

[Page Two](#)

[Page Three](#)

[Page Four](#)

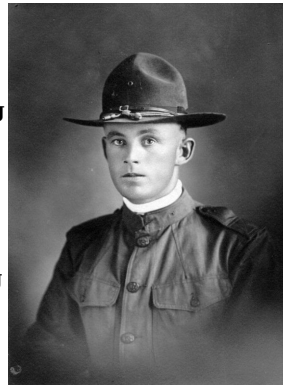
Everywhere one looks you see sadness these days. The other day on the train a woman sat counting the fingers on her hand. One, two, three, four, five she said, then began the counting again. She repeated herself over and over. Some of us riding the car couldn't help but to start smiling at her. Her husband then spoke in a soft voice. Ladies and gentlemen, please don't laugh at my wife. She has lost all five of her sons in battle defending our fine nation. Now she is gone in the head and I am taking her to the asylum.

World War One
Tragic War And Futile Peace: World War I
Edited By: Robert Guisepi
2001

World War I (The Great War) from its beginning to the Armistice including the Marne, Somme, Verdun, gas, trench war, poems and music

"What is this war? It is mud, trenches, blood, rats, lice, bombs, pain, barbed wire, decaying flesh, gas, death, rain, cats, tears, bullets, fear and a loss of faith in all that we once believed in"

Otto Dix



Embroiding most of the nations of Europe along with Russia, the United States, the Middle East and other regions, World War One pitted the Central Powers--mainly Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey--against the Allies--mainly France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and, from 1917, the United States. It ended with the defeat of the Central Powers. The war was virtually unprecedented in the slaughter, carnage and destruction it caused.

World War I was one of the great watersheds of 20th-century geopolitical history. It led to the fall of four great imperial dynasties (in Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey), resulted in the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and, in its destabilization of European society, laid the

groundwork for World War II.

By the time World War One had ended, no one knew why it was fought. Nor could what caused it really be understood. One thing seems certain. The nationalism that prevailed at the time combined with the incompetent ruler of Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm and a poorly conceived system of alliances, lay at the heart of it all.

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[Between the Wars](#)

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[Declaration of War \(American\)](#)

[Flanders Field](#)

[Gavrilo Princip](#)

[Kaiser Wilhelm II](#)

[Marne](#)

[Otto Dix](#)

[Passchendaele](#)

[Pershing](#)

[Sasson](#)

[Schlieffen Plan](#)

[Somme](#)

[Submarine](#)

[Verdun](#)

[Wilfred Owen, "Gas"](#)

[Woodrow Wilson](#)

[World War One Battles](#)

[Letters from the Front](#)

[Edward Luckart](#)

In a nation that prided itself on physical fitness, the Kaiser had a deformed left arm and this affected his entire life. He constantly tried to prove his manhood in everything he did. One need but watch the films showing the Kaiser and his companions dressed in their 18th century Calvary uniforms, riding around in automobiles to understand the state of affairs at the time. Combined with the alliance system in place in 1914, war was inevitable.

The Austrian Empire was well past its prime yet its Emperor refused to admit this and insisted on maintaining its dominance over the Balkans. Thus, when the Archduke of Austria was assassinated, Austria used it as an excuse to send troops into Serbia and declared war on the Serbs. Serbia was aligned with Russia who declared war on Austria. Germany was allied with Austria so that meant war between Germany and Russia. Russia had a treaty with France so war with Russia meant war with France and war with France who had a treaty with England, meant war with England. Europe was caught in its own trap.

The Kaiser seemed not to understand the system of alliances which had been created before his taking the thrown and he removed from power the only man in Germany who did, Bismarck. Bismarck once said that it would be some damn fool thing in the Balkans to throw Europe into war, and it did. Believing it would be a quick conflict, he was the most surprised when it turned into the horrible affair it became. Just before the shooting started, Wilhelm tried desperately to stop it all by sending telegrams to Czar Nicholas (his cousin) but it was too late. The saber rattling had gone too far and all of Europe was mobilizing

This was a war which had no purpose, was fought without good reason and by the time it was over 9 million would be dead, four empires destroyed and the stage set for World War Two.

The outbreak of war

With Serbia already much aggrandized by the two Balkan Wars (1912-13, 1913), Serbian nationalists turned their attention back to the idea of "liberating" the South Slavs of Austria-Hungary . Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijevic, head of Serbia 's military intelligence, was also, under the alias "Apis," head of the secret society Union or Death, pledged to the pursuit of this pan-Serbian ambition. Believing that the Serbs' cause would be served by the death of the Austrian archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir presumptive to the Austrian emperor Francis Joseph, and learning that the Archduke was about to visit Bosnia on a tour of military inspection, Apis plotted his assassination. Nikola Pasic, the Serbian prime minister and an enemy of Apis, heard of the plot and warned the Austrian government of it, but his message was too cautiously worded to be understood.

At 11:15 AM, on June 28, 1914, in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, Francis Ferdinand and his morganatic wife, Sophie, duchess of Hohenberg, were shot dead by a Bosnian Serb, Gavrilo Princip.

The chief of the Austro-Hungarian general staff, Franz, Graf Conrad von

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Hötzendorf, and the foreign minister, Leopold, Graf von Berchtold, saw the crime as the occasion for measures to humiliate Serbia and so to enhance Austria-Hungary's prestige in the Balkans; and Conrad had already (October 1913) been assured by William II of Germany's support if Austria-Hungary should start a preventive war against Serbia. This assurance was confirmed in the week following the assassination, before William, on July 6, set off upon his annual cruise to the North Cape, off Norway.

The Austrians decided to present an unacceptable ultimatum to Serbia and then to declare war, relying on Germany to deter Russia from intervention. Though the terms of the ultimatum were finally approved on July 19, its delivery was postponed to the evening of July 23, since by that time the French president, Raymond Poincaré, and his premier, René Viviani, who had set off on a state visit to Russia on July 15, would be on their way home and therefore unable to concert an immediate reaction with their Russian allies. When the delivery was announced, on July 24, Russia declared that Austria-Hungary must not be allowed to crush Serbia.

Serbia replied to the ultimatum on July 25, accepting most of its demands but protesting against two of them, namely, that Serbian officials (unnamed) should be dismissed at Austria-Hungary's behest and that Austro-Hungarian officials should take part, on Serbian soil, in proceedings against organizations hostile to Austria-Hungary. Though Serbia offered to submit the issue to international arbitration, Austria-Hungary promptly severed diplomatic relations and ordered partial mobilization.

Home from his cruise on July 27, William learned on July 28 how Serbia had replied to the ultimatum. At once he instructed the German Foreign Office to tell Austria-Hungary that there was no longer any justification for war and that it should content itself with a temporary occupation of Belgrade. But, meanwhile, the German Foreign Office had been giving such encouragement to Berchtold that already on July 27 he had persuaded Francis Joseph to authorize war against Serbia. War was, in fact, declared on July 28, and Austro-Hungarian artillery began to bombard Belgrade the next day. Russia then ordered partial mobilization against Austria-Hungary; and on July 30, when Austria-Hungary was riposting conventionally with an order of mobilization on its Russian frontier, Russia ordered general mobilization. Germany, which since July 28 had still been hoping, in disregard of earlier warning hints from Great Britain, that Austria-Hungary's war against Serbia could be "localized" to the Balkans, was now disillusioned insofar as Eastern Europe was concerned. On July 31 Germany sent a 24-hour ultimatum requiring Russia to halt its mobilization and an 18-hour ultimatum requiring France to promise neutrality in the event of war between Russia and Germany.

Both Russia and France predictably ignored these demands. On August 1, Germany ordered general mobilization and declared war against Russia, and France likewise ordered general mobilization. The next day, Germany sent troops into Luxembourg and demanded from Belgium free passage for German troops across its neutral territory. On August 3 Germany declared war against France.

In the night of August 3-4 German forces invaded Belgium. Thereupon, Great Britain, which had no concern with Serbia and no express obligation to fight either for Russia or for France but was expressly committed to defend Belgium, on August 4 declared war against Germany.

Austria-Hungary declared war against Russia on August 5; Serbia against Germany on August 6; Montenegro against Austria-Hungary on August 7 and against Germany on August 12; France and Great Britain against Austria-Hungary on August 10 and on August 12, respectively; Japan against Germany on August 23; Austria-Hungary against Japan on August 25 and against Belgium on August 28. Romania had renewed its secret anti-Russian alliance of 1883 with the Central Powers on Feb. 26, 1914, but now chose to remain neutral. Italy had confirmed the Triple Alliance on Dec. 7, 1912, but could now propound formal arguments for disregarding it: first, Italy was not obliged to support its allies in a war of aggression; second, the original treaty of 1882 had stated expressly that the alliance was not against England.

On Sept. 5, 1914, Russia, France, and Great Britain concluded the Treaty of London, each promising not to make a separate peace with the Central Powers. Thenceforth, they could be called the Allied, or Entente, Powers, or simply the Allies.

The outbreak of war in August 1914 was generally greeted with confidence and jubilation by the peoples of Europe, among whom it inspired a wave of patriotic feeling and celebration. Few people imagined how long or how disastrous a war between the great nations of Europe could be, and most believed that their country's side would be victorious within a matter of months. The war was welcomed either patriotically, as a defensive one imposed by national necessity, or idealistically, as one for upholding right against might, the sanctity of treaties, and international morality.

World War I

Although the terrible struggle that racked the world from 1914 to 1918 was fought mainly in Europe, it is rightly called the First World War. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries European powers had competed across

the globe; however, never had so many fighters and such enormous resources been brought together in a single conflict. Altogether twenty-seven nations became belligerents, ranging the globe from Japan to Canada and from Argentina to South Africa to Australia. The Central Powers - German, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey - mobilized 21 million men. The Allies eventually called 40 million men to arms, including 12 million Russians. The two sides were more equally matched than the numbers would indicate, however. Since the Russian divisions were often poorly equipped and ineffectively used, the Allies' apparent advantage was not so great as numbers would indicate. In addition, in the German army the Central Powers boasted superb generalship and discipline. Another advantage was that the Central Powers fought from a central position and were able to transfer troops quickly and efficiently to various fronts.

The Allies had the advantages of greater resources of finance and raw materials. Britain maintained its naval dominance and could draw on its empire for support. In addition, because Germany was effectively blockaded, the United States, even though officially neutral for most of the war, served as a major source of supplies for the Allies.

The warring nations went into battle in a confident mood. Each side was sure of its strength and felt it had prepared carefully. Each nation's propaganda machine delivered reassuring messages of guaranteed victory. All expected that the war would soon be over, concluded in a few decisive battles. It was generally believed that the war would be over by Christmas.

The First Two Years Of War

All of the general staffs had been refining their war plans for years. The Germans knew that Allied naval supremacy would cut them off from needed sources abroad. They realized that they were potentially surrounded and that they should strike a quick knockout blow to end the war. Following the plan devised by Chief of the General Staff Alfred von Schlieffen, the Germans aimed to push the Belgians aside and drive rapidly south into France. The plan then called for the German forces to wheel west of Paris, outflank the French forces, and drive them toward Alsace-Lorraine, where they would be met by another German army. Within six weeks, the French would be destroyed, caught between the western hammer and the eastern anvil. Meanwhile, a small German force would be holding the presumably slow-moving Russians on the eastern front, awaiting the arrival via the excellent German rail system of the victorious western forces. The plan nearly worked.

The Germans marched according to the plan until they got so close to Paris that they could see the top of the Eiffel Tower. They were hurled back by a bold French offensive through a gap that opened between their armies in the First Battle of the Marne, fought between September 5 and 12. With the assistance of a small British expeditionary force and Parisian taxi drivers providing transportation, the French then marched north in a race with the Germans to reach and control the vital ports along the English Channel. After much desperate fighting, the enemies established battle positions that stabilized, creating the "western front." This solid line of opposing trenches, which stretched from the Channel to near Nancy, was the scene for a grisly new war of attrition.

The other part of the German scheme that did not go according to plan was the unexpected speed with which the Russians mobilized. They penetrated deeply into East Prussia and overran the Austrian province of Galicia. However, confused leadership resulted in two catastrophic Russian defeats in East Prussia, and Germany never again faced a serious threat on its eastern frontier.

By the end of 1914 all sides knew that they were trapped in a new type of war, one of horrible consequences. Single battles claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, and the toll during the first few months of the conflict ran as high as one and one-half million dead and wounded.

In 1915 the British attempted a major campaign to force open the Dardanelles, closed by Turkey when it joined the Central Powers. This plan, attributed to Winston Churchill, then first lord of the admiralty, was designed to open up the sea route to Russia, which was badly in need of war supplies, and to take the pressure off the western front. After heroic and

costly attacks, Allied Australian and New Zealand troops, known as Anzacs, were forced to withdraw from their landing positions on the Gallipoli peninsula in European Turkey.

Another major Allied setback in 1915 was the defeat of the Russian forces in Poland. More than 1,200,000 Russians were killed and wounded, and the Germans took nearly 900,000 prisoners. Although Russia somehow remained in the war, fighting well against the Dual Monarchy, it was no longer a concern for the Germans. These defeats generated rising criticism against the tsar's government, and Russian morale deteriorated.

Serbia was the next Allied victim. In September 1915, Bulgaria, still aching from its defeat in the Second Balkan War, entered the war on the side of the Central Powers. Surrounded by enemies, Serbia was helpless, and resistance was quickly crushed. The Austrians had finally gained their goal of the previous summer, but in the context of the continental tragedy, this achievement no longer seemed significant.

The Allies' only bright spot in 1915 was Italy's entry into their ranks. Italy had remained neutral in August 1914 when it had defected from the Triple Alliance, of which it had been at best a token member. Italy joined the Allies following promises made in a secret treaty in London promising the Italians huge concessions of territory once victory had been attained.

Stalemate

The Allies' strategy on the western front was to restrict attacks in France to intermittent nibbling, thus saving manpower and at the same time concentrating on their naval blockade. Denied badly needed imports, it was assumed, the German war effort would be seriously weakened. Countering this tactic, the German high command launched a massive offensive against the strategic fortress of Verdun in the spring of 1916. This forced the Allies to throw hundreds of thousands of men into battle. The slaughter brought on by massed artillery and infantry charges between the trenches was horrible. The total loss of wounded and dead from this battle came to some 700,000 men.

To ease the pressure against Verdun, the British army began an offensive along the Somme River along the western front. The attackers' losses were catastrophic: 60 percent of the officers and 40 percent of the men became casualties the first day of the battle. Despite these awesome figures - which included the British firing 2 million shells at the first battle of the Somme - the attacks continued for three months without any substantial gains. Total German losses at the Somme were about 450,000, while the British and French lost about 600,000 men.

The only major naval engagement of the war, the Battle of Jutland (May 31-June 1, 1916), reaffirmed British control of the seas. The Germans maneuvered brilliantly and took risks. They could afford to gamble, because defeat would in no way worsen their existing position. The British fleet, on the other hand, had to act cautiously and absorbed greater losses. However the Germans retreated to their base and remained there for the rest of the war.
^3

[Footnote 3: The New Cambridge Modern History, 2nd ed., XII (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), p. 191.]

On the eastern front in 1916 the Russians continued their generally successful campaigns against the Austro-Hungarian forces. But the Germans were always there to save their allies from destruction. Romania, impressed by the Russian victories, finally joined the Allies and launched an attack on the Hungarians. After an initial success, the Romanians were soon knocked out of the war by a joint German-Bulgarian invasion.

Total War And The Home Front

At the close of 1916, after more than two years of fighting, neither side was close to victory. Instead, the war had turned into a dreary contest of stamina, a far cry from the glories promised by the propaganda of 1914. War was no longer fought between armies, it was fought between states and every component within the state participated.
^4

[Footnote 4: Quoted in F. P. Chambers, The War Behind the War, 1914-1918 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) p. 473.]

On the home front, rationing was instituted to ensure sufficient supplies for soldiers at the front. As men went off to fight, women took over their jobs in the workplace. Intensive propaganda campaigns encouraged civilians to buy more bonds and make more weapons. Nations unleashed a barrage of propaganda inciting total hatred of the enemy, belief in the righteousness of the cause, and unquestioned support for the war effort.

Civil liberties suffered, and in some cases distinguished citizens were thrown into prison for opposing the war effort. In Britain, for example, the philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell was imprisoned for a short time for his pacifist views. Governments took over control of their national economies, gambling everything on a victory in which the loser would pay all the expenses incurred in the war. The various states outlawed strikes and rigidly controlled currencies and foreign trade.

At the beginning of the war, all was flag-waving and enthusiasm. The international socialist movement, whose policy it was to promote international proletarian unity, fell victim to the rabid patriotism that infected the continent. Workers of one country were encouraged to go out and kill workers of the enemy country in the name of the state. There was much idealism, sense of sacrifice, and love of country. At first there was no understanding of the horror, death, and disaster that comes with modern, industrialized war. British poet Rupert Brooke caught the spirit in his poem "The Soldier":

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home. ^5

[Footnote 5: "The Soldier," The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke (Canada: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1915).]

But this early idealism, this romantic conception of death in battle, gradually changed to one of war weariness and total futility. This growing mood is best seen in the poetry of the young British officer and poet Wilfrid Owen, himself a victim on the western front:

What passing-bells for those who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns
No mockeries for them; no prayers nor bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires. ^6

[Footnote 6: Wilfred Owen, "Anthem for a Doomed Youth," Collected Poems (Chatto & Windus, Ltd., 1946).]

By the end of 1916 a deep yearning for peace dominated Europe. Sensing this mood, leaders on both sides put forth peace feelers. But these half-hearted overtures achieved nothing. Propaganda was used effectively to continue the war and support for it. The populations of the warring states were made to believe that their crusade was somehow divinely inspired. In reality, the Dual Monarchy and France fought for survival; Russia, German, and Italy all fought to improve their respective positions in Europe; while Britain fought for Belgium and a renewed balance of power on the continent.

Allied Fatigue And American Entry

In 1917 British and French military strength reached its highest point, only to fall precipitously. Allied commanders were hopeful that the long-planned breakthrough might be accomplished, but a large-scale French attack was beaten back, with huge losses. Some French regiments mutinied rather than return to the inferno of "no-man's land" between the trenches. The British sacrificed hundreds of thousands of men without any decisive results in several massive offensives into German machine guns. The Allies also launched unsuccessful campaigns in Italy. Aided by the Germans, the Austrians smashed the Italian front at the battle of Caporetto (1917), an event vividly described by Ernest Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*. Italian resistance finally hardened, and collapse was barely averted.

The growing effectiveness of the German submarine menace deepened Allied frustration. By 1917 Allied shipping losses had reached dangerous proportions. In three months 470 British ships fell victim to torpedoes. Britain had no more than six weeks' supply of food on hand, and the supply situation became critical for the Allies. As it turned out, the very weapon that seemed to doom their cause, the submarine, was the source of the Allies' salvation: Germany's decision to use unrestricted submarine warfare brought the United States openly into the war.

The Americans had declared their neutrality in 1914 when President Woodrow Wilson announced that the American people "must be impartial in thought as well as in action." The events of the next two years showed that this would not be the case. American sentiment was overwhelmingly with the Allies from the first. France's help to the colonies in the American

Revolution was warmly recalled. Britain and America were closely tied by language, literature, and democratic institutions. Because Britain cut off communications between Germany and the United States, British propaganda and management of the war news dominated public opinion. Another factor predisposing the United States to the Allied cause was Germany's violation of international law in the invasion of Belgium. This buttressed the widely-held view created by the kaiser's saber-rattling speeches that the Germans were undemocratic, unpredictable, and unstable.

These attitudes were reinforced by the fact that the United States had made a substantial investment in the Allied war effort. As the war progressed it became apparent that the British blockade would permit American trade to be carried on only with the Allies. Before long, American factories and farmers were producing weapons and food solely for Great Britain and France. Industry expanded and began to enjoy a prosperity dependent on continued Allied purchases. Between 1914 and 1916 American exports to the Allies quadrupled. Allied bonds totaling about \$1.5 billion were sold in the United States in 1915 and 1916. It was quite apparent to the Germans that there was little neutrality on the economic front in the United States.

The immediate cause of the U.S. entry into the war on the Allied side was the German submarine campaign. Blockaded by the British, Germany decided to retaliate by halting all shipping to the Allies. Its submarine campaign began in February 1915, and one of the first victims was the luxury liner Lusitania, torpedoed with the loss of more than a thousand lives, including one hundred Americans. This tragedy aroused public opinion in the United States. In the fall of 1916 Wilson, campaigning with the slogan "he kept us out of war," was reelected to the presidency. Discovery of German plots to involve Mexico in the war against the United States and more submarine sinkings finally drove Wilson to ask Congress to declare war against Germany on April 6, 1917.

Submarine warfare and a wide range of other causes brought the president to the point of entering the war. Once in the conflict, however, he was intent on making the American sacrifice one "to make the world safe for democracy." Wilson's lofty principles caused a great surge of idealism among Americans.

Germany's Last Drive

The United States mobilized its tremendous resources of men and materiel more rapidly than the Germans had believed possible when they made their calculated risk to increase submarine warfare. Nonetheless the Central Powers moved to try to gain a decisive victory before U.S. aid could help the Allies.

The fruitless offensives of 1917 had bled the British army white, and the French had barely recovered from their mutinies. The eastern front collapsed with the February/March revolution in Russia. Eight months later, Lenin and the Bolsheviks took power in Russia and began to negotiate for peace. By the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk early in 1918, Russia made peace with Germany, giving up 1,300,000 square miles of territory and 62 million people. ^7

[Footnote 7: D. W. Treadgold, *Twentieth Century Russia* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1959), p. 154.]

Freed from the necessity of fighting on the east, the Germans unleashed a series of major offensives against the west in the spring of 1918. During one of these attacks, a brigade of American marines symbolized the importance of U.S. support when they stopped a German charge at Chateau-Thierry. The Germans made a final effort to knock out the French in July 1918. It was called the *Friedensturm*, the peace offensive. The Germans made substantial gains, but did not score the decisive breakthrough. By this time the German momentum was slowing down, and more than a million American "doughboys" had landed in France. The final German offensive was thrown back after a slight advance.

With the aid of U.S. troops, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the supreme Allied commander, began a counterattack. The badly beaten and continually harassed German troops fell back in rapid retreat. By the end of October, German forces had been driven out of France and Allied armies were advancing into Belgium. The war of fixed positions separated by "no man's land" was over. The Allies had smashed the trench defenses and were now in open country.

Already on October 1 the German high command urged the kaiser to sue for

peace, and three days later the German chancellor sent a note to President Wilson seeking an end to hostilities. Wilson responded that peace was not possible as long as Germany was ruled by an autocratic regime. The German chancellor tried to keep the monarchy by instituting certain liberal reforms, but it was too late. Revolution broke out in many parts of Germany. The kaiser abdicated and a republic was proclaimed.

While Germany was staggering under the continual pounding of Foch's armies, the German allies were suffering even greater misfortunes. Bulgaria surrendered on September 30 and Turkey a month later. Austria stopped its fighting with Italy on November 3. Nine days later the Habsburg empire collapsed when Emperor Charles I fled Vienna to seek sanctuary in Switzerland.

At five o'clock on the morning of November 11, 1918, in a dining car in the Compiègne Forest, the German delegates signed the peace terms presented by Marshal Foch. At eleven o'clock the same day hostilities were halted. Everywhere except in Germany, the news was received with an outburst of joy. The world was once more at peace, confronted now with the task of binding up its wounds and removing the scars of combat. Delegates from the Allied nations were soon to meet in Paris, where the peace conference was to be held.

[Back to Main menu](#)

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