

Newsela - World War I was World's First "Total" War

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World War I began in the summer of 1914. The Allies and the Central Powers fought each other. The Allies were England, France, Belgium, Serbia and Russia. The United States and other countries joined them later. The Central Powers were Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria.

Almost 30 countries were in the war. Nine million people died.

When war started, armies hid and fought in trenches

In June 1914, a leader from Austria-Hungary was shot over land. This made Germany attack Belgium and France. Armies hid and fought in long, narrow holes in the ground. They were called trenches.

In 1914, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson did not want Americans to join the war. Many Americans came from countries that were part of the Central Powers and the Allies. Wilson told Americans not to take sides.

America tried to stay friendly with both sides. Wilson wanted them to keep buying U.S. goods. American ships went to England, an Allied country. They went to Germany, a Central Powers country, too.

Many Americans died when Lusitania was sunk

On May 7, 1915, Germany sank the Lusitania, an English ship. Americans on that boat were killed. Wilson warned Germany. He said Americans must be able to go to any country safely.

Germany stopped sinking ships for a while. But three months later, Germany sank another English ship. Two Americans died. To calm Wilson, Germany promised to stop the surprise attacks. These promises kept the United States out of the war for two years.

In January 1917, Germany started sinking many Allied ships again. At the same time, a German leader tried to make trouble between America and Mexico. Germany sent a letter to Mexico saying it should start a war with America. In return, Germany would help Mexico get back Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The English got a copy of the letter. They sent it to Wilson. It was printed in U.S. newspapers. Now Germany was America's enemy. Two months later, Germany sank three American ships.

Soldiers fought, but all Americans helped in some way

The United States went to war against Germany on April 6, 1917. Soldiers were sent to Europe to fight.

All Americans started helping. Factories made weapons. Farms grew food for the soldiers. Railroads and trucks moved everything to ships. Laws were passed that made it a crime to help the enemy.

On January 8, 1918, Wilson gave his "Fourteen Points" speech. He talked about what would happen at the end of the war. He spoke about people voting for their leaders. He wanted countries without weapons. He hoped countries could freely trade. He asked that nations meet to solve problems and stop wars.

The American troops fought in the trenches with the Allies. They pushed the Germans out of France. Peace finally came at 11 a.m. on November 11, 1918. The Americans had lost many on the battlefield and more to diseases. Most died from the Spanish flu, which spread to the United States, too.

Versailles Peace Treaty actually punished Germany

The Versailles Peace Treaty was signed in 1919 by 27 countries. The treaty, or agreement, punished Germany. The country had to pay a lot of money to the Allies. Germany's weapons were taken away.

Also, the League of Nations was started. It was a group of many countries that would try to keep peace in the world. Many in America were against the League of Nations. They worried that the United States would not be able to work with other countries the way it to. But Wilson wanted the country to join the League of Nations. He became very sick, and America never joined the League of Nations.

Wilson's ideas are still remembered today. People vote for their leaders. Many countries are more peaceful. Countries trade with each other. At the United Nations, countries meet to solve problems and stop wars.