

## THE UNITED STATES IN WORLD WAR I

While the United States was having its troubles in Latin America, Europe was working its way toward a great war.

Germany was unhappy because other European nations had **colonies** on the continents of Africa and Asia. For years, some nations of Europe had been taking part in an arms race. Each nation was trying to have a bigger and better army and navy than its rivals. When some of the smaller nations argued, the larger nations took sides.

Soon this choosing of sides caused two **alliances** to form. The idea of an alliance was that if one member was attacked, the other members would come to its aid. Three nations formed the Triple Alliance. They were Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Great Britain, France, and Russia were members of the Triple Entente, the other alliance.

On June 28, 1914, the archduke of Austria-Hungary, Francis Ferdinand, was shot. This was the spark that set off World War I.

War was declared. Armies began to march, and fighting began. The members of the Triple Alliance eventually were called the Central Powers, with the exception of Italy. Italy joined the Triple Entente nations, which were called the **Allies**.

German armies invaded France after defeating Belgium. Great Britain rushed in to help France. Trenches, or ditches, were dug across France, and Europe was at war.

What should the United States do? President Woodrow Wilson and many other Americans said it should not take sides, that it should stay neutral. From 1914 through 1916, the United States did stay **neutral**. It traded with both the Central Powers and the Allies. Slowly the United States did more and more trading with the Allies.

Americans were friendlier toward the Allies than toward the Central Powers. It was also easier to trade with the Allies. The Allies had set up a great naval blockade around the ports used by Germany and its friends.

In order to hurt the Allies, the Germans started using **submarine** warfare. German submarines, or U-boats, started looking for Allied ships to sink. Soon the Germans used unrestricted submarine warfare. Ships of any nation were sunk, whether they were supply ships or passenger ships.

Then, on May 7, 1915, the British passenger ship *Lusitania* was sailing from New York toward England. The German sub *U-20* torpedoed the great ship off the Irish coast. In a few minutes, the *Lusitania* was sunk. Out of more than 1,000 who drowned, 114 were Americans. Angry Americans were ready to fight!



Destruction in Belgium, 1918

**colony**—a settlement set up and ruled by people from another country

**alliance**—a formal agreement between two or more nations to help one another in times of war

**allies**—people of countries that join together for a special purpose, such as helping another in times of war

**neutral**—not supporting or favoring either side in a war, conflict, or contest

**submarine**—a boat that operates underwater

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## EDDIE RICKENBACKER (1890–1973)

Eddie Rickenbacker represented Americans who tried to make the world safe and make America strong. He became an example of how a poor person could make good in the United States.

Rickenbacker was born October 8, 1890, in Columbus, Ohio. Eddie was one of the oldest children in a family of eight. When his father died, Eddie felt his responsibility greatly.

Eddie dropped out of junior high school. He got a job working twelve hours a day, six days a week. He earned only \$3.50 per week. Eddie realized he needed an education. He took a correspondence course in mechanical engineering. Then he got a job with the Columbus Buggy Company. There he began experimenting with automobiles.

In 1907, Eddie got into auto racing. He continued to race until 1916 and was ranked third among American speed champions. In 1916, he was in England organizing a racing team when the United States entered World War I.

Rickenbacker enlisted in the Army in May 1917. He wanted to fly fighter planes, but the Army said he was too old. Finally, the Army agreed that he could learn to fly. Eddie loved it and became a good pilot. Eventually, he was assigned to the Ninety-fourth Aero Pursuit Squadron. This group became known as the "Hat in the Ring" Squad because of their insignia. They were the first American aero



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unit to fight on the western front.

Rickenbacker led Flight One against the "Flying Circus" of the German ace, von Richthofen, in 1918. By the time the war ended, both the Hat in the Ring and Rickenbacker were famous. He had become an ace during the war. His squadron did more than any other squadron, with sixty-nine enemy kills to its credit. Rickenbacker was awarded many medals and received a hero's welcome when he returned to the United States.

Rickenbacker returned to the automobile business. He put his money into the Indianapolis Speedway, buying controlling interest in 1927. He kept the controlling interest in the speedway until 1947.

In 1929, Rickenbacker joined the American Airways, Inc. He continued with airplanes until he finally joined Eastern Airlines, Inc. in 1935. He became president and director of Eastern.

**EDDIE RICKENBACKER, CONTINUED**

When the United States entered World War II, the secretary of war, Henry Stimson, asked Rickenbacker to help. Eddie had technical knowledge that Stimson needed.

Secretary of War Stimson sent Rickenbacker to inspect American air bases abroad. On his second mission, the plane in which he was flying missed its landing spot in the Pacific. It was forced down 600 miles north of Samoa in the Pacific Ocean. For twenty-three days, Rickenbacker and six other men floated in the Pacific Ocean. The men caught fish when they could and drank rainwater. When the raft was finally found, the men were in good spirits but had lost a great deal of weight. Rickenbacker

was flown, strapped to the wing of a small plane, to a hospital. He rested two weeks and then continued his mission.

Before the end of the war, Rickenbacker proposed a plan for the expansion of the civil airlines. If they grew, there would be a place for the pilots who had been trained to fly during the war. He also wanted the first-class mail carried by planes. With Rickenbacker at its head, Eastern Airlines made money when other airlines were losing money.

Rickenbacker died in Switzerland in 1973 at the age of eighty-two. He was a success at just about everything he did.

In spite of this, President Wilson felt the United States should still stay out of the war. But, in early 1917, German submarines sank several American ships without warning. At about this time, the British got hold of a top-secret note from the Germans to Mexico. A top German official named Alfred Zimmermann had sent the message to another German official in Mexico. The note said that if the United States went to war, Mexico should help Germany by invading the American Southwest. In return, Mexico could get back Texas and the Southwest. The British gave the note to the Americans. The Americans were angry. Other American ships were sunk, so finally, on April 6, 1917, the United States declared war.



U.S. Army recruiting poster

**CRITICAL THINKING**

It was to Germany's advantage for the United States to stay out of the war. Why did German submarines sink American ships, which they knew would anger Americans?

American soldiers arrived in France just when the Allies were in the most trouble. Russia had a great revolution, which changed its government. The Russians had signed a peace treaty with Germany and stopped fighting. This had taken them out of the war on the side of the Allies. German troops left Russia and were moving toward the western front in France. Only the fresh American troops kept the Allies from being overrun and pushed back. The German drive slowed, then stopped. By July 1918, the Germans were falling back in retreat.

On November 11, 1918, an **armistice**, or cease-fire, was signed. The war was over. Today, this date is celebrated every year in the United States as Veterans Day.

**armistice**—an informal agreement to stop fighting a war

## **REVIEW: WORLD WAR I**

The answer to each question is written in mixed-up order after the question. Unscramble the letters to spell each answer correctly. Write the correct answer on the line or lines provided.

- To what Latin American nation were United States Marines sent in 1912?  
**C A R A N I A U G** \_\_\_\_\_
- For what Mexican revolutionary leader did General Pershing hunt in 1916 and 1917?  
**C A N H O P A L L I V** \_\_\_\_\_
- What was the Triple Entente called after World War I began?  
**I A L E L S** \_\_\_\_\_
- What was the name of the Central Powers before World War I started?  
**P I T L E R L A N C E I A L**  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Whose death started World War I?  
**F A R I C N S F A N D D E R N I** \_\_\_\_\_
- What word means “not taking sides”?  
**L E N T R A U** \_\_\_\_\_
- What great passenger ship did the German *U-20* sink?  
**T A N I L U S A I** \_\_\_\_\_
- Who was the German who tried to get Mexico to go to war against the United States?  
**F A L D E R M M M A Z I E R N N**  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What was a U-boat?  
**M U S A B E I R N** \_\_\_\_\_
- What agreement was signed on November 11, 1918?  
**I C E M A R T I S** \_\_\_\_\_