

CHAPTER  
**13**

Summary

CHAPTERS IN BRIEF *The Great War, 1914–1918*

**CHAPTER OVERVIEW** *Strong national feelings and strong armies produced competition between European nations and led to war. The system of alliances turned a local conflict into a general European war and then a world war. Horribly brutal, it changed the lives of millions and transformed Russia when it helped cause a revolution.*

## 1 Marching Toward War

**KEY IDEA** *In Europe, military buildup, nationalistic feelings, and rival alliances led to a continental war.*

In the later 1800s, many people in Europe joined groups to promote peace. They met several times between 1843 and 1907 to urge their cause. While this movement for peace was building, so were other developments. These other factors would soon plunge Europe into war.

One of those factors was nationalism—the deep feeling of attachment to one’s own nation. This force helped unify the people of a country. It also helped promote competition between countries. By 1900, six nations were rivals for power in Europe. These nations, called the Great Powers, were Germany, Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, and France. They competed economically, and they competed for neighboring land.

Imperialism was another force that helped lead to war. France and Germany, each seeking control of parts of Africa, almost came to war twice in the early 1900s. Such competition bred mistrust.

The third factor leading to war was a growing arms race. Each country in Europe—except Great Britain—built a large army. Generals in each country made complex plans to be able to mobilize their armies or rush troops to battle as quickly as possible.

Growing rivalry led the nations to make alliances with one another. Fearing that France would want revenge for its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Otto von Bismarck set out to isolate France. In 1879, he formed a Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy, and a treaty with Russia. However, when Wilhelm II became kaiser, or emperor, of Germany, he did not want to share power. He forced Bismarck out and followed his own policy. He let the agreement with Russia expire, and Russia quickly allied itself with France. This alliance meant that Germany would have to fight enemies on east and west borders if there were a war with either country. Wilhelm II then moved to make the German navy larger. Britain grew alarmed

and began to build more ships of its own. It made a Triple Entente alliance with France and Russia. The six Great Powers had now formed two camps: Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy against Britain, France, and Russia.

Meanwhile, trouble was brewing in the Balkans, in southeastern Europe. The Ottoman Empire, which controlled this area, was breaking apart. Both Austria-Hungary and Russia wanted some of this land. The kingdom of Serbia, which was in this region, wanted to bring other Slavic peoples who lived in the Balkans under its control. In 1908, Austria-Hungary seized Bosnia and Herzegovina. These lands had Slavic peoples, and the Serbs were angered. However, their Russian allies were unwilling to support them, and they backed down.

By 1914, the situation was different. Serbia had gained land in other parts of the region and felt strong. Austria worried that Serbia might interfere with its control of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Amid these tensions, a shot rang out. In June 1914, a Serbian shot and killed the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, Russia came to Serbia’s defense, and soon most of Europe was at war.

## 2 Europe Plunges into War

**KEY IDEA** *One European nation after another was drawn into a large and industrialized war that resulted in many casualties.*

The system of alliances turned the war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia into a wider war. Russia moved against Austria-Hungary. Figuring that Germany would support Austria-Hungary, Russia moved troops against Germany as well. Germany declared war on Russia. Soon after, it also declared war on France, Russia’s ally.

Germany had a plan for winning the war on two fronts. It called for a rapid push through France, a quick defeat of that nation, and a turn to face Russia in the east. To capture France quickly, Germany

moved through Belgium, which was a neutral country. Britain was outraged by this and declared war on Germany. France, Britain, and Russia were later joined by Italy, which broke from Germany and Austria-Hungary. They were called the Allies. Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire joined Germany and Austria-Hungary. They were called the Central Powers.

After the German army moved almost to Paris, French defenses strengthened and stopped them in September 1914. Both sides became bogged down in a bloody conflict. Soldiers dug deep trenches into the ground, protecting themselves with barbed wire and machine guns. Inside the trenches, they lived in mud, suffered the lack of food, and were killed or wounded by exploding bombs. Attacks were even worse. Generals still hoped to win ground with massed attacks of huge armies. But, when soldiers left the trenches to storm enemy lines, they faced powerful weapons. Machine guns, tanks, poison gas, and larger pieces of artillery killed hundreds of thousands of soldiers. This was the war in France, which was called the Western Front.

The war on the Eastern Front showed more movement at first—but it was equally destructive. Russian armies attacked both Germany and Austria-Hungary. After some early success, they were driven back in both places. One reason was that Russia did not have a fully industrial economy. It could not keep troops supplied. Still, Russia had a huge population and could send millions to war. The large Russian army provided a constant threat to Germany, preventing it from putting its full resources against the allies in the west.

### 3 A Global Conflict

**KEY IDEA** *World War I spread to several continents and used the full resources of many governments.*

The war moved into Southwest Asia when the Allies hoped to take a part of the Ottoman Empire called the Dardanelles. That would allow them to capture Constantinople—the Ottoman capital—and send supplies to Russia through the Black Sea. The attack failed with great loss of life. In another thrust at that empire, a British officer named T. E. Lawrence helped lead an Arab revolt against Ottoman rule. As a result, the Allies were able to capture several important cities in Southwest Asia.

Japan took German colonies in China and the Pacific Ocean. The Allies also captured three of the four German colonies in Africa. People in the Allies' colonies joined in the war effort. Some worked for the Allied cause. Others fought in the armies.

The British had used their strong navy to block all supplies from reaching Germany. In response, the Germans increased their submarine attacks on ships that brought food and supplies to the Allies. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson had protested this policy before, and did so again. When American ships were sunk, the American people grew angry. Then the British intercepted a secret message from Germany to Mexico. It offered to help Mexico regain land lost to the United States in the 1840s if Mexico allied itself with Germany. This and the submarine attacks turned many Americans against Germany. In April 1917, Congress declared war on Germany.

By that year, the war had had a terrible impact, killing millions and radically changing the lives of millions more—people at home as well as soldiers. This “Great War,” as it was called, was a total war. It demanded all the resources of the countries that fought it. Governments took control of factories, telling them what to produce and how much of it to make. Governments rationed food and other goods, limiting how much people could buy and hold. That way they were sure to provide needed supplies to the armies in the field. They used propaganda to generate support for the war. They also took steps to put down any dissent against the war.

With so many men in the field, women played a growing role in the economies of the countries at war. They worked in factories, offices, and shops. They built planes and tanks, grew food and made clothing. These changes had an impact on people's attitudes toward what kind of work women could do.

In 1917, the United States entered the war, and Russia left it. Suffering during the war chipped away at the Russian people's support for the czar. In March, he stepped down. The new government hoped to continue fighting the war, but the Russian armies refused. Just months later, a new revolution struck. Communists seized Russia's government. They quickly made a treaty with Germany, giving up huge amounts of land in return for peace. In March 1918, Germany tried one final attack. Once again, the German army nearly reached Paris. The soldiers were tired, and supplies were short, though.

The Allies—now with fresh American troops—drove the Germans back.

Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire surrendered. In October, a revolution toppled the emperor of Austria-Hungary. In November, Kaiser Wilhelm II was forced to step down in Germany. The new government agreed to stop fighting, and on November 11, 1918, Europe was finally at peace.

The war had made a great and terrible mark on the world. About 8.5 million soldiers had died and another 21 million had been wounded. Countless civilians had suffered as well. The economies of the warring nations had suffered serious damage, too. Farms were destroyed and factories ruined. One estimate said the war had caused \$338 billion in damage.

Along with this death and destruction, the war had an emotional cost. People felt disillusioned since all the suffering did not seem to have a purpose. The art and literature of the years after the war reflected a new sense of hopelessness in people.

## 4 A Flawed Peace

**KEY IDEA** *After winning the war, the Allies dictated a harsh peace that left many nations feeling betrayed.*

Many nations sent delegates to peace talks in Paris. The main leaders were Woodrow Wilson of the United States, Georges Clemenceau of France, and David Lloyd George of Britain. Germany and its allies and Russia were not present.

Wilson pushed for his peace plan called the Fourteen Points. He wanted to end secret treaties and alliances and give people the right to form their own nation. He also hoped to set up a world organization that could police the actions of nations and prevent future wars.

Britain and especially France had different views. They had suffered greatly in the war and wanted to punish Germany. After long debates, the leaders finally agreed on a peace settlement called the Treaty of Versailles.

The treaty called for a League of Nations—the world organization that Wilson wanted. It would include 32 nations, with the United States, Britain, France, Japan, and Italy making up the leadership. Germany and Russia were left out of the League. The treaty took away German land in Europe and took away its colonies. Limits were placed on the size of Germany's armed forces. Finally, Germany

was given complete blame for the war, which meant it would have to make payments to the Allies for the damage caused.

Germany's former colonies were given to the Allies to govern until they decided which were ready for independence. Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia were all declared independent. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—once part of Russia—were made independent nations as well. The Ottoman Empire was broken up. The Ottomans kept control only of Turkey.

The treaty never made a lasting peace. This was in part because the United States Senate never approved either the treaty or joining the League of Nations. Also, Germans bitterly resented the treaty, which placed all the blame for the war on them. Colonial peoples in Africa and Asia had hoped that they could win their independence. They were angry when the treaty did not allow for that. Japan and Italy were also upset with the treaty. They had both joined the war in hopes of winning more land and were disappointed by getting few territorial gains.

## Review

### *Analyzing Causes and Recognizing Effects*

1. What factors led to World War I?
2. Why did a revolution occur in Russia?
3. **Summarizing** What was the war like on the Western Front?
4. **Analyzing Issues** How did the war change the countries that fought it?
5. **Forming and Supporting Opinions** Discuss the weaknesses of the Treaty of Versailles.