



History & Geography

For history and geography, you can read through the major battles of WWI that we have included below. We have also included several maps of Europe for map drills.

For your younger children, this timeline is a good overview for further study: <https://kidskconnect.com/history/world-war-i/>

For middle elementary and up students, there are several excellent documentaries on Curiosity Stream.

See many photographs from World War I in the National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/topics/wwi>

"Life does not consist in thinking, it consists in acting."

~ Woodrow Wilson

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Europe Pre-World War I



Geography of The Great War

Find and map each battle, adding to your book of centuries as you wish.

The World War I battles fought between major global superpowers opened up new frontiers in international warfare. Lasting from 1914 to 1918, many battles were experienced during World War I.

The 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at the hands of 19-year-old Gavrilo Princip began the march toward the war. Throughout the war, terrible battles were fought between the central powers of the world, battles that were made even worse by the relatively recent invention of the machine gun.

1. Battle of Tannenberg

The August of 1914 Battle of Tannenberg was fought between Russian and German soldiers. It is notable for being the first battle fought on the Eastern Front. The Russian army, under the command of Grand Duke Nicholas, had come to the aid of French soldiers who were under attack from the Germans. Although it was predicted that the Russian army would have a decisive victory due to being larger and more powerful, the Germans were victorious.

By the month's end, the Germans had taken 92,000 prisoners and destroyed half of the Russian 2nd army. In total, the Russians lost about 250,000 men as well as military equipment. The only positive outcome for the Allied forces during the Battle of Tannenberg was diverting the Germans from attacking France. That allowed the French to counterattack at the First Battle of Marne.

2. First Battle of Marne, Marne River near Brasles, France

In September of 1914, the First Battle of Marne marked the end of the German incursion into France and the beginning of the trench warfare so widely associated with World War One. German Field Marshal Alfred Von Schlieffen devised a plan to conquer France by his armies invading it from Lille. The army would then turn west near the English Channel before turning south to cut off the French retreat. If the plan worked, German armies would encircle the French Army from the north and capture Paris.

A French offensive in Lorraine caused the Germans to counter-attack and threw the French to a fortified barrier. The French defense strengthened and they sent their troops to reinforce the left flank. The German northern wing troops weakened after the removal of 11 divisions to fight in Belgium and East Prussia.

When the German 1st Army under General Alex von Kluck targeted points to the north of Paris, they had to pass into the valley of the River Marne and across the French defenses and were exposed in doing so.

On September 3rd, French General Joseph Joffre ordered a halt to French retreat; three days later he reinforced the left flank and began an offensive. That compelled General Kluck to stop his advance to support his weak flank at Meaux. September 9th, the German ambassador Bernhard Bulow learned the British force was advancing between his 2nd and 1st army, and he ordered Kluck's men to retreat. A counterattack by the 5th and 6th French and British armies resulted in the First Battle of the Marne. That forced the battle-worn Germans into full retreat by September 11th. France's strategic victory saved Paris from German capture and pushed the enemy 45 miles away, enabling them to continue the war.

3. Battle of Gallipoli, Gallipoli peninsula (Gelibolu in modern Turkey)

Lasting eight months, the 1915-1916 Battle of Gallipoli was launched by the combined British, French, Indian, New Zealand, Australian, and Canadian forces to deter the Turkish Ottoman Empire that sided with Germany.

The British and her allies planned to sail a huge fleet at the 65-mile Dardanelles water strait that linked the Mediterranean and Istanbul, the Ottoman capital they planned to capture. The plan was to force the Ottoman Empire to surrender but failed due to the outdated allies' fleet, and many ships that were sunk by Ottoman cannons and mines.

The Battle of Gallipoli saw 58,000 Allied soldiers' casualties. These included 29,000 British and Irish soldiers and 11,000 Australians and New Zealanders. There also were about 300,000 wounded troops from either side.

The Ottoman victory propelled the lieutenant colonel of the 19th Turkish Division, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, to prominence. He later became the founding father of the modern-day Turkish Republic in 1923.

4. Battle of Jutland, fought near the Skagerrak, an arm of the North Sea, about 60 miles off the west coast of Jutland (Denmark)

Believed to be the biggest naval battle of the First World War, on the 31st of May and the 1st of June in 1916, the Battle of Jutland pitted the British against the German fleet with their "dreadnought" battleships.

The battle involved 250 ships and about 100,000 troops. The battle occurred in the North Sea, and German Admiral Reinhard Scheer planned to draw in both Admiral Sir David Beatty's Battlecruiser Force and Admiral Sir John Jellicoe's Grand Fleet. Scheer's plan was to destroy Beatty's force before Jellicoe's arrived.

According to the Imperial War Museum's records, the plan was thwarted when the British were alerted by their code-breakers, and they placed their forces early to sea. The encounters between Beatty's force and the German high-seas fleet caused the loss of several ships.

The Germans destroyed the HMS Lion and also sank HMS Indefatigable and HMS Queen Mary. They exploded after German shells hit their ammunition magazines.

Seemingly staring at defeat, Beatty withdrew until Jellicoe arrived with the main fleet. The outgunned Germans retreated.

The British lost 14 ships and suffered 6,000 casualties, while the Germans lost 11 ships and over 2,500 men. After this battle, the Germans never seriously challenged the British control of the North Sea. It also secured the British control of shipping lanes, after which Britain put in place a blockade that caused Germany to be defeated in 1918.

5. Battle of Verdun, Verdun-sur-Meuse, France

Beginning February 21st and ending December 19th, 1916, the Battle of Verdun was one of the longest and most devastating of all World War One battles. Nearly three-quarters of the French army fought in this battle.

It began when the German army began attacking French forts and trenches with artillery fire from 1,200 guns, according to Verdun Memorial Museum reports. The General aimed to end the trench warfare that began in 1914, allowing his troops to advance.

Initially, the Germans breached the French front lines and took over Fort Douaumont without a fight. Despite heavy shelling, the French Infantry was unmoved from their positions and repelled the Germans. French General Henri Petain was appointed to defend Verdun and command the troops. He raised the traffic volume on the Bar-le-Duc to Verdun route, which took men, basic supplies, and artillery to the battlefield.

This ensured that the Germans couldn't reach the French frontline when they attacked the left bank of River Meuse on March 6th, 1916.

By June's end, the Germans had captured Fort Vaux. On July 1st, the French and British launched an offensive on Somme, relieving the German pressure on French troops at Verdun.

In the fall of 1916, the French counter-attacked and recaptured Fort Douaumont, and a few days later they entered Fort Vaux, which the Germans had deserted. From December 15th to the 18th, the French attacked and recovered nearly all of the territory lost since February. After the battle ended there were over 305,000 dead or missing and about 400,000 wounded on both warring sides.

6. Battle of Passchendaele, 1917, Ypres salient on the Western Front, Belgium

Also known as the Third Battle of Ypres, the Battle of Passchendaele gained notoriety not only for its many casualties but also for the widespread mud. This battle was fought in Ypres, a town along the British lines.

After a warning that a German blockade would cripple the British war effort, Field Marshal Douglas Haig desired a British offensive in Flanders. He wanted to destroy German submarines stationed on the Belgian coast. The British infantry began to attack on July 31st at Ypres.

The constant shelling broke up the battlefield soil and destroyed drainage systems. In the following days, the heaviest rains in 30 years turned the loose soil into mud, which clogged rifles and halted tanks. Many men and horses drowned in this mud.

There was a stalemate for a month, but when the weather improved, attacks resumed on September 20th. On November 6th, the little of what remained of the Passchendaele village was captured by the British and Canadian forces. That gave Haig an excuse to halt the offensive and claim victory.

The three-month battle of Passchendaele had cost both sides greatly, with 325,000 British and Allied modern-day casualties and 260,000 German casualties.

7. Battle of Caporetto (autumn 1917), near the town of Kobarid in North Italy (near modern-day Slovenia)

Also called the 12th Battle of the Isonzo, the Battle of Caporetta saw Austro-Hungarian and German forces break through the Italian defenses in northern Isonzo after catching the Italian soldiers by surprise. This Italian defeat resulted in a change of government and the dismissal of Luigi Cadorna as Chief of Staff.

When depleted Austrian and Hungarian allies faced collapse at Gorizia, their commander Arz Von Straussenberg sought help from the German Third Supreme Command led by Paul Von Hindenburg.

When Cadorna learned of German involvement, he called off his own attacks in mid-September 1917 and assumed a defensive stance. Six German divisions under the command of Otto von Below supplemented the Third Supreme nine Austrian army divisions.

The Germans chose a 25-kilometer-long line in front of Caporetta, north of Gorizia along Isonzo, as the preferred point of attack where the Italians were weak for the combined offensive. The Italian commander Luigi Capello was ordered to prepare a defensive line but massed his troops to attack the southern flank of Von Below's arm, to the east of Gorizia.

At 2 A.M. on the 24th of October, 1917, at Tolmino, the combined Austrian, Hungarian, and German forces attacked and surprised the Italians. By the close of the day, the German, Austrian, and Hungarian forces had breached the Italian lines using grenades and flamethrowers, adopting infiltration tactics.

Cadorna made the Italian forces cross the river, which took four days, culminating on the 30th of October, 1917. The Italians incurred 300,000 casualties, of which 90 percent were prisoners. As a result, Cadorna was dismissed, and Marshal Armando Diaz replaced him. A new Prime Minister, Vittorio Orlando, assumed office and replaced incumbent Paolo Boselli.

8. Battle of Cambrai (1917), Cambrai, France

During the battle of Cambrai, which took place from November 20th to December 4th, 1917, the British and Germans engaged in the first large-scale use of battle tanks in northern France.

The usage of tanks was combined with air power and heavy artillery. The nineteen British divisions assembled had about 476 tanks, of which 324 were fighting tanks, and the rest were supply and service vehicles. The battle commenced on the dawn of 20th November 1917, when the British Third Army launched an attack on the Germans towards Cambrai.

Initially, eight British divisions attacked three German divisions and took 7,500 prisoners. The Third Army attacked the German's Hindenburg defensive line to relieve pressure on French forces. Though the British made gains at first, they were overrun by the German counter-offensive, in part due to bad weather.

The British forces had advanced 5 miles and taken a series of villages. However, by the end of the first day over half of the British tanks were destroyed. This slowed the British progress even as fighting intensified.

On October 28th, the British reached the crest of Brouillon Ridge. Two days later German forces launched a counter-offensive using heavy artillery and infantry tactics. The British army retreated, having captured only the Havrincourt, Ribécourt, and Flesquières villages, according to the Imperial War Museum.

The Battle of Cambrai opened the way for the use of sophisticated arms tactics and armored warfare. Both the German and British had casualties of about 45,000.

9. The Second Battle of Cambrai (1918), Cambrai, France

During the spring of 1918, German General Erich Ludendorff ordered his forces to attack the Western Front, an over 400-mile-long strip of land stretching through France and Belgium, and from the Swiss border to the North Sea.

Knowing a German attack was imminent, the British reinforced their coasts, as did the French to the south of the British. However, in Cambrai, an incomplete British trench system left a weakness in the British line, manned by the Fifth Army.

On March 21, 1918, the Germans attacked and in five hours, they fired a million artillery shells at the Fifth Army. The Germans intensified their attacks with elite troopers, who were armed with loud flame throwers that panicked the British. The first day of the attack resulted in 21,000 British soldiers being taken prisoner as the Germans advanced through the Fifth Army lines. This German attack was the biggest breakthrough in three years of warfare on the Western Front, and Gough ordered the Fifth Army to withdraw.

The British also surrendered the Somme region to the Germans. This put Paris within the German's target as they moved their three Krupps cannons, which they used to shell Paris from 75 miles away.

Their push to Paris made German emperor Friedrich William II declare March 24th a success, with many Germans assuming the war was over. However, the Paris advance by the Germans was not sustainable.

Ludendorff ordered the highly effective German 18th Army to advance on Amiens, an important railroad city, thinking it would hamper the British and their allies. But the 18th Army ran out of supplies, and horses that were to be used in Amiens advance and transport were killed for food.

Heading towards Amiens, the Germans passed by Albert, where they looted the shops there due to hunger. With their discipline gone, the advance to Amiens stopped, which shocked the exhausted Ludendorff.

The German Spring Offensive conquered much territory, but by April, the Germans had 230,000 casualties. Those numbers were too much for the German Army. By the end of March 1918, 250,000 Americans poured into the Western Front to join their British allies. Their effectiveness was hindered by their general, John Pershing, and his refusal to have his forces commanded by French or British officers.

In spite of these allied conflicts, by June 1918 the German army had been weakened by the many casualties it suffered. When Ludendorff ordered a last World War I German offensive on July 15, 1918, the Germans suffered huge losses at Marne after a French ambush and counterattack. From March to July 1918, the Germans had lost a million men.

10. Battle of the Somme, 1916, Somme River, north-central Somme, and south-eastern Pas-de-Calais Départements, France

From July 1st until November 18th, 1916, a massive joint operation between British and French forces against the Germans occurred in the Somme area in northern France. Dubbed the Battle of the Somme, it had been planned in December 1915 by Allied commanders to counter the German offensive at Verdun.

The British spearheaded the offensive and faced a German defense developed for many months. Despite a seven-day bombardment before the July 1st attack, the British did not achieve the success the military leadership anticipated- having sent 100,000 men to capture the German trenches.

Somme became a battle of attrition, and for 141 days, the British advance captured only three square miles of territory. Collectively, the opposing sides saw over a million casualties wounded, captured, or killed.

According to experts, losses incurred by the British in the battle of the Somme were due to the use of untrained volunteers as soldiers and inadequate artillery used in the seven-day bombardment, as it didn't affect German soldiers who were safe in deep trenches. The British also underestimated the well-trained and battle-hardened German forces. As a result, the German forces were able to regroup, counter-attack, and retake much lost territory. In five months, over a million soldiers from the French, British, and German armies had been killed or wounded.