

1914-1918

World War I

Rivalries over control of lands in Africa, trade markets in Asia and China and protection of existing borders lead to the “Great War” between the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria and Turkey) and the Allies (United States, Britain, France, Russia, Belgium, Serbia, Greece, Romania, Montenegro, Portugal, Italy and Japan).

1914, Europe. On June 28, 1914, Austrian Archduke Francis (Franz) Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife are assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia, by Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip (Prinzip). Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia on July 28. Within a few days, Germany declares war on Russia, and then France, and invades Belgium. Britain and Belgium declare war on Germany. Russian troops defeat German forces at Gumbinnen, Germany. French troops unsuccessfully attack Lorraine and then suffer heavy losses in mid-August at the Battle of the Frontiers. The German army under Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg defeats Russian forces in the Battle of Tannenberg (then in Germany) on the Eastern Front in August. The German military strategy, the Schlieffen Plan, is designed to encircle France by cutting through neutral Belgium. The German army marches across Belgium and, at the first Battle of the Marne in September, the German drive is stopped 25 miles from Paris. Germany’s African colonial territories are under Allied control by mid-September. In November, Britain, France and Russia declare war on Turkey after the Turkish fleet attacked Russian seaports. The Battle of Ypres (Ieper), which lasts almost the full month of November, halts the German advance. The Battle of Crakow, which begins in mid-November, produces heavy losses on both sides, but little strategic advantage. By year’s end, the war on the Western Front (France) is “positional” trench warfare running from the English Channel to Switzerland.

1914, Africa, Asia and the Americas. On August 26, 1914, British and French troops defeat German colonial forces and partition Germany’s African colonies. Japan declares war on Germany on August 23 and on Austria-Hungary two days later, seizing German interests in China. A German fleet defeats the British off the coast of Chile in early November but the British recover in December with a victory in the Falkland Islands.

1915, Europe. In 1915 Sir Douglas Haig takes command of British forces. The German submarine blockade of Great Britain begins in February. In the Dardanelles campaign British forces try unsuccessfully to run the strait and seize Constantinople. In April British forces land in Turkey for a second attempt, but are forced to withdraw from Gallipoli at the end of the year. The German military uses chlorine poison gas at the second Battle of Ypres. Italy enters the war in May with an attack on Austria. When nearly 1,200 people die, 128 of them United States citizens, in the sinking of the *Lusitania* ocean liner in May, America considers entering the war. Italy declares war on Turkey in August. On the Eastern Front (Russia), the German and Austro-Hungarian “great offensive” under Field Marshal August von Mackensen and Hindenburg conquers all of Poland and Lithuania; 1 million Russians die in the fighting by September 6. The “Great Fall Offensive” by



French war brides

the Allies during September and October results in little change from 1914. Bulgaria declares war and joins Austria-Hungary and Germany in a successful attack on Serbia; Britain, France, Russia and Italy then declare war on Bulgaria in October.

1915, Africa and Asia. South African troops attack German positions in Swakopmund in German South West Africa in January and by May, have taken control of Winhhoek, capital of the colony. By July all German forces have surrendered to the South African army commanded by Louis Botha. In September British forces attack Turkish troops in Mesopotamia.

1916, Europe. In early 1916 the Germans and French each lose approximately 350,000 men at the Battle of Verdun in France. Extensive submarine warfare begins in March. The sea battle of Jutland between Britain and Germany, started May 31, is considered a British victory although Britain suffers the heavier losses; however, the German fleet never ventures forth again. On the Eastern Front, the Brusilov offensive demoralizes the Russians and costs them 1 million people. At the Battle of the Somme (river in France), which lasts from July to November, the British lose more than 400,000 men; the French, 200,000; and the Germans, about 450,000; all with no strategic results. Romania declares war on Austria-Hungary in late August and the Greek fleet surrenders to the Allies at Athens in October. On November 16 Poland receives recognition from Germany and Austria-Hungary as an independent country; however, German forces occupy Poland. Bucharest, Romania, is captured by the Central Powers in December.

1916, Africa and Middle East. Allied forces complete their occupation of the German Cameroons in February 1916. In April Turkish forces capture Kut-el-Amara in Iraq from the British. In June Arab and British fighting units join forces to remove Turkish control from the area, and German positions in East Africa are attacked by troops under Jan Smuts. In September British troops capture Dar es Salaam (Tanganyika), at the time the capital of German East Africa.

1917, Europe. The Russian Revolutions of March and October seriously demoralize the Russian army. On April 6 the United States declares war on Germany after Germany announces it will begin unrestricted submarine warfare. Submarine warfare is at its peak in April. On the Southern Front (Italy), Italian forces retreat from the Battle of Caporetto, losing 600,000 people as prisoners and deserters from October to December. On the Western Front, the Battles of Arras and Champagne (both in France), and the third Battle of Ypres take place. The first large British tank attack begins in November. On December 7 the United States declares war on Austria-Hungary. An armistice is negotiated between the transitional Russian government and Germany on December 15.

1917, Africa, Asia and Middle East. British troops capture Baghdad, Iraq, in March. Arab forces led by British Colonel T. E. Lawrence attack a Turkish garrison and capture sections of the Hejaz railroad, weakening communication lines for the Turkish army. In August China declares war on Germany and Austria-Hungary. In October the German offensive in East Africa is successful and German forces are victorious at the Battle of Mahiwa. The



Company D, 1st Regiment

British victory over Turkish forces at Gaza and Jerusalem leads to the Balfour Declaration to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

1918, Europe. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, among Russia, Austria-Hungary and Germany, removes Russia from the war. In the spring of 1918 a great German offensive is led by Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff. At Château-Thierry in northern France, American troops engage in their first important fighting role, joining the French under Marshal Ferdinand Foch to stop the German advance. The second Battle of the Marne in July and August is followed by the successful Allied offensive in France, with fights at Amiens and St. Mihiel. The Battles of the Argonne and Ypres, also in France, panic German leadership, which then asks for an armistice in early October following mutinies and unrest in many major cities. German Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates in November and hostilities cease on the Western Front.

1918, Asia and Middle East. Japanese troops move on Siberia in August. The British offensive against Turkish forces begins in Palestine in September. By October a united British and Arab force captures Damascus. Britain and Turkey sign an armistice in October. German forces surrender all positions in Northern Rhodesia in November.

Worldwide, more than 8 million people die during the war, including 112,000 Americans, and 2 million are wounded worldwide. Three empires—the Ottoman, the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian—are ended.