



## World War I

World War I spans almost five years, involves thirty countries, and was fought on land, at sea, and in the air. In order to avoid being overwhelmed by the tremendous amount of information, use maps and dates to get a general overall picture of what happened. Then choose a specific part for more thorough study. In my summary of the war, I have purposely left out specific names and dates, so that you can get a general feeling for the war -- you will be able to get all the specifics from an encyclopedia.

### Causes of the War

The idea of colonization in the 1800's led to competition between the major powers in Europe. As large, strong countries gobbled up smaller countries, feelings of nationalism strongly increased throughout all people groups in Europe and the Middle East.

Nationalism is pride in your language, country, and culture. Nationalism can lead to a feeling of superiority over other nationalities. People often resent being ruled by someone of a different nationality. These attitudes naturally lead to militarism -- building up armies and ammunition for defense. Nationalism and militarism were the root causes of World War I.

The war began when a Serbian student murdered Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. The Austrian government issued an ultimatum to Serbia. Groups of countries allied themselves on either side of the conflict. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and later Turkey were on the side called the Central Powers. France, England, The Soviet Union, and later many others were known as the Allies.

Both sides thought that a war would be quick and victory easily gained. Soldiers paraded off to war being cheered by civilians. Germany, the most powerful military force, planned to quickly defeat France on the Western Front, then turn their full attention to fighting The Soviet Union on the Eastern Front. However, a series of events slowed the Germans and the war settled into a long, bloody stalemate, with each side digging complex trenches.

During the next four years, battles were fought all over. One side would launch an attack and gain a few miles. Then the opposing side would launch a counter attack and gain back the ground lost. Back and forth it went while both sides lost thousands of soldiers.

At sea, England had the most powerful navy. They set up blockades to prevent supplies from going through. Germany countered this by using U-boats (undersca boats, or submarines) to sink the battleships. At sea, as on land, both sides sustained heavy casualties.

At the same time the war was taken to the air. Airplanes would engage in dogfights, where one pilot would try to shoot down another. After shooting down six enemy aircraft, the pilot was considered an Ace. The most famous World War I flying ace was the German pilot Baron von Richthofen, who was known as the Red Baron.

Throughout the war, improvements were made in strategy and weaponry. Machine guns were attached to airplanes. Poison gases and armored tanks were used by both sides. The Central Powers used Zeppelins, large hydrogen-filled airships, to drop bombs on London and Paris. Both sides used propaganda to rally people to their cause.

In the spring of 1917, two and a half years into the war, the Russian Revolution began. The czar of Russia was overthrown and a temporary democratic government was set up. Then Lenin led the Bolsheviks (Communists) to overthrow that government. By December, The Soviet Union pulled out of the war against Germany. Now Germany could direct all of its attention to its Western Front.

At the beginning of the war, most Americans did not want to be involved in the war. President Woodrow Wilson even used the fact that he had kept America out of the war as a campaign slogan to get re-elected.

But a series of events and some propaganda changed public opinion. In 1917, America declared war against the Central Powers, primarily because of Germany's use of U-boats to sink American ships, including the Lusitania.

President Wilson proposed "14 points" or goals to define the purpose of American soldiers. The Americans supplied the much needed manpower to push the Germans back.

The war continued for another year and a half after the United States joined the Allies, with heavy casualties on both sides. Gradually the Central Powers weakened and were pushed back.

The war ended with many bitter feelings on both sides. The Central Powers were forced to sign harsh peace treaties. They were forced to give up much of their land, reduce the size of their military forces, and pay huge war debts.

President Wilson did not agree to the harsh peace treaty, but he went along with the plan so that the League of Nations would be formed, in the hope that future World Wars could be prevented.

The world paid a heavy price for the war. Ten million men had died and another twenty million had been injured.

*World War I left Germany bitter and broken, ripe for a leader like Adolph Hitler to save them from their woes. The war was over, but the bitterness that caused the war remained, ready to erupt again when the opportunity was presented.*