

## History in Depth

### The New Weapons of War



#### Poison Gas

Soldiers wore masks to protect themselves from poison gas. Gas was introduced by the Germans but used by both sides. Some gases caused blindness or severe blisters, others death by choking.

#### Machine Gun

The machine gun, which fires ammunition automatically, was much improved by the time of World War I. The gun could wipe out waves of attackers and thus made it difficult for forces to advance.

#### Tank

The tank was an armored combat vehicle that moved on chain tracks and thus could cross many types of terrain. It was introduced by the British in 1916 at the Battle of the Somme.

#### Submarine

In 1914, the Germans introduced the submarine as an effective warship. The submarine's primary weapon against ships was the torpedo, an underwater missile.

## The Battle on the Eastern Front

Even as the war on the Western Front claimed thousands of lives, both sides were sending millions more men to fight on the **Eastern Front**. This area was a stretch of battlefield along the German and Russian border. Here, Russians and Serbs battled Germans and Austro-Hungarians. The war in the east was a more mobile war than that in the west. Here too, however, slaughter and stalemate were common.

**Early Fighting** At the beginning of the war, Russian forces had launched an attack into both Austria and Germany. At the end of August, Germany counterattacked near the town of Tannenberg. During the four-day battle, the Germans crushed the invading Russian army and drove it into full retreat. More than 30,000 Russian soldiers were killed.

Russia fared somewhat better against the Austrians. Russian forces defeated the Austrians twice in September 1914, driving deep into their country. Not until December of that year did the Austrian army manage to turn the tide. Austria defeated the Russians and eventually pushed them out of Austria-Hungary.

**Russia Struggles** By 1916, Russia's war effort was near collapse. Unlike the nations of western Europe, Russia had yet to become industrialized. As a result, the Russian army was continually short of food, guns,

## The Frozen Front

For soldiers on the Eastern Front, the overall misery of warfare was compounded by deadly winters. “Every day hundreds froze to death,” noted one Austro-Hungarian officer during a particularly brutal spell.

Russian troops suffered too, mainly due to their lack of food and clothing. “I am at my post all the time—frozen [and] soaked . . .,” lamented one soldier. “We walk barefoot or in rope-soled shoes. It’s incredible that soldiers of the Russian army are in rope-soled shoes!”



ammunition, clothes, boots, and blankets. Moreover, the Allied supply shipments to Russia were sharply limited by German control of the Baltic Sea, combined with Germany’s relentless submarine campaign in the North Sea and beyond. In the south, the Ottomans still controlled the straits leading from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea.

The Russian army had only one asset—its numbers. Throughout the war the Russian army suffered a staggering number of battlefield losses. Yet the army continually rebuilt its ranks from the country’s enormous population. For more than three years, the battered Russian army managed to tie up hundreds of thousands of German troops in the east. As a result, Germany could not hurl its full fighting force at the west.

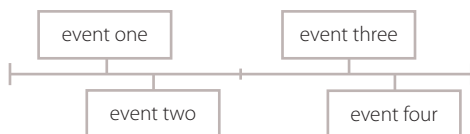
Germany and her allies, however, were concerned with more than just the Eastern or Western Front. As the war raged on, fighting spread beyond Europe to Africa, as well as to Southwest and Southeast Asia. In the years after it began, the massive European conflict indeed became a world war.

### Reading Check

**Synthesize** Why was Russia’s involvement in the war so important to the other Allies?

## Lesson 2 Assessment

- Organize Information** Create a timeline like the one below to organize key events in the outbreak of World War I.



- Key Terms and People** For each key term or person in the lesson, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Summarize** What were the characteristics of trench warfare?
- Compare and Contrast** How was war on the Western and Eastern Fronts the same? How was it different?
- Analyze Causes** Why did the Schlieffen Plan ultimately collapse? Cite specific details from the text.

**Battles in Africa and Asia** In various parts of Asia and Africa, Germany's colonial possessions came under assault. The Japanese quickly overran German outposts in China. They also captured Germany's Pacific island colonies. English and French troops attacked Germany's four African possessions. They seized control of three.

Elsewhere in Asia and Africa, the British and French recruited subjects in their colonies for the struggle. Fighting troops as well as laborers came from India, South Africa, Senegal, Egypt, Algeria, and Indochina. Many fought and died on the battlefield. Others worked to keep the front lines supplied. To be sure, some colonial subjects wanted nothing to do with their European rulers' conflicts. Others volunteered in the hope that service would lead to their independence. This was the view of Indian political leader Mohandas Gandhi, who supported Indian participation in the war. "If we would improve our status through the help and cooperation of the British," he wrote, "it was our duty to win their help by standing by them in their hour of need."

**America Joins the Fight** In 1917, the focus of the war shifted to the high seas. That year, the Germans intensified the submarine warfare that had raged in the Atlantic Ocean since shortly after the war began. In January 1917, the Germans announced that their submarines would sink without warning any ship in the waters around Britain. This policy was called **unrestricted submarine warfare**.

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## The World at War, 1914–1918



The Germans had tried this policy before. On May 7, 1915, a German submarine, or U-boat, had sunk the British passenger ship *Lusitania*. The attack left 1,198 people dead, including 128 U.S. citizens. Germany claimed that the ship had been carrying ammunition, which turned out to be true. Nevertheless, the American public was outraged. President Woodrow Wilson sent a strong protest to Germany. After two further attacks, the Germans finally agreed to stop attacking neutral and passenger ships.

Desperate for an advantage over the Allies, however, the Germans returned to unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917. They knew it might lead to war with the United States. They gambled that their naval blockade would starve Britain into defeat before the United States could mobilize. Ignoring warnings by President Wilson, German U-boats sank three American ships.

In February 1917, another German action pushed the United States closer to war. Officials intercepted a telegram written by Germany's foreign secretary, Arthur Zimmermann, stating that Germany would help Mexico "reconquer" the land it had lost to the United States if Mexico would ally itself with Germany.

The Zimmermann note simply proved to be the last straw. A large part of the American population already favored the Allies. In particular, America felt a bond with England. The two nations shared a common ancestry and language, as well as similar democratic institutions and legal systems. More important, America's economic ties with the Allies were far stronger than those with the Central Powers. On April 2, 1917, President Wilson asked Congress to declare war so that the United States could enter World War I. This excerpt from his speech gives some of his reasons.

*"The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifice we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them."*

-Woodrow Wilson, Speech to Congress, April 2, 1917

Days later, the United States entered the war on the side of the Allies.

## War Affects the Home Front

By the time the United States joined the Allies, the war had been raging for nearly three years. In those three years, Europe had lost more men in battle than in all the wars of the previous three centuries. The war had claimed the lives of millions and had changed countless lives forever. The Great War, as the conflict came to be known, affected everyone. It touched not only the soldiers in the trenches but civilians as well.

### Reading Check

**Contrast** How was the experience of war different for the subjects of European colonies in Africa and India?

**Governments Wage Total War** World War I soon became a **total war**. This meant that countries devoted all their resources to the war effort. In Britain, Germany, Austria, Russia, and France, the entire force of government was dedicated to winning the conflict. In each country, the wartime government took control of the economy. Governments told factories what to produce and how much.

Numerous facilities were converted to munitions factories. Nearly every able-bodied civilian was put to work. Unemployment in many European countries all but disappeared.

So many goods were in short supply that governments turned to **rationing**. Under this system, people could buy only small amounts of those items that were also needed for the war effort. Eventually, rationing covered a wide range of goods, from butter to shoe leather.

Governments also suppressed antiwar activity, sometimes forcibly. In addition, they censored news about the war. Many leaders feared that honest reporting of the war would turn people against it. Governments also used **propaganda**, one-sided information designed to persuade, to keep up morale and support for the war.

**Women and the War** Total war meant that governments turned to help from women as never before. Thousands of women replaced men in factories, offices, and shops. Women built tanks and munitions, plowed fields, paved streets, and ran hospitals. They also kept troops supplied with food, clothing, and weapons. Although most women left the work force when the war ended, they changed many people's views of what women were capable of doing.

Women also saw the horrors of war firsthand, working on or near the front lines as nurses. Here, American nurse Shirley Millard describes her experience with a soldier who had lost his eyes and feet:

*"He moaned through the bandages that his head was splitting with pain. I gave him morphine. Suddenly aware of the fact that he had [numerous] wounds, he asked: 'Sa-ay! What's the matter with my legs?' Reaching down to feel his legs before I could stop him, he uttered a heartbreaking scream. I held his hands firmly until the drug I had given him took effect."*

Shirley Millard, *I Saw Them Die*



A woman relief worker writes a letter home for a wounded soldier.

**Reading Check**  
Summarize How did the governments of the warring nations fight a total war?

## The Allies Win the War

With the United States finally in the war, it seemed that the balance was about to tip in the Allies' favor. Before that happened, however, events in Russia gave Germany a victory on the Eastern Front and new hope for winning the conflict.