

The Great War (1914-1919)

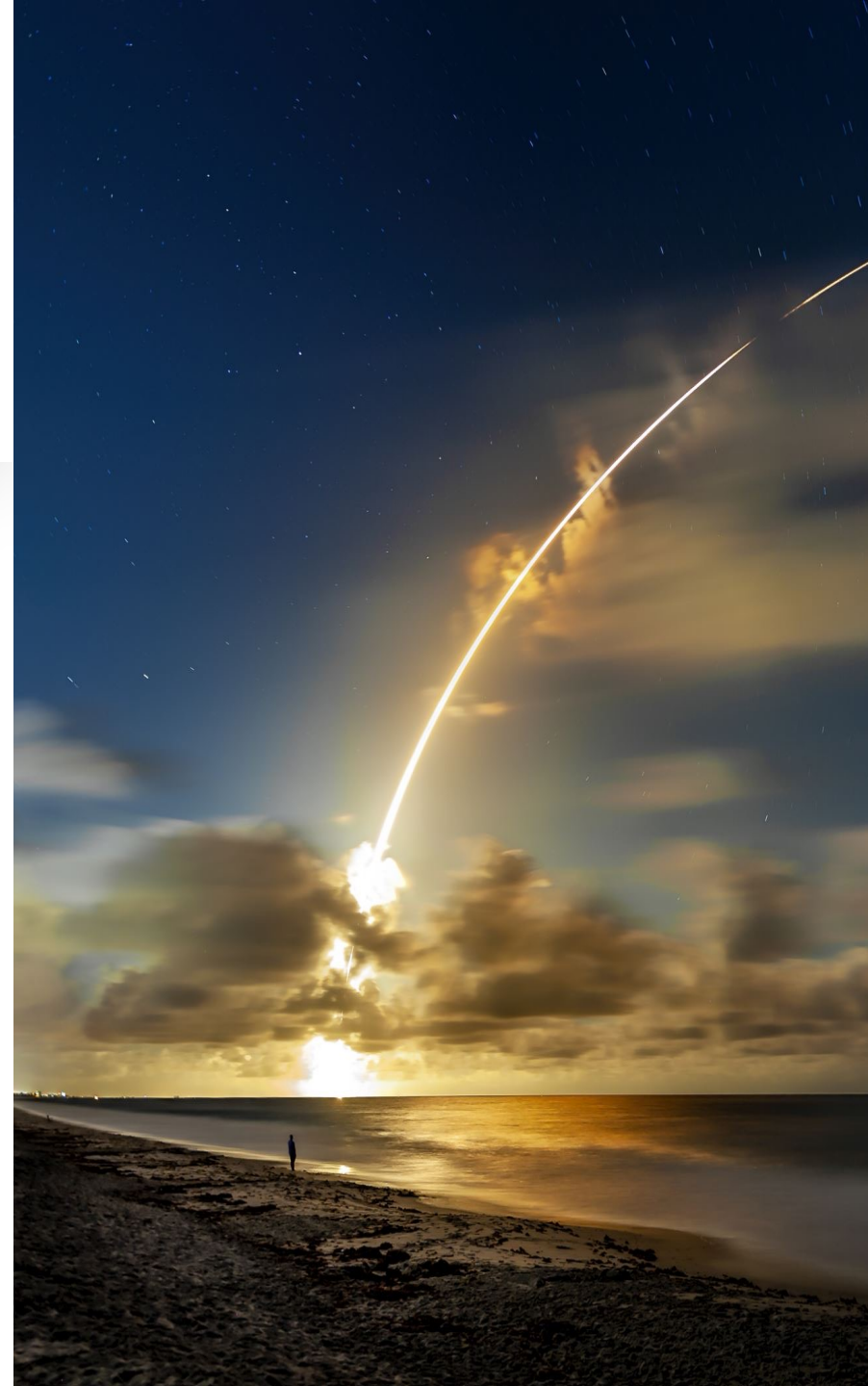
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I have not been at the front.
I have been in front of it.

Wilfred Owen



Talking about People in the Great War

- We learned from the Omdurman and Boers War last week how the human capacity to kill had been increasing since the Industrial Revolution. Today, we will have a glimpse of the phenomenal rise by the second decade of the twentieth century in the ability of governance to mobilize human beings who experienced the effects of the war differently on the war fronts stretched from Europe to Asia, Africa, and the Pacific.
- Here are some of the [numbers to reflect upon](#).

Talking about People in the Great War

- Historian Deborah Cohen published this list in 2001:
 - 9.5 million dead, over 52 months,
 - 5600 men a day
 - 20 million severely wounded
 - 8 million disabled
 - 6 million children lost their fathers
 - 3 million watched them die at home.

(Deborah Cohen,
The War Come Home Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939
2001)

- Some 85% of the wounds could have come from exploding shells.
- 8.5 million POWs.

The Manliness

- There was an unending need for manpower. Britain kept changing the required standards to meet the demand.
- On October 11, 1914, the army lowered the recruitment standard to five feet five from five feet eight. In the same month, it suffered 30,000 casualties. So, on November 5, it lowered the standard to five feet three.
- Kitchener issued a call for volunteers in October 1914: 300,000 volunteers, responded. Most of them did not survive the battle of Somme in 1916.

The Manliness

- In October 1915, Lord Derby introduced conscription. Next year, the first conscripts began training.
- By November 1918, “half the British infantry were now younger than nineteen.”

The Manliness

- “For 14 hours yesterday, I was at work — teaching Christ to lift his cross by numbers, and how to adjust his crown; and not to imagine the thirst until after the last halt. I attended his Supper to see that there were no complaints; and inspected his feet that they should be worthy of the nails....and with maps, I make him familiar with the topography of Golgotha.”

Wilfred Own,
Cited in Fussell, P 129

Rethinking the Conversations about War

- The mobilization in this total war occurred worldwide.
- The largest number of soldiers was raised by Russia. The figure was 15 million men which meant 39% of its population of military age.
- Before the outbreak of the First World War, the Ottoman Army numbered only 210,000 men including 10,000 officers. During the war, 2,7000,000 men were conscripted though the size of the standing army at any time never exceeded 650,000 men.

Rethinking the Conversations about War

- The Massive Mobilization for war efforts extended to the Imperial colonies as well.
- France raised 200,000 men from West Africa and 550,000 from the Empire as a whole.
- Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa provided the British Empire with 1.2 million men.
- Das maintains that India made the largest contribution to the First World War in terms of manpower of any of the colonies or dominions of the British Empire. According to government records of the time, the total number of Indian ranks recruited during the war up to 31 December 1919 was 877,068 combatants and 561,169 non-combatants, making a total of 1,440,437. In addition, there were an estimated 239,561 men in the British Indian army in 1914.

Empires' Fight

- Indian “volunteer” army waged a battle not only against an enemy, they had no animosity against but also within their organizations where racist discrimination remained the rule.
- They fought against their co-religionists as well, without knowing mostly. The British used them against the Ottoman Empire in the Mesopotamian campaign.
- They shared the victory in Palestine.
- Only in the European winter, they were helpless.

Empires' Fight

- A total of 132, 496 Indians, including both combatants and noncombatants, were sent to France up to 31 October 1918; most of them served there between October 1915 and December 1915, when the infantry was withdrawn and sent to Mesopotamia.
- Mesopotamia was the main Indian theater of war, with some 588,717 men including 7812 officers, 287,753 other ranks, and 293,152 non-combatants.

Rethinking the Conversations about War

- In 2018, looking at a century of the Great War historiography, historian Susan Grayzel stressed the need to further explore Britain's greater spatial and temporal range inclusive of the formal and informal empire. In addition to that, she believed, the war narrative must also include the larger shifts and understandings of gender, sexuality, race, and the imperial state (Grayzel, 386). While that work must continue, we must note that folding the narratives of the Empire with the British island is not absent from scholarship. She pointed to a transnational generation of First World War scholars incorporating multiple levels of historical experience both below and above the national.
 - (Susan Grayzel, "Belonging to the Imperial Nation: Rethinking the History of the First World War and Its Empire," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (June 2018): 383-405).

Rethinking the Conversations about War

Instead of a reductive analysis that equates war experience with the production of anticolonialism, Das excavated sources, including folk songs, pro-war poetry by celebrated women such as Sarojini Naidu, and oral histories, demonstrate how both the mythmaking of war and its intense trauma reach deep into the empire.

Dominion troops—including those from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada—occupy a particular place in the history of Britain at war, as they do in the national storytelling of these countries. Thus, the war is rescripted here as a cultural exchange, with long-term legacies for both sides of a racial and geographic divide. Here are a few examples.

Das Contribution

- Das is one example. He gives agency to some of the 1.6 million Indian participants in the war theater.
- Thakur Amar Singh was one of them. He wrote a daily diary, based on his experiences as a nonwhite Commissioned Officer on the trench war front of France and other theaters where he accompanied the Indian troops. Das counts 89 volumes of his diaries in which amid the war, Singh focused more on the interracial complexities and sufferings of the war.

Santanu Das, "Indians at home, Mesopotamia, and France, 1914-1918: Towards an Intimate History," in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Santanu Das (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

- Fussell showed that the class system remained intact on the front as well. The regulars of the British staff entertained an implicit contempt of the rapidly trained new men, they called, of "Kitchener's Army," largely recruited from the Midlands."

Das Contribution

- Das also locates a Bengali Captain Dr. Kalyan Mukherji whose mother published his letters posthumously.
- From Mesopotamia, a major theater of war for the Indian troops, Mukerji lamented the hollowness of British claims to civilization and intellectual pursuits given the massive killing and plight their war had brought to humanity. Sources like these opened far more revealing narratives of the war than the palimpsests that the British censorship had left behind.

Das Contribution

- Sisir Sarbadhikari is another primary source Das exploits. He was a medical attendant also on the Mesopotamian front. His memoir covered the periods of the first British defeat and the captivity.
- His life as a medical attendant becomes far more interesting during the captivity during which he experiences the complexity of racial and national identities, personal equations, and longings and aspirations.
- The war, in his view, brought together individuals from faraway lands in different roles of aggressors and victims, prisoners and captors, wounded, and healers and created numerous sites for human interactions directly and indirectly under the most horrible and unimaginable circumstances. His interaction with persons from the persecuted Armenian minority is particularly poignant.

Rethinking the Conversations about War

- Pursuing the areas of research that Grayzel suggested, Alison Fell explored the emotional world of the British nurses taking care of nonwhite soldiers in a racialized world.
- The ethnic and territorial origins of soldiers reflected the way they defined manliness. British soldiers expressed a linkage in their minds to marriage and procreation to overcome the shocks they had suffered, as a way out of the crisis. Manliness in the colonial subjects was ambivalent. While there might be a need or expectation to challenge the colonial power, participation in the war and braver, they thought, became a way of salvaging honor.

Rethinking the Conversations about War

- Honor became an interesting point for war studies. Das accentuated a remarkable distinction in this regard. He pointed out that the folksong singers and their kith and kins had no respect for honor (izzat) or martyrdom. In fact, they admitted that their siblings or offspring and spouses were “volunteering mercenaries.”
- In the imperial power, nonetheless, the British retained the ability to fix the range of permissible manliness. Volunteers from Jamaica, for instance, were deployed but only for the menial labor.

WINNER OF THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD
& THE NATIONAL CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD

THE
GREAT
WAR
AND MODERN
MEMORY

PAUL FUSSELL

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION
BY JAY WINTER



Paul Fussell 1975

- Fussell focused on the ironies of war. Europeans had scored more victories in the colonial arena than against each other. The destructive power of the Maxim and Krupp guns had been visible at Omdurman and during the Boer wars.
- In 1914, the colonial powers faced each other once the ultimatum to the Slavic world proved futile. The declarations of war then followed. The alliances joined each other. The colonies aligned with them.

Fussell—Ironies of War

- Fussell says, “Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected. Every war constitutes an ironic situation because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its presumed end. In the Great War, eight million people were destroyed because two persons, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, and his Consort, had been shot.”



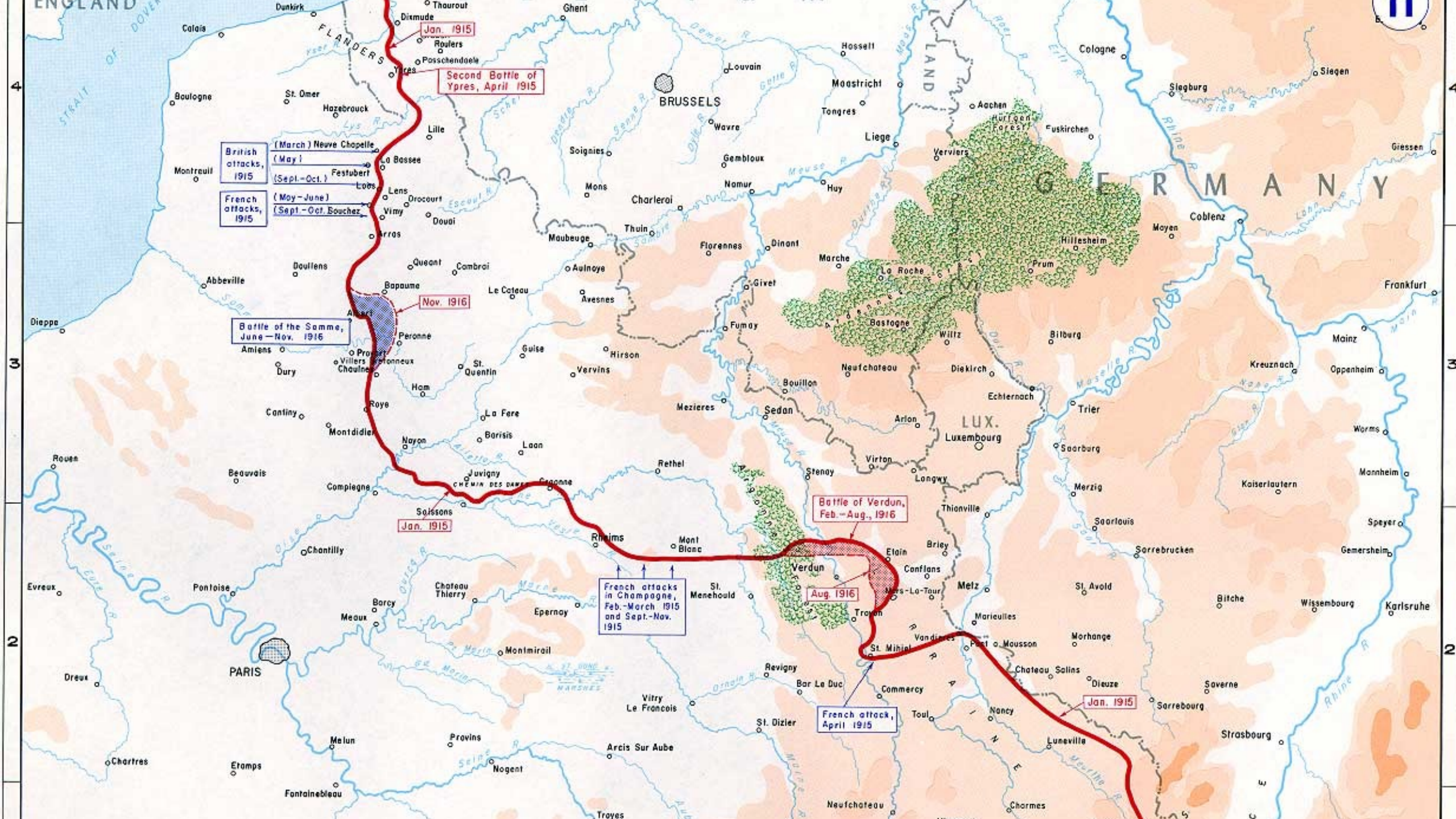
The Schlieffen Plan

Paul Fussell 1975

- Here are some facts Fussell wanted his readers to remember, defying hopes and despair, strategies, and military and civil leadership.
- War cemeteries of Britain in France and Belgium: 2500
- War, declared by the Central Powers on August 4, 1914, continued for four years and three months.
- Entrenched warfare required enormous human sacrifice. In September 1914, the battle of Marne which stopped the German advance on Paris, took half a million casualties on each side.

Entrenched

- The two sides had dug the permanent trench line by November 1914.
- On October 27, 1914, Germany initiated the first use of gas; on April 22, 1915, a second gas attack, “the least inhumane of modern weapons.”



Entrenched

- 400 or 500 miles long. Shape of an S flattened at the sides and tipped to the left. From the North Sea coast of Belgium, the line wandered southward, bulging out to contain Ypres, then dropping down to protect Bethune, Arras, and Albert. It continued south in front of Montidier, Compiègne, Soissons, Reims, Verdun, St. Michiel, and Nancy, and finally attached its southernmost end to the Swiss border at Beurnevisin, in Alsace.”
- Belgians held the top forty miles—part north of Ypres.
- The British held the next ninety miles, down to the river Ancre, including Somme and Picardy. 800 battalions of 1000 men each. The French held the rest.
- Trenches 6250 miles long for French. Britain: 6000 miles: 12,000 miles on the Allied side alone. 25,000, may be, counting the Central Powers.

Entrenched

- “To be in the trenches was to experience an unreal, unforgettable enclosure and constraint, as well as a sense of being unoriented and lost. One saw two things only: the walls of an unlocalized, undifferentiated earth and the sky above.” P54
- Sunrise and sunset p 55: “The hour of stand-to constituted a highly ritualized distillation of the state of anxious stalemate and the apparently absolute equivalence of force that had led to the stasis of mutual entrenchment. The hour was memorable as an emblem of the political essence of the war itself, for morning and evening stand-tos evened out the advantages possessed by either side. In the morning, the advantage lay with the British side ... In the evening, the Germans had the advantage...” P55:

Entrenched

- Rumors, says Fussell, became a part of the trench life in multiple ways. Here is how he describes and reflects upon one: "... deserters from all sides had a secret gang living underground, grown too big and had to be eliminated "gassed." One reason the legend of the wild deserters is so rich is that it gathers and unifies the maximum number of meaningful emotional motifs. For one thing, it offers a virtual mirror image, and a highly sardonic one, of real, orderly trench life, in which, for example, the night was the time for "work." For another, it projects the universal feeling of shame about abandoning the wounded to spend nights suffering alone between the lines. It embodies in objectified dramatic images the universal fantasy—the Huckleberry Finn daydream—of flagrant disobedience to authority. It conveys the point that Germans and British are not enemies: the enemy of both is the war. And finally, it enacts in unforgettable terms a feeling inseparable in the trenches— that "normal" life there was equal to outright bestiality and madness." (P133- 135).

Leadership

- 1915: “a year not only of ironic mistakes but of a grossly unimaginative underestimation of the enemy and the profound difficulties of siege warfare.” P 12
- Commanders changed for face-saving: Scottish Douglas Haig, 1915, “Was stubborn, self-righteous, inflexible, intolerant —especially of the French — and quite humorless ... he was provincial ... bullheaded, ... the perfect commander of an enterprise committed to endless abortive assaulting. ... His want of imagination and innocence of artistic culture have seemed to provide a model for Great men ever since.” P 12-13.

Leadership

- 1916: Haig prepared six months for a massive attack at the Somme, with equal to twenty-six World War II infantry divisions, seven-to-one superiority over the Germans. It was “The largest engagement fought since the beginnings of the civilization.”
- Attacked June 1916. One week of bombardment, a million and a half shells from 1537 guns, followed by July 1 attack on a 13-mile front. 60,000/100,000 killed or wounded.
- French in the meantime collapsed at Verdun; the British had to take over the Western Front as well. Reactions showed up in the May 1917 French mutinies.

Leadership

- April 25, 1915–Gallipoli: Opened the Western Front: troops began landing on April 25, 1915; 1915 end forces from Gallipoli withdrawn.
- “...the Somme was the end of illusions about breaking the line and sending the cavalry through to end the war.” The Somme madness did not stop until November 1916.
- October 1916: tanks were introduced but insufficient. Tanks 381 at Cambrai November 20, 1917, but insufficient reserves to exploit the breakthrough.

1917

German counterattack:

- Feb 1, unrestricted submarine warfare begins
- On April 6, Wilson ends neutrality and joins the war.

Passchendaele catastrophe:

- July 31, 1917, attack on the German submarine bases on the Belgian coast. Fired 4 million shells over four days. Irony: “The bombardment churned up the ground; rain fell and turned the dirt to mud.”
- 370,000 British dead. “It was a reprise of the Somme, but worse.”

The War of Emerging Powers

- By the end of the century, within the larger European system, two alliances had emerged. The Central Powers combined Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary. The Triple Entente joined Russia, France, and Great Britain.
- Germany and Italy had unified and appeared on the European map seeking their share of world power, particularly the Imperial bounty of colonization.
- The Great War was the first war between Great Powers since 1871 (Prussian-French war) when Germany carved Alsace Lorraine as victor's price. Lebensraum was the object of the German quest.

The Alliances

- The Central Powers and the Triple Entente were not war coalitions. They responded to the fragile situations that some of them faced. Austria-Hungary had survived the 1848 Revolutions, but the Habsburg Empire worried about the continuation of its multiethnic composition.
- Russia, facing the Ottomans, had been projecting itself as the protector of the Eastern Orthodox Church and Slavic interests in the Balkans.

Why Go There

- In a European system tilted towards avoiding wars, why did a war begin that swept away three empires in its wake?
- Once Kaiser Wilhelm had sidelined Bismarck, the German foreign policy profile had changed from a stabilizing entity to an ambitious posturing, joining the naval supremacy race competing with Britain. The German Industrial Revolution enabled him to stand right behind the largest naval power, the pride of his grandmother's global outreach.

One Assassination

- The Habsburgs read a real threat to their empire in the assassination of the Archduke.
- What happened in the war and its consequences are by now extensively researched and discussed topics of world history. So, I will not reinvent the wheel but try to do something differently.
- First, what happened: [One example is this BBC website to sum it up.](#)

The Armistice

- 21 March 1918: the Germans attacked the Somme, a 40-mile front, and won, the British lost 300,000 men. 90000 were imprisoned.
- May-June 1918: The German advance near the rivers Lys and Marne demonstrated “the most ironic point of all, namely, that successful attack ruins troops.” P 18. The attackers indulged in looting and failed to take advantage of the enemy's absence between Albert and Amiens.
- August 8, 1918: Ludendorff designated it as “The Black Day of the German Army,” as the Allies counterattacked which led to German collapse because the Americans stepped up their role.
- On November 9, 1918, Kaiser fled, and Germany declared herself a republic and two days later signed the Armistice in the Forest of Compiègne.”

The Armistice

- The poet Siegfried Sassoon fought in the trenches for a while and reacted to its end like this, “...the news of the Armistice brought no pleasure; rather, it “sent me out walking alone..., cursing and sobbing and thinking of the dead.”
- Demobilized, Sassoon instantly catches Spanish influenza and almost dies of it. He recovers in Wales, where for almost a year he tries to shake off the war: “I was still mentally and nervously organized for war. Shells used to come bursting on my bed at midnight, even though Nancy shared it with me; strangers in the daytime would assume the faces of friends who had been killed. When strong enough to climb the Hill behind Harlech..., I couldn't help seeing it as a prospective battlefield. I would find myself working out tactical problems, planning ... where to place Lewis gun ...” Cited in Fussell, Page 237

War Aims

- Wilson joined the war in 1917 and attempted to get emphatic war aim statements from the Allies. He failed but this is what they probably sought:
- Allies 9/1914: no separate peace with the CPs.
- France: expel Germany, recover Alsace and Lorraine, weaken future Germany. Colonial gains in Africa and the ME.
- Russia: expand Poland (at the expense of Germany and Austria-Hungary) under Russian control. Control Dardanelles and Constantinople, allowing unimpeded movement from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean.
- Britain: Restore BOP. Make colonial gains.

War Aims

Italy: 9/1915 Treaty of London to irredentist claims on the Austrian-Hungarian territories along the Adriatic and in Asia Minor.

Central Powers

Austria-Hungary: reduce Serbian power but annexation of another ethnic group was problematic.

Germany: make gains in the Western (Luxembourg and parts of Belgium and Northern France) and Eastern Europe. Control Poland at the expense of Russia. Annex the Baltic countries: Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Create *Mitteleuropa*. Colonial gains in Africa: *Mittelafrika*.

Congress of Vienna to the [League of Nations](#)

- Wilson presided over the post-war treaty that also created League of Nations. This link offers details of all the compromises and concessions made.

EUROPE 1914



The old empires...

EUROPE 1923



...became new countries



Former Russian Empire

Defeated former empires:

Germany

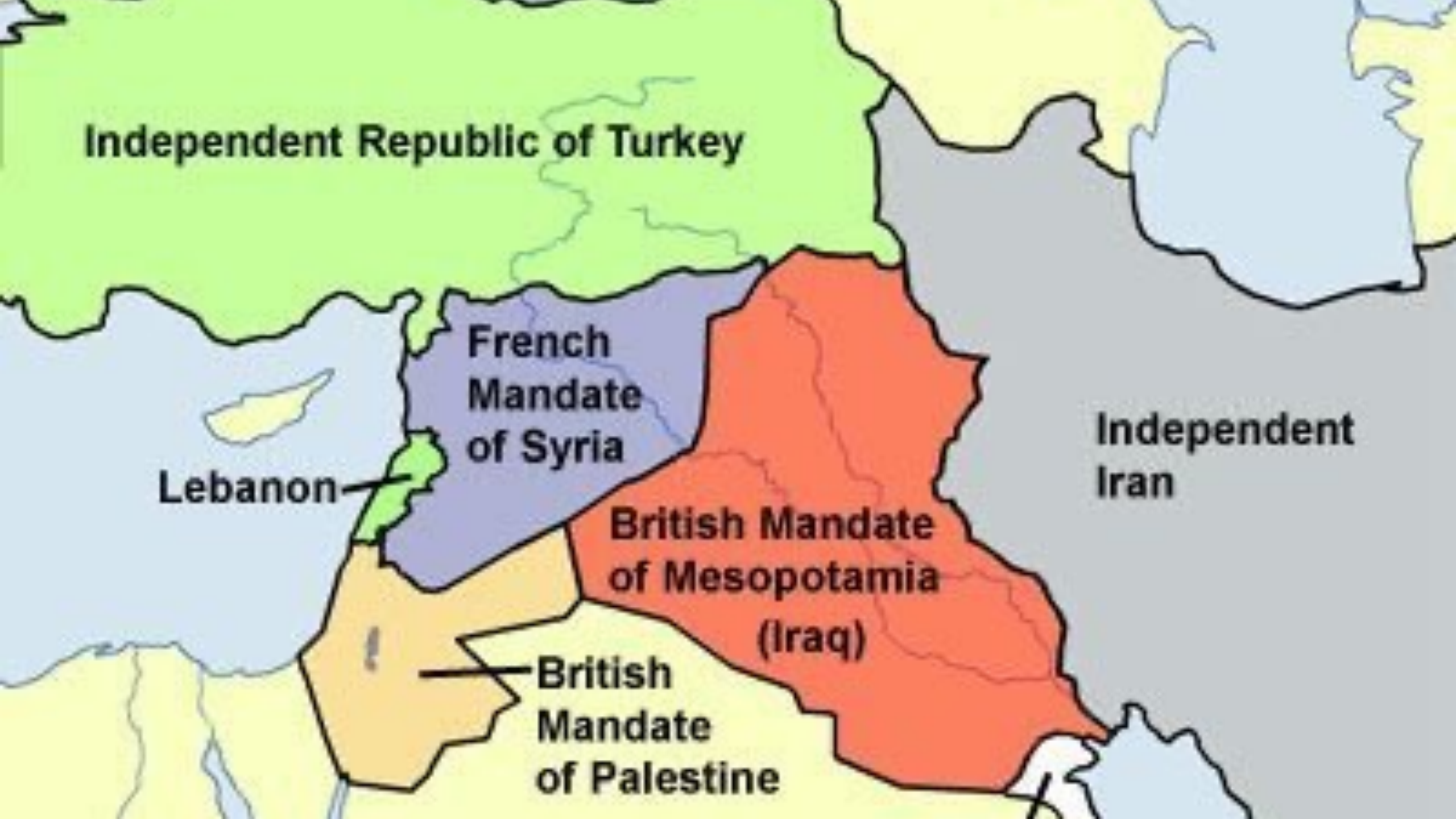
Austria-Hungary

Ottoman Empire

Free cities

Areas subject to referendum

Contested areas



Independent Republic of Turkey

Lebanon

**French
Mandate
of Syria**

**British Mandate
of Mesopotamia
(Iraq)**

**British
Mandate
of Palestine**

**Independent
Iran**



AFRICA
 SCALE OF MILES
 0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000
 REFERENCE



The Treaty Brest-Litovsk, March 3, 1918

- Bolshevik Revolution 1917: allowed Germans to move thirty percent of additional force to the western front.
- We will talk about it and the Russian war on Tuesday while discussing the Russian Revolution.

Air War

- By 1914, there were 1000 warplanes on all sides.
- Initially, they did reconnaissance, like the role of cavalry and also artillery observers. Added photography and attack capabilities.
- Used also to create panic and demoralization.
- Beginning 1/1915 Zeppelin raids on Britain. Civilians targeted: totality of war.
- April 1918: RAF became the world's first independent Air Force.

Conclusion

- Wars and conflicts occur when human beings fail to overcome their mutual differences over their interests, and the way they define them. A growing consciousness of power elements makes negotiated solutions complex, difficult, or impossible. It does not help.
- Germany was asked to pay 132 billion gold marks (about £6.6 billion - around £280 billion in today's money) to the Allies. British economist John Maynard Keynes condemned the settlement. He was right. We will learn that the Great War was World War I.