be held responsible for the widespread destruction. German leaders were forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles, which stated that they had caused the war. Germany was also forced to agree to "reparations," or enormous payments to the countries they had damaged throughout the war. As a consequence, Germany became increasingly poor, and people began starving within their borders. Their anger eventually turned into resentment, which Adolf Hitler used to encourage the beginning of World War II just 20 years later.

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## **19. The Spanish Influenza Pandemic**

The Spanish influenza pandemic took the lives of 20 million to 50 million people toward the end of WWI. Despite its name, the virus actually originated in the United States. In March 1918, a group of soldiers at a training facility in Kansas fell deathly ill within a few short days. A few weeks later, many of them headed to Europe to fight in the war. The virus was carried with them and soon infected millions of people in the warring continent.

To make matters worse, most countries involved in the war censored the media, so people did not receive adequate information about the disease. Crowded military encampments and the trenches where soldiers spent most of their days also made it much easier for the virus to spread. Eventually, the disease took

hundreds of thousands of lives in Britain, the United States, Western Samoa, and Japan. India lost between 12 million and 17 million people.

By the summer of 1919, the disease had gone through its worst phases. The virus stopped mutating, better health care policies helped stop the pandemic from spreading. Still, this devastating epidemic greatly contributed to the tragedy of one of the deadliest periods of human history.

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## **20. Technology in WWI**

Many considered World War I the first “modern” war. This is because of the rapid advancements made in military technology, including machine guns, tanks, aircraft radio communications, and submarine torpedo boats, like the German U-boat. Airplanes were among the most important developments, especially as the light, maneuverable fighter planes would eventually become the basis for large transatlantic airplanes and charter flights. The tank, which could cross trenches and down barbed-wire fences, was a game changer for the British troops as well. Armies also began using chemical weapons such as phosgene and mustard gas to eliminate or weaken the enemy in the trenches.

Sadly, many military and state leaders did not know how to keep up with the quickly changing world of war-time technology. They were unable to develop strategies to match the machines they were facing, and as a result, many soldiers needlessly lost their lives in battle.

The technology first developed during WWI went on to change the warfare and the world forever. Large-scale fighting has not been the same since.

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## **21. Women During WWI**

Within the first few years of the war, the role of women in society dramatically transformed. Although they did not have the right to vote, while men were sent to fight on the battlefield, women had to enter the workforce. Many of them worked in factories or on farms, producing weapons, tankers, aircrafts, and more. They also worked directly on the ground, facing enemy fire as nurses, doctors, and ambulance drivers. Other women worked as telephone operators, where they translated between French and English on the Western Front. By 1917, millions of women worked in paid employment. In fact, organizations like the Red Cross and Salvation Army were completely dependent on female volunteers. Of course, women who stayed at home also contributed by canning food, growing vegetables, or limiting their families’ food intake to preserve rations for the future.

In 1916, nearly 12,000 women were granted the right to enlist in the U.S. Navy. They often worked in the clerical office or helped transport cargo between military bases. Meanwhile, Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia all permitted women to fight as soldiers as early as 1914. One famous soldier, Maria Bochkareva, led her own Russian military unit against the Germans.

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## **22. Children During WWI**



World War I was a sad and scary time for people all over the world. Unfortunately, many children did not live a worry-free childhood, as the realities of war were impossible to ignore. Both Allied and Central countries suffered from food shortages, and everyone was forced to live off rations. Schools also had to hold drills in which students practiced lying under their desks in case of an air raid. A lot of young men turned 18 during the war, which meant that they had to enlist in the army to fight for their country. Other children were evacuated from their hometown and sent to refugee camps or countryside shelters.

Many children wanted to help out though. Some grew food and vegetables at school, while young girls often knitted hats, scarves, and socks in their classes to send to the troops. Boy Scouts helped out by guarding the railways and the coasts for signs of the enemy. They helped walk people to bomb shelters as well. However, children did have time to play. They had toys, wooden swords, penny whistles, balls, drums, and other items to entertain them. Every country also celebrated holidays throughout the war.

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### **23. The Leaders who Changed the World**

Although WWI began with a conflict between only two nations, it quickly spiraled into a global catastrophe, which meant that every country relied on strong leadership and guidance for what to do next. Consequently, many leaders took charge and will be remembered throughout history for their role in the great war.

In 1914, two of the most influential figures in the world were the German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, and the Austro-Hungarian emperor, Franz Joseph. In Russia, meanwhile, Czar Nicolas II led the country throughout the first three years of war until Vladimir Lenin led the Bolshevik Revolution and overthrew his rule in 1917. On the Allied Side, British Prime Minister Lloyd George, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, and U.S. President Woodrow Wilson were all highly decisive leaders as well. They were also the three men responsible for negotiating with Germany over the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Winston Churchill, who would later go on to become the Prime Minister of England during World War II, served as the British Chief Lord of the Admiralty during WWI. Of course many war generals, soldiers, and civilian leaders also greatly impacted the path of the war.

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### **24. The Aftermath of World War I**

In World War I, more than 7.5 million soldiers lost their lives fighting, while another 21 million were injured. Nearly 10 million civilians also died, not in battle, but due to bombs, invasions, starvation, or random acts of violence. Then, toward the end of the war, the Spanish Epidemic took as many as 50 million more lives. When the fighting was finally called off, people knew that the world would never be the same, and many were disenchanted with society. No one had ever seen so much damage or loss of life in such a short period of time, and the impact was colossal.

The global political system also changed. Nations like Russia, Germany, Turkey, and the Austria-Hungary Empire collapsed had undergone a complete transformation. Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks now ruled in Russia, and territories like Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Poland were all liberated from Russian rule. Meanwhile, Germany fell into a serious recession, and its identity as one of the world's power houses became obsolete. The Ottoman Empire fell, and eventually the title of the Sultan was

eliminated. Eventually, Kemal Ataturk rose to take his place, and the Ottoman Empire became known as Turkey. Austria-Hungary was split into four new nations: Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. In Britain, France, and the United States, people grappled with how to live life now that the turmoil of war was over.

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Youtube: World War One (ALL PARTS) Epic History TV

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