

The Great War

Eager troops marched off, sure they would be home for Christmas. But both the British and the Russians mobilized quickly. On the outskirts of Paris, the German advance was halted. The machine gun completely changed warfare. Its deadly efficiency spurred the digging of massive trench systems that would eventually stretch across much of Western Europe. The defining feature of World War I would be trench warfare.

In Eastern Europe, the Germans scored an early victory over the Russians, and then joined forces with the Austrians to push Russia back. With over two million soldiers dead, Russia was no longer a serious problem to the Central Powers. Germany turned back to the west. Both sides found that frontal assaults to break through enemy lines were fruitless as wave after wave of soldiers was mowed down.

As the war turned into a stalemate, new allies were sought. When the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers, the Allied forces suffered a disastrous defeat in an attempt to establish a front near Constantinople. The British, led by Lawrence of Arabia, encouraged Arab leaders to revolt against the Ottomans, and by 1918, the Ottoman Empire was finished. The Allies also attacked German colonial holdings in Africa and Asia.

In 1917, the United States joined the war, abandoning neutrality when the Germans resumed unrestricted submarine warfare.