Summary history

Chapter 1 - §1 and §2.

§1 Era of the two world wars

The first world war began in 1914. The period from 1914 to 1945 is referred to as the Era of the Two World Wars. But you should use round numbers for this era: 1900-1950.

Common features of wars dating from the end of the 18th century

The main features of wars and armed conflicts since the late 18th century:

* *Important role of economy*

It costs a lot of money to wage a war. You’re more likely to win a war when you’ve got more money (well trained army, good weaponry). They started focussing on protecting their own economy while damaging the enemy’s.

* *Important role of technology*

You should develop better weapons than the enemy. Also non-military technology always influences the ways in which wars are fought.

* *Important role of leadership*

During wars, leadership is of great influence. Some leaders only distinguish themselves as strong military commanders but most are both political and military leaders.

* *Important role of strategy and tactics*

It’s determined by the political leaders: what do the leaders want to achieve by going to war and broad agreements about how the war should be conducted. Broad agreements on the battle field is known as military tactics.

* *Great influence of public opinion*’

After the French revolution, more people could read and write. Mass media was born and more people could vote. This made it difficult for governments to enter into war without the support of the majority of the population.

§2 The first world war (1914-1918)

The direct cause of the First World War

In 1914, the Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were killed by a group of Serb nationalists in Sarajevo, Bosnia. The nationalists wanted to unite several Slavic groups living in the Balkans into one large national state. Austria-Hungary was their biggest enemy. The empire attacked Bosnia in 1878 and added the country as a province in 1908. In response to the assassination (sluipmoord), the Austro-Hungarian government issued Serbia with an ultimatum. The Austro-Hungarian government demanded that the Austrian police in Serbia would be allowed to investigate in the assassins (moordenaars), otherwise it would declare war to the province. Serbia refused to cooperate and on 28 July, 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia.

Austria-Hungary received support from Germany.

Serbia was supported by Russia.

Germany attacked Belgium and France.

England declared war on Germany.

Italy and the US later also declared war on Austria-Hungary and Germany, which by this point added the Turkish Empire to its list of allies.

Underlying causes

There were other deeper underlying causes besides the assassination:

* *Nationalism in the European states*

Nationalism grew in the 19th century and every country was striving to be most powerful. Other countries were soon seen as ‘competitors’. The Balkans were mainly populated by Slavs. A large part of this area belonged to Austria-Hungary. The Slavs who lived there longed for their own independent state. They were supported in their struggle by the independent Slavic country Serbia, which was supported by Russia. French nationalists wanted to avenge the French defeat against Germany in 1870 and to reclaim lost territory. Germany wanted to conquer more colonies overseas. This caused frustration in England and France in particular. They saw it as a treat to their own colonial power.

* *Establishment of different alliances*

Towards the end of the 19th century, European countries formed alliances for support and safety. Nowadays, most European countries are member of one large military alliance, the NATO. The deep divisions at the turn of the 20th century made such an alliance possible at that time. In 1914, countries were dragged into war as they went to the aid of their allies.

How did warfare change during the First World War

* *It was the first war that could be classed as a world war*

It was fought mainly in Europe. The Western Front in Belgium and France and the Eastern front in Russia. Fighting also took place in northern Italy, the Balkans and the Dardanelles. Outside Europe, the war was fought in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the North sea, the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean.

* *Industrial war on a much larger scale than before with new and improved weapons*

The first world war had great influence on industry. Weapons were improved and new ones invented. Mas production took place. Chemical weapons were used for the first time. Chlorine gas was first used by the Germans at Ypres in April 1915. Most harmful gasses were first used in 1917. Both sides soon developed gas masks.

Tanks were used for the first time during the war by the British in 1916 at the battle of the Somme in Northern France. But they were useless after a few days. They either broke down, were eliminated or ran out of petrol. Lighter and more advanced tanks were developed at the end of the war.

Trucks proved more useful than tanks, they transported troops, food and equipment. The telephone also played a great role in that time.

This was the first war in which submarines played a role. The Germans hoped to break the British naval blockade of Germany and to cut off the flow of supplies to Britain and France, but they failed. It had an unintentional result , the US joined the war against Germany after German submarines sunk US ships, killing American citizens.

Many aeroplanes were used and many people went to work as ground staff at the airports or as factory workers in the aircraft industry. At first, planes were used for reconnaissance purposes but were soon used to attack the enemies from the skies.

It was an important question which country was able to train the most pilots and manufacture the most aircrafts. In the first world war, this was the Allies.

* *New tactics: trench warfare*

The Germans could not break as quickly through the defences of the Eastern and Western Front as they thought. The armies on both sides kept up an extremely heavy artillery (gunnery) barrage (versperring). In order to limit losses, the troops dug ditches to hide in, known as trenches. Now the trenches ran along the entire length of the Western Front and a large part of the Eastern Front. The battles at Verdun and the Some was not to occupy territory but just to slaughter as many of the enemy as possible. From late 1914 until the spring of 1918, the frontline in France advanced no more than 15 kilometres. When the war of attrition proved futile (worthless), the Germans, followed by the Allies, switched to mobile and mechanized warfare. Troops were trained to mount rapid attacks on a small scale using new light weapons. This change in tactics made the Allies in particular successful.

* *Increased use of propaganda*

In Germany, like before, leaders orchestrated the propaganda campaigns from up to down. For the Allies it became most important. Propaganda was used everywhere.

* *Improved medical care for soldiers*

This was the first war in which more soldiers died of wounds than of diseases. Many medicines were made and soldiers could be vaccinated against typhoid or tetanus.

* *The first ‘total war’*

Total war affects all of society and not just the armed forces. So everyone suffered:

* All young men had to fight in the army.
* Numerous men and women helped the war effort by working in factories to manufacture supplies for the soldiers.
* Everyone was affected by measures imposed by the governments out of necessity. For example: The rationing of food and other products.
* Mass media and films were used to call on the population to support their governments and troops.
* There were massive casualties. (doden en gewonden). No family was spared.

The first world war also bore some similarities to previous wars

* *Economic warfare now also played an important role*

England and France had many colonies that provided them with food. Austria-Hungary and Germany did not. Germany was hit by the British naval blockade, which cut off its imports. By 1918, Germany’s war of attrition reached its limits.

Old weapons cause the most devastation

The new weapons were less effective than the old weapons used in the 19th century. These weapons (like rifles, machine guns and cannons) were improved and used.

Were the leaders butchers or bunglers?

In the beginning of the first world war, France suffered greatest losses. They lost 300,000 in the first weeks. The bloodiest battle took place in Verdun and cost over 350,000 French’ lives and nearly as many Germans. Some researchers defend the generals’ actions: they didn’t know how to conduct trench warfare at the beginning.

Consequences of the war

The population living near the front lines suffered great loses during the war. The war was finally lost by Austria-Hungary and Germany.

* *The first world war redrew the map of Europe*

In march 1918, the Russian communists signed a peace treaty with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Under the terms of this treaty, the communists had to agree that Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania seceded from Russia and became independent states. In November 1918, Germany and Austria-Hungary had to admit defeat. They signed an armistice with the Western Allies (bondgenoten). In 1919, the defeated parties were forced to accept the Allies’ peace terms. The treaty with Germany was called *The Treaty Of Versailles.* These treaty terms changed the map:

* Austria-Hungary was split into two separate states. It lost all its Slavic regions in Central Europe and the Balkans had to cede (afstaan) South Tyrol and Trieste to Italy.
* Germany had to cede territories to France, Belgium and Poland.
* Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia emerged as new states.
* *Great bitterness among German population*

The Germans thought the Treaty Of Versailles was unfair. They thought they weren’t the only one to blame for war. They had to pay for all the reparations. This was more than they could ever be able to pay. Germany was the only nation not given the right of self-determination. Germany was forced to reduce its armed forces.