The Great War, 1914–1918

Several factors lead to World War I, a conflict that devastates Europe and has a major impact on the world.

The Great War, 1914–1918

Marching Toward War

Rising Tensions in Europe

The Rise of Nationalism
- Europe enjoys peace in late 1800s but problems lie below surface
- Growing nationalism leads to competition among nations
- Nationalism in the Balkans leads many groups to demand independence

Imperialism and Militarism
- Competition for colonies stirs mistrust among European nations
- Mutual animosity spurs European countries to engage in arms race
- Militarism—policy of glorifying military power, preparing army

Shifting Alliances Threaten Peace
- Kaiser Wilhelm II becomes German ruler in 1888
- Foreign policy changes begin in 1890 with dismissal of Bismarck
  - alliance with Russia dropped; Russia then allies with France
  - effort to strengthen German navy, which alarms Britain
- Britain, France, Russia form Triple Entente alliance in 1907

Section 1
Marching Toward War

In Europe, military buildup, nationalistic feelings, and rival alliances set the stage for a continental war.

Tangled Alliances

Bismarck Forges Early Pacts
- Germany’s Otto von Bismarck works to keep peace in Europe after 1871
- Believes France wants revenge for loss in 1870 Franco-Prussian War
- Seeks to isolate the French with a series of treaties and alliances:
  - signs treaty with Russia in 1881
  - forms Triple Alliance—Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy—in 1882

Continued . . .
Crisis in the Balkans

A Restless Region
- Many groups in Balkans win independence during early 1900s
- New nation of Serbia made up largely of Slavs
- Austria-Hungary annexes Slavic region Bosnia and Herzegovina (1908)
- Serbia outraged, sees itself as rightful ruler of these Slavic lands

A Shot Rings Throughout Europe
- Serbian rebel kills Austro-Hungarian royal official in June 1914
- Austria declares war on Serbia; Russia comes to aid of Serbia

Section 2
Europe Plunges into War

One European nation after another is drawn into a large and industrialized war that results in many casualties.

Europe Plunges into War

The Great War Begins

Armies on the March
- Russia moves troops to its borders with Austria and Germany
- Germany declares war on Russia, quickly attacks France
- Great Britain declares war on Germany

Nations Take Sides
- By mid-August 1914, two sides at war throughout Europe:
  - Central Powers—Germany, Austria-Hungary (and other nations)
  - Allies—Britain, France, Russia (and other nations)

A Bloody Stalemate

The Conflict Grinds Along
- Western Front—heavy battle zone in northern France
- Schlieffen Plan—German plan to defeat France, then fight Russia
- German army quickly advances to outskirts of Paris
- Forced to retreat at First Battle of the Marne
- Schlieffen Plan fails; Germany has to fight two-front war

War in the Trenches
- Conflict descends into trench warfare—armies fighting from trenches
- Battles result in many deaths, small land gains
- Life in trenches is miserable, difficult, unsanitary
- New weapons only lead to more deaths
- Massive losses for both sides at 1916 battles of Verdun and Somme

The Battle on the Eastern Front

Early Fighting
- Eastern Front—site of main fighting along the German-Russian border
- Russians push into Austria and Germany, but soon forced to retreat

Russia Struggles
- Russia's war effort suffering by 1916; many casualties, few supplies
- Huge size of Russian army keeps it a formidable force
- Prevents Germany from sending more troops to the Western Front
Section 3
A Global Conflict

World War I spreads to several continents and requires the full resources of many governments.

War Affects the World

The Gallipoli Campaign
- Allies move to capture Ottoman Dardanelles strait in February 1915
- Hope to defeat Ottoman Empire, a Central Powers ally
- Also want to open a supply line through region to Russia
- Effort ends in costly Allied defeat

Battles in Africa and Asia
- Allies take control of German holdings in Asia, Africa
- Britain and France use their colonial subjects to help in war effort

America Joins the Fight
- Germany seeks to control Atlantic Ocean to stop supplies to Britain
- Uses unrestricted submarine warfare—ships near Britain sunk without warning
- Halts policy in 1915, after sinking of Lusitania angers U.S.
- Renews unrestricted policy in 1917, hopes to starve Britain quickly
- Renewal of policy and effort to enlist Mexico anger U.S.
- U.S. declares war against Germany in April 1917, joining Allies

War Affects the Home Front

Governments Wage Total War
- World War I becomes total war—nations devote all resources to war
- Governments take control of economy to produce war goods
- Nations turn to rationing—limiting purchases of war-related goods
- Propaganda—one-sided information to build morale, support for war

Women and the War
- At home, thousands of women fill jobs previously held by men
- Many women also experience the war by working as nurses

The Allies Win the War

Russia Withdraws
- Civil unrest in Russia forces czar to step down from throne in 1917
- Communists soon take control of Russia’s government
- Russia signs treaty with Germany in March 1918, pulls out of war

The Central Powers Collapse
- With Russia gone, Germany moves most forces to Western Front
- Engages in major fighting; Allies force Germans to retreat
- Allies win war; armistice—end of fighting—signed in November 1918

The Legacy of the War

A High Price
- War takes heavy toll: 8.5 million soldiers dead, 21 million wounded
- War devastates European economies, drains national treasuries
- Many acres of land and homes, villages, towns destroyed
- Survivors suffer disillusionment and despair; reflected in the arts
Section 4
A Flawed Peace
After winning the war, the Allies dictate a harsh peace settlement that leaves many nations feeling betrayed.

Key Leaders Come Together
• Group of leaders known as the Big Four dominate peace talks:
  - U.S. president Woodrow Wilson
  - French ruler Georges Clemenceau
  - David Lloyd George of Great Britain
  - Vittorio Orlando of Italy

Wilson's Plan for Peace
• Wilson proposes Fourteen Points—outline for lasting world peace
• Calls for free trade and end to secret alliances, military buildups
• Promotes self-determination—right of people to govern own nation
• Envisions international peace-keeping body to settle world disputes

The Versailles Treaty
• Britain, France oppose Wilson's ideas; want to punish Germany
• Allies, Germany sign accord, Treaty of Versailles, in June 1919—creates League of Nations—international organization to keep peace
• Blames Germans for war, forces Germany to pay damages to nations
• League to rule German colonies until deemed ready for independence

The Creation of New Nations
• Versailles treaty, other peace accords change the look of Europe
• Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, Ottoman Empire all lose lands
• Former Ottoman lands in Southwest Asia turn into mandates
• New countries created in southeastern Europe; Russia gives up land

A Troubled Treaty
• Treaty of Versailles creates feelings of bitterness on both sides
• German people feel bitter and betrayed after taking blame for war
• America never signs Treaty of Versailles—many Americans oppose League of Nations and involvement with Europe
• Some former colonies express anger over not winning independence
• Japan, Italy criticize agreement; gain less land than they want
This is the end of the chapter presentation of lecture notes. Click the HOME or EXIT button.