

How did the death of a European archduke start the first world war?

In 1914 a Serbian assassin killed Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne. That provided a convenient excuse for Austria-Hungary, which wanted to take over its smaller neighbor, to declare war on Serbia. One by one, other countries in Europe, Asia, North Africa, and eventually North America joined the fight in support of one side or the other. This Great War (it wasn't called World War I until a second world war came along twenty years later) was the first war to involve countries from all over the world.

The seeds of war had been growing for decades. Fueled by the Industrial Revolution, the powerful countries of Europe had become hungrier than ever for power, territory, and money. Some had created huge colonial empires that stretched around the globe. Some had built up their military forces and made protective alliances with other countries. France, Great Britain, and Russia formed the Triple Entente (also called the Allies); Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy signed the Triple Alliance (also called the Central Powers). If one country was attacked, the others on its side pledged to defend it. Though the alliances were meant to keep peace, they were a recipe for war.

No one had imagined the incredible bloodiness and destruction made possible by new weapons like tanks, machine guns, grenades, long-range artillery, submarines, airplanes, and poison gas. Before the war was over in 1918, about 10 million soldiers had died worldwide. An additional 20 million people died of hunger, disease, and other war-related causes, and 6 million were left crippled. America's share of the casualties was 117,000 dead from combat and disease.

Why did the United States enter World War I?

When the war broke out in Europe, the United States declared that it would remain neutral. President Woodrow Wilson urged Americans not to take sides, but so many had deep roots in Europe that it was difficult not to. Most Americans sided with

the Allies, especially after German submarines sank a British passenger ship called the *Lusitania* in 1915. Almost 1,200 people went down with the ship, including 128 Americans. There was a brief clamor for war right after the incident, but most Americans supported President Wilson's neutrality.

Yet in 1917 newspapers published a telegram sent by Germany's foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, which revealed that Germany was trying to lure Mexico into the Central Powers and turn it against the United States. The Zimmermann telegram left President Wilson with little choice but to ask Congress to declare war.

AMERICAN VOICES

“THE WORLD MUST BE MADE SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY. . . . WE HAVE NO SELFISH ENDS TO SERVE. WE DESIRE NO CONQUEST, NO DOMINION. WE SEEK NO INDEMNITIES FOR OURSELVES, NO MATERIAL COMPENSATION FOR THE SACRIFICES WE SHALL FREELY MAKE. WE ARE BUT ONE OF THE CHAMPIONS OF THE RIGHTS OF MANKIND. . . .”

—PRESIDENT WILSON, *from his address to Congress, April 2, 1917, asking for a declaration of war against Germany*

Wilson's speech was met with thunderous applause. Afterward the president told an aide, “My message today was a message of death for our young men. How strange it seems to applaud that.” Then he went back to his office, put his head on his desk, and wept.

By the time the United States entered the war, the Allies were on their last legs, with France and Britain drawing on their last resources. The addition of fresh American soldiers helped turn the tide of war by the end of 1918. Germany, the last of the Central Powers to surrender to the Allies, did so at the “Eleventh Hour”—11 A.M. on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the year. Around the world November 11 became known as Armistice Day to honor veterans of World War I. In America the name was later changed to Veterans' Day to honor soldiers of all wars.

**MAJOR MILESTONES IN WORLD WAR I
1914-1918**

1914

JUNE 28 A Serbian nationalist murders Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo. Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia, its tiny southern neighbor, five days later.

AUGUST 1-23 Germany declares war on Russia and France; Britain declares war on Germany; Austria-Hungary declares war on Russia; Japan declares war on Germany.

SEPTEMBER 5 In the Battle of the Marne, the first major battle of the war, Germany tries to take Paris before the Allies can fully mobilize. The French and British repulse the German invasion. This squelches Germany's plans for a quick victory and begins three years of horrific, stalemated trench warfare in which soldiers spend months in bloody, muddy ditches, trying to hide from—but also kill—an enemy that is doing the same thing. Casualties top 250,000 on each side.



OCTOBER 29 Turkey enters the war against the Allies. Italy remains neutral.

1915

MAY 7 A German submarine sinks British passenger liner *Lusitania*, killing almost 1,200, including 128 Americans.

MAY 23 Italy joins the Allies.

1916

JUNE 16 President Wilson is nominated for a second term and wins reelection under the slogan "He Kept Us Out of War."

JULY-NOVEMBER In one of the most disastrous battles of the war, British troops attack German trenches in the Battle of

the Somme. Britain makes little or no territorial gains yet suffers the worst casualties in its history—420,000 men. The French lose 195,000; the Germans, 650,000.

1917

FEBRUARY 24 The British Secret Service intercepts the Zimmermann telegram, revealing Germany's attempt to lure Mexico into the Central Powers.

APRIL 2 President Wilson asks Congress to declare war on Germany.

1918

JUNE 25 American soldiers, untested in battle on European soil, prove their ability by capturing the forest of Belleau Wood from the Germans.

SEPTEMBER 26 American troops join Allied forces on the offensive at the Battle of Argonne Forest, the last major battle of the war. The German army falls back and begins to collapse.

NOVEMBER 11 Germany signs a peace agreement and fighting ends.

1919

JANUARY 28 The Treaty of Versailles is signed in France.

What were President Wilson's "Fourteen Points"?

They were a generous and forgiving end to the war that President Wilson hoped would ensure "peace without victory," a lasting peace in which no country was blamed, humiliated, or made to pay for a war that everyone had started. Wilson felt that a harsh peace treaty would only make the defeated Central Powers—especially Germany—angry, poor, and unstable. His Fourteen Points tried to deal with the issues that had really started the war in the first place, calling for freedom of the seas, an end to secret pacts among nations, fewer weapons, and a League of Nations to serve as a peacekeeping force to help avoid future conflicts.

Unfortunately, however, some of Wilson's most important points were pushed aside in the negotiations for the Treaty of Versailles. The rest of the Allies were angry about the massive property destruction and loss of life caused by the war, and they wanted Germany to pay for it. So they slapped Germany, Austria, and Turkey with huge *reparation* payments, or rebuilding costs. Those countries were forced to give up land in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Germany also had to accept responsibility for starting the war. The harsh punishments inflicted on Germany left the country poor and angry. Altogether, the Treaty of Versailles was a formula for disaster—specifically, another world war.








In 1919 President Wilson suffered a *stroke*, or brain damage caused by a blood clot, while touring the country. Wilson was bedridden and incapable of doing much. While he recovered, First Lady Edith Wilson made it seem as though she was just bringing papers to her husband when she was actually making presidential decisions for him. At that time Wilson could have resigned, but his doctors told the First Lady that he might lose his will to live if he did. Mrs. Wilson was both criticized and ridiculed as the “presidentress” who was running a “petticoat government.” In 1967 Congress amended the Constitution to allow the vice president to take over temporarily if the president is unable to perform his duties. George Bush became the first “acting president” for a few hours when Ronald Reagan had surgery in 1985.

Why were Americans so scared of the color red after the war?

It wasn't the color but what it stood for: Communism.

Communism is an economic system in which the government owns almost all the land, industry, and business; controls work; and gives out goods according to need instead of according to how hard a person works. Communism is usually paired with a totalitarian government, where the leader has total control. These forces, under the leadership of dictator Vladimir Lenin and his successor, Joseph Stalin, came to rule Russia during World War I. Russia then merged with several neighboring

These elements of warfare were new in WWI.

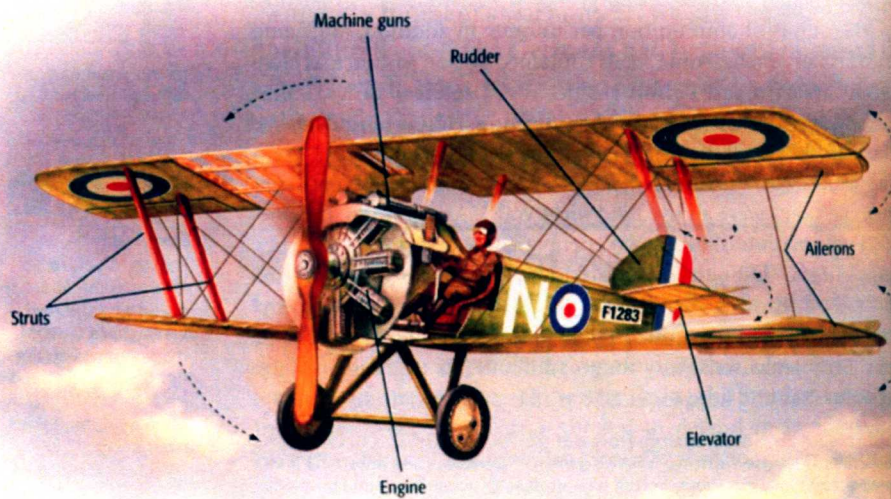
				
Trench Warfare <i>wet, cold, dirty, unhealthy, and dangerous</i>	Machine Guns <i>sent soldiers into trenches, contributed to stalemate</i>	Poison Gas <i>destroyed soldiers' lungs, killing them slowly; caused them to wear gas masks</i>	U-boats <i>caused heavy losses to Allied shipping</i>	Tanks <i>slow, but very tough and could cause heavy damage</i>

CONNECTING TO SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

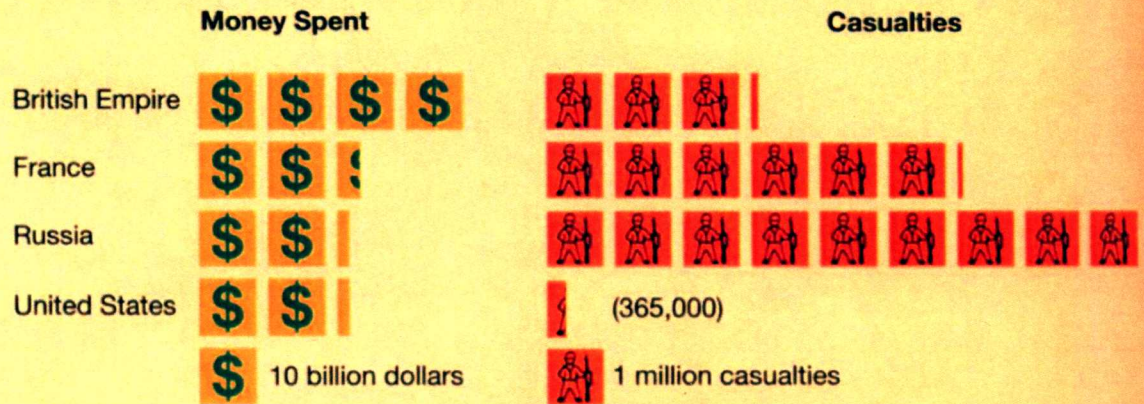
The Airplane in World War I

The Wright brothers built the first successful powered airplane in 1903. When World War I began, the Allied and Central Powers used airplanes mostly for scouting. Pilots flew high over the battlefield to take pictures of enemy troops and equipment. The pictures provided valuable information for military commanders. As the war went on, the armies of both sides installed machine

guns on fighter planes and shot down enemy scouts. Engineers improved fighter planes' speed and ability to maneuver. In addition, both the Allies and the Central Powers built large bombers and developed planes that could take off from ships. Thousands of planes were built during the war. **How were airplanes used in World War I?**



Costs of the War for the Allies



Source: V. J. Esposito, *A Concise History of World War I*

GRAPH SKILLS During World War I, there were millions of casualties, that is, people dead or wounded. In addition, the war effort cost each side billions of dollars. • Which Allied nation had the greatest number of casualties? How much did the United States spend on the war?

World War I Letters and Poems

Dear Mother and Father,

Well Mother, this is the proudest day of my life. We leave for "over there" tonight, and I am thankful that I can take a place among men who will bring freedom to the world. I do not want you to worry about me at all, for I am coming back and will be 100 percent better for having gone, for in the army one gains a knowledge of life, that is impossible to gain elsewhere.

All I want of you all is to "Keep the home fires burning" and it will not be long until we come marching home our mission accomplished...

When you speak of me in France, do not do so with a heavy heart, do it in a proud way, for it is indeed, a thing any parent should be proud of.

I feel this way about it I would rather die in war, than to have stayed out and lived a "Coward" and a "Slacker"...

This is a man's game, and let me tell you Mother when Battery "E" 312 Field Artillery (which is recognized to be the best of the Battery Of Field Artillery in the U.S. army) starts in there is going to be a long line of Huns in line at roll call in hell for breakfast... Well I will say good bye to all and "don't worry."

*Love and best wishes
Your loving son Lester*

Dear Mother,

Well there has been great activity in the line of warfare since my last letter. I never realized before that so much destruction of material things as well as human life could possibly occur in a few hours...

One afternoon... I and twelve or fifteen of the men in our company, were left in camp while the rest of the company were out delivering ammunition. Long range guns were dropping high explosive shells over us and scoring a few direct hits on the hospital. Now it is very seldom that you hear the guns that fire these long range shells but on this occasion we could hear the guns that were firing these shells. The report [explosive noise] could be heard before the shell came over... About three seconds after the report from the gun was heard then came the short shrill whine or whistle of the shell going over and then the explosion of the shell itself.

These shells were falling only about three hundred yards over and beyond us and were going directly over us. We didn't feel much danger as the shells were going over and anyway there were few dugouts in this town so we were out lying on the grass. But later those gunners became careless with their range and shells started to drop first on one side and then another...

Every time we heard the whistle of a coming shell we would duck just the same. This is a habit you very soon acquire. This whine of the coming shell can be heard two or three seconds before it hits... It is certainly a helpful feeling that comes upon one when the shells come near and you are out in the open, on an open road, or halted on a shell swept road that is filled with traffic.

I am not writing this to show you the danger because all this does not happen every day... The area of ground is so large that thousands of shells do nothing but dig holes in the ground...

Your Son,
Corp. R. T. Bainbridge

From Letters from the Battlefield: World War I. Virginia Schomp. Benchmark Books: New York, 2004.

"Mothers" by Kay Boyle

In the still of the night
Have we wept.
And our hearts, shattered and aching
Have prayed.
In the cold, cold moonlight
Have we sobbed
And dreamed of what might have been.
And our hearts have bled from stabs
Given unheeding.
We are the women who have suffered alone—
Alone and in silence.

From Old Glory: American War Poems from the Revolutionary War to the War on Terrorism. Robert Hedin (Ed.). Persea Books: New York, 2004.

February of 1915, Germany declared the waters around the British Isles to be a war zone. It announced that it would use submarines to sink enemy ships and neutral merchant ships traveling in these waters. Some of the merchant ships were American. They were carrying goods to be sold to England and other Allied nations. Some of the ships also carried American passengers.

Germany argued that it *had* to stop supplies from reaching countries it was fighting. President Wilson warned that the United States would break off diplomatic relations with Germany if German submarine attacks killed American citizens or sank American ships. In May of 1915, 128 Americans died when a German sub sank the British ship *Lusitania*. And in March of 1917, German submarines sank four American merchant ships.

★ The Russian Revolutions

While the war in Europe continued, something else was happening that would have far-reaching effects. Russia was turning to communism.

It was February 23, 1917 (by the old "Julian" calendar, used in Russia until 1918). In the capital city of Petrograd (now St. Petersburg), a long line of women had been waiting in the bitter cold all night, hoping to buy bread. Russia had plenty of food. But the country's railroad system was so inefficient that people in the large cities often went hungry. On this day, the women were told there was no bread to be bought. Desperate, they began smashing store windows in search of something to eat.

Later the same morning, workers from the city's textile and metal-working plants went on strike. They paraded through the streets, carrying banners that read, "We want bread." The next day, the number of strikers

doubled. Now their banners also read, "Down with the war." The strikers thought the war against Germany was starving Russia.

On February 25, some 250,000 people jammed the streets of Petrograd. Offices, shops, and schools were closed. No newspapers appeared. Even the streetcars stopped running.

On February 26, the strikers spent the day urging the 160,000 soldiers in the local army barracks to support them: "Join us, comrades. Put down your rifles or give them to us."

On February 27, several regiments of soldiers mutinied and joined the workers. Together, they stormed Petrograd's main prison and set free political prisoners. That night, a provisional government – a government meant to be temporary – was organized. It asked the czar, or emperor, to give up his power. Three days later, Czar Nicholas II stepped down from the throne. The February revolution was over. The Provisional

Czar Nicholas II with his five children. All were executed by the Bolshevik government in 1918.





Demonstrators (above right) being shot at with machine guns during a protest in July 1917. Vladimir Lenin (above) works in his office after taking control of Russia.

Government, headed by Alexander Kerensky, ruled Russia. But it would not hold power for long.

Enter Lenin

Eight months later, a second revolution took place in Russia. The October revolution created what was the Soviet Union, known officially as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

The October revolution was led by the Bolsheviks under Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Lenin believed that people were poor and hungry because a ruling class owned the factories and the land. Lenin wanted the government to run the economy. And he wanted the Bolsheviks to run the government. Unlike the leaders of the Provisional

Government, he was not interested in democracy.

Also, Lenin wanted to end the war against Germany. The Russian army had suffered horribly because the czar's government had managed the war badly. Soldiers at the front lacked food and boots. One out of four did not even have a gun. Soldiers had to pick up weapons from their dead comrades. As a result, by the middle of 1915, 3.8 million men had been killed. And the casualties kept mounting.

Day after day, Lenin and the Bolsheviks called for "Peace! Bread! Land!" In October, the Bolsheviks won a majority of the seats in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets. *Soviets* were



"Ad the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

THE WEATHER
Fair today and tomorrow; moderate to cool in night. Clear, with a few clouds, Sunday.

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1917.—TWENTY-TWO PAGES
REVOLUTIONISTS SEIZE PETROGRAD; KERENSKY FLEES; ITALIANS AGAIN DRIVEN BACK; LOSE 17,000 MORE MI
MINISTERS UNDER ARREST

men and soldiers' delegates told The Associated Press today that the object of taking possession of the posts and telegraphs was to thwart any effort the government might make to call the capital. The

Council Welcomes Lenin. The Petrograd Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates held a meeting at which M. Trotsky no longer insisted that the Government had no right to demand the preliminary

'RUSSIA OUT' SPARTANBURG

organizations of workers and soldiers that had been formed in the major cities. On the night of October 26, the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government and seized power. Only six lives were lost in the battle. In March 1918, they signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany, which pulled the Soviet Union out of the war. Then they turned their attention to building the world's first communist state.

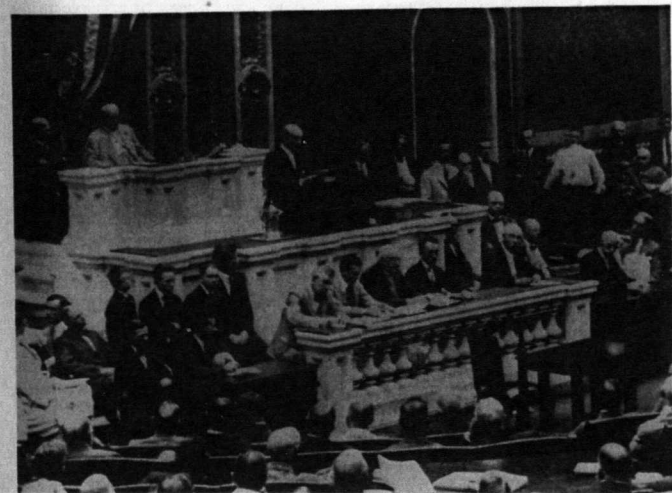
The U.S. Goes to War

Meanwhile, in April of 1917, the United States had declared war on Germany and joined the Allies. "The world must be made safe for democracy," President Wilson had said.

Could the United States help win the war for the Allies in Europe? The country was not well prepared. The U.S. Army was small. It had only about 200,000 soldiers, and most of them

"The world must be made safe for democracy."

— President Woodrow Wilson



President Wilson addresses the U.S. Congress, asking for a declaration of war.

Corneal Davis, born in 1900, answered President Wilson's call to fight for democracy.



Davis in 1919, just after leaving the service.

When I was in my last year of high school down in Mississippi, I read this great speech coming from Woodrow Wilson, who was president at the time. I was so excited by it that I clipped it out of the newspaper and sat down and remembered it by heart. He said, "It is a fearful thing for me to try to lead a great peaceful people into war. It could be one of the most terrible and disastrous of all wars. Because civilization itself could hang in the balance." But here is the thing I appreciated and got excited over. He then said, "Right is more precious than peace. We will fight for the things that we carry nearest our heart. For a universal dominion of rights, by a concert of free people, that is going to bring peace and happiness to all of this world."

That's what he said: "We will fight for the things that we carry nearest our heart." And I read that stuff and went crazy over it. Don't you think that an African American boy listening to that sort of speech would get excited? Wouldn't you, if you couldn't drink out of the same water fountain that white people drank out of? It excited me, really, that's the truth. Oh, yeah, I said, that's the thing, a universal dominion of rights, where everybody is going to have the same rights. "A concert of free people": If you read that speech, you will find those words in there. And I thought I ought to get in there and help to bring about this universal dominion of rights, this concert of free people, because it sure wasn't free down where I was.

So that was one of the reasons I wanted to go off to war, but I also wanted to make some money so I could go to college. So I went down and joined. But the question being debated at that time was whether or not they should really train black officers for the war. There was quite a controversy about whether or not blacks should really go over there and whether they would be, I guess, accepted by the French. They only had about ten thousand African Americans in the armies back in those days, but the number went up to about fifty thousand by the end of the war.

I went over to France in a convoy of black soldiers, led by a black colonel who was highly educated and had all the military knowledge that we needed. We picked up more ships in New York City, an infantry outfit they called the Buffalo Soldiers. There were also a lot of Creoles out of New Orleans who could speak French.

I think we made a great hit with the French. I guess back home they thought the French were going to object to us, but we rounded up two or three French generals, and they gave us ammunition and everything else they had. There were plenty of American marines who didn't want us to go into certain places in Paris—there was no "universal dominion of rights" so far as the marines were concerned, I can tell you. They used to say the nastiest things about us, telling the French women that we weren't even human. But the French people didn't feel that way. I don't know of anyplace where a black person couldn't go in France; if there was such a place, I didn't know of it.

With Americans fighting the Germans in France, patriotism ran high at home—and so did suspicion. Anyone with a German last name was suspected of being a spy. A wild anti-German mood spread across the country. Schools banned German classes. German words were changed: Sauerkraut was called "Liberty cabbage," dachshunds were called "Liberty pups," and hamburgers became "Liberty steak." The Post Office even refused to mail magazines and newspapers that printed articles against the war.

Leon Despres, who was born in 1908, shared the patriotic mood of the country during the First World War.



Despres with his sister Claire, 1917.

When America entered the war I was nine years old and completely caught up in the superpatriotism of the times. It seemed to me that the United States had been patient and neutral for a long time, but that they had to get involved because the Germans were cruelly killing people and sinking our ships with their torpedoes. I felt that our soldiers going over were tremendously brave.

This was a time of great bitterness towards the Germans. There was no feeling that the war was the result of long economic rivalries or anything of that sort. It was purely an evil thing, perpetrated solely by the kaiser. Since part of my family was German, we had been accustomed to speaking German around the house, but once the war began we stopped speaking it. We turned our backs on anything German—literature, music, history. A German name was a great liability during World War I. Families changed their names. There was a boy in my class whose last name was Kirshberger, and his family changed it to Churchill. It seemed downright unpatriotic to keep a German name and very patriotic to change your name. In fact, anyone who was known to talk positively about Germany was thought to be a spy.

I was totally caught up in the righteousness of the war, and I wanted to do my bit. I wrote letters to the soldiers and learned to knit scarves for them, though I never really caught on to it, so I don't think my scarves amounted to anything. I had a victory garden, and that was very exciting, though I don't think I ever grew anything more than radishes. We collected salvage for the Red Cross; I was very conscientious in collecting and tying up newspapers, collecting as much metal as I could. They would give you coupons, which you would paste on a card, and when you filled the card, then you could put the card in your window. It was an exciting time, and everything we did—knitting, gardening, rolling bandages, walking in parades—we felt was part of winning the war.

It was a wonderful time to be a young boy. I remember going to see the war games on the lakefront in Chicago. They had rifles and terribly loud explosions and flashes, and I thought it was glorious. That was my idea of war. You know, it didn't occur to me that people were getting their faces blown off, that they were losing limbs, that they were being wounded forever, that young men were being killed. I was aware that young men died in the war, but to me it was kind of a beautiful sacrifice, sad but very beautiful.



A group of boys from Cooperstown, New York, knitting warm clothes for American soldiers.

American troops march through London in August 1917. Rested, well fed, and confident, they injected new energy and enthusiasm into the war-weary Allied forces.



Most Americans wanted to “do their bit” to help in the war effort. For the most part American women helped the war cause on the home front, but many responded to the nation’s call for service in Europe.

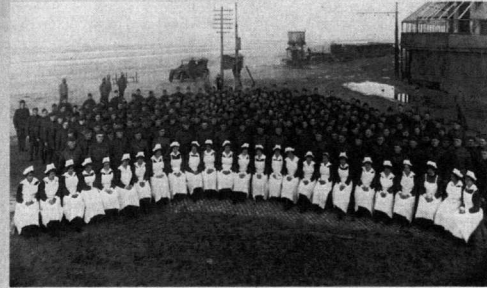
Laura Smith, who was born in 1893, described her life as a war nurse.



Smith (right) with fellow nurse Marion Jones in Paris, 1918.

The day that the war was declared, my boyfriend went to enlist, and the line was so long they couldn’t receive everyone who showed up. I was just finishing nursing school in 1917, and our whole class enlisted with the Red Cross as soon as we graduated. We were sent down to New York, where we marched in a parade wearing our nurse uniforms. Everyone waved their flags and applauded as we went by; there was so much enthusiasm for the war. I don’t think we knew what we were getting ourselves into. I wasn’t scared at all. I didn’t know enough to be scared.

I got my first dose of the real war when they put me on duty in the amputation ward of a hospital in Paris. I had to help a doctor amputate a young man’s leg. It was very difficult to look at. That’s when I learned what I was going to be up against. I think they put us there just to prepare us for what we would be doing on the front. And what made me so sad was that the boys in the ward were all so full of fun—happy and joking. I just cried all day. I told myself I was going to forget everything, and deliberately closed my mind to a lot of things that even now I can’t remember. I can still recall the sound of a leg being sawed off, though, and that’s the one thing I wanted to forget.



Smith’s nurse corps with American soldiers at Dunkirk, shortly before returning home in 1919.

They sent us out to our evacuation hospital, which was a group of tents about twenty miles from the front lines. Each tent held twenty cots, and the boys were sent down from the front in ambulances. We cleaned them up, dressed their wounds, and let them sleep, but there wasn’t too much we could do for them. They came in so dirty, with fleas and all, that some of them had to be deloused, and they were just glad to be clean and out of those trenches. Sometimes they came in so many at a time that we had them lying on the ground outside our tent because there wasn’t room for them.

We tried not to attach ourselves to anyone, but my friend and I became so fond of one of the boys that was injured. He had a hole right in his forehead and he couldn’t speak except for one word, which was *glass*. One day one of the nurses sang “Over There” to him, and he sang and sang, every word. For whatever reason, the music triggered something in his brain that allowed him, at that moment, to sing. My friend and I wanted to get him to talk again, so we kept him for two or three days, which was something we’d never done with any of the other patients. But we never got him to talk. He was so young, and he smiled all the time and didn’t seem to be in any pain, but it was so sad to think that it was his brain that was affected in that way.

The European conflict had a dramatic effect on American society. American businesses took advantage of the European need for food, raw materials, and weapons, and the increased business activity boosted America into a period of prosperity. At the same time, the flow of immigrants into the United States from Europe had dropped off, cutting back on the availability of cheap industrial labor.

These wartime labor shortages helped open many nontraditional jobs to women. Women worked on the railroads, in metalworking and munitions jobs, and as streetcar conductors. This helped change social attitudes and made people more willing to grant women the right to vote.

But perhaps the most enduring effect of the war on American life occurred in the African American community. In 1910 four out of five African Americans lived in the South, where most were tenant farmers. As America’s wartime economy took hold, thousands of these men and women made their way to the big cities in the industrial North, looking for jobs in the steel, auto, and mining industries. Black southerners, urged on by visions of freedom and jobs, hoped they would find the promised land. The population shift was so large that this phenomenon was called the Great Migration.