

World War I Breaks Out

READ TO DISCOVER

1. What were the major causes of unrest in Europe?
2. What were the results of the early fighting in the war?
3. Why did the war settle into a stalemate?

DEFINE

militarism
no-man's-land
trench warfare

IDENTIFY

Franz Ferdinand
Gavrilo Princip
Allied Powers
Central Powers
First Battle of the Marne
Battle of the Somme
Manfred von Richthofen
Edward Rickenbacker

WHY IT MATTERS TODAY

Nationalism and militarism still exist in the world today. Use CNNfyi.com or other **current events** sources to find out about a country in which nationalism or militarism is common. Record your findings in your journal.

CNNfyi.com

EYEWITNESSES TO HISTORY

"As I write, Germany is reported to have declared war against Russia and France, and the participation of England on the one side and of Italy on the other seems imminent [close at hand]. Nothing like it has occurred since the great Napoleonic wars, and with modern armaments and larger populations nothing has occurred like it since the world began. . . . All of Europe is to be a battleground. . . . The future looks dark indeed."

—William Howard Taft, *A Message to the People of the United States*

Former president William Howard Taft published "A Message to the People of the United States" in August 1914. He expressed the surprise and fear that many Americans felt at the news that Europe was at war. Few Americans had seen the war coming. Europe had appeared peaceful for more than 40 years. While the Wilson administration wrestled with problems created by the Mexican Revolution, tensions in Europe exploded into global war.

The Causes of the War

One longterm cause of the war lay in the growth of nationalism throughout Europe. In the 1860s a spirit of nationalism united Italians in their fight to free themselves from Austrian rule. Nationalism also helped Otto von Bismarck join the German states into a single nation in the 1870s.

Nationalism and territorial rivalries. Nationalism was particularly strong in the central European region of the Balkans. This region was so unstable that it was called the powder keg of Europe. The Ottoman Empire (later known as Turkey) gained control of the Balkans in the 1400s and ruled the area until the 1800s. By then the region's four main ethnic groups—Albanians, Greeks, Romanians, and Slavs—were each struggling for independence. Greece began a successful revolt in the 1820s, and Romania followed in 1859. Following a war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in 1878, Bulgarians, Montenegrins, and Serbs each staked their claims to nationhood. Soon after, Austria-Hungary occupied the small Balkan kingdoms of Bosnia and Herzegovina (often just called Bosnia).

The newly independent Serbia saw Bosnia as part of its rightful territory. Austria-Hungary's 1908 annexation of the territories produced open hostility. Serbia's growing strength threatened Austria-Hungary's control of its territories in the Balkans. This encouraged the Slavs to push for independence. Austro-Hungarian chief of staff Baron Conrad von Hötzendorf foresaw a major conflict:



This 1912 British cartoon shows European leaders trying to keep a lid on trouble in the Balkans.

History Makers Speak

"The unification of the South Slav[s] . . . is one of the powerful national movements which can neither be ignored nor kept down. The question can only be, whether that unification will take place within the boundaries of the Monarchy [the Austro-Hungarian Empire]—that is, at the expense of Serbia's independence—or under Serbia's leadership at the expense of the Monarchy."

—Baron Conrad von Hötzendorf, quoted in *The First World War*, by Martin Gilbert

Militarism and alliances. Because large European countries frequently overpowered smaller ones, relations between nations were characterized by a strong spirit of **militarism**, or the glorification of military strength. Leaders of the major European powers believed that disputes would ultimately be settled on the battlefield. As a result, they engaged in an arms race in which they tried to develop larger armies and more powerful weapons than their rivals. In this dangerous atmosphere, leaders formed alliances with other nations, each promising to aid the other in case of attack by a third power.

Germany had a longtime ally in Austria. France's 1892 alliance with Russia threatened to surround Germany with enemies. Eventually, Italy joined Austria-Hungary and Germany in one alliance, and Great Britain joined France and Russia in another. The alliances avoided war for a time but created the risk that a single incident could trigger a major war.

✓ **READING CHECK: Making Generalizations** What role did nationalism and militarism play in the build-up to war?

The Great War Begins

In June 1914 Archduke **Franz Ferdinand**, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, visited Sarajevo (sahr-uh-YAY-voh), the Bosnian capital. As the archduke rode through the city streets, a Serbian nationalist **Gavrilo Princip** (PREENT-seep) stepped out of the crowd. He fired two shots, killing the archduke and his wife, Sophie.

Austria-Hungary quickly declared war on Serbia. Germany immediately offered its support. Russia, with a large Slav population of its own, was compelled to honor its alliance with Serbia. The alliance system soon turned a local conflict into a global war. The **Allied Powers** of Britain, France, and Russia were pitted against the **Central Powers** of Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria. Italy remained neutral until 1915 when it joined the Allies. Eventually, some 30 nations took part in what became known as the Great War.

Germany's military strategy called for a massive strike against France, which it quickly defeated, leaving British forces stranded on the western side of the English Channel. With France and Britain out of

Then and Now

Conflicts in Bosnia

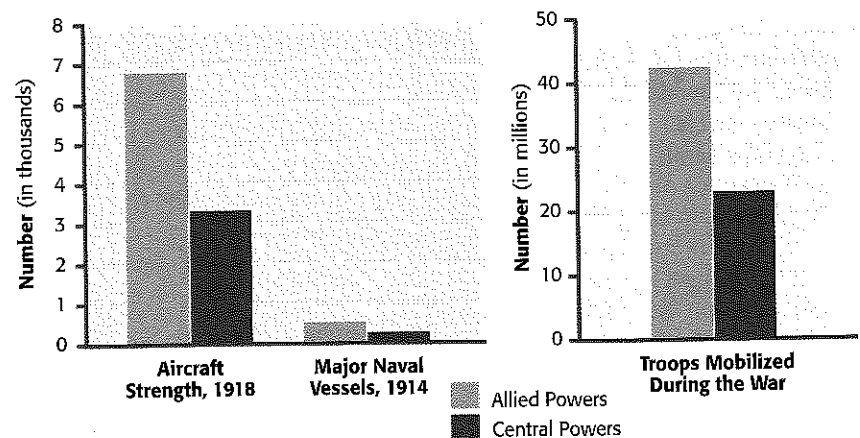
Bosnia and Herzegovina—a nation about the size of West Virginia—has been a place of unrest for many years. After being controlled by various kingdoms for several centuries, Bosnia gained its independence in about 1200. It remained independent until 1463, when it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. Bosnia remained under Ottoman rule for the next 400 years. In 1878 Austria-Hungary took control of Bosnia from the Turks.



Bosnian refugee camp

At the end of World War I, Serbia's ruler was crowned king of the newly created nation of Yugoslavia, which included Bosnia. After World War II, Yugoslavia was reorganized into six republics—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. In the late 1980s Yugoslavia's government began to disintegrate. Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic sought to create a Greater Serbia, uniting all Serbs in a single state under his leadership. At that time Bosnia's population of about 4 million included three main ethnic groups: Croats, Serbs, and Slavic Muslims. Early in 1992 some 70 percent of the country's voters—including many Bosnian Serbs—voted for independence from the rest of Yugoslavia. That March, Serbian forces began seizing territory in northern and eastern Bosnia. They drove out much of the non-Serbian population. The United States and most of the international community recognized Bosnia's independence in April 1992. Fighting continued, however, until a 1995 treaty ended the civil war. The United Nations sent in a peacekeeping force to help the country maintain peace.

Allied and Central Resources, 1914–1918



Sources: *Encyclopedia of Military History: A Concise History of World War I*

Interpreting Graphs In 1914 Germany had more aircraft and was the world's second greatest naval power. During the war, the Allies mobilized more troops and surpassed Germany in overall production of military equipment.

Skills Assessment What was the total aircraft strength in 1918?

the war, Germany would then focus its attention on defeating Russia in the east. Known as the Schlieffen Plan, this strategy called for German forces to avoid the heavily defended French-German border by invading France through the neutral country of Belgium.

German troops poured into Belgium on the night of August 3–4, 1914. The small Belgian army put up unexpectedly strong resistance, giving the French and British time to rush troops into the battle. The German invasion forced the Allies back to the Marne River in northeastern France. That September, during the **First Battle of the Marne**, the Allies pushed the

German lines back some 40 miles. As 1914 drew to a close, leaders of both sides realized that there would be no quick victory.

READING CHECK: Identifying Cause and Effect Why did the Great War begin?

The War Reaches a Stalemate

Leaders had thought that this war would resemble earlier conflicts—with cavalry charges, decisive battles, and a quick victory. German kaiser Wilhelm II told troops they would be home “before the leaves have fallen from the trees.” Both sides threw troops and arms into battle, expecting to achieve a clear victory. Instead, each side battered and bloodied the other in a brutal stalemate.

Trench warfare. By early 1915 both armies occupied trenches along a front running for hundreds of miles from the North Sea to the border of Switzerland. Separating the two sides was a thin strip of bombed-out territory—strewn with barbed wire and land mines—called **no-man's-land**. A new type of fighting, known as **trench warfare**, emerged on the western front. Battles began with massive artillery barrages. Then soldiers went “over the top” of the trenches and charged across the no-man's-land toward the enemy trenches. As they ran, thousands of soldiers were cut down by a hail of machine-gun fire.

The war remained locked in a stalemate throughout 1915. Determined to break out, each side prepared massive offensives for 1916. In February 1916 the Germans launched a huge offensive designed to “bleed the French army white” by causing unsustainable casualties. The Germans targeted the fortified French city of Verdun because they knew the French would feel compelled to defend it. The

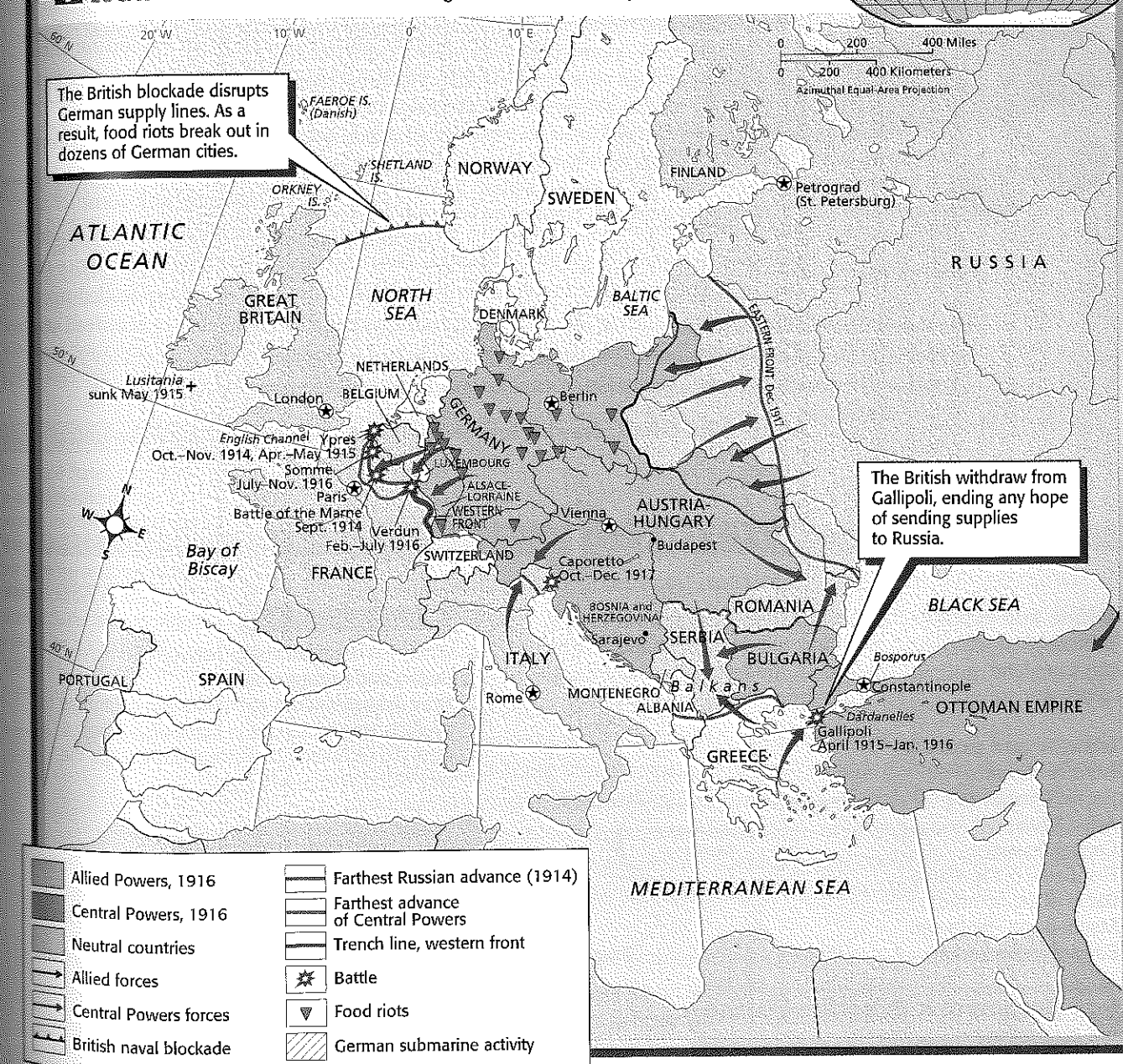
battle began with a staggering 21-hour artillery barrage in which more than 1 million shells were fired. Then 1 million soldiers of the German Fifth Army advanced on some 200,000 French defenders. For months the battle raged back and forth.

In July the Allied Powers launched an offensive near the Somme River in northern France. They had the same goal as the German attack on Verdun—to exhaust the enemy's reserves. In the **Battle of the Somme**, British forces suffered some 60,000 casualties in a single day. This four-month-long battle left more than 1 million dead

World War I, 1914–1917

Interpreting Maps The warring powers fought on several battlefronts, with the most intense fighting occurring on the western front.

LOCATE Where did the Central Powers gain the most territory?



Soldiers faced horrible conditions in World War I trenches.



and wounded. At Verdun, the longest battle of the war, the two sides suffered nearly 1 million more casualties, half of them deaths.

For soldiers who avoided death, the trenches were a living nightmare. Rats and lice plagued the troops. Rain flooded the trenches, drenching soldiers in mud. Dead soldiers often lay unburied for days. Unsanitary conditions bred disease and sickness that claimed nearly as many lives as the fighting did.

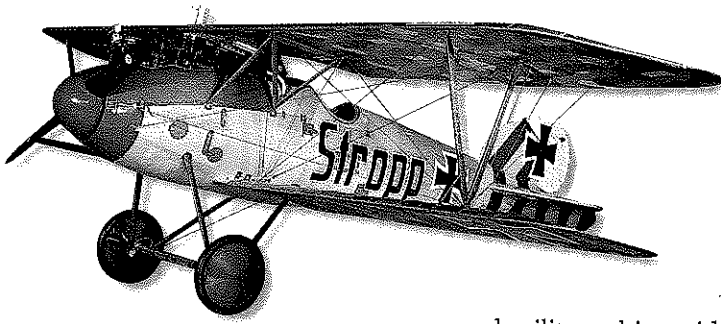
New weapons. Deadly new weapons added to the horror of trench warfare. Machine guns fired hundreds of rounds per minute. Partly to counter the machine gun's deadly impact, the Allies introduced tanks at the Battle of the Somme. One British soldier reported that tanks scared the Germans "out of their wits" and made them "scuttle like frightened rabbits."

Perhaps the most feared new weapon introduced during World War I was poison gas. It could be released as a cloud of mist that silently drifted over the trenches. It could also be launched inside an exploding shell. Either way, soldiers had only seconds to slip on their gas masks or else suffer a slow, suffocating death.

Modern machines such as submarines and airplanes brought terror to the seas and the skies. Submarines slipped silently beneath the waves to sink commercial and military ships with little or no warning. Some airplane pilots engaged enemy planes in aerobatic dogfights. Although these skirmishes did little to influence the course of the war, they made celebrities out of those who survived. Skilled pilots were known as aces. The most successful was the German Baron **Manfred von Richthofen**, known as the Red Baron. He had a reported 80 kills, or enemy aircraft shot down. The top American ace was **Edward Rickenbacker**, with 26 kills.

✓ **READING CHECK: Drawing Inferences** How did trench warfare affect the fighting?

A World War I German airplane



SECTION 1 REVIEW

1. Define and explain:

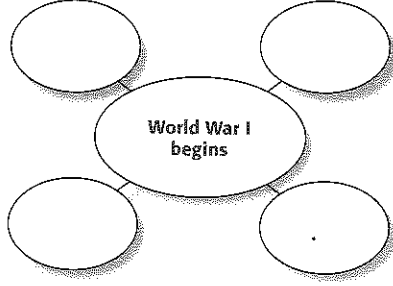
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3. Identifying Cause and Effect

Copy the diagram below. Use it to list the factors that contributed to the outbreak of World War I.



4. Finding the Main Idea

- What was the relationship between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina?
- How did nationalism and militarism contribute to conflicts among nations in Europe?
- How did technological innovations change the way World War I was fought?

5. Writing and Critical Thinking

Analyzing Information Imagine you are a British reporter at the front during 1916. Write a newspaper article describing conditions at the front and encouraging the British people to continue fighting.

Consider:

- new weapons used during the war
- the tactics of trench warfare
- the transportation available to the opposing sides

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