

An American soldier shares an emotional goodbye, 1917

# The Course and Conduct of WWI





More than 2 million Americans served in Europe during World War I. Eager to promote democracy around the world, many entered the war with great enthusiasm. But their first taste of battle left them more realistic about the horrors of war.

# A War of Firsts

- **First Selective Service**
- This famous World War I recruiting poster helped entice tens of thousands of young American men to register for the draft in 1917. Once they did, it took weeks of training to prepare them for combat.





BY J. M. FLAHERTY

**I WANT YOU  
FOR U.S. ARMY**

NEAREST RECRUITING STATION

# Attention!

ALL MALES between the ages of 21 and 30 years, both inclusive, must personally appear at the polling place in the Election District in which they reside, on

**TUESDAY, JUNE 5th, 1917**

between the hours of 7 A.M. and 9 P. M. and

# Register

in accordance with the President's Proclamation.

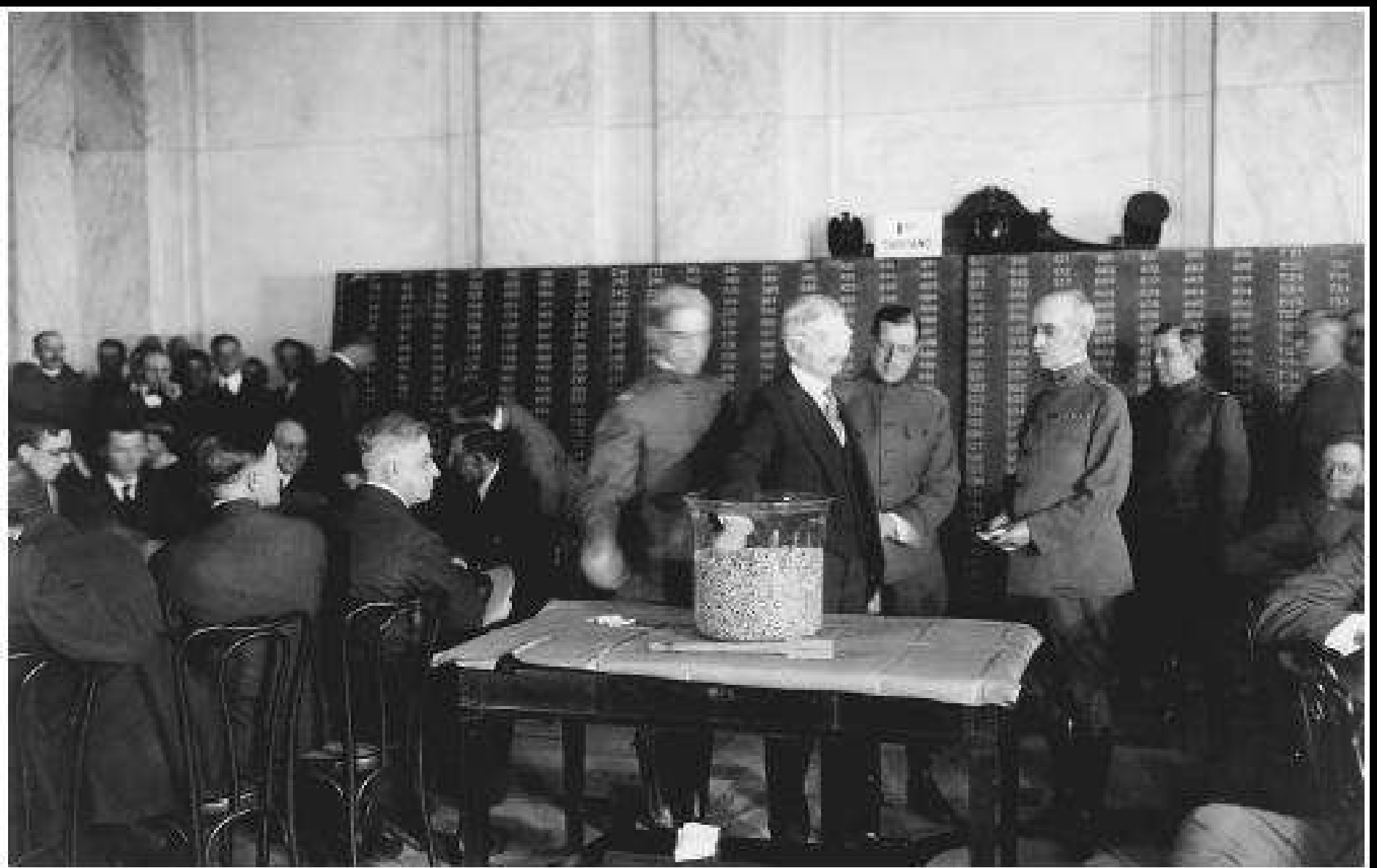
Any male person, between these ages, who fails to register on June 5th, 1917, will be subject to imprisonment in jail or other penal institution for a term of one year.

**NO EXCUSE FOR FAILURE TO REGISTER WILL BE ACCEPTED**



Young men at the first national registration day held in association with the Selective Service Act of 1917.

*Thomas R. Marshall, vice president to Woodrow Wilson, draws a World War I draft capsule, c. 1918. (LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION)*



1	Name in full: <u>Herschel Skaggs</u> <small>(Given name) (Family name)</small>	Age in yrs <u>23</u>
2	Home address: <u>Sharon</u> <u>Kans</u> <small>(No.) (Street) (City) (State)</small>	
3	Date of birth: <u>Mich</u> <u>8</u> <u>1894</u> <small>(Month) (Day) (Year)</small>	
4	Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? <u>Natural born</u>	
5	Where were you born? <u>Columbus</u> <u>Kans</u> <u>U.S.A.</u> <small>(Town) (State) (Nation)</small>	
6	If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?	
7	What is your present trade, occupation, or office? <u>Farmer</u>	
8	By whom employed? <u>Business for self</u> <u>30</u> Where employed?	
9	Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, wholly dependent on you for support (specify which)? <u>no</u>	
10	Married or single (which)? <u>Single</u> Race (specify which)? <u>Caucasian</u>	
11	What military service have you had? Rank <u>no</u> ; branch _____; years _____; Nation or State _____	
12	Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? <u>Farming</u>	

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

If present in all  
States for  
year of this  
year

CA  
Herschel Skaggs  
(Signature or mark)



757-A  
REGISTRAR'S REPORT

1	Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? <u>Medium</u> Slender, medium, or stout (which)? <u>Medium</u>
2	Color of eyes? <u>Gray</u> Color of hair? <u>Black</u> Bald? <u>no</u>
3	Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? <u>no</u>

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

.....

.....

Lloyd Davis  
(Signature of registrant)

Precinct Sharon  
 City or County Barber  
 State Kans

June 5-1917  
(Date of registration)

Camp 7 Austin

9/19/17

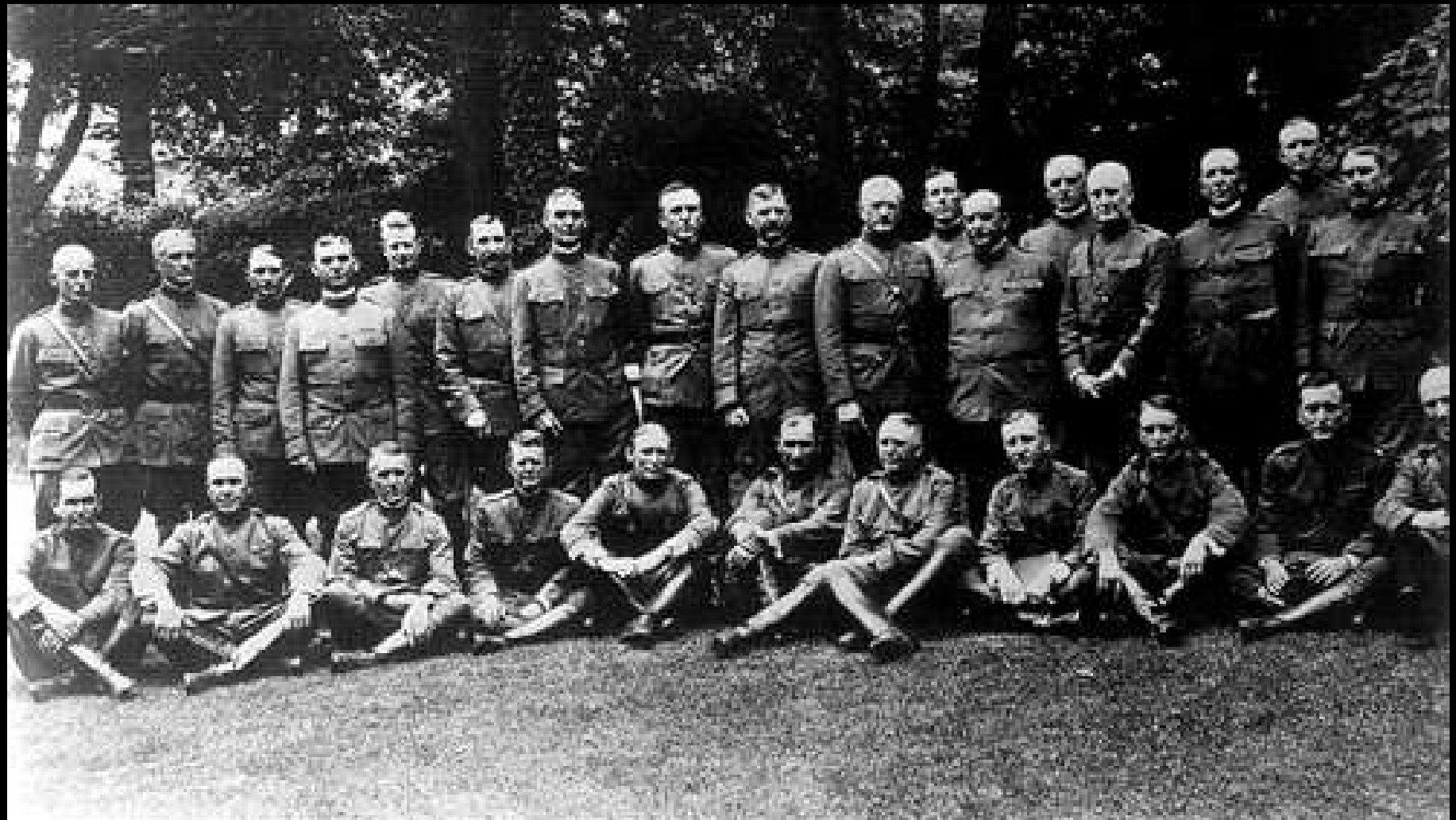


# First Americans to Reach French Soil

- World War I began on two main battlefronts. The western front stretched across Belgium and northern France. The eastern front spread across much of present-day Poland. Russia's withdrawal from the war in early 1918 closed down the eastern front.



# Officers of the American Expeditionary Forces



# AEF parading in front a building in Vladivostok



# First African American Officer Training Camp

- General John J. Pershing inspects African American soldiers. Before going into battle, one black soldier told his comrades, “Now is our opportunity to prove what we can do.”



# • Machine gun

- A group of well-placed machine gunners could stop the advance of a much larger force. German forces learned this lesson quickly, but the British and French did not. Allied armies charged across open fields toward enemy lines, only to be mowed down by machine gun fire, leading to thousands of casualties.
- At first, machine guns were used mostly for defense, because soldiers found them too heavy and bulky to carry in an offensive attack. Over time, both sides found ways to mount these weapons on aircraft and to use them on warships.



New Technologies Change the Way  
War is Fought

- **The Battle of the Somme in 1916 was a disastrous attempt by the British to attack the Germans in their trenches. The British created a plan that relied on bombardment by large, heavy artillery to weaken German defenses before the army advanced. Unfortunately, this plan did not go as hoped. The advancing British army was an easy target for the German machine guns, which could fire 400 to 600 rounds per minute, spraying the approaching enemy with a massive amount of bullets. In the first day alone, the British lost an estimated 58,000 soldiers.**
- **Estimated Casualty Statistics for the Battle of the Somme**

- **Allied Powers:**

- 693,000

- **Central Powers:**

- 420,000





- The Battle of Verdun, which began in February 1916 and lasted nearly ten months, is considered to be the longest battle of World War I. Early in this battle, the Germans introduced a new kind of flamethrower that consisted of a gas canister strapped on the back of a soldier. Attached to the canister was a nozzle that was lit on fire and that sprayed burning fuel on its victims. The Germans used this weapon to clear the area of enemy soldiers before the main army advanced. This weapon was dangerous not only to the enemy but also to the soldier operating it, because it was highly explosive. Even with this weapon, the Germans still suffered heavy casualties.
- Estimated Casualty Statistics for the Battle of Verdun
- Allied Powers: 362,000
- Central Powers: 336,000



Infantryman demonstrates range of "lifebuoy" flamethrower. Weapon is effective, but heavy.

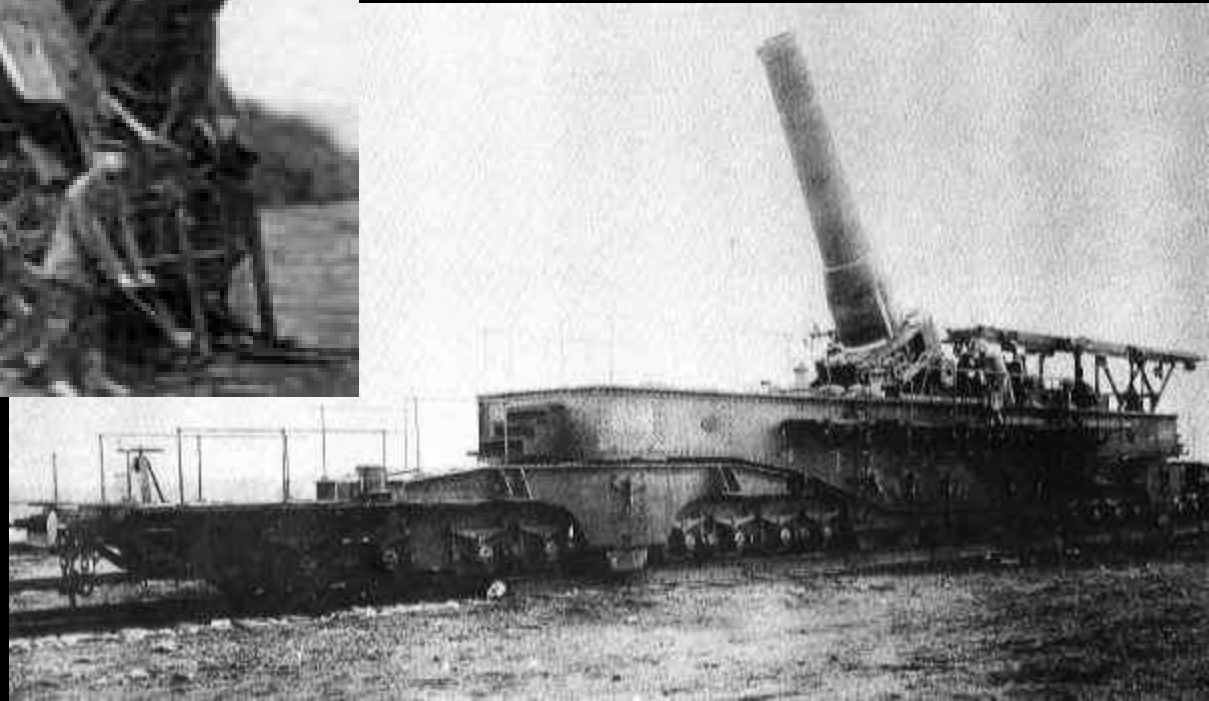
## Flamethrower

- Isonzo was a series of battles that began in 1915 and took place along a river between Austria-Hungary and Italy. It seemed as if Italy, which had many more soldiers, would have an easy victory. However, although Austria-Hungary had fewer men, it had more heavy artillery. Also known as “big guns,” this artillery was loaded with highly explosive shells containing dozens of small lead balls. With each battle, the Italians suffered more casualties from the artillery bombardment. After these early setbacks, the Italian commander realized that big guns were important both before and during successful army advances.
- Estimated Casualty Statistics for the Battles of Isonzo
  - Allied Powers: 1,022,000
  - Central Powers: 451,000



Artillery

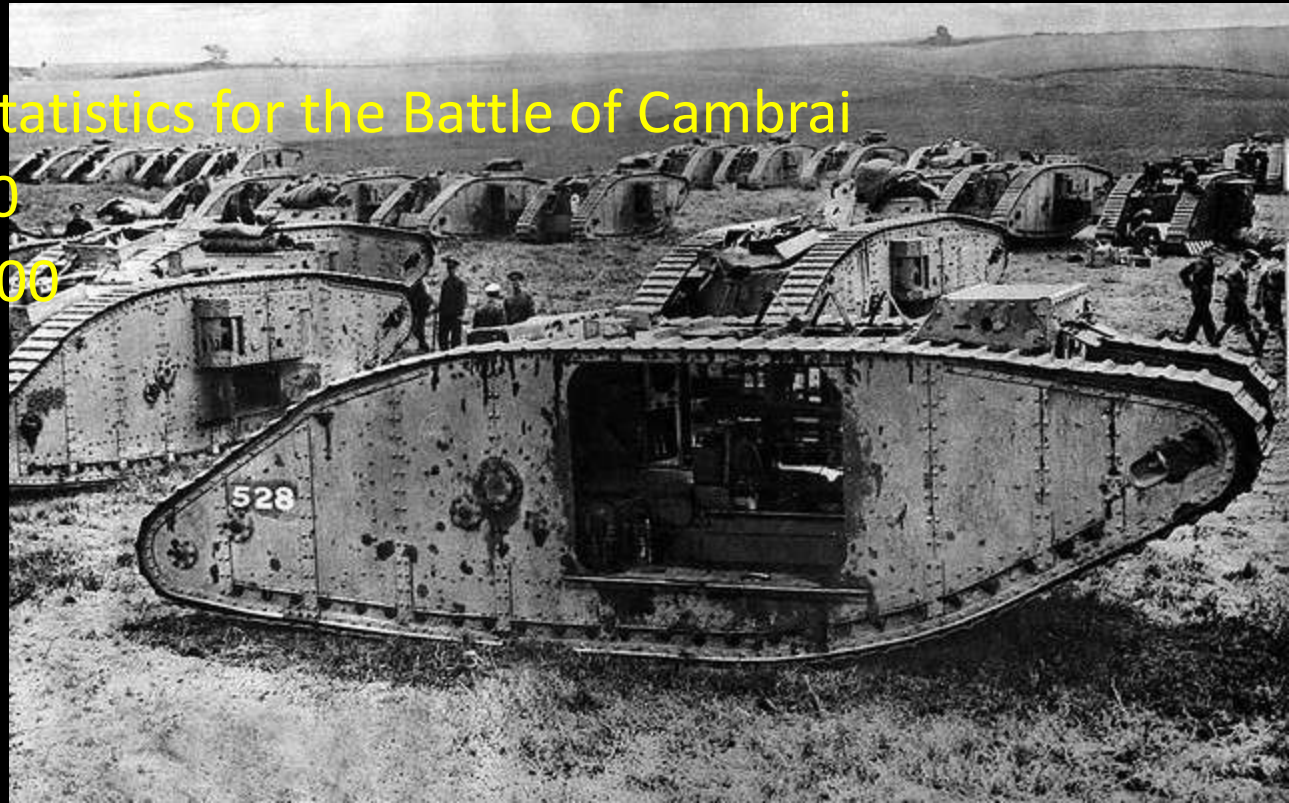
The best known of these powerful guns were Germany's Big Berthas. Each weighed about 75 tons and could fire a 2,100-pound shell a distance of more than 9 miles. Big Berthas were the largest mobile guns ever used on the battlefield.

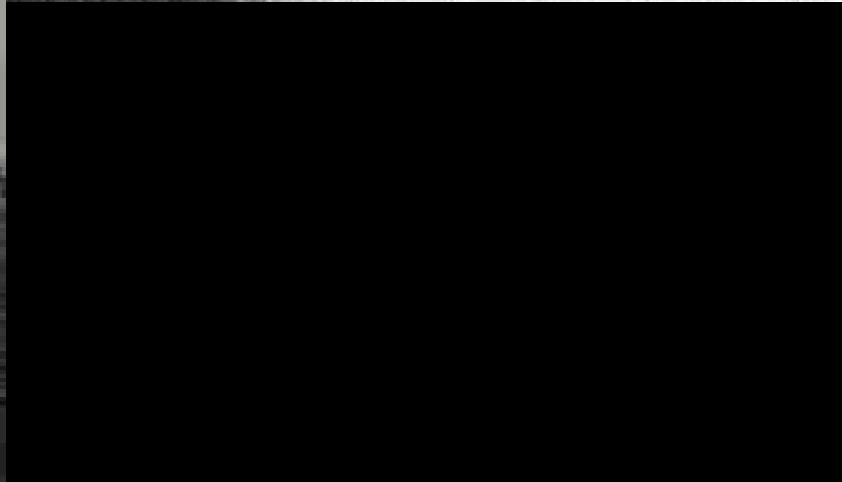
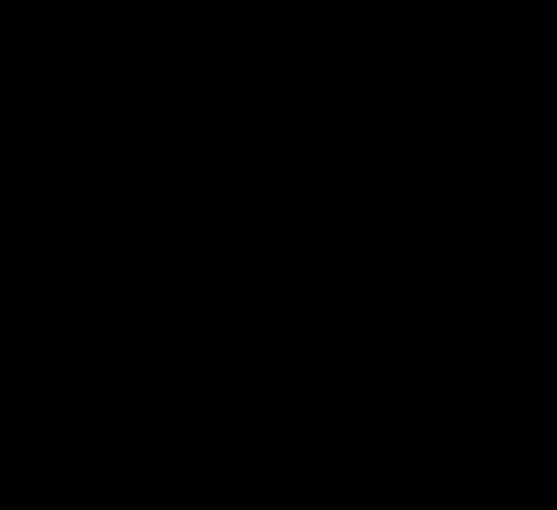


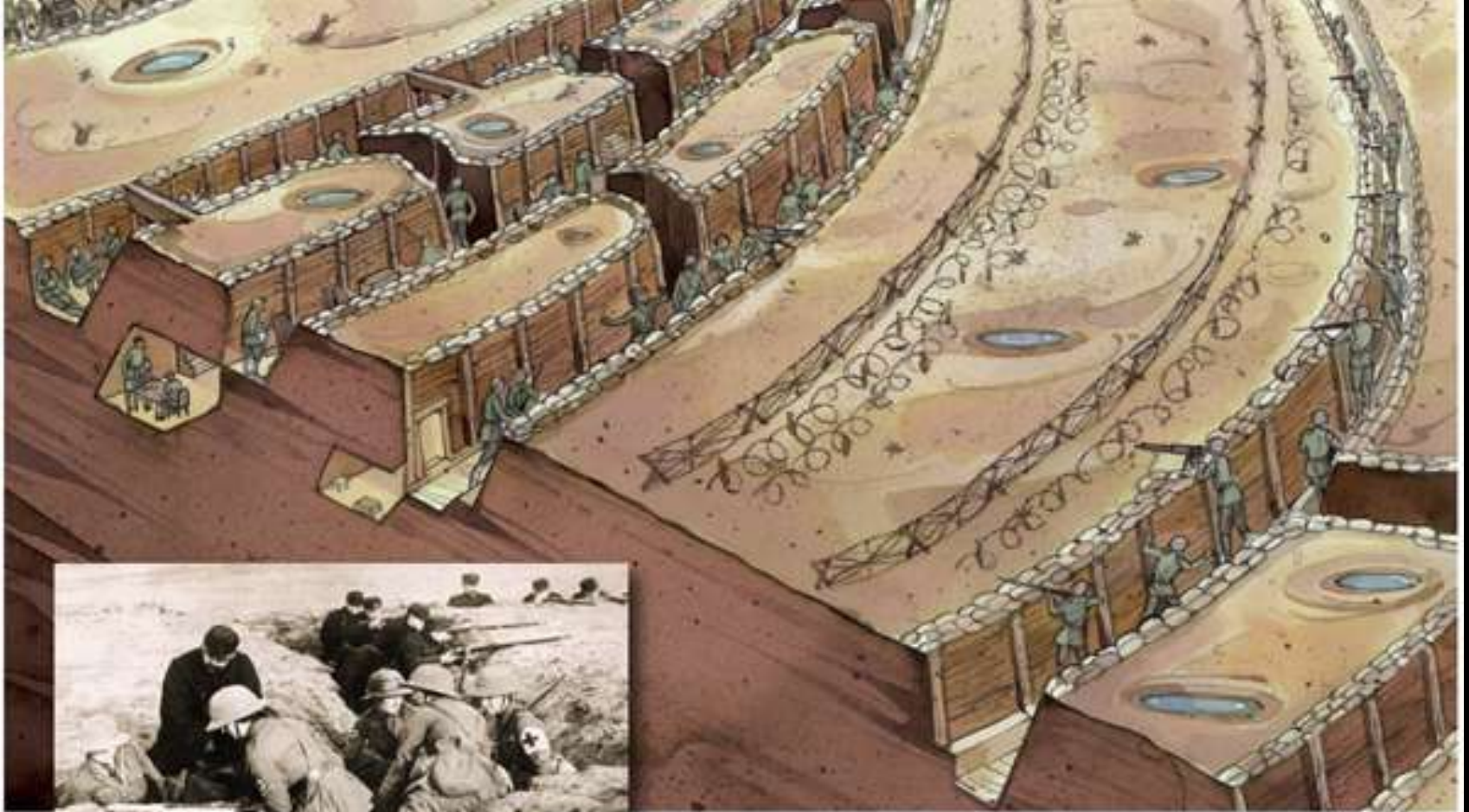
- Although debuted by the British earlier in the war, the tank was first used effectively in combat during the Battle of Cambrai in 1917. At Cambrai, British tanks were able to cross the area between the British and German trenches. The tank's protective metal kept the men inside from falling victim to the onslaught of enemy machine guns. The heavy tank crushed everything in sight, including the dangerous barbed wire guarding the trenches. Some 8,000 German prisoners and 100 guns were taken.

- Estimated Casualty Statistics for the Battle of Cambrai
- Allied Powers: 45,000
- Central Powers: 45,000

Tank







In World War I, typical frontline trenches were 6 to 8 feet deep and wide enough for two people to stand side by side. Short trenches connected the front lines to the others. Each trench system had kitchens, bathrooms, supply rooms, and more. However, living in and doing combat from the trenches was not pleasant. Nurses, such as those in the photograph below, provided medical care under difficult conditions.

- The German advance to Paris was stopped at the First Battle of the Marne in 1914. Casualties on both sides were heavy. After retreating north for 40 miles, the Germans stopped near the River Aisne, where they dug a series of trenches. This complex network created a new way of fighting. From the front line of the trenches, soldiers hurled grenades and fired machine guns at each other. For the next few years, a stalemate developed, because neither side wanted to face the dangers of advancing toward enemy trenches.

- **Estimated Casualty Statistics for the First Battle of the Marne**

- **Allied Powers: 263,000**

- **Central Powers: 250,000**





trench foot was caused by cold, wet, and insanitary conditions. The soldiers stood in trenches for 10 hours or more at a time. The feet would turn red or blue and slowly go numb.

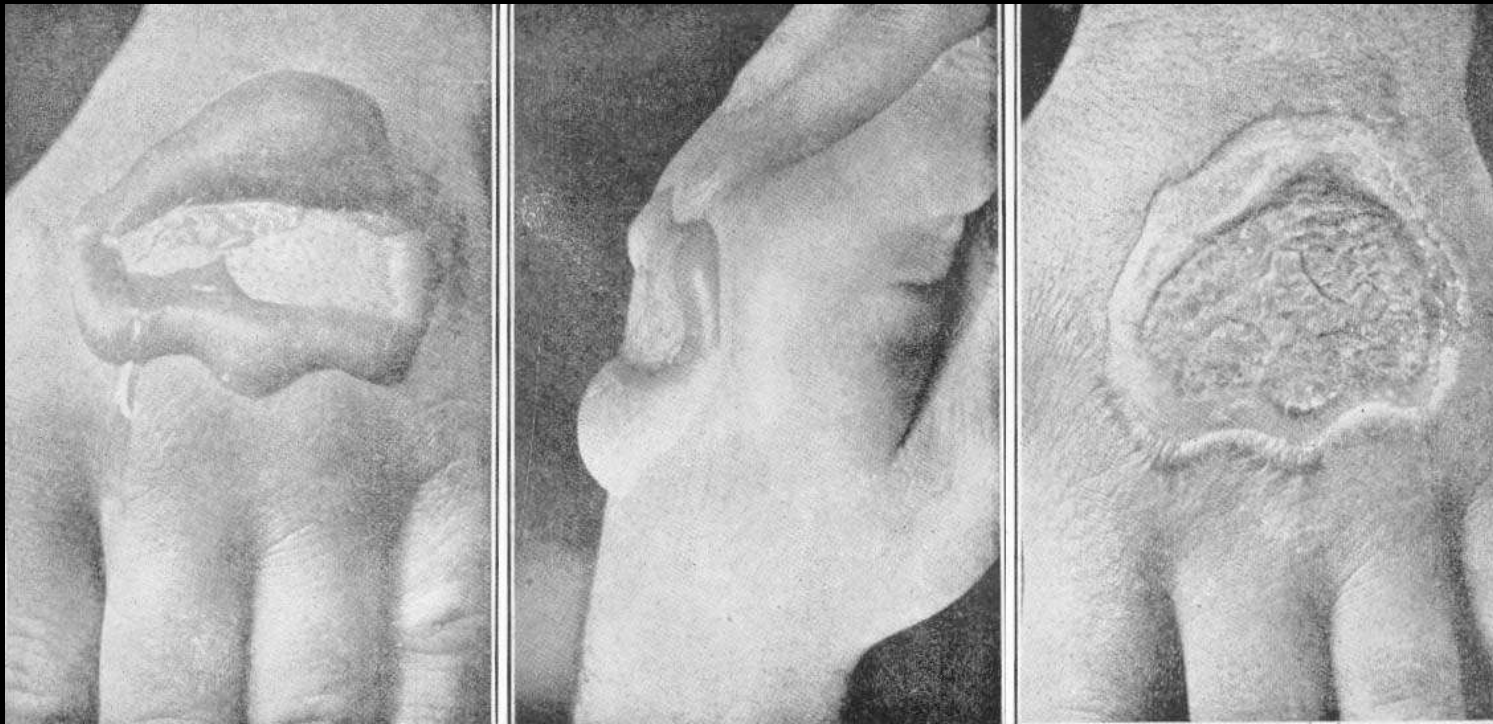


Both the Allies and the Central powers developed new weapons in hopes of breaking the deadlock in the trenches. In April 1915, the Germans first released poison gas over Allied lines. The fumes caused vomiting and suffocation. Both sides soon developed gas masks to protect troops from such attacks.

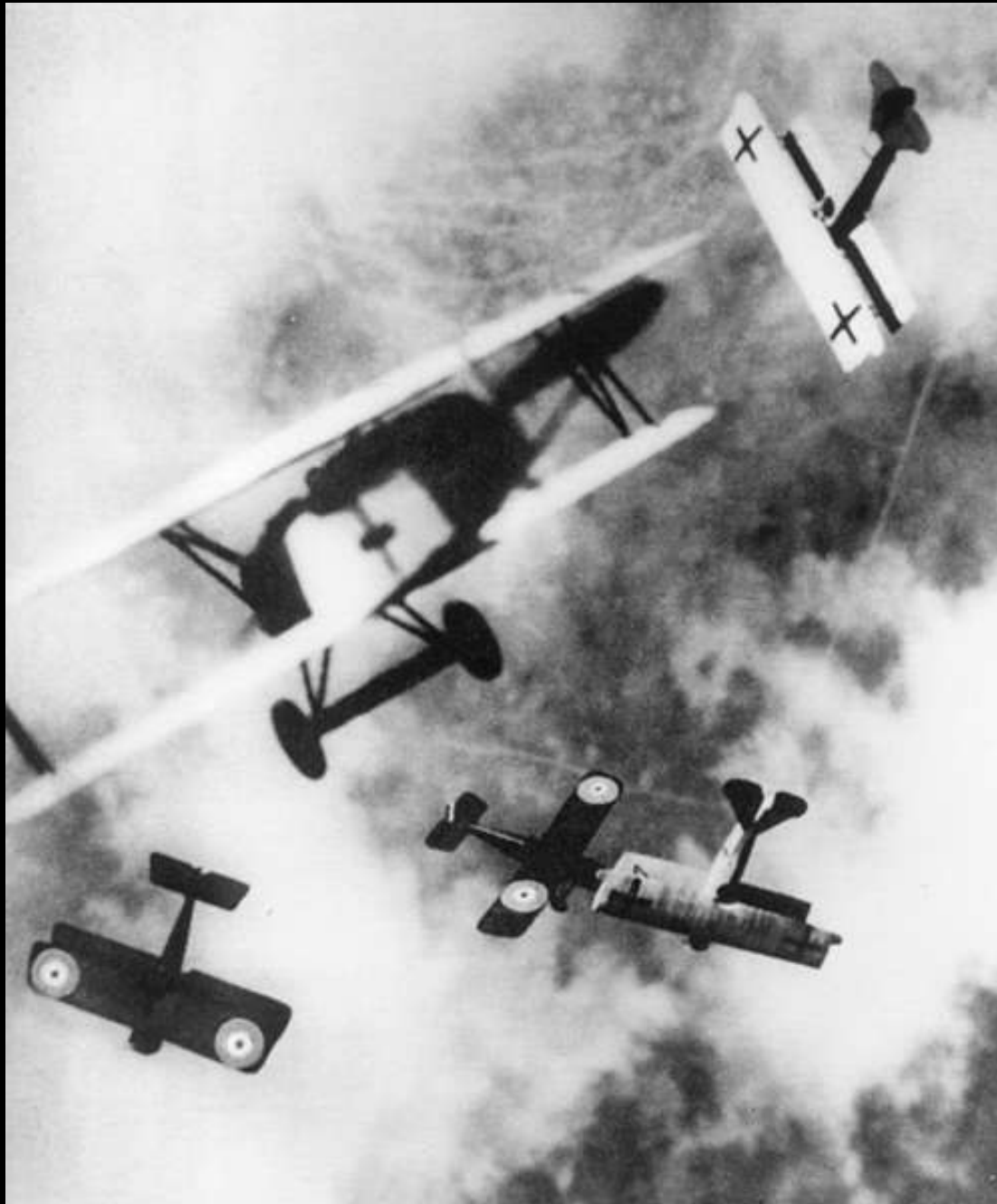


**German soldier in World War One with dogs equipped with gas masks.**

- The first notable use of poison gas was during the Second Battle at Ypres in 1915. One evening, the French and Algerian troops noticed a strange, yellow-green cloud moving their way. They thought it was an attempt by the Germans to cover an advancing attack. Instead, the cloud was full of chlorine gas, which caused severe choking. By the end of the war, both sides were experimenting with different types of poison gas and different ways of getting it into enemy trenches. At the Third Battle of Ypres (also known as Passchendaele), the Germans used mustard gas, which caused chemical burns that left lifelong injuries—both internal and external.
- Estimated Casualty Statistics for the Battle of Passchendaele
- Allied Powers: 509,000                      -Central Powers: 348,000



This series of photos are of a man whose leather glove was accidentally contaminated on its back by mustard. Photos 1 and 2 were taken one day and photo 3 one week later.



World War I was the first war in which planes were used as weapons. Early in the war, when enemy planes met, pilots exchanged smiles and waves. Soon they were throwing bricks and grenades or shooting pistols at one another. Once guns were mounted on planes, the era of air combat began.

- The Battle of Tannenberg in 1914 was an important victory for the Germans. They stopped the Russian army from advancing into German-controlled territory. Prior to the outbreak of fighting, both sides sent airplanes to gather details about their enemy. The Russian commander made a costly mistake by ignoring the warnings provided by his pilots. After tremendous losses at Tannenberg, the Russians did not make the same mistake again. Airplane missions were an important source of information for both sides throughout the war.
- Estimated Casualty Statistics for the Battle of Tannenberg
- Allied Powers: 267,000
- Central Powers: 80,000



The Germans also created high-flying, gas-filled airships called zeppelins. These cigar-shaped aircraft were first used for scouting enemy positions. In 1915, German pilots used zeppelins in bombing raids over London. Although the German airships terrified British civilians and alarmed the Allies, they often missed their targets. By 1916, the British had found a way to counter the airship threat. They built fighter planes that could fly as high as a zeppelin and developed bullets sharp enough to pierce the airship's outer skin, causing it to explode.

- The Battle of Jutland in 1916 was one of the largest naval battles in history. The British had a fleet of 151 battleships, while the Germans had only 99 battleships. A battleship would speed around, trying to trick the enemy ship into coming closer. Once the enemy ship was close enough, the battleship would fire its big guns. If effective, the attack would cause the enemy ship to sink. At Jutland, the British lost more ships than the Germans did, but many of the remaining German ships were seriously damaged.
- Estimated Casualty Statistics for the Battle of Jutland
- Allied Powers: 7,000
- Central Powers: 3,000

## Battleships

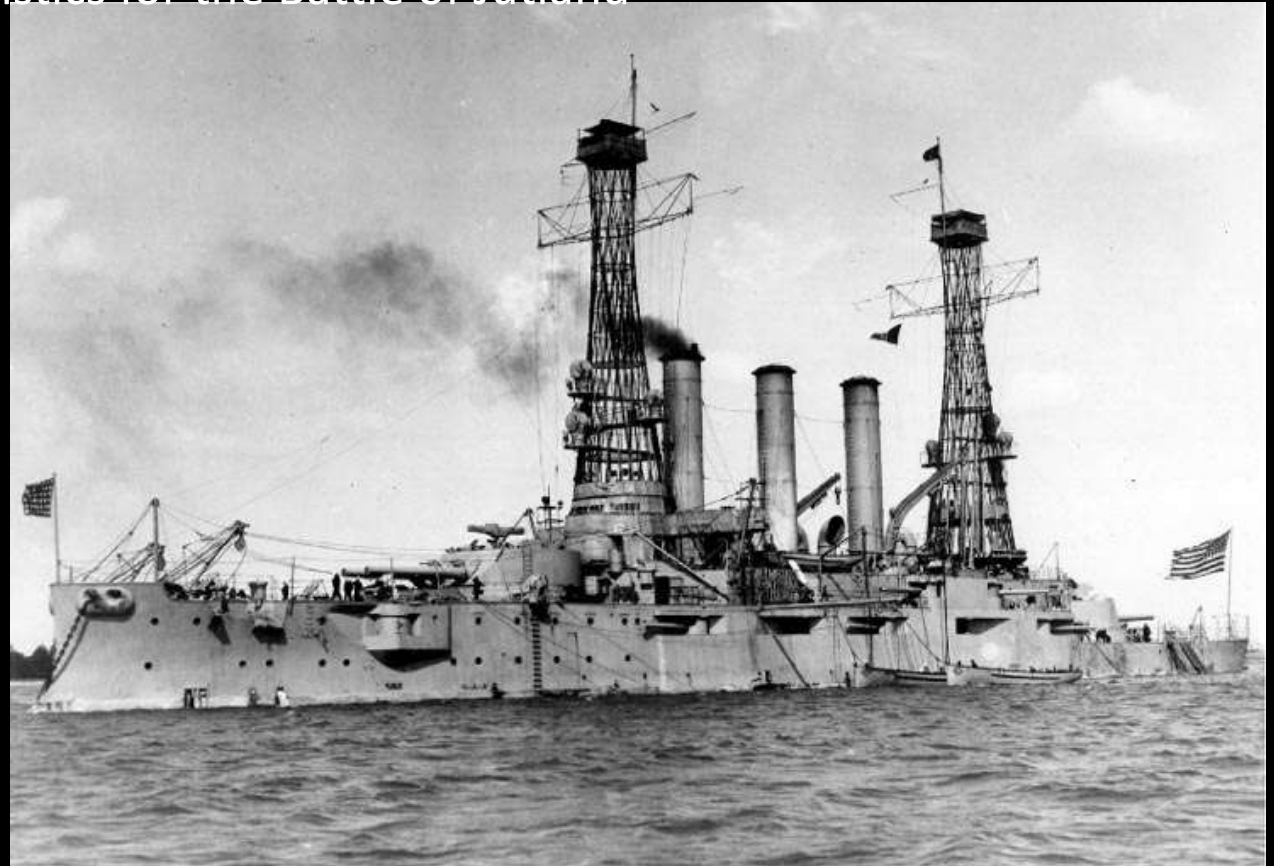


Photo # 19-N-13078 USS Missouri during World War I



Battle Ship in Heavy Seas—1918

The U-boat changed naval warfare forever. To combat U-boats, the Allies developed hydrophones. These “underwater ears” helped ships sense the approach of a U-boat and take defensive action.



- The Germans used submarines, which they called U-boats, throughout the war. The sinking of the *Lusitania* and other nonmilitary ships by German U-boats eventually brought the United States into the war. The Allies also used submarines. During the campaign at Gallipoli that began in 1915, the Allies used submarines to stop Turkish sea traffic and to bombard the shore. This activity was an important support to the land attack, though the Allies ultimately lost the campaign.
- Estimated Casualty Statistics for Gallipoli
- Allied Powers: 205,000
- Central Powers: 252,000





The effectiveness of U-boat attacks was greatly reduced by the development of the **convoy** [**convoy: a group of vessels or vehicles that travel together, often under the protection of an armed escort**] system. Under this system, Allied warships protected merchant ships by escorting groups of them across the Atlantic Ocean. The number of Allied shipping losses quickly decreased.



# Meuse-Argonne Offensive, 1918



## The War Comes to an End

The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was the last major battle of World War I. More than a million American troops helped the Allies capture the railroad that served as Germany's main supply line to France. With defeat all but certain, Germans demanded an end to the fighting. Kaiser Wilhelm abandoned his throne and fled to the Netherlands as the German government agreed to a truce.

## Estimated World War I Casualties

Country	Total Casualties
<b>Allied Powers</b>	
Russia	9,150,000
France	6,160,800
British Empire	3,190,235
Italy	2,197,000
United States	323,018
Japan	1,210
Other Allied nations	1,040,164
<b>Central Powers</b>	
Germany	7,142,558
Austria-Hungary	7,020,000
Turkey	975,000
Bulgaria	266,919

Source: U.S. Department of Justice.