

# THE GREAT CRUSADE

*Many of the problems in today's world had their origins in the First World War. Understanding the causes and results of this war can help you understand what happened later.*

*Why did the nations of the world plunge into this bloody struggle? Let's examine the world of 1914.*

## SEEDS OF WAR

Andrew Carnegie, the famous industrialist who spent millions of dollars for libraries and other causes, sent a New Year's greeting to all his friends on January 1, 1914. In it he said: "We send this New Year Greeting. . . strong in the faith that International Peace is. . . to prevail." Between 1900 and 1915, more than sixty-three "world peace" societies were organized in America. One magazine, printed in July 1914, said: "[a] period of peace, industry, and world-wide friendship is dawning."

Yet, before the year was over, Europe, Asia, and Africa were involved in a major war. Soon, the United States and other American countries were drawn into the conflict. The war was called the Great War.

Two of the main reasons why peace was endangered in 1914 were colonial rivalries and entangling alliances. These are both connected to two other major reasons for the war - nationalism and militarism.

### Colonial Rivalries

As industries expanded in western Europe and the United States, these nations began to compete for colonies. But England and France had a head start. The United States had acquired most of Spain's collapsing empire in 1898. Germany and Italy, on the other hand, had fallen behind in the race for colonies. They were not even unified national states until the 1870s. By then most of the "good" colonial areas had been claimed. Only the poorer areas were left.

### Entangling Alliances

Because of the colonial competition and because of old hatreds, two "alliances" were formed in Europe. The two new nations, Germany and Italy, joined with the Austro-Hungarian Empire to form the Central powers, or the Triple Alliance. Later, Bulgaria and Turkey joined the Alliance. Britain and France joined with Russia to form the Allied powers or the Triple Entente. Each member of each alliance agreed to fight if one of its allies were attacked. It was like setting up a row of dominoes and waiting for the first one to topple.

### Nationalism and Militarism

Because of nationalistic feelings, each of the major European powers had built huge armed forces by the early twentieth century. Britain controlled the seas; Germany tried to "catch up." France had the largest army in the world; Russia also had a huge army. German leaders feared that in a war they would be squeezed between French and Russian troops.

European leaders hoped that the "balance of power" [that both groups were somewhat equal] would prevent any fighting. But as we look back at the world situation in 1914, we see how everything was set for a war. Europe was like an open keg of gunpowder waiting for a spark.

### The War Begins

The powder keg was lit by a spark in the small town of Sarajevo in Austria-Hungary. Sarajevo was in an area where Serbian people lived. They wanted to break away and form a separate nation of Serbia. The heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, and his wife, Sophie, were visiting Sarajevo. During a parade on June 28, 1914, a young man fired two shots and killed both Ferdinand and Sophie.

Then events moved swiftly. Austria blamed Serbia for the assassination. Russia announced it would support Serbia. Germany told Austria it

would honor its treaty agreement if Austria were attacked. When Austria declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914, the first domino was pushed over. Germany declared war on Russia on August 1 and on France on August 3. The Germans knew that they would have to strike first to avoid being attacked from both the east and west. Britain came to the aid of France when Germany marched through neutral Belgium to attack France. Within a few days, nearly all of Europe was at war.

1. Name the countries that formed the Triple Alliance.
2. How did nationalism and militarism help cause World War I?

## AMERICA TRIES TO STAY NEUTRAL

When the war began, most Americans were surprised and confused. But the belief that the United States should not get involved in European disputes was still strong. Look at the top cartoon on this page. What does it say about President Wilson's feelings and American views of Europe?

Wilson and other American leaders tried to keep the country out of the war. Wilson issued a proclamation that said: "The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name." Nearly all Americans agreed. And, for three years (1914-1917), the United States was able to stay out of the war.

### Freedom of the Seas

What does the bottom cartoon on this page say about the relations between the warring nations in Europe and the United States? Why does Uncle Sam look puzzled?

American goods and ships traveled to all parts of the world. Farm produce and meat were being sold to European nations. It was important for the United States to keep friendly with both sides.

Freedom of the seas was important to Americans. It meant that ships of neutral countries could trade with any warring nations as long as they did not carry *contraband* (materials which could be used in the war, like

steel and gunpowder). Textiles, food, and most building supplies were not contraband items. Both Britain and Germany violated American rights. At first, the British caused the most trouble. They blockaded the North Sea entrance to German ports. American ships were stopped. The United States threatened to stop trading with Britain.

Germany's navy was not strong enough to fight Britain. So the Germans began to use a new weapon, the submarine. Attacking while submerged, the submarines, or U-boats, could sink much larger ships. The Germans hoped to blockade Britain and force the British Navy to remove its blockade of Germany. It was submarine warfare that eventually brought the United States into the war.

### Propaganda-Both Sides Distort the News

*Propaganda* is a method used to persuade people to believe certain things. It plays on emotions and distorts the truth. Both Britain and Germany used propaganda to try to draw the United States into the war. One example is the invasion of Belgium.

The best route for Germany to use in invading France was through Belgium. Although it was a neutral country, German troops marched through Belgium anyway.

Britain used propaganda to stir up feelings of hatred against Germany. They began to report news about German "atrocities" or cruelty against the Belgians. Political cartoons, like the one on this page, were printed in American newspapers and magazines in 1914 and 1915.

After the war, an international commission found no evidence that the atrocity stories were true. They were part of a propaganda campaign to make the United States come to the aid of the Allies.

The Germans also claimed that the British and French committed atrocities. But the German propaganda was not as persuasive as Britain's. Most Americans gradually began to believe that the Germans were cruel aggressors and the cause of the war.

### The Sinking of the *Lusitania*

According to the "rules of war" neutral ships were not to be attacked by warring nations. Britain began to paint neutral markings on her ships and to fly neutral flags-especially the American flag.

On May 7, 1915, the British ship, the *Lusitania*, was sunk with nearly 1200 casualties. Although they had been warned of the dangers, 128 American tourists were among those who died. The *Lusitania* flew the American flag, hoping to confuse the Germans. Today, we know that it was carrying ammunition, in violation of agreements about passenger ships. The sinking of the *Lusitania* almost caused the United States to enter the war in 1915. But President Wilson was successful in getting a German apology and a temporary end to submarine attacks on passenger liners.

1. *What are some of the reasons why it was difficult for the United States not to "take sides" in the war?*
2. *Did events at sea contribute to U.S. involvement in the war?*

## **THE UNITED STATES ENTERS THE WAR**

In the middle of the *Lusitania* crisis, the 1916 presidential election was held. The Republicans nominated Charles Evans Hughes, former Progressive governor of New York and popular Supreme Court justice. The Democrats nominated Wilson again and appealed to the public with the slogan "He kept us out of war!" On election night Wilson went to bed thinking Hughes had won. But when the votes were all counted, Wilson was the winner.

### **The Zimmerman Note**

Wilson was finally forced into the war when the British released a note sent by the German foreign minister, Zimmerman, to the Mexican government. The note proposed that Mexico join an alliance with Germany if the United States went to war against the Central powers. Mexico's reward would be recovery of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. And, on April 2, 1917, Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war. By this time, several American ships had been sunk by German submarines. After

several days of debate, Congress declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917.

### **Over There**

It took more than a year for American troops to be trained, equipped, and sent to Europe. In the words of a popular song of the day, they promised Britain and France they would "be over," and would not "come back until it's over, over there." For the first time since the Civil War, Americans were "drafted" to serve in the armed forces. Many volunteered. By the war's end, 4,800,000 men and women were in uniform.

As the United States rushed to train and equip an army, the war in Europe began to go badly for the Allies. On the eastern front, the Russians were collapsing. Revolution swept Russia in the spring of 1917 and the Bolsheviks came to power. The Bolsheviks, or Communists, won support from the Russian people by promising to withdraw from the war.

In March 1918, Russia surrendered to Germany. This meant that thousands of German troops could now be sent to the western front in France. In April, huge German attacks almost overran the Allied lines, and Britain and France pleaded for American troops.

And the Americans did come. At Chateau-Thierry, 30,000 Americans helped stop the German drive on Paris. With terrible losses on both sides, American troops forced the Germans to withdraw from Belleau Wood. In July 1918, the Germans launched a tremendous final attack on Paris. The American First Army, led by General John "Black Jack" Pershing, stopped the drive, counterattacked, and after a month of heavy fighting, pushed the Germans back. By the end of the summer, the Allies were driving the Germans back all along the front.

On November 7, Germany asked for an armistice, or an end to the fighting. The armistice was declared on November 11, 1918.

1. *How did the Russian Revolution affect the course of the war in Europe?*
2. *Describe the military achievements of the American troops in World War I.*

## WINNING THE WAR AND LOSING THE PEACE

President Wilson sincerely believed that World War I was the "war to end all wars," and a "war to make the world safe for democracy." He believed that if peace could be achieved without punishing the Central powers or grabbing German colonial territory, that future conflicts could be prevented.

### Wilson and the Fourteen Points

In 1917, Wilson issued "Fourteen Points" that summarized the American war goals. The first five points called for freedom of the seas, cutting back the size of military forces, and an end to secret treaties. The next eight points were concerned with changing European boundaries so that each national group could live in a country controlled by its own people. The fourteenth point was the most important to Wilson. It called for a League of Nations with all the nations of the world as members. This League would "guarantee" independence and peace to all nations-large or small.

### The Treaty of Versailles

When the war ended, the United States was jubilant. Woodrow Wilson sailed to Europe to attend the Versailles Peace Conference and was hailed as a hero in every European country he visited. He was ready to help write a peace treaty to "end all wars."

But Wilson had not taken into account the fears, jealousies, and hatreds of the European leaders. He soon discovered that they were more interested in punishing Germany and gaining territory than in writing a just peace treaty. Germany was forced to give up territory and was burdened with huge debts, called reparations, to the Allies. Wilson argued that such terms would cause more hatred, but his warnings were ignored. But, Wilson got the Allies to agree to one plan of his - setting up a world peace-keeping organization, called the League of Nations. He thought it would solve many of the problems of the treaty.

### The Debate over the League

But Wilson had misjudged the feelings of many Americans. They were sick of the hatreds in Europe and wanted to return to the happier times when we were not involved in foreign wars. Republican senators like Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts felt that the League of Nations would keep America continually involved in world disputes. This senator and his followers were called *isolationists* because they felt that America should be isolated from world problems. Since the Senate must approve all treaties, their opposition could prevent the United States from joining the League of Nations.

Wilson tried to gain support for the peace treaty by speaking throughout the nation. He suffered a stroke in Colorado, and for the remainder of his term as President, he was an invalid. He could no longer fight for the treaty.

The struggle in the Senate came to a climax in March 1920. Neither Lodge nor Wilson would give in. The treaty was rejected by 9 votes. A separate peace agreement was signed with Germany.

In the presidential election of 1920, Warren Harding, the Republican, took office and promised a "return to normalcy," which meant escape from war, high taxes, and foreign commitments. The "great crusade" to make the world safe for democracy was over. The United States and its allies had won. But had they? Had anyone really won?.

*Some people said the Allies won the war but lost the peace. What do you think they meant?*

