



British machine gunners wear masks to protect against gas attacks during the 1918 Battle of the Somme, France. The Germans fired shells filled with chlorine gas at Allied lines. This was the first time that large amounts of gas were used in battle, with devastating increases in casualties.

WWI Timeline

All copy quoted from the following sources:

[World War I Centennial | National Archives](#)

[Major Battles Of World War I \(WW1\) - WorldAtlas](#)

June 28, 1914 Archduke Assassination

Archduke Franz Ferdinand is assassinated in Sarajevo. His death is the event that sparked WWI.

July 30, 1914 Russia mobilizes

Russia mobilizes its vast army to intervene against Austria-Hungary in favor of its ally, Serbia. This move starts a chain reaction that leads to the mobilization of the rest of European Great Powers, and inevitably to the outbreak of hostilities.

August 1, 1914 Germany declares war on Russia

Germany and the Ottoman Empire sign a secret alliance treaty.

August 4, 1914

Germany invades Belgium, beginning WWI.

August 5, 1914

Montenegro declares war on Austria-Hungary.

August 5, 1914

Austria-Hungary declares war on Russia.

August 1914

The first battle of the Eastern Front, the **Battle of Tannenberg** was fought between Russian and German soldiers. By the end of September, the Germans has taken 92,000 prisoners and destroyed half of the Russian 2nd army. They then turned on General Rennenkampf's army and drove it from East Prussia. In total, the Russians lost about 250,000 men as well as military equipment. The Battle of Tannenberg diverted Germany from attacking France, which allowed the French to counter-attack at the First Battle of Marne.

August 10, 1914

Britain declares war on German, and France declares war on Austria-Hungary.

August 12, 1914

The United Kingdom declares war on Austria-Hungary.

September, 1914

First Battle of Marne marked end of German incursion into France and the **beginning of trench warfare**. With smart tactical execution and help from the British, the French saved Paris from German capture and forced a full German retreat 45-miles away to the north along the Lower Aisne River.

April 22, 1915

Gas warfare. The Germans fired shells filled with chlorine gas at Allied lines. This is the first time that large amounts of gas were used in battle, and the result was the near-collapse of the French.

May 7, 1915

Lusitania Sinks

A German submarine sinks the passenger liner, Lusitania. The ship carries 1,198 people; 128 are Americans.

June 9, 1915

Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan abruptly resigns over President Woodrow Wilson's increasingly strong demands of Germany to stop the sinking of merchant ships without warning. Bryan insisted on a policy of strict neutrality, but with the sinking of the British liner Lusitania, Wilson took a tough stand and Bryan resigned.

September 18, 1915

Germany Limits Submarines

Reacting to international outrage at the sinking of the Lusitania and other neutral passenger lines, Kaiser Wilhelm suspend unrestricted submarine warfare. This is an attempt to keep the U.S. out of the war, but sorely hampers German efforts to prevent American supplies from reaching France and Britain.

1915-1916

Battle of Gallipoli

Lasting eight months, troops from the U.K. (England, Ireland, India, New Zealand, Australia and Canada) and France joined to knock out the Turkish Ottoman Empire that sided with Germany. Allied troop losses were 58,000 with at least 300,000 wounded on both sides. The plan was based on a plan to sail a huge fleet through the 65-mile Dardanelles water strait between the Mediterranean and Istanbul, the Ottoman capital they planned to capture. The plan failed due to the Allies outdated fleet; many ships were sunk by Ottoman cannons and mines. The Ottoman victory propelled Lt. Col. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to prominence; in 1923 he became the founding leader of the Turkish Republic.

April 1916-February 1918

Lafayette Escadrille

This squadron was comprised primarily of American combat aviators who volunteered to fly with the French Air Force before the United States joined the Allied effort. Their first major battle was at Verdun and later in the Somme Offensive. They were known for their daring maneuvers and innovative, highly effective flying techniques that changed aerial warfare. The squadron's mascots were lion cubs, Whiskey and Soda. Because painting the Stars and Stripes of the American flag was prohibited by the then-neutral stance of the United States, the aviators chose an insignia that expressed their fighting spirit: a profile of a screaming Lakota Indian warrior in full headdress.

Feb 21-Dec 19, 1916

Battle of Verdun

One of the longest and most savage of WWI. Three-quarters of the French army fought in this battle. It began when the Germans, in an attempt to end the trench warfare that was preventing movement of their troops, attacked French forts and trenches with artillery fire from 1,200 guns. Fighting was intense, and while the French managed to hold or re-take their territory, the Germans also realized some gains. On July 1st, the French and British launched an offensive on Somme, thereby relieving the German pressure on troops at Verdun. In late December, the French attacked and nearly retook all territory lost since February. In all, there were about 305,000 dead or missing and about 400,000 wounded between both warring sides.

May 31, 1916

Battle of Jutland

Considered the biggest naval battle of WWI, the British and German fleets were pitted with their "dreadnought" battleships. It was a bloody bath that involved 250 ships and about 100,000 troops. The Germans lost 11 ships and 2,500 men. The British lost 14 ships and 6,000 casualties, but they controlled the North Sea and the shipping lanes that allowed a blockade that caused Germany to be defeated in 1918.

July 1 – November 18, 1916

Battle of the Somme

A massive joint operation between British and French forces against the Germans in northern France, the 141 days of fighting were largely marked as a battle of attrition with only three-square miles of territory captured. Collectively, opposing sides had more than a million wounded, captured or killed. On what was one of the bloodiest days of British military history, the British suffered 57,470 casualties on the first day of battle with 19,240 killed. It affected the British psyche. According to experts, losses incurred by the British were due to use of untrained volunteers as soldiers, and inadequate artillery. They also underestimated how well-trained, armed and battle-hardened the German forces were tucked into their trenches. As a result, German forces were able to regroup, counter-attack, and retake much of lost territory.

September 15, 1916

First Tanks

The British employ the first tanks ever used in battle, at Delville Wood. Although they were useful at breaking through barbed wire and clearing a path for the infantry, early tanks were still primitive, and they failed to be the decisive weapon their designers thought they would be.

January 1917

"Zimmerman Telegram" A secret telegram from the German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmermann to his ambassador in Mexico, is intercepted and confirmed as authentic. It proposes an alliance with the government of Mexico against the United States to take back territory lost in the Mexican-American War.

April 6, 1917

A Joint Resolution of Congress declares that a **State of War exists between the Imperial German Government and the People of the United States.**

May 18, 1917

Selective Service Act

Congress passes the Selective Service Act authorizing the draft. Although criticized for destroying democracy at home while fighting for it abroad, President Wilson claims he sees no other option and signs the bill into law.

June 25, 1917

First American troops land in France.

June 30, 1917

Greece declares war on the Central Powers.

July 11 – November 10, 1917

Third Battle of Flanders Battle of Passchendaele (Third Battle of Ypres)

The three-month battle was notorious for its 325,000 British, Australian, Canadian and Scottish casualties and 260,000 German casualties – and for the mud. The constant shelling turned the clay into soil and destroyed drainage systems. The heaviest rains in 30 years turned the loose soil into mud that clogged rifles and halted tank movements. Many men and horses drowned in the mud. After a stalemate of a month of rain, the fighting resumed. The battles of Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood and Broodseinde led the Allies to capture the ridge east of Ypres. Allied victory was declared only five miles beyond where the original offensive had begun.

November 5, 1917

The Allies agree to establish a Supreme War Council at Versailles.

November 21, 1917

Dedication of the first American cemetery in France, St. Nazaire, FR

November 20 – December, 1917

Battle of Cambrai in northern France between the British and Germans marked the first time that battle tanks were used on a mass scale and were combined with air power and heavy artillery. Both the British and Germans had casualties of about 45,000.

March 3, 1918

Germany and Russia Peace Treaty

The Germans sign a peace treaty with the new Bolshevik government of Russia. The terms give Germany huge tracts of land that had been Ukraine and Poland, and peace on the Eastern Front allowed Germany to shift soldiers to the Western Front, causing serious problems for the French, British, and Americans.

Spring 1918

German Offensives on the Western Front

German General Erich Ludendorff ordered his forces to attack the Western Front, a 400-mile+ strip of land stretching through France and Belgium and from the Swiss border to the North Sea. The Russians contributed another 500,000 troops. In March, the Germans attacked at Cambrai, and on the first day, took 21,000 British soldiers as prisoners, and gave the Germans their biggest breakthrough in three years of warfare on the Western Front and positioned them to take Paris. But, a lack of supplies and

degraded troop discipline due to hunger stalled their advance. 250,000 American troops joined their British allies at the Western Front. The Germans suffered huge losses at Marne after a French ambush and counter attack. From March to July 1918, the Germans had lost a million men.

May 28, 1918

Battle of Cantigny is the first major American offensive of the war. Though small in scale, the Americans fight bravely and soon go on to larger attacks against German positions.

June 3, 1918

Americans attack the Germans at Chateau-Thierry. This battle would morph into the large Battle of Belleau Wood.

June 6, 1918

Battle of Belleau Wood begins as the U.S. Marine Corps attacks the Germans across an open field of wheat, suffering huge casualties.

September 12, 1918

The Battle of St. Mihiel begins when 300,000 American troops under the direct command of General Pershing fling themselves into the German lines.

September 26, 1918

Meuse-Argonne Offensive lasted 47 days and involved more than a million American troops, the largest battle in U.S. history.

November 9, 1918

Kaiser Wilhelm abdicates, ending all German hope for a victory. He and his retinue quietly slip over the border into the Netherlands where he lives out the remainder of his life in relative peace and writes a self-promoting memoir defending his actions in the war.

November 11, 1918

Armistice Day – An armistice (Latin for “stand still arms”) ended fighting on the Western Front. Today, the U.S. federal holiday is known as Veteran’s Day. It is known as Armistice Day or Remembrance Day or Poppy Day in the United Kingdom, Belgium and France. The guns fell silent on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

May 27, 1919

The Paris Peace Conference set the conditions for the defeated Central Powers. It resulted in the creation of the League of Nations and five treaties that rearranged the maps of Europe and parts of Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands, and imposed financial penalties. The conference was led by the Council of Four: Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Mr. David Lloyd George, Signor Vittorio Emanuele Orlando of Italy, Prime Minister of France George Clemenceau, President of the United States Woodrow Wilson.

July 31, 1919

President Woodrow Wilson refers to “the Great War” as “**The World War**” as its official name. WWI is not commonly used until the Second World War started.