

## Chapter 13 Section 2- War Consumes Europe

### I. The Alliance System Collapses

- a. By 1914, Europe was divided into two rival camps. One alliance, the Triple Entente, included Great Britain, France, and Russia. The other, known as the Triple Alliance, included Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Austria-Hungary's declaration of war against Serbia set off a chain reaction within the alliance system. The countries of Europe followed through on their numerous and complex pledges to support one another. As a result, nearly all the nations of Europe soon were drawn into the war.
- b. **A Chain Reaction** In response to Austria's declaration of war, Russia, Serbia's ally, began moving its army toward the Russian-Austrian border. Expecting Germany to join Austria, Russia also mobilized along the German border. Czar Nicholas II of Russia told the Kaiser that the maneuvers were just a precaution. Yet to Germany, Russia's mobilization amounted to a declaration of war. On August 1, the German government declared war on Russia. Russia looked to its ally France for help. Germany, however, did not even wait for France to react. Two days after declaring war on Russia, Germany also declared war on France. Much of Europe was now locked in battle.

### II. The Schlieffen Plan

- a. Germany quickly put its military plan into effect. The plan was named after its designer, General Alfred Graf von Schlieffen (SHLEE.fuhn). In the event of a two-front war, Schlieffen had called for attacking France and then Russia. The general had reasoned that Russia—with its lack of railroads— would have difficulty mobilizing its troops. Under the **Schlieffen Plan**, a large part of the German army would race west, to defeat France, and then return to fight Russia in the east.
- b. Speed was vital to the German plan. The French had troops all along their border with Germany. Thus, the Germans knew that breaking through would be slow work. There was another route, however: France's northern border with Belgium was unprotected. Germany demanded that its troops be allowed to pass through Belgium on their way to France. Belgium, a neutral country, refused. Germany then invaded Belgium. This brought Great Britain into the conflict. The British had close ties with Belgium, one of their nearest neighbors on the continent. Outraged over the violation of Belgian neutrality, Britain declared war on Germany on August 4.

### III. European Nations Take Sides

- a. By mid-August 1914, the battle lines were clearly drawn. On one side were Germany and Austria-Hungary. They were known as the **Central Powers**, because of their location in the heart of Europe. Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire would later join the Central Powers in the hopes of regaining lost territories.
- b. On the other side were Great Britain, France, and Russia. Together, they were known as the Allied Powers or the **Allies**. Japan joined the Allies within weeks. Italy, which at first was neutral, joined the Allies nine months into the war. Italy claimed that its membership in the Triple Alliance had been a defensive strategy. The Italians felt that the Germans had made an unprovoked attack on Belgium. Therefore, the Italians argued, they were not obligated to stand by their old ally.

### IV. A Bloody Stalemate Along the Western Front-As the summer of 1914 turned to fall, Germany's lightning-quick strike instead turned into a long and bloody stalemate, or deadlock, along the battlefields of France. This deadlocked region in northern France became known as the **Western Front**.

- a. Early on, Germany's Schlieffen Plan worked brilliantly. By the end of August, the Germans had overrun Belgium and swept into France. By September 3, German units were on the edge of Paris. A major German victory appeared just days away. The French military then came into possession of intelligence that told them the exact direction the German army was about to take. On September 5, the Allies attacked the Germans northeast of Paris, in the valley of the Marne River. Every available soldier was hurled into the struggle. When reinforcements were needed, more than 600 taxicabs rushed soldiers from Paris to the front. After four days of fighting, the German generals gave the order to retreat. By September 13, the Germans had been driven back nearly 60 miles. Although it was only

## Chapter 13 Section 2- War Consumes Europe

the first major clash on the Western Front, the First Battle of the Marne was perhaps the single most important event of the war. The defeat of the Germans left the Schlieffen Plan in ruins. A quick victory in the west no longer seemed possible. In the east, Russian forces had already invaded Germany. Germany was going to have to fight a long war on two fronts. Realizing this, the German high command sent thousands of troops from France to aid its forces in the east. Meanwhile, the war on the Western Front settled into a stalemate.

- b. By early 1915, opposing armies on the Western Front had dug miles of parallel trenches to protect themselves from enemy fire. This set the stage for what became known as **trench warfare**. In this type of warfare, soldiers fought each other from trenches. And armies traded huge losses for pitifully small land gains. Life in the trenches was pure misery. “The men slept in mud, washed in mud, ate mud, and dreamed mud,” wrote one soldier. The trenches swarmed with rats. Fresh food was nonexistent. Sleep was nearly impossible. The space between the opposing trenches won the grim name “no man’s land.” When the officers ordered an attack, their men went “over the top” of their trenches into this bombed-out landscape. There, they usually met murderous rounds of machine-gun fire. Staying put in the trench, however, did not ensure one’s safety. Artillery fire brought death right into the trenches. “Shells of all calibers kept raining on our sector,” wrote one French soldier. “The trenches disappeared; filled with earth . . . the air was unbreathable. Our blinded, wounded, crawling, and shouting soldiers kept falling on top of us and died splashing us with blood. It was living hell.”
- c. Military strategists were at a loss. New tools of war—machine guns, poison gas, armored tanks, larger artillery—had not delivered the fast-moving war they had expected. All this new technology did was kill huge numbers of people more effectively.

**V. The Battle on the Eastern Front**—Even as the war on the Western Front claimed thousands of lives, both sides were sending millions more men to fight on the **Eastern Front**. This area was a stretch of battlefield along the German and Russian border. Here, Russians and Serbs battled Germans, Austrians, and Turks. The war in the east was a more mobile war than that in the west. Here too, however, slaughter and stalemate were common.

- a. At the very beginning of the war, Russian forces had launched an attack into both Austria and Germany. At the end of August 1914, Germany counterattacked near the town of Tannenberg. During the four-day battle that followed, the Germans crushed the invading Russian army and drove it into full retreat. Germany regained East Prussia and seized numerous guns and horses from the enemy. More than 30,000 Russian soldiers were killed.
- b. Russia fared somewhat better against the Austrians. Russian forces defeated the Austrians twice in September 1914, driving them deep into Austria. Not until December of that year did the Austrian army—with German assistance—manage to turn the tide. In a 17-day battle near Limanowa, Austria defeated the Russians and drove them eastward. Two weeks later, the Austrian army pushed the Russians out of Austria-Hungary.

**VI. Russia’s War Effort Weakens**

- a. By 1916, Russia’s war effort was near collapse. Unlike the nations of western Europe, Russia had yet to become industrialized. As a result, the Russian army was continually short on food, guns, ammunition, clothes, boots, and blankets. Moreover, the Allies were unable to ship supplies to Russia’s ports. In the north, a German naval fleet blocked the Baltic Sea. In the south, the Ottomans still controlled the straits leading from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. The Russian army had only one asset—its numbers. Throughout the war the Russian army suffered enormous battlefield losses. More than 2 million Russian soldiers were killed, wounded, or captured in 1915 alone. And yet the army continually rebuilt its ranks from the country’s enormous population. For more than three years, the battered Russian army managed to tie up hundreds of thousands of German troops in the east. Thus, Germany could not hurl its full fighting force at the west.

**VII.** Germany and her allies, however, were concerned with more than just the Eastern or Western Fronts. As the war raged on, fighting spread beyond Europe to Africa, as well as to Southwest and Southeast Asia. In the years after it began, the massive European conflict indeed became a world war.