

The Road to War

For the entire history of the world, conflicts had been limited to several countries fighting at once. Even during the Napoleonic Wars, the conflict was limited to European countries fighting in Europe. Sometimes alliances would form, and even draw in several nations at once, but never before had the world seen a conflict that would encompass the entire world. In the early 20th century, that was all about to change due to several factors that would lead to a perfect storm that would tear apart the entire world.

The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution had changed a lot about everyday life. During the 1800's, people had seen a massive increase in manufactured goods. This made many of the things they would use in everyday life easier to get, and much cheaper. This demand for new manufactured goods would be the driving force of European Imperialism, leading them to conquer African nations to control their resources. This revolution would also forever change the way wars are fought.



Women became an extremely important part of the war effort in WW1, as they were needed to work in the factories while the men were at war.

In all previous wars, supplies for armies had been somewhat limited. Particularly ammunition and guns had been very limited resources for soldiers, who often had to make their ammunition around a campfire by melting metal in molds to create their own bullets. Factories made this need irrelevant. Once soldiers were given an almost unlimited supply of bullets, guns could be invented that could fire bullets faster and constantly.

Cannons had also begun to be used in war before WW1, but since their ammunition was even larger and required more resources, weapons stores for these guns was also limited. The cannon balls were heavy, and difficult to move. Railroads offered a solution by moving tons of supplies while the factories manufactured the supplies for the soldiers. The unprecedented production of war supplies would lead to unprecedented destruction, and literally millions of soldiers would die because of these advances.



Militarism

The Industrial Revolution gave nations the opportunity to build militaries larger than had ever existed before. In previous wars, militaries that had 100,000 men had been large, and 1,000,000 men was enormous. Thanks to the production of the factories, and the increased population of each country, militaries were now counted in millions rather than thousands. Nations invested millions of dollars developing new technology, new weapons, and bigger, better ships. Germans began to develop a new, secret technology called a u-boat that would allow them to travel and control trade on the seas by moving undetected by surface ships. As these countries built enormous militaries and invested millions of dollars on them, they didn't use them for anything except watching one another across their borders.

Nationalism



As countries become more defined, and men began to gain more rights and say in their governments, they began to take more pride in their nationality as well. People began to believe that their culture was superior to any other culture as well. As countries ran out of space to conquer in Africa, they started to clash with other European nations. German, French, and British newspapers started to report about these conflicts in Africa, which led their citizens to further dislike and mistrust each other. Once war actually started, stereotypes showing Germans as rampaging apes and crazy, out-of-control monkeys fueled the hatred felt by Allied citizens toward the Germans. Propaganda posters began to manipulate all citizens into sacrificing money, goods, or their sons for the good of the nation, and making them feel guilty if they settled for anything less. This dangerous peer-pressure, mixed with unfair stereotypes and outright lies, caused what is called nationalism, or intense pride in one's nation.

Alliances

As countries built up militaries and fought against one another, they also began to make deals to protect one another. These treaties, called mutual defense alliances, committed each country to helping defend the other one if it was attacked. Initially, countries made treaties with other countries that made the most sense. Since the Austrian and German people shared a common heritage, culture, and royal bloodlines, an alliance between their nations made sense. Other countries made alliances out of necessity. Feeling threatened by countries seeming to “team up” together often led others to join an alliance too, for fear of being left alone and having to fight 3 or 4 nations at once.

A Prince is Murdered

Europe was primed for war. Nations had huge armies, massive supply stockpiles, alliances that committed them to war if one nation was attacked, and hated one another. All that was left was a spark to start the war. That spark came in the form of the assassination of the Austrian crowned-prince, Franz Ferdinand. Ferdinand was set to be king of Austria once his father died, but during a parade, he and his wife were murdered by a terrorist organization from Serbia. The Serbs and Austrians had been having many issues politically, and did not like one another very much, so a terrorist organization called “The Black Hand” decided to take action. During the parade, the Black Hand shot the prince and his wife in their car, both would be taken to the hospital and would later die. Austria would later declare war on Serbia for revenge of their dead prince. Serbia would call on its ally Russia to protect them, and Austria would bring Germany into the war, forming the Central Powers. Soon, both Britain and France, and all of their colonies throughout the world would declare war on Germany and Austria, and together with Russia would form the Triple Entente. World War 1 had officially begun.



Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What was the major impact of the Industrial Revolution on the way WW1 was fought?
2. What were the reasons why countries entered into alliances with one another?
3. What were the M.A.I.N causes of WW1?

Write about it.

The propaganda posters show different ways countries appealed to people to get them to support the war effort. Design a poster that would be best designed to get people to sign up for our army today.