PrepUS History

Unit 7 - Changing America

World War I Begins

The “Great War” had begun. On one side were the Allied Powers, or the Allies. They included Great Britain, France, and Russia. On the other side, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire made up the Central Powers.

Japan was a rival of Germany in Asia. It joined the Allies in August 1914. Italy refused to honor its alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Instead, it joined the Allies in 1915.

**The Western Front**

Germany had invaded Belgium in order to reach France. The Germans hoped to defeat the French quickly and then move east against Russia. The Belgians, however, held out for nearly three weeks. This gave France and Britain time to react.

When the Germans at last overcame the Belgians, they marched into France to within 15 miles of the capital, Paris. The British and French met the Germans at the Marne River. The Battle of the Marne, fought in September 1914, stopped the German advance.

The battle also made it clear that neither side could win the war quickly or easily. The war in Western Europe became a stalemate, in which neither side could make progress against the other. For the next three years, opposing forces faced off from a network of trenches, which both armies dug in along the front lines. These trenches sheltered soldiers from bullets and artillery shells. In between was a "no man's land" of shell craters and barbed wire, which neither side controlled.

To break the standstill, both sides launched major offensives in 1916. The Germans launched the Battle of Verdun in northeastern France in February. Verdun was one of the longest and bloodiest battles of the war. At its end in December 1916, more than 750,000 French and German soldiers were dead. Many more were wounded.

While the Battle of Verdun raged, the Allies launched their own offensive in July - the Battle of the Somme. This battle also produced horrifying casualties, and the Allies gained only 7 miles.

**New Weapons on the Battlefield**

New deadly weapons introduced during the war caused large numbers of injuries and deaths. Improved artillery fired larger shells at great distances. Better rifles enabled soldiers to hit targets with greater accuracy. Yet as the number of dead and wounded grew, each side fought on - and each side looked for a way to gain an advantage over the other.

The Germans first used poison gas against Allied troops in April 1915. The gas could kill or seriously injure anyone who breathed it. A British officer described the effects of a gas attack:

*"They fought with their terror, running blindly in the gas cloud, and dropping in agony."*

*~ quoted in* Avoiding Armageddon *~*

After the Germans had introduced gas to the battlefield, the Allies began to use poison gas as well. To protect themselves, soldiers began carrying gas masks.

The Allies also sought a decisive advantage on the battlefield. For example, they introduced the armored tank to battle in January 1916. Tanks were designed to break the stalemate of trench warfare. They could cross no-man's land and fire on the enemy at close range. By crushing barbed wire, tanks also made an easier route for advancing troops. After seeing the effectiveness of tanks, the Germans began making them, too.

The most dramatic new weapon was the airplane. Planes took warfare to a new dimension. Both sides used planes to watch troop movements and bomb targets.

Daring pilots waged duels in the skies called "dogfights." The first fighter planes were equipped only with machine guns fastened to the top wing. The Germans used the zeppelin, or blimp, to bomb Allied cities.

**On the Seas**

With their land armies deadlocked in Western Europe, both sides turned to the sea. Great Britain blockaded all ports under German control. Over time, this produced serious shortages. Many Germans went without food and other supplies.

Germany had an effective naval weapon of its own: the submarine. Known as U-boats - from the German word Unterseeboot - these submarines sank ships carrying supplies to Britain. U-boat attacks on ships at sea eventually brought the United States into the war.

1. Why did Germany invade Belgium before invading Russia?

***The Germans hoped to defeat the French quickly and then move east against Russia.***

2. Why was the Battle of the Marne particularly important?

***The Battle of the Marne, fought in September 1914, stopped the German advance into France and made it clear that neither side could win the war quickly or easily.***

3. Define stalemate:

***The war in Western Europe became a stalemate, in which neither side could make progress against the other.***

4. Define no man’s land:

***Opposing forces faced off from a network of trenches, which both armies dug in along the front lines. These trenches sheltered soldiers from bullets and artillery shells. In between was a "no man's land" of shell craters and barbed wire, which neither side controlled.***

5. What were the two offensives launched in 1916? Identify the names and which side was launching that offensive.

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6. What new types of weaponry were used in WWI?

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7. Who used the blockade and what were its results?

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8. What is the German name for submarine? What was another name for them? What did they do?

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