

nations, including Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, joined later.

Schlieffen Plan

A German military plan, formulated in 1905, that addressed how Germany should handle the threat of a war on two fronts with Russia and France. In short, the plan stipulated that if war were expected, Germany should first attack France before embarking upon military actions against Russia. The rationale for this approach was that Russia would require several weeks in order to mobilize its troops and assemble them along the German border. Under the plan, Germany hoped to overrun France in only six weeks by attacking across France's borders with Belgium and Holland, which were less fortified than the border with Germany.

Triple Alliance

A prewar alliance among Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy, formalized in 1882. At the start of World War I, Italy dropped out of this alliance, initially maintaining a neutral position in regard to the war.

Triple Entente

A vaguely defined prewar alliance among Russia, France, and Britain, finalized in 1907. The Triple Entente was not a formal treaty and had little real substance.

War of Attrition

A war in which victory is determined purely by which side is better able to endure numerous, prolonged casualties (as opposed to a war in which victory is determined by accomplishing a specific objective, such as capturing a major city).

Zimmermann Telegram

A January 1917 telegram sent by German foreign minister Alfred Zimmermann to the German ambassador to Mexico, discussing a secret plan to bait Mexico into attacking the United States. Under the plan, Germany intended to offer Mexico financial incentives to attack the United States, as well as military support to help Mexico retake its former territories of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. British intelligence intercepted the telegram, which was eventually published in the American press, sparking an uproar that shifted American public opinion in favor of entering the war.

4. The Road to War:

Events

June 28, 1914 Archduke Franz Ferdinand assassinated in Sarajevo

July 5 Austria requests and receives Germany's "blank check," pledging unconditional support if Russia enters the war

Assessing the First Month of the War

The bold, risky steps that Germany and Russia took in the war's opening month had a profound effect on the dynamics of the rest of the war and provided early hints that the war might last much longer than expected. Even in the first days of the war, Germany's much-touted Schlieffen Plan began to unravel, as Russian troops arrived at the German borders faster than anticipated. Although Germany successfully thwarted the Russians, it was forced to divert armies from its advance to the west. Meanwhile, the stiff resistance from Belgium during that western advance indicated that the conquest of France might likewise be more difficult than expected. On the other side, the massive losses that Russia suffered in the first month offered a similar warning sign of how costly and difficult the war might turn out to be.

6. Germany's Assault on France:

Events

August 23, 1914 Battle of Mons; British and French troops begin 120-mile retreat

September 4 Allied retreat halted at the river Marne

September 5 Battle of the Marne begins

September 9 Germans begin forty-five-mile retreat back to the river Aisne

The Battle of Mons

After completing their occupation of Belgium on August 20, 1914, German forces moved quickly upon France with two armies. Although fighting between French and German forces had taken place in the region of Alsace-Lorraine in southeastern France, the first joint French-British encounters with Germany occurred near the town of Mons along the Franco-Belgian border on August 23, 1914.

As French and British armies tried to halt the advancing Germans, they found themselves under heavy fire from long-range German artillery. With the German troops still well outside the range of their own guns, the Allied Powers were quickly forced to retreat. The allied retreat continued for two full weeks, allowing the Germans to advance over 120 miles to the river Marne, on the outskirts of Paris. For the Germans, the advance was not an easy one. As they retreated, the French and British armies took every opportunity to fight back and to hold each piece of ground for as long as they could.

The Battle of the Marne

On September 4, the Allied retreat was halted. The exhausted and sleep-deprived German troops faced an Allied defense reinforced with fresh troops brought in from Paris. On September 5, a decisive battle began that lasted five days. More than a million troops fought on each side as the Allies made their stand, determined to prevent the fall of Paris.

As the Germans drove at Paris from the southeast, a gap emerged between the German First and Second armies, and British and French commanders seized the opportunity to split the German forces apart by moving into the gap. French reservists were even ferried in to fill the breach using streams of taxicabs. The Germans were never able to regroup.

Formation of the Western Front

On September 9, after four days of intense fighting, the German armies found themselves unable to maintain their position on the Marne and began to fall back. British and French forces pursued the

Importance of the War at Sea

The range and power of the warring nations' naval fleets, along with their ambition to control the world's waterways, were major reasons that World War I spread so quickly. Naval warfare had always been unpredictable (because of the role of weather and other factors), but new technologies made it even more so. Mines, torpedoes, and submarines introduced new threats that made even the greatest warships vulnerable. Compared to giant dreadnoughts, which took years to build and were manned by hundreds of men, submarines were cheap and generally used a crew of fewer than two dozen. Mines were cheaper still and, once laid, required no crew at all.

However, both Britain and Germany were still deciding how best to use these new naval forces, and both were reluctant to commit their main fleets to heavy battles. The Battle of Coronel, the Battle of the Falkland Islands, and other early sea battles quickly made it clear how naval warfare could be used to project power over long distances. In World War I, naval power was more often used to maintain control of trade routes than to capture new territory. As it turned out, great sea battles between large surface fleets were rare in the war; instead, the submarine came to own the seas, and Germany became the undisputed master at employing this new technology.

8. The War in the Air:

Birth of a New Weapon

In the summer of 1914, the airplane was less than eleven years old. Aviation was a fledgling technology that fascinated many but still generated skepticism when it came to practical applications. Most airplanes of the time were slow, flimsy contraptions with barely enough power to lift a single pilot and perhaps one passenger. While numerous countries had shown an interest in military aviation, the concept of using airplanes to wage war was still a fairly radical idea. All that changed during the course of World War I.

Reconnaissance Planes

Early in the war, military strategists realized that aircraft could be very useful for spying on enemy troop movements. Thus, the reconnaissance plane was born—a tool that all sides in the war used to varying degrees. These aircraft typically carried a pilot and an observer with a camera, who would photograph troop positions on the ground. The use of aircraft for reconnaissance grew rapidly during the first few months of the war and played an increasingly crucial role in achieving victories. Such aircraft proved vital to the British and French forces during the Battle of Mons and the Battle of the Marne, for example.

Fighter Planes

As aerial reconnaissance became more common, so did the need for ways to stop enemy observation planes. One way was by firing upon them from the ground, which was ineffective until guns could be better adapted for the purpose. The other way was to develop a means for one aircraft to attack another. The first such attempts were made using the observation aircraft themselves, as pilots and observers attempted to shoot at other planes using rifles and even pistols—a method that quickly proved hopeless. Some pilots tried throwing hand grenades, bricks, or even long ropes with grappling hooks at planes below them. The ideal solution was the machine gun, which could fire a continuous stream of bullets, significantly increasing the chance of hitting a target.

Machine guns tended to be large and heavy, however, and only a few were small and light enough to be practicable for use on an airplane. Another problem was that firing sideways seriously decreased accuracy, while firing forward meant that the airplane's propeller would be in the way. The problem was not solved until mid-1915, when a Dutch aircraft designer named Anton

leaders did have the advantage of being able to recruit forces from the many nations in its empire, the situation in Turkey and Mesopotamia left Britain facing a war on multiple fronts.

10. The War of Attrition in Europe:

Events

April 26, 1915 Italy signs secret "London Pact"

May 23 Italy declares war on Austria-Hungary

February 21, 1916 Battle of Verdun begins

July 1 Battle of the Somme begins

August 18 Romania signs treaty with Allied Powers

August 27 Romania declares war on Austria-Hungary, invades Transylvania

September 1 Bulgaria declares war on Romania

September 5 Bulgarian invasion of Romania reaches Danube just south of Bucharest

November 18 Battles of Verdun, the Somme end

June 7, 1917 Battle of Messines Ridge

July 2 Greece declares war on Central Powers

July 31 Battle of Passchendaele begins

November 6 Canadian forces capture Passchendaele

Italian Neutrality

Prior to the summer of 1914, Italy had been an ally of Germany and Austria-Hungary, as a member of the so-called Triple Alliance since 1882. When war broke out, however, Italy declared itself neutral and behaved strictly so until the spring of 1915. All this time, Italy watched the war develop and calculated how to reap the greatest benefit from the situation.

The London Pact

In April 1915, Italy approached Austria-Hungary and offered its alliance to the Central Powers in exchange for a list of a half-dozen territories under Austrian control. When Austria refused a few days later, Italy turned to the Allied Powers with an even longer list of demands. Negotiations began immediately, and a few weeks later, on April 26, a secret agreement was signed that came to be known as the London Pact. The pact granted Italy claims to territories in Austria-Hungary, as well as in Albania, Turkey, and North Africa. Thus, on May 23, 1915, Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary.

South Tyrol and the Battle of Caporetto

Italian forces promptly advanced into the mountainous border regions of South Tyrol and to the Isonzo River. They made good progress at first, but within weeks, the front bogged down in the treacherous terrain, while the Austro-Hungarian forces pulled off a very effective defense. As a result, one more entrenched front line was added to the war.

The Italians and Austrians fought battle after battle along the Isonzo River, and though losses were huge, progress by either side was negligible. The situation continued largely unchanged until the Italians were defeated in the disastrous Battle of Caporetto in October 1917 and forced to retreat

The Last Russian Offensive

After the developments of March 1917, participants on all sides watched Russia closely to see what it would do without a tsar. Although a new provisional government was officially in charge, the situation in Russia remained highly unstable, especially in the military. On July 1, Russian forces opened several new offensives along the eastern front—an action that Russian minister of war Alexander Kerensky ordered as part of an effort to boost morale in the army. On the same day, however, a huge antiwar rally clogged the streets of Petrograd.

Although the Russian advances initially showed promise against Austrian forces in Galicia, the Russian troops fled quickly when German reinforcements arrived. Sporadic fighting along the eastern front continued throughout July and August, but growing desertions, infighting, and general disorder throughout the Russian military greatly diminished its effectiveness over time.

The Bolshevik Revolution

Russia's position in the war remained in question throughout the summer and fall of 1917. Officially, the country was still at war, and fighting did continue. However, there was intense disagreement in the country over whether or not Russia should remain at war, and if not, under what conditions it should leave the conflict.

The provisional government, under the leadership of Alexander Kerensky, favored remaining in the war until Germany and Austria-Hungary were defeated. The more radical Petrograd Soviet, a loose conglomeration of labor unions with a largely Socialist/Communist leadership, felt that Russia should get out of the war as soon as possible but also recognized that pulling out immediately would likely mean a loss of territory and heavy reparations. A third group, the Bolsheviks, who had even more radical leanings than the Petrograd Soviet, wanted the country to exit the war immediately, no matter the cost.

The debate continued throughout the summer and fall until November 6, 1917 (October 24 by the Russian calendar). On that day, the Bolsheviks seized total control of the country with the help of the military. The next day, Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin issued his first decree, declaring Russia to be at peace. Though he ordered the Russian military to cease all hostilities, the country's formal exit from the war would be somewhat more complicated.

Russia's Cease-Fire

On November 26, 1917, the Bolsheviks issued a call for a halt to hostilities on all fronts and requested that all sides immediately make arrangements to sign an armistice. This idea was not well received by France and Britain, who still intended to push the Germans out of their lands. When Russia received no response, it made another call, warning that if no one responded, Russia would make a separate peace. When there still was no response, the Bolsheviks, in an effort to embarrass the Allied forces, published a series of secret treaties that Russia had made with the Allies.

After several days of negotiations, a cease-fire was declared on December 15, 1917. A formal peace treaty, however, proved more difficult to achieve. It took months of negotiations, and Russia lost an enormous amount of territory. Russia's land losses included Finland, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, the Ukraine, Belarus, Bessarabia, and the Caucasus region, along with some of the coal-mining regions of southern Russia.

The Fallout from Russia's Exit

Russia's departure from the war posed a serious danger to the Allied forces, for it effectively closed the eastern front and thus meant that the Allies would soon face some 900,000 additional German troops on the western front. In addition, the large quantities of Russian equipment that the Germans captured would also now be used on the Allies. The United States provided the only possible hope

The Central Powers' Attempts at Diplomacy

On October 3–4, 1918, the first joint German-Austrian diplomatic note was sent to Wilson, requesting an armistice and suggesting that all hostilities end without any penalties for either side. Wilson rejected the note on October 8, stating that he would not even discuss the idea of an armistice until France, Belgium, and Serbia were completely free of German and Austrian forces.

On October 12, the German government announced that it had accepted Wilson's requirement and that it would withdraw its forces from France and Belgium. Despite the announcement, however, the fighting on the western front continued without letup. On October 21, Germany announced that it would cease all submarine warfare. On October 25, Allied military commanders met at Senlis, France, to discuss formal terms for an armistice. Although they disagreed over matters of detail, all concurred that Germany must be rendered unable to make war again.

The Dissolution of Austria-Hungary

By the end of October, Germany was still actively trying to broker a favorable way out of the war, but Austria could no longer afford to wait, because the country was already falling apart. On October 27, 1918, Austria approached the Allies independently for an armistice and ordered the Austrian army to retreat the same day. On October 29, Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes proclaimed the establishment of a southern Slavic state to be called Yugoslavia.

On October 30, an Austrian delegation arrived in Italy to surrender unconditionally. That same day, Hungary formally declared its independence. On November 3, all the terms of the Austrian armistice were in place, and on the following day, Austria-Hungary formally ceased to exist.

The Collapse of the Ottoman Empire

On October 14, 1918, Sultan Mehmed VI of the Ottoman Empire, having suffered heavy territorial losses over the past year and facing a British invasion of Turkey proper, requested peace terms. An armistice was signed on October 30. One of its terms was that the Dardanelles be opened immediately to Allied ships. In the coming months, most of the territory of the Ottoman Empire would be redistributed under the trusteeship of various Allied forces and eventually reorganized into independent countries.

The Collapse of Germany

In the early days of November 1918, the situation in Germany deteriorated from unstable to outright chaotic. Prince Max von Baden proved ineffective at negotiating favorable terms for a German armistice, and unrest within the military grew, especially in the navy, where mutinies were becoming widespread. Kaiser Wilhelm II, who by this point was in hiding in the Belgian resort town of Spa, found himself under rapidly increasing pressure to abdicate, which he stubbornly refused to do.

On November 7, Max dispatched a group of German delegates by train to the secluded location of Compiègne, France, to negotiate an armistice. The delegation arrived on the morning of November 9, and negotiation promptly began. That same day, Prince Max took the step of announcing Wilhelm II's abdication of the German throne—without the now-delusional kaiser's agreement. Prince Max himself then resigned, and separate left-wing political groups respectively proclaimed the establishment of a German Soviet Republic and a German Socialist Republic, though neither would actually come to be.

The Armistice

Finally, on November 11, at 5:10 A.M., the armistice with Germany was signed. Hostilities officially ended at 11:00 A.M. that day. Thus, the end of World War I is generally reported to have