

WW1

World War I began in 1914 after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and lasted until 1918. During the conflict, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire (the Central Powers) fought against Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Romania, Japan and the United States (the Allied Powers). Thanks to new military technologies and the horrors of trench warfare, World War I saw unprecedented levels of carnage and destruction. By the time the war was over and the Allied Powers claimed victory, more than 16 million people—soldiers and civilians alike—were dead.



The spark that ignited World War I was struck in Sarajevo, Bosnia, where Archduke Franz Ferdinand—heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire—was shot to death along with his wife, Sophie, by the Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip on June 28, 1914. Princip and other nationalists were struggling to end Austro-Hungarian rule over Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The assassination of Franz Ferdinand set off a rapidly escalating chain of events: Austria-Hungary like many countries around the world, blamed the Serbian government for the attack and hoped to use the incident as justification for settling the question of Serbian nationalism once and for all.



World War 1 Begins:

Convinced that Austria-Hungary was readying for war, the Serbian government ordered the Serbian army to mobilize and appealed to Russia for assistance. On July 28, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, and the tenuous peace between Europe's great powers quickly collapsed.

Within a week, Russia, Belgium, France, Great Britain and Serbia had lined up against Austria-Hungary and Germany, and World War I had begun.

The Western Front:

According to an aggressive military strategy known as the Schlieffen Plan, Germany began fighting World War I on two fronts, invading France through neutral Belgium in the west and confronting Russia in the east.

On August 4, 1914, German troops crossed the border into Belgium. In the first battle of World War I, the Germans assaulted the heavily fortified city of Liege, using the most powerful

weapons in their arsenal—enormous siege cannons—to capture the city by August 15. The Germans left death and destruction in their wake as they advanced through Belgium toward France, shooting civilians and executing a Belgian priest they had accused of inciting civilian resistance.

First Battle of the Marne:

In the First Battle of the Marne, fought from September 6-9, 1914, French and British forces confronted the invading Germany army, which had by then penetrated deep into northeastern France, within 30 miles of Paris. The Allied troops checked the German advance and mounted a successful counterattack, driving the Germans back to north of the Aisne River.

The defeat meant the end of German plans for a quick victory in France. Both sides dug into trenches, and the Western Front was the setting for a hellish war of attrition that would last more than three years.

Particularly long and costly battles in this campaign were fought at Verdun (February-December 1916) and the Battle of the Somme (July-November 1916). German and French troops suffered close to a million casualties in the Battle of Verdun alone.

Russian Revolution:

From 1914 to 1916, Russia's army mounted several offensives on World War I's Eastern Front, but was unable to break through German lines. Defeat on the battlefield, combined with economic instability and the scarcity of food and other essentials, led to mounting discontent among the bulk of Russia's population, especially the poverty-stricken workers and peasants. This increased hostility was directed toward the imperial regime of Czar Nicholas II and his unpopular German-born wife, Alexandra.

Russia's simmering instability exploded in the Russian Revolution of 1917, spearheaded by Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks, which ended czarist rule and brought a halt to Russian participation in World War I.

America Enter WW1:

At the outbreak of fighting in 1914, the United States remained on the sidelines of World War I, adopting the policy of neutrality favored by President Woodrow Wilson while continuing to engage in commerce and shipping with European countries on both sides of the conflict.



Neutrality, however, was increasingly difficult to maintain in the face of Germany's unchecked submarine aggression against neutral ships, including those carrying passengers. In 1915, Germany declared the waters surrounding the British Isles to be a war zone, and German U-Boats sank several commercial and passenger vessels, including some U.S. ships.

Widespread protest over the sinking by U-boat of the British ocean liner Lusitania—traveling from New York to Liverpool, England with hundreds of American passengers onboard—in May 1915 helped turn the tide of American public opinion against Germany. In February 1917, Congress passed a \$250 million arms appropriations bill intended to make the United States ready for war. Germany sank four more U.S. merchant ships the following month, and on April 2 Woodrow Wilson appeared before Congress and called for a declaration of war against Germany.

Treaty of Versailles:

At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Allied leaders stated their desire to build a post-war world that would safeguard itself against future conflicts of such devastating scale.

Some hopeful participants had even begun calling World War I “the War to End All Wars.” But the Treaty of Versailles, signed on June 28, 1919, would not achieve that lofty goal.

Saddled with war guilt, heavy reparations and denied entrance into the League of Nations, Germany felt tricked into signing the treaty, having believed any peace would be a “peace without victory,” as put forward by Wilson in his famous Fourteen Points speech of January 1918.

As the years passed, hatred of the Versailles treaty and its authors settled into a smoldering resentment in Germany that would, two decades later, be counted among the causes of WW2.