

MAJOR EVENTS & BATTLES OF WWI

Schlieffen Plan *August 1914*

After the July Crisis and declarations of war from European powers, Germany needed to quickly defeat the French so they could turn around and fight Russia. The Schlieffen Plan was the strategy used to ensure a swift victory and avoid fighting on two fronts. It required German troops to march through neutral Belgium to get behind French lines, encircling the troops and easily defeating them. Belgium, however, had signed a treaty of neutrality with other European powers. The invasion of Belgium angered Great Britain and they declared war on Germany on August 4th. Interestingly, Germany had been anticipating war for a while and the Schlieffen Plan had been ready as a battle plan since 1906. This was their only war plan, and it did not go as expected.

The Western and Eastern Fronts *August 1914*

The Western Front was the main theater of war during World War I. Fighting on this front was characterized by trench warfare and artillery bombardments. The major players on this front were Germany, France, Britain, and later the United States.

The Eastern Front was much larger than the West and, therefore, harder to defend. Due to its size, trench warfare never really took hold along the front. The major players here were Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Romania, and the Ottoman Empire.

Battle of Tannenberg

Date: August 26-30, 1914

Front: Eastern

Description: Russian armies invaded German East Prussia. Due to ineffective communications between the Russian armies, the Germans were able to gain the upper hand. After three days, the Russian armies retreated and their general committed suicide. The battle almost completely wiped out the Russian 2nd army.

Outcome: Most complete German victory of the war, greatest German triumph of the war

Casualties: **Russia:** 78,000 + 92,000 POWs (170,000 total) **Germany:** 13,873

First Battle of Marne

Date: September 5-12, 1914

Front: Western

Description: Fought outside of Paris, this was the first time radio intercepts were used in battle when the French were alerted to German troop movements. German forces were overrun and outgunned leading the German general to lose control of his commanders. The commanders ordered a retreat, signaling the abandonment of the Schlieffen Plan. German troops retreated and dug the first trenches of the war.

Outcome: Allied victory, begins stalemate on Western Front, first trenches dug, ended Germany's hopes of a quick victory on the Western Front

Casualties: **Allied:** 263,000 (F, B) **Germany:** 256,000

Stalemate on the Western Front 1914-1918

Due to the outcome of the First Battle of Marne, Western Europe was plunged into a stalemate. During the next four years, both sides were deadlocked with neither side able to defeat or gain an advantage over the other. This was the era of trench warfare.

German Submarine Blockade Early 1915

To help gain an advantage in the war (considering the stalemate on the Western Front), Germany began submarine warfare against Britain to affect their trade. From the outset, Britain had established a blockade against Germany where even food was considered contraband. The only way Germany could be a real threat to Britain's navy was with their U-boats (submarines). All waters around Great Britain were considered a war zone, and neutral vessels sailing in these waters ran the risk of being attacked.

Sinking of the Lusitania May 7, 1915

U-boat, U-20, torpedoed the Cunard ocean liner the RMS Lusitania off the coast of Ireland. It sank within 18 minutes, killing 1,198 of the 1,959 on board. The sinking of a civilian vessel turned a lot of international sentiment against Germany. Germany would end their campaign for the time being. Outrage over the incident was felt strongly in Britain and the United States, which had 128 Americans on board that were killed. Many called on President Woodrow Wilson to declare war (most of Congress and the public were not ready for war), but he refused to overreact and the United States stayed out of the war (at least for the next few years). Wilson did send a letter to Germany stating that any future incidents would be seen as "deliberately unfriendly." This set the stage for American entrance into the war in 1917.

Battle of Verdun

Date: February 21 – December 20, 1916

Front: Western

Description: German troops turn their attention to the Western Front because Russia is crumbling from within. Germans believe that Russia will no longer be a contender in the war very soon and, therefore, turn their attention to the French. This was the longest battle of the war. To this day, they still find skeletons in Verdun from WWI.

Outcome: Technically French, but no tactical and strategic victory for either side, just a huge reduction in the size of both armies due to casualties.

Casualties: France: 550,000

Germany: 434,000

Battle of Somme

Date: July 1 – November 18, 1916

Front: Western

Description: This offensive took place during Verdun and was meant to relieve some of the pressure the French were feeling in that battle. Because of Verdun, Britain assumed the major role in the battle. In the first day alone, the British lost 58,000 troops (one-third of its total troops in the battle). It was the worst day in the history of the British army.

Outcome: Inconclusive, lowered morale, controversial battle that is argued had little effect on the war with a heavy casualty loss.

Casualties: **Allied:** 794,238(F,B) **Germany:** 537,918

Unrestricted Submarine Warfare & the Zimmermann Note *Early 1917*

Germany had stopped their U-boat attacks after the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915. With stalemate on the Western Front still an issue, Germany was looking for some way to gain an advantage. On February 1, 1917 the German government announced that it would resume unrestricted submarine warfare. Wilson angrily denounced Germany.

In early 1917, the British intercepted a message from the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, to his ambassador in Mexico. In the note, Zimmermann authorized his ambassador to propose that Germany would help Mexico “to reconquer lost territory in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona” in return for Mexican support against the United States. Britain revealed the Zimmermann note to the American government. When the note became public, anti-German feeling intensified in the United States.

Russian Revolution *February-March 1917*

Three years of war had taken its toll on Russia. Most of the Russian people had lost complete faith with their tsar, Nicholas II. He had insisted on commanding the Russian army and morale was at an all-time low. Russia had suffered more casualties than any other nation in any war. The economy was continually disrupted due to war costs. Bread riots erupted in cities. On March 15th, Nicholas abdicated the throne for his brother, Michael. Michael refused the crown and Russia and the world saw the end of tsarist autocracy in Russia.

The United States Declares War *April 1917*

In April 1917, President Wilson asked Congress to declare war. They did, however, the US needed months to prepare for war (recruit, train, supply, and move troops). But by 1918, about 2 million American soldiers joined the Allied forces on the Western Front. Their arrival brought a much needed morale boost and also helped the debt-ridden Allies with financial aid.

The Bolsheviks are Coming! *October 1917*

In October/November 1917, the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, launched a nearly bloodless coup of the provisional government set up after the destruction of tsarist regime. Lenin became the dictator of the world's first Marxist state. His government made peace with Germany (armistice), leaving Germany to focus only on the Western Front of the war. The Germans looked ahead toward a breakthrough on the Western Front, but the arrival of American troops would change that.

The Spring Offensive

Date: March 21 – July 18, 1918

Front: Western

Description: The Germans launched their final offensive knowing they had to end the war now, before the United States could fully deploy all their troops. This marked the deepest advances either side had seen on the Western Front since 1914.

Outcome: Tactical victory for Germany.

Casualties: **Allied:** 863,374 (F,B, US, I) **Germany:** 688,341

The Hundred Days Offensive

Date: August 8 – November 11, 1918

Front: Western

Description: A series of offensives launched by the Allied forces to push back the Central Powers advances at the end of the war. Over the course of about 100 days, the Allied forces took victory after victory pushing back against the Central Powers. By the end, Kaiser Wilhelm's commanders told the leader that the war could not be won.

Outcome: Decisive Allied victory. End of the German Empire and leads to armistice.

Casualties: **Allied:** 700,000 (F,B, US) **Germany:** 760,000

The End is Near *Autumn 1918*

Kaiser Wilhelm II was encouraged by his advisors to abdicate the throne as uprisings occurred all over Germany. Meanwhile, Austria-Hungary was close to collapse and nationalist groups took advantage, further splintering the empire. By autumn, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire had all asked for peace.

German Armistice *November 11, 1918*

At 11 am, on November 11, 1918, the German government sought an armistice. The Great War...the war to end all wars...was finally over.