

HOW WWI CHANGED AMERICA:

America Goes to War

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT:

Christopher Capozzola, Ph.D.:

Europe had experienced decades of peace, but it was a bit of an illusion.

Each of the European empires were building bigger armies, bigger navies, and in the summer of 1914 all of those countries came into conflict after the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo.

Within the space of about two or three weeks, all of the different empires of Europe lined up on one side or another in a massive war. On the one side, Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, which were known as the Central Powers. And on the other side, the alliance of Britain, France and Russia.

Jennifer D. Keene, Ph.D.:

Germany invades Belgium August 4th.

Two days later, Ellen Wilson dies. This is Woodrow Wilson's wife, so Woodrow Wilson is going through this massive personal crisis, the moment that Europe has exploded in war. It takes him a few weeks to issue an official declaration that America will remain neutral in this conflict. And this is because people think that this will be a quick war, and he understands we have people that come from all the nations that are involved. And he does not want arguments over this European war to tear American society apart.

The problem is that the war does not end quickly, and so once the war goes into 1915, the question is "What will Americans do?"

Christopher Capozzola, Ph.D.:

One of the first things that all of the warring powers needed, was money. And they turned to this new industrial powerhouse, the United States.

Jennifer D. Keene, Ph.D.:

We trade with Europe and we loan money to Europe. However that trade and that money goes primarily to the Allied side.

John H. Morrow, Jr., Ph.D.:

We had floated all these loans to the Allies and were supplying them with munitions, powder and food stuffs and raw materials. Once 1916 arrives, you begin to get a war preparedness movement.

Christopher Capozzola, Ph.D.:

In the years between 1914, when the war breaks out, and 1917, when the United States declares war, the US is watching. They are involved, and in fact, they're sometimes wrapped up into the war itself because American ships were sometimes sunk by German U-boats, particularly, the Lusitania in 1915. This was a moment when the United States considered entering the war and chose not to.

What the United States does is demand from Germany a pledge not to sink American ships. In early 1917, Germany makes a fateful decision. They realize that their only way to win is to keep American ships from reaching Britain and France. They know that by sinking American ships, they will drag the United States into the war. Their gamble is that they can win before the Americans can get there. It turned out to be a losing bet.

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT: AMERICAN GOES TO WAR

Germany begins sinking American ships in early 1917. This leads President Woodrow Wilson to go to Congress and ask for a declaration of war.

Jennifer D. Keene, Ph.D.:

When we enter the war, we have a combined military force of about 300 thousand. When the war ends, we'll have over four million men in arms. So over 19 months, the American military is going to have to grow incredibly.

Christopher Capozzola, Ph.D.:

The United States adopts conscription, mandatory military service that applied to men between the ages of 18 and 45. Within a very short period of time, the United States turns from having one of the smallest armies in the world, to in fact, having one of the largest.

Jennifer D. Keene, Ph.D.:

The modern military doesn't just need numbers. It needs all sorts of people that can do a variety of different jobs. Training these men, having enough officers to lead them, having enough ships to transport them overseas, creating supply lines that can actually keep them fed and armed. This all has to be created almost out of nothing.

John H. Morrow, Jr., Ph.D.:

It will take us until June 1918 to get the bulk of an army there that can make a difference. And by the fall campaigns, we have some 850,000 American soldiers on the continent in Europe, which is comparable to the British army.

We actually anticipated that the war would go on into 1920 by which time we would have a superbly trained and equipped army and we would win the war. The German army spoiled all of that by deciding they needed to surrender in October 1918. They knew they couldn't hold out any longer because of the pounding of all three Allied armies.

Jennifer D. Keene, Ph.D.:

American entry into the First World War did help turn the tide of the war in the Allies' favor. The victory was a coalition victory, and it was the aid that Americans gave to this coalition and the psychological boost that the American entry gave to the Allied soldiers that ultimately resulted in the Allied victory.

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Music

"DISTANT MEMORIES"

WRITTEN BY C. SHAKER, O. PRICE, AND V. HARRISON
COURTESY OF EXTREME MUSIC

"MY OBSESSION"

WRITTEN BY M. BOJANIC & R. COOKE
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