Everything You Need to Know About World War I

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French soldiers behind a ditch awaiting an assault during the early days of World War I. Photo from the public domain

World War I was a bloody war in Europe. It took place from 1914 to 1919. About 10 million soldiers died. Another 20 million were wounded.
The start of World War I
In 1914, Franz Ferdinand was a prince in the empire of Austria-Hungary. It was a huge empire made up of the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary. The empire ruled over many different groups of people, including some Serbians. Serbia and Austria-Hungary had already been fighting over areas in Austria-Hungary that had many Serbs. Then in 1914, a Serbian man shot Franz Ferdinand.

Serbia was a neighbor and enemy of Austria-Hungary. Austria-Hungary decided to attack Serbia.

First, Austria-Hungary asked Germany to help it in war. Serbia asked for aid from Russia. Russia got help from France and Britain.

Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914. Now, much of Europe was caught in the fight.

At first, these were the major fighters:

- Allied Forces, or “the Allies”: France, the United Kingdom, Russia
- Central Powers: Germany and Austria-Hungary
Schlieffen Plan vs. Plan XVII

Germany decided to first attack France. It would go through Belgium. Britain had promised to help Belgium in any attack.

French and British armies tried to stop the German army. They pushed the Germans back.

The Germans then retreated. They dug trenches, which are large holes in the ground. The French couldn't get the Germans out. So the French also dug trenches.

Neither side could force the other to move.

Fighting in the trenches

From 1914 to 1917, soldiers on each side fought from trenches. They fired onto the enemy and tossed grenades.
The area between the trenches was called "No Man's Land." The only way to get to the other side's trench was to run across No Man's Land. Many fighters were shot here before they even got close. Thousands were killed daily.

It became clear that the side with the most men would win the war.

By 1917, the Allies had lost many young men.

**U.S. enters the war and Russia gets out**

The Allies were hoping that the United States would join their side. The Americans had many men and supplies.

The U.S. had tried to stay away from the war. It seemed so far away. It did not seem to affect them.

Then two big things happened. First, the Germans sunk a British boat. The boat had many Americans on it. More than 1,100 passengers died, including more than 120 Americans.

The second happened in early 1917. Germany sent Mexico a secret message. It asked for Mexico's help fighting the U.S. in the war. The message was found by Britain and shown to the United States.

On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany.

**The Russians leave the war**

As the United States entered World War I, Russia was getting out. A new government had kicked out the Russian emperor. Russia left the war to deal with problems in its own country.

This meant Germany could take its fighters away from Russia. It sent them to western Europe to face the American soldiers.
The end of the war
The European troops were tired from years of war. The Americans entering the war were fresh and strong. Soon the Germans were retreating. The end of the war was near.

At the end of 1918, a peace was finally agreed upon. Fighting was set to end on November 11, 1918.

For months, countries worked on a peace agreement. They tried to divide up land fairly. They wrote the Versailles Treaty to end World War I. But, Germany thought the treaty was unfair. Germany thought it had to pay too much money to other countries. Germany became poorer after the treaty. Years later, this led Germany to start World War II.

By the end of World War I, about 10 million soldiers were dead. Plus, millions of innocent civilians were killed. World War I is remembered for being one of the bloodiest wars in history.