

# Unit 5: World War One



World wars are international conflicts that involve the most influential countries throughout the world. These wars span multiple countries on multiple continents and the subsequent results impact the vast majority of the world. World War One was a period of time in which empires still existed in the world and tension was building for many years. When war finally broke out, few people were surprised.

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## Chapter 1 Causes of Tension

Tensions had been mounting on the European continent for a number of years and were coming to a boiling point. There were four main causes of tension before the outbreak of war.

**Militarism:** Militarism fueled tensions as nations expanded their armed forces. When one country builds up its military, it can provoke other countries to do the same. As a result, entire regions become equipped and prepare for an armed conflict simultaneously.



**Alliance System:** The alliance system is an important part of diplomatic relationships. However, the alliance system can also turn a relatively minor incident into a major conflict because allied countries back each other to help squash opposition. When one country is involved in conflict, their allies might be pulled in because of diplomatic obligations.

**Nationalism:** Feelings of nationalism, which is an extreme form of patriotism, also fueled tensions at this time. Before war started in 1914, the Ottoman, Austria-Hungarian, and German empires controlled large portions of the European continent. The territories they controlled had citizens from many different cultures and ethnicities that were not necessarily shared by the ruling bodies. Nationalism created mistrust because both the governing body and citizen populations did not feel that they had their best interests of the country in mind.

**Imperialism:** Imperialism is a foreign policy in which a large country seeks to control the economic and/or political affairs of a weaker country or region. This foreign policy caused rivalries between nations as they competed for control over the same region to access needed resources. This competition even led to conflicts and war in places far from Europe.



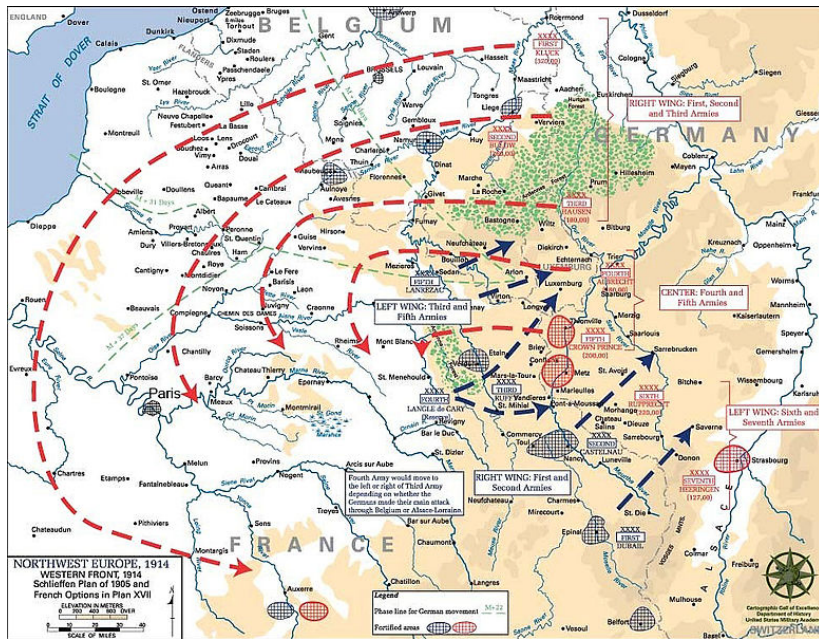
## Chapter 2 The Outbreak of War

Serbian nationalists wanted Austria to grant Bosnia its independence. In June 1914 while visiting the capital of Bosnia (Sarajevo), the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated in their car in broad daytime. The Archduke was the heir to the Austria-Hungarian empire and his visit angered members of the Black Hand. The Black Hand was a terrorist group in Bosnia that used violence to promote their desire for independence. Twenty-five conspirators from the Black Hand were arrested and tried for their role in the assassination. Most were sent to prison or faced the death penalty.

The Austria-Hungarian governing body could have handled this as a domestic affair but instead responded by declaring war on Serbia. This caused a domino effect that pulled many of the global powers into armed conflict. Russia had an alliance with Serbia and declared war on Austria-Hungary. Germany declared war on Russia and France because of the German alliance with Austria-Hungary. As Germany marched through Belgium on their way to France, Great Britain declared war on Germany because of their alliance with Belgium.



Germany had the Schlieffen Plan, which was the strategy they would use to fight the war on two fronts (France in the west and Russia in the east). The plan was to concentrate their troops in the west to quickly defeat France and then rush to Russia before the Russians had time to mobilize. However, the plan was ineffective in its implementation.

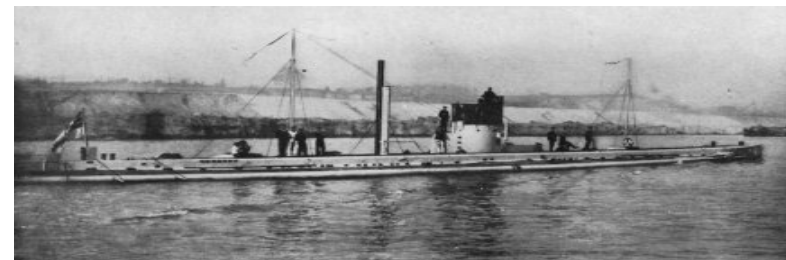


One of the most common mechanisms for battle during World War One was trench warfare even though neither side gained much territory during the four years that the war persisted. Troops would dig themselves in and it was difficult to dislodge them. In addition, the lack of communication made it difficult to organize a planned attack. Thousands of soldiers died on both sides without achieving anything and battles lasted for months.

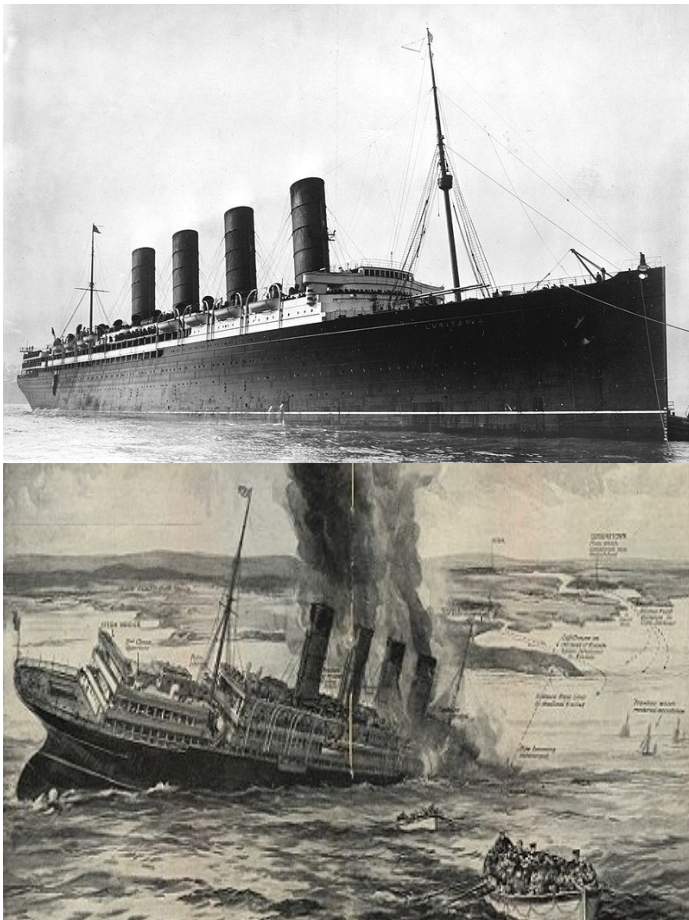
## Chapter 3 From American Neutrality to American Involvement

The United States remained neutral for most of the war. President Wilson did not want to involve our country in a European conflict and many people within our country were opposed to entering the conflict. During the first two years of the conflict, the U.S. was in a recession and the unemployment rate was at about 15 percent. However, with European nations entrenched in war, the American economy became dependent on sales of war materials to the Allied Powers and our economy was able to prosper as a result of filling orders for war supplies. In fact, Allies even took out loans with American banks to purchase war supplies that were often made in America.

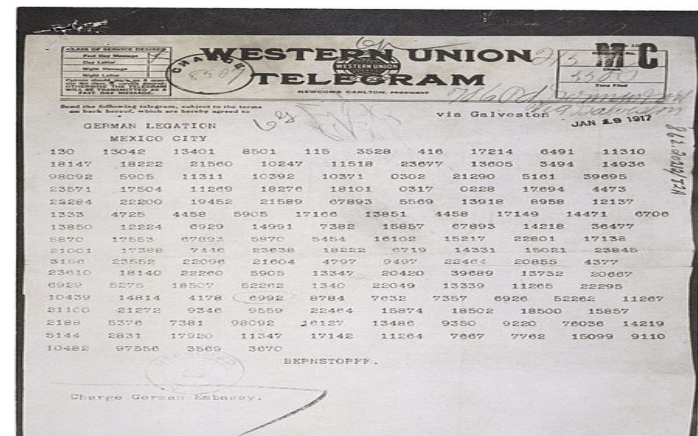
The British established a blockade of German ports. Germans struck back with submarine warfare aimed at ships in war zones. Submarines, also known as U-boats, were seen as uncivilized because an enemy was not easily detected. However, this sentiment only existed because Germany was the only country to have this technology at the time. In 1915, an American life was lost when a British liner was destroyed and 3 more Americans died when a U.S. merchant ship was destroyed by a German U-boat.



Later that same year, Germany published a warning for anyone attempting to travel on the British passenger ship the RMS *Lusitania*. Germany took an ad out in a newspaper warning that the ship was a potential target. Tensions came to a head when a German submarine destroyed the ship, killing 1,200 people including 128 Americans. President Wilson asserted Americans' right to travel freely but the *Lusitania* was found to have been transporting munitions to Great Britain unbeknownst to the passengers on board.



On February 25, 1917, the United States government intercepted and decoded a telegram that was sent between Germany and Mexico. The telegram became known as the Zimmerman Note. Arthur Zimmerman was Germany's foreign minister. He sent a note to a German ambassador in Mexico that was ultimately intercepted. The note proposed an alliance between Germany and Mexico. Germany was hoping that Mexico would incite a war with the United States to distract us from what Germany perceived as the inevitable involvement of the U.S. in World War One. Germany promised Mexico that in return for their support, Germany would help to recover the Mexican territories previously lost to the United States.



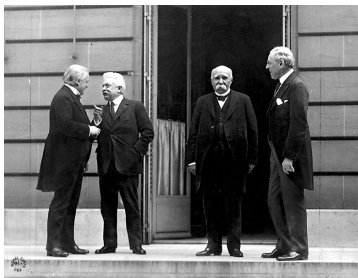
When President Wilson revealed the contents of the letter, the American people were furious. A few days later, German submarines sank five more American ships and America now wanted war. On April 2, 1917, Wilson delivered a speech to Congress at a special session that was convened for the sole purpose of discussing America's stance in the war. Wilson spoke about the violation against American neutrality rights and ended with a call for war. Congress overwhelmingly voted in favor of a declaration of war against Germany.

## Chapter 4 The End of the War

The United States Entered the war at a critical time. The Bolshevik Revolution, or communist revolution, in Russia caused civil and political unrest. The Russian czar was overthrown and a new communist government was established. Vladimir Lenin took control of the new government and signed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with Germany. It ended Russian involvement in the war and allowed Germany to leave the eastern front and concentrate on fighting the Allied Powers in the west.

Eventually, with the help of the Americans, Allied forces broke through German lines in the Argonne Forest and took thousands of German prisoners. Germany realized that they were beaten and forced the Kaiser to resign. On November 11, 1918 at 11am (the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month) Germany and the Allied Powers signed an armistice.

President Wilson proposed his Fourteen Point Plan, which set goals for postwar settlement and hoped it would prevent further international tensions. Many European countries were optimistic of Wilson's proposal but his main allies (Georges Clemenceau of France, David Lloyd George of Great Britain, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando of Italy) were skeptical about the American president's idealism.



The following is a summary of Wilson's Fourteen Points:

- **Point 1:** Open treaties of peace (secret treaties were one of the causes of WWI).
- **Points 2-5:** Called for freedom of the seas, free trade, limits on armament, and the peaceful adjustment of all colonial claims.
- **Points 6-13:** Involved territorial settlements in Europe, determined borders based on ethnic groups living in certain areas, and supported self-determination by which the people should choose their own governments.
- **Point 14:** Called for a "general association of nations" to guarantee the "political independence and territorial integrity of great and small nations alike."

This last point led to the formation of the League of Nations, which was established to maintain world peace. However, there were not enough votes in Congress for the U.S. to join and the League of Nations failed in its primary mission of preventing war when World War Two broke out.



THE GAP IN THE BRIDGE.

An armistice ended the fighting but the Treaty of Versailles formally ended the conflict. The Central Powers were dismantled and/or had to adhere to the terms and conditions of the treaty. The Austria-Hungarian and Ottoman empires were completely dismantled and a number of countries were granted independence.

Central Powers	Land Lost	New Countries
Austria-Hungary Empire	Most of the empire was broken up	Poland Czechoslovakia Yugoslavia



Central Powers	Land Lost	New Countries
Ottoman Empire	Most of the empire was broken up	Iraq Syria Palestine Jordan



Central Powers	Land Lost	New Countries
Germany	Western and Eastern Regions	Poland

In addition to a loss of territory, Germany had extra limitations placed on their country including:

- Limit its army to 100,000 soldiers.
- Its navy was reduced to 6 warships, 0 submarines, and no air force.
- Not allowed to have a military within 30 miles from the east bank of the Rhine River.
- Had to turn over its colonies.
- Pay reparations totaling billions of dollars.
- Accept full responsibility of the war (War Guilt Clause).

The Treaty of Versailles might have formally ended World War One but decimated the morale of the German people, and provided a platform for Adolf Hitler to rise in power by promising to bring Germany back to its former glory.

