

Roots of the Conflict

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The **Canada in World War I** series explores the role Canadians played in this defining event in Canadian history. Each book in the series looks at a different aspect of Canada's involvement in the war. This includes the roots of the war, the effect of the war on Canada, the battles in which Canadians played a significant role, and the life of a soldier during the conflict.

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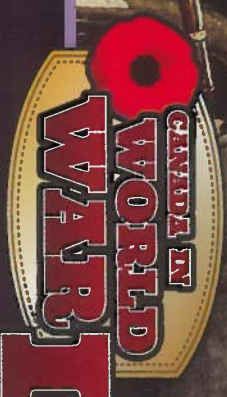
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CANADA IN WORLD WAR I

WEIGL

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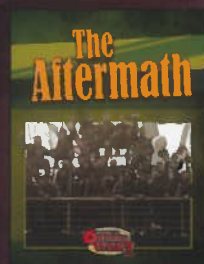


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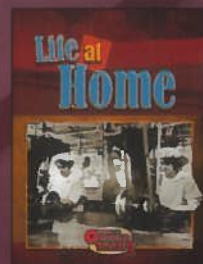
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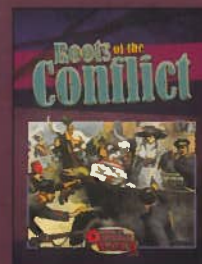
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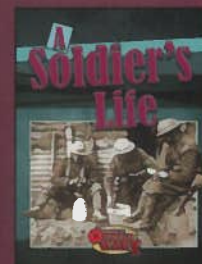
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Roots of the Conflict



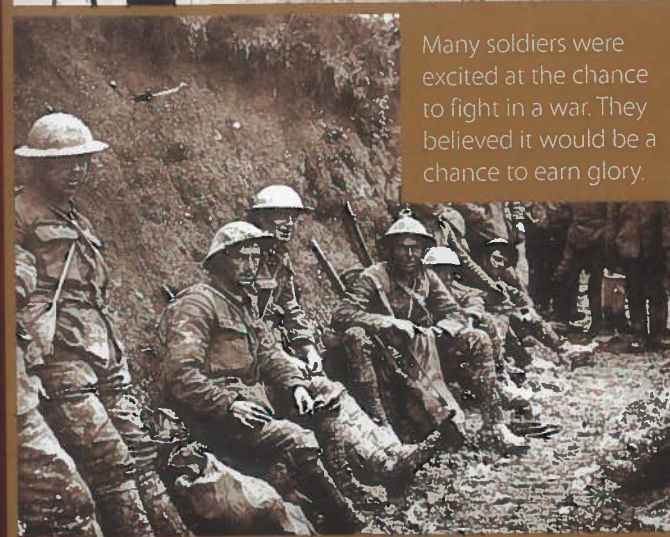
Once the war started, large-calibre guns, or artillery, played an important role in each army's strategy.



By its end, World War I would become the most destructive war in the history of the world.



Many soldiers were excited at the chance to fight in a war. They believed it would be a chance to earn glory.



Franz Ferdinand's wife was killed with him.



The Roots of War

Leading up to the war, Great Britain and Germany entered into a naval arms race, with each trying to build the most battleships and other naval vessels.

On June 28, 1914, Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, was assassinated in Sarajevo. This is widely viewed as the primary cause of World War I, but it was just the spark that set the world ablaze. There had been tensions between the major European powers dating back to the previous century.

Fear of enemy attack pushed the European powers to seek **alliances** with other countries. Each country promised to help its allies if they were attacked. The countries also needed to make sure their armed forces were a match for any potential enemies. This led to an arms race as each great power increased the size of its army. By 1914, Europe was divided into two heavily armed groups of allied countries.

Some European powers had established **colonies** around the world. This growing **imperialism** led to the creation of colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. Colonies were seen as a source of wealth and national pride. Disputes arose over ownership of the colonies, which fueled tensions between the great **empires** as they fiercely defended their national interests around the world. The rise of **nationalism** had led to the unification of Germany and Italy. However, the desire for all members of a particular ethnic group to be part of the same country threatened to break up the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. Both ruled territory in the Balkans in southeastern Europe, which was inhabited by people of many different nationalities.



Europe in 1914

In 1914, kings and emperors ruled many of the countries in Europe. These rulers sought to protect their empires through agreements with other countries. By 1914, this tangled web of alliances and treaties created two opposing powers—the Allies and the Central Powers.

The Allies

GREAT BRITAIN The British Empire was the largest empire in history in 1914. It covered a quarter of the world's surface, including Canada, and had more than 400 million people. Though British forces fought in wars outside of Europe, they tried to stay out of wars on the continent. It was not until the rise of Germany threatened the British Empire's dominance at sea that the British allied themselves with France and Russia. At this time, the British Empire was at the peak of its economic and political power.

FRANCE In 1914, France was one of the few European countries not ruled by a monarch. It had been a **republic** since the fall of Napoleon III in 1870, during the **Franco-Prussian War**. France had lost the territories of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany after the war and was determined to win them back. Though its economy was not as strong as Germany's or Great Britain's, France was one of the leading trading and industrial nations. It also controlled a large empire, including parts of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.



RUSSIA With a population of 166 million, Russia was the largest country in the world in 1914. Its empire stretched from Eastern Europe to the Pacific Ocean and south to the Middle East. Russia also had the world's largest army. **Czar Nicholas II** had ruled with no real checks on his power until the revolution of 1905 forced him to establish a **parliament**. There was little political freedom in Russia in 1914, and the empire remained unstable, with many work strikes and demands for political reform.

After his defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Napoleon III spent the last years of his life in exile in Great Britain.

The Central Powers

GERMANY The German Empire was created in 1871, after independent German states and kingdoms united to form one country. In 1914, **Kaiser Wilhelm II** ruled the empire, though it also had an elected parliament. Germany had colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, though not as many as Great Britain or France. The empire had a population of more than 65 million and a very strong economy. Germany had a large and well-equipped army, and its navy was the second largest in the world.



Kaiser Wilhelm II was the grandson of Britain's Queen Victoria.

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY Austria and Hungary each had its own parliament and prime minister, but they were ruled by a single emperor. By 1914, Emperor Franz Joseph had ruled the Austro-Hungarian Empire for 66 years. The 84-year-old emperor faced many problems. Austria-Hungary contained many different ethnic groups. Germans controlled the government in Austria, and the government in Hungary was run by the Magyars, or Hungarian peoples. There was always a danger of the empire breaking apart.

OTTOMAN EMPIRE The Ottoman Empire stretched from southern Europe to the Middle East. It had ruled the Balkan region for centuries, but by 1914, the empire had been in decline for decades. Taking advantage of this, the Balkan countries allied in 1912 and captured much of the Ottoman territory in Europe in the First Balkan War. However, the countries began to argue among themselves. This led to a second Balkan war in 1913. In this war, the Ottoman Empire recaptured some of the territory it had lost the previous year.

ITALY Italy had been a collection of separate countries until the peninsula was finally united as one nation in 1870. King Umberto I of Italy formed an alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1882. However, some areas where Italians lived were still controlled by Austria-Hungary, and Italy was determined to have all Italians under its rule. Italy had also gone to war with the Ottoman Empire in 1911 and captured Libya in North Africa, as well as the Dodecanese Islands in the eastern Mediterranean.

Timeline

1870-1880

1881-1905

1906-1913

1914



1870 to 1871 - The French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War leads to the loss of Alsace and Lorraine.

1879 - Germany and Austria-Hungary form the Dual Alliance.

1882 - Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy form the Triple Alliance.



1888 - Wilhelm II becomes kaiser of Germany.

1894 - An alliance is formed between Russia and France.

1904 - Great Britain and France sign the agreement known as the **Entente Cordiale**.



1907 - Great Britain and Russia settle their differences and ally with France to form the Triple Entente.

1908 - Bosnia-Herzegovina is **annexed** by Austria-Hungary.

1912 to 1913 - The Balkan Wars take place in southeast Europe.



June 28 - Serbian nationalists assassinate Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo.

July 23 - With German support, Austria-Hungary demands that Serbia take action against those responsible for the assassination of Franz Ferdinand.



July 25 - Supported by Russia, Serbia agrees to only part of Austria-Hungary's demands.

July 28 - Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia.

July 29 - Russia begins to **mobilize** its armed forces.

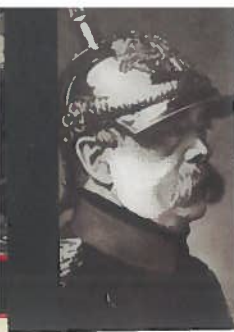


July 29 - Great Britain warns Canada of the worsening situation in Europe.

July 31 - Austria-Hungary orders its armed forces to mobilize.

August 1 - France and Germany both order general mobilization. Germany declares war on Russia.





Preparing for Battle

Europe had largely been at peace since the end of the **Napoleonic Wars** in 1815. These wars ended with the Congress of Vienna, a treaty that created new borders and set the balance of power in Europe for the next several decades. A series of treaties and alliances between the major empires and countries in Europe helped maintain this balance of power for nearly a century.

By the beginning of the 20th century, however, growing nationalism in the Balkans and the unification of both Germany and Italy shifted the balance of power. As the peoples of the Balkans struggled to free themselves from the Ottoman Empire, Russia came to their support. Russia wanted to increase its influence in the area and gain control of Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. This would give the Russian navy access to the Mediterranean Sea. Austria-Hungary opposed Russian influence in the Balkans. Germany's unification affected the treaties that maintained the balance of power in Europe. The system of alliances put in place by German chancellor Otto von Bismarck was abandoned when Wilhelm II became kaiser in 1888.

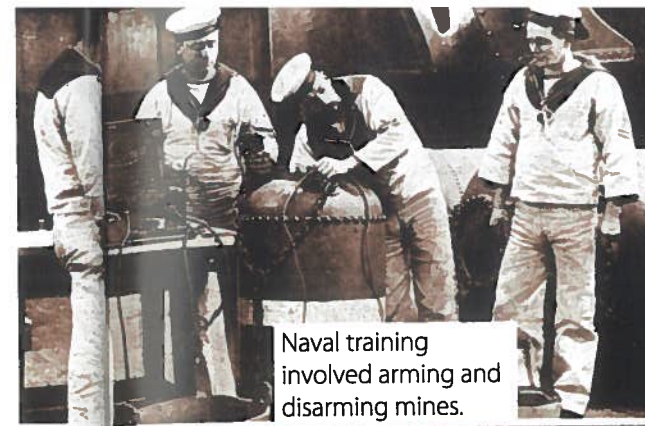
Fear of Germany drove the other European powers to settle their differences and work together. Great Britain had long been the world's leading naval power, but it felt threatened when Germany began to build a large navy. Great Britain and France had been enemies for centuries, and the British also had issues with Russian expansion. However, Great Britain settled its differences with France in 1904 and came to an agreement with Russia in 1907. This created the alliance known as the Triple Entente. At this time, Germany was allied to Austria-Hungary. With each nation promising aid to its allies if they were attacked, the stage was set for war once a crisis erupted that could not be solved by negotiation.

However, these rivalries were not confined to Europe. As the European powers expanded their empires around the world, their conflicts spread to other continents as well. This led to tensions that threatened to boil over into war.



The Scramble for Africa

During the 19th century, European powers raced to occupy land in Africa and claim it as their own. To prevent war, the countries divided the continent between them.



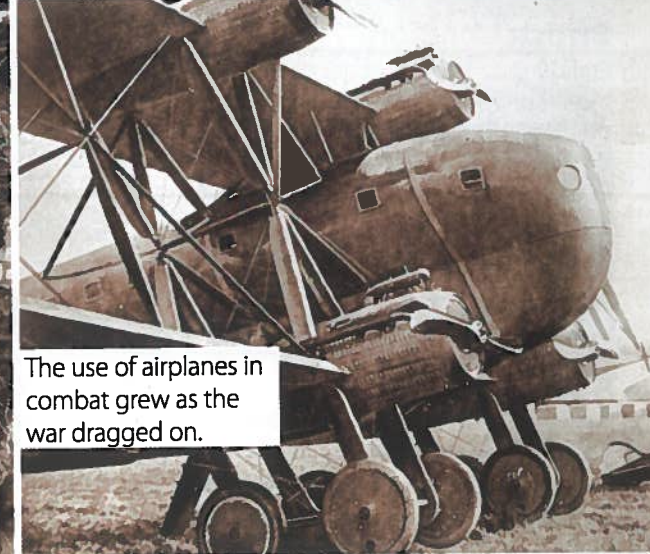
Naval training involved arming and disarming mines.



Cavalry was an important part of each army's forces.



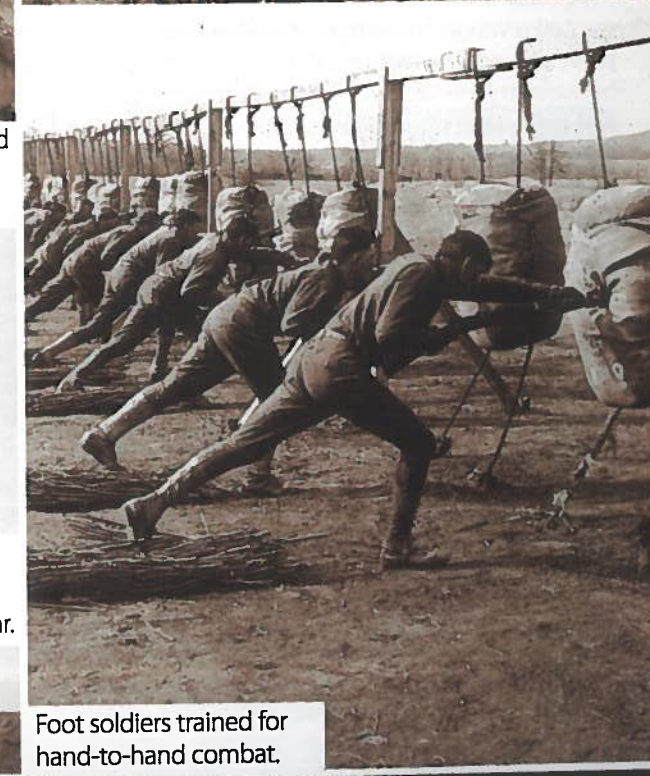
The use of poison gas in the war would call for new kinds of training and new technologies, such as gas masks.



The use of airplanes in combat grew as the war dragged on.



Tanks were one of the most important innovations of the war.



Foot soldiers trained for hand-to-hand combat.

Issues and Causes

All the major European powers increased the size of their armed forces in the years leading up to World War I. This was partly to defend themselves in case of a surprise attack by their enemies but also to show support to their allies.

British Isolation

Preferring to stay out of the conflicts in Europe, the British focussed on increasing the size of their overseas empire and on their trade around the world. This is how Great Britain established itself as the world's largest naval power. When Germany began to challenge its supremacy, Great Britain looked to form alliances with Germany's enemies. Great Britain also increased its navy to compete with the growing German navy.



Alsace and Lorraine

France's loss of Alsace and Lorraine to the newly formed German Empire following the Franco-Prussian War greatly strained the relationship between the two nations. In France, there was much resentment over the loss. Many people wanted revenge on Germany for taking the provinces, which were situated along the border between the two countries. Most French people wanted to take the provinces back.



The Balkans

Many ethnic groups populated southeastern Europe. For centuries, the region had been controlled by the Ottoman Empire. As the empire declined in the later years of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the nations of the area steadily gained independence. This led to tensions between the new countries over territory. It also created issues for Austria-Hungary and Russia. The Russians supported the independence of the Balkan peoples, but Austria-Hungary was worried that this might lead to its own empire falling apart.



Bosnia-Herzegovina

Bosnia-Herzegovina was formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, but Austria-Hungary had administered the province since 1878. In 1908, the Austro-Hungarian Empire annexed the province and made it an official part of the empire. This angered nearby Serbia, which believed it had a claim on the territory. Russia supported Serbia's claim.



Italian Indecision

Italy was formally part of an alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, but the Austro-Hungarian Empire still controlled territory that the Italians felt rightfully belonged to them. For this reason, Italy did not join its allies when World War I began. Instead, Italy joined the Triple Entente powers in 1915. In return for joining the Triple Entente, Italy was promised territory that belonged to Austria-Hungary.

The Russo-Japanese War

In 1904, Russia and Japan came into conflict over the area of Manchuria, which is today northeastern China. The resulting Russian defeat led to unrest in Russia. The czar then turned his attention back to the Balkans and the issues facing the **Slavic** peoples there. This increased tensions with Austria-Hungary in the region.



Overseas Empires

The late 19th century had seen the European powers take over territories in different parts of the world. This led to disputes over the borders of overseas colonies. There was tension between Great Britain and Russia over territories in Asia. Great Britain also faced competition from France in Asia and Africa, and all of the European powers were competing to control parts of China. Germany began its own colonies later than other countries and resented its smaller share of land and resources.

Nationalism

Nationalism arose as a political force in the 19th century and eventually became a factor in the outbreak of World War I. Nationalism meant that people believed in loyalty to their own nation, its language, and its culture above all else. This was combined with a desire for people who all spoke the same language to be united in the same country.

Nationalism helped to unite Italy and Germany, but it had the opposite effect elsewhere in Europe. Russia, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire all had many different ethnic groups living within their borders. These groups began to demand their independence, which threatened to break up the empires that controlled them. The Balkans in southeastern Europe were often called the “powder keg of Europe,” since tensions between different groups of people in this region could explode into war at any moment.

The Balkan Wars



The Turkish army was defeated and forced to retreat in the Balkan War of 1912.



Many Albanians fought to free themselves from the Ottoman Empire.

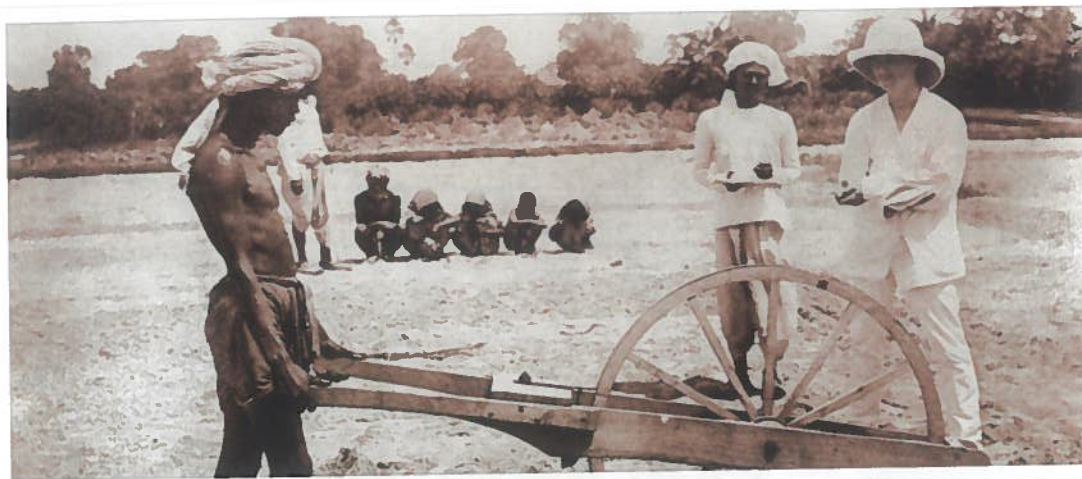
The different ethnic groups in the Balkans steadily began to gain independence from the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century. Tensions grew higher as the Ottoman Empire declined. From 1912 to 1913, Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria joined together to attack the Ottoman Empire and gain new territory. This came to be known as the Balkan Wars.

The changes in the region also caused friction between the great powers. Austria-Hungary worried that the rise of nationalism and independence in the Balkans might spill over into its own empire, which was made up of many ethnic groups. Several of these ethnic groups now had countries of their own outside the empire's borders. Bosnia-Herzegovina became part of the empire in 1908, but Serbia believed that Serbs living in Bosnia-Herzegovina should be part of Serbia. It was this fight over Bosnia-Herzegovina that led to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo.

“One day the great European War will come out of some . . . foolish thing in the Balkans.”

Otto von Bismarck
(1815-1898)





Imperialism

Britain's presence in India had a lasting effect on Indian culture.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries were marked by a period of rapid imperial expansion among the European powers. In 1914, the British Empire included Canada, Australia, India, and much of Africa. France controlled much of northwest and central Africa and had other colonies in Asia and the Pacific. Even smaller European countries, such as Italy, Spain, and Portugal, had colonies. Germany had colonies in Africa, the Pacific, and Asia. Sometimes, European powers would exchange colonial territories to settle disagreements and avoid going to war.

An example of this occurred when German complaints about French power in Morocco led to Germany receiving French territory in another part of Africa. However, there were still disputes over colonial borders and natural resources. These disputes led to tensions between the powers in Europe and in the colonies themselves. Russian advances in northern China brought it into conflict with Japan. France and Italy were rivals in North Africa. Great Britain was concerned about Russian expansion in Asia toward its territory in India. France and Great Britain had a number of disputes in Africa and Southeast Asia.

France was among the colonial powers that tried to bring aboriginal people into its armed forces.



European powers had better weapons than the local people they encountered overseas. This made it fairly easy to conquer and then control colonial territories. At first, European powers were content to control territories with their military and dominate local economies. This later changed to direct political control. Colonies were a source of pride, and many Europeans went to live overseas, displacing local populations and taking the best resources. Most Europeans firmly believed that they were superior to people living in other parts of the world. Europeans also felt they had a duty to bring the benefits of civilization to less advanced countries. This often resulted in European settlers taking control of the economies and governments of their colonies.

Many colonists felt it was their duty to change the culture of the native peoples.

Countries such as Germany and Great Britain had large navies, which required access to safe ports around the world. These ports also helped move people and goods between the colonies and Europe and around the world. As the empires expanded, railways were built to transport raw materials and manufactured goods over land. Railways helped maintain large armies overseas. Native populations were also used in European armies. Great Britain used large numbers of troops from India, and France had soldiers from northern Africa in its armed forces.

"I contend that we are the first race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race . . . If there be a God, I think that what He would like me to do is paint as much of the map of Africa British Red as possible."

Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902),
leading supporter of
British imperialism.



The Arms Race

A country's ability to make artillery shells would become a deciding factor in the outcome of the war.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Germany was the most powerful nation in Europe and had the strongest army. The warlike speeches of Kaiser Wilhelm II alarmed other European countries and helped provoke an arms race as each European power tried to build a larger army and better weaponry.

European military expenditure greatly increased between 1900 and 1914. German defence spending grew by 73 percent. By the 1910s, 45 percent of Russian government spending was on the armed forces. France and Great Britain also increased military spending, and all of the European powers except Great Britain increased the size of their armies.

"I look upon the People and the nation as handed on to me as a responsibility conferred upon me by God, and I believe, as it is written in the Bible, that it is my duty to increase this heritage for which one day I shall be called upon to give an account. Whoever tries to interfere with my task I shall crush."

Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859–1941), in 1913



In August 1914, Great Britain had almost 250,000 regular troops, though more than half of those were stationed overseas. The British could also call on support from troops throughout its empire, including soldiers from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. France had about 4 million men in the regular army and reserve units. Russia had the largest army in the world, with almost 6 million men in the standing army and reserves. Germany's army and reserves contained 4.5 million soldiers and Austria-Hungary had 3 million.

The drastic increase in the size and power of the German navy leading up to World War I created a naval arms race with Great Britain. Though Great Britain did not increase the size of its ground army before the war, the British government ordered the building of new ships to keep its navy ahead of the growing German navy. In 1906, Britain launched HMS *Dreadnought*, a new type of battleship that was faster and had greater firepower than the other ships of the time. However, Germany soon began building its own dreadnoughts. By 1914, Great Britain had 38 dreadnoughts, while Germany had 24. During the arms race, Germany also built submarines, which they called U-boats. It had amassed 38 U-boats by the time war broke out.



During the war, German U-boats would sink thousands of ships.



The HMS *Dreadnought* saw almost no combat during the entire war. The ship was sold for scrap shortly after the war ended.

Canada Prepares for War

After Canada became a country in 1867, it sought to both preserve its ties to Great Britain and establish itself as an independent nation. Though Canada was a self-governing dominion of the British Empire in 1914, it was automatically pulled into the conflict when Great Britain declared war on Germany. However, Canada could still choose how involved it would be in the war effort.



Many recruits were very young when they signed up to serve their country.

Before the war began, Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden had promised to send troops to aid Great Britain in the event of war. At the time Borden made the promise, Canada's armed forces only had about 3,000 full-time soldiers and several small militia groups. The government began opening recruitment offices across the country. Canadian men came out in large numbers to enlist. In just a few weeks, the ranks of Canada's armed forces had grown to more than 32,000 men.

At this time, Canada was in an economic recession. This left thousands of people in Canada without jobs. Many of these people were born in Great Britain but had lived in Canada for several years. British-born Canadians rushed to recruitment offices to enlist in the armed forces and do their part to help Great Britain. When Canada sent its first contingent of soldiers overseas, more than 70 percent of them had been born in Great Britain.



New recruits were trained in Valcartier, Quebec, before being sent to Europe.

By the Numbers

World War I would see the largest mobilization of weapons and troops the world had ever seen. During the war, new weapons would be developed and used, including tanks and poison gas. By the end of the conflict more than 15 million people would be dead, including many civilians.

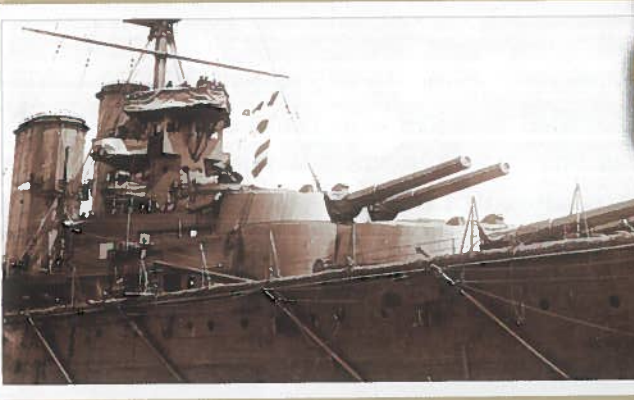
Strength of Belligerents, August 4, 1914

Resources	Central Powers	Allied Powers
population (in millions)	115.2	265.5
steel production (in millions of metric tons)	17.0	15.3
army divisions available for mobilization	146	212

British and German Naval Strength, August 1914

Type	British	German
dreadnought battleships	29	17
dreadnought battle cruisers	9	7
pre-dreadnought battleships	39	22
armoured cruisers	34	9
cruisers	64	41
destroyers	301	144
submarines	65	28

The battle to control the seas would be very important during the war.



Armed Forces by Country

- 12,000,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), Russia **5,971,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 8,905,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), Great Britain **975,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 8,410,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), France **4,017,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 5,615,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), Italy **1,251,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 4,355,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), United States **200,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 800,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), Japan **800,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 750,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), Romania **290,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 707,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), Serbia **200,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 620,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), Canada **58,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 11,000,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), Germany **4,500,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 7,800,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), Austria-Hungary **3,000,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 2,850,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), Turkey **210,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)
- 1,200,000** mobilized forces (1914–1918), Bulgaria **280,000** standing armies and reserves (1914)

The War Begins

World War I had many causes. Nationalism, the arms race, the complicated system of alliances, and disputes among the great powers, both in Europe and overseas, all contributed to the outbreak of war in 1914. Tensions had been building for many years. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo finally pushed these tensions past the breaking point.

Most people expected the war to be over quickly and very few expected a conflict lasting for four years. Few also expected the tremendous loss of life that would happen in World War I as a result of newly developed weapons. Some thought the war would be over by Christmas. Wilhelm II promised German troops that they would be home before the leaves started to fall. The Russians expected to be on the outskirts of Germany's capital, Berlin, in six weeks. No one wanted to listen to those politicians or military leaders who said that the war would last for six months or longer.

The European powers all had plans that they could put into place in the event of war. The **Schlieffen Plan** was devised by Germany to avoid a long, drawn out war on two fronts. The plan was to conquer France within five weeks, before Russia could effectively mobilize its huge army in the east. In 1914, Russian forces were organized faster than expected. In the west, British and French armies halted the German advance and a stalemate developed that would last for more than three years.

The war that began in Europe in 1914 eventually became the first global conflict. More than 16.5 million people lost their lives in World War I. A further 20 million were wounded. Some of these were soldiers, but others were civilians who were caught up in the fighting. World War I led to great changes in Europe and the Middle East. The German, Russian, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian Empires collapsed and new countries were created. Though the conflict was called the "war to end all wars," it left many issues unresolved. This led to the outbreak of World War II in 1939.



Germany suffered the most deaths of any country in the war.



By December 1914, the war had stalled, and each side dug trenches. This became known as trench warfare.



At first, the war was mobile, with each side pushing to gain territory.



The machine gun would prove to be one of the most deadly weapons of the war.



Between fighting, soldiers could sometimes relax.