

World War I

Causes

World War I had sweeping consequences for politics and diplomacy in the rest of the 20th century. The war resulted in the collapse and fragmentation of the Empires of Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire. The German Empire was overthrown, and Germany lost territory. As a consequence, the maps of Europe and the Middle East were re-drawn; ancient monarchies were replaced by communist or democratic republics. For the first time, an international body, the League of Nations, was created to prevent war ever occurring again. The terms of the treaties ending the war, and the instability of new nations, were important factors leading towards World War II twenty years later.



The causes of the war can be traced to the unification of Germany in 1871 and the uneasy balance of power among the European Great Powers in the opening years of the 20th century. Slow fuses to final detonation included continuing French resentment over the loss of territory to Germany in the 19th century; growing economic, military and colonial competition between Britain and Germany; and the continuing instability of Austro-Hungarian rule in the Balkans.

The spark for the war happened on 28 June 1914, as a Bosnian Serb succeeded in the assassinating the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. Austria-Hungary's demands for revenge against the Kingdom of Serbia led to the activation of a series of alliances which within weeks saw most European powers at war. Because of the global empires of many European nations, the war soon spread worldwide.

The war was fought between two major alliances. The Entente Powers initially consisted of France, the United Kingdom, Russia, and their associated empires and dependencies. Numerous other states joined these allies, most notably Japan in August 1914, Italy in April 1915, and the United States in April 1917.

Entry of the United States

The United States originally pursued a policy of isolationism, avoiding conflict while trying to broker a peace. This resulted in increased tensions with Berlin and London. When a German U-boat sank the British liner Lusitania in 1915, with 128 Americans aboard, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson vowed, "America was too proud to fight" and demanded an end to attacks on passenger ships. Germany complied. Wilson unsuccessfully tried to mediate a settlement. He repeatedly warned the U.S. would not tolerate unrestricted submarine warfare, in violation of international law and U.S. ideas of human rights. Wilson's desire to have a seat at negotiations at war's end to advance the League of Nations also played a significant role. Wilson hoped the League of Nations and disarmament would secure a lasting peace. Borrowing a thesis from H. G. Wells, he described the war as a "war to end all war". He was willing to side with France and the Britain to this end, despite their own militarism. In January 1917, after the Navy pressured the Kaiser, Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare. Britain's secret Royal Navy cryptanalytic group, Room 40, had broken the German diplomatic code. They intercepted a proposal from Berlin (the Zimmermann Telegram) to Mexico to join the war as Germany's ally against the United States, should the U.S. join. The proposal suggested, if the U.S. were to enter the war, Mexico should declare war against the United States and enlist Japan as an ally. In return, the Germans would promise Mexico support in reclaiming Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

U.S. declaration of war on Germany

After the British revealed the telegram to the United States, President Wilson, who had won reelection on his keeping the country out of the war, released the captured telegram as a way of building support for U.S. entry into the war. After submarines sank seven U.S. merchant ships and the publication of the Zimmerman telegram, Wilson called for war on Germany, which the U.S. Congress declared on 6 April 1917.

The United States was never formally a member of the Allies but became a self-styled "Associated Power". The United States had a small army, but it drafted four million men and by summer 1918 was sending 10,000 fresh soldiers to France every day. General John J. Pershing, American Expeditionary Force (AEF) commander, refused to break up U.S. units to be used as reinforcements for British Empire and French units. As an exception, he did allow African-American combat regiments such as the Harlem Hell-fighters to be used in French divisions.

Arizona's First Infantry Regiment was drafted into federal service in 1917, re-designated as the 158th Infantry Regiment, and sent overseas in July and August 1918. In France, the 158th Infantry was assigned to a division, which furnished replacement personnel to other units. The 158th Infantry was honored to act as guard of honor to President Wilson during his residence in France in 1918, and the 158th Infantry Band was chosen as Wilson's honor band. Presently, the Arizona National Guard 108th Army Band is a lineage descendant of the 158th Infantry Band. The regiment was mustered out of federal service on May 3, 1919.

End of war

During the last week of October declarations of independence were made in Budapest, Prague and Zagreb. On 3 November 1919, Austria-Hungary sent a flag of truce to ask for an Armistice. The terms, arranged by telegraph with the Allied Authorities in Paris, were communicated to the Austrian

Commander and accepted. The Armistice with Austria was signed in the Villa Giusti, near Padua, on 3 November. Austria and Hungary signed separate armistices following the overthrow of the Habsburg monarchy.

Following the outbreak of the German Revolution, a republic was proclaimed on 9 November. The Kaiser fled to the Netherlands. On 11 November an armistice with Germany was signed in a railroad carriage at Compiègne. At 11 a.m. on 11 November 1918 — the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month — a ceasefire came into effect. Opposing armies on the Western Front began to withdraw from their positions.

A formal state of war between the two sides persisted for another seven months, until signing of the Treaty of Versailles with Germany on 28 June 1919. Later treaties with Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire were signed. The latter treaty with the Ottoman Empire was followed by strife (the Turkish Independence War) and a final peace treaty was signed between the Allied Powers and the country that would shortly become the Republic of Turkey, at Lausanne on 24 July 1923.