

World War I had lasted more than four years and caused the collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and German empires.



AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN ANTIWAR POSTER

NEW WORLD ORDER

A series of **armistices** ended the fighting, notably with Ottoman Turkey **316-17** on October 30, 1918, Austria-Hungary **318-19** on November 3, and Germany **322-23** on November 11. New states asserted their independence as the **old empires collapsed**, including Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia). In the former Russian Empire, **civil war** was raging.

Devastated World

After the fighting stopped, the world faced a daunting transition to peace. Malnutrition and disease killed millions, while political disorder and continuing armed conflict blocked recovery in many places. Soldiers returning home were disoriented by the experience of war.

World War I cost the lives of almost 10 million military personnel. These included over 2 million Germans, 750,000 British, 62,000 Australians, 65,000 Canadians, 74,000 Indians, and 58,000 Belgians. The French death toll was 1.4 million, about one in 10 of all French males. Almost 117,000 U.S. service personnel died.

Overall, losses were heavily concentrated in younger adult males. In Germany, for example, one in three men who had been aged 19 to 22 when the war started was dead by November 1918. Countless survivors were to varying degrees disabled and most were psychologically scarred.

It is impossible to establish how many civilian deaths were attributable to the effects of the war, although a figure of 6 million has been suggested.

Malnutrition and

general hardship, which increased the incidence of disease, continued beyond the war's end.

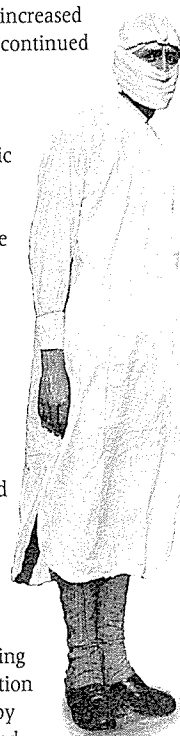
Deadly virus

Whether the flu pandemic raging at the time of the armistice should be considered a consequence of the war is uncertain, although wartime conditions certainly facilitated the spread of the deadly virus known misleadingly as "Spanish flu." Many thousands of soldiers who had survived the fighting died of influenza around the war's end. First recorded in January 1918, the virus killed between 50 and 100 million people worldwide before subsiding in late 1919. The population of Germany, weakened by food shortages, suffered heavily, but so did the well-fed United States.

The world's attention was distracted from probably the most deadly pandemic in human history by focusing

Influenza pandemic

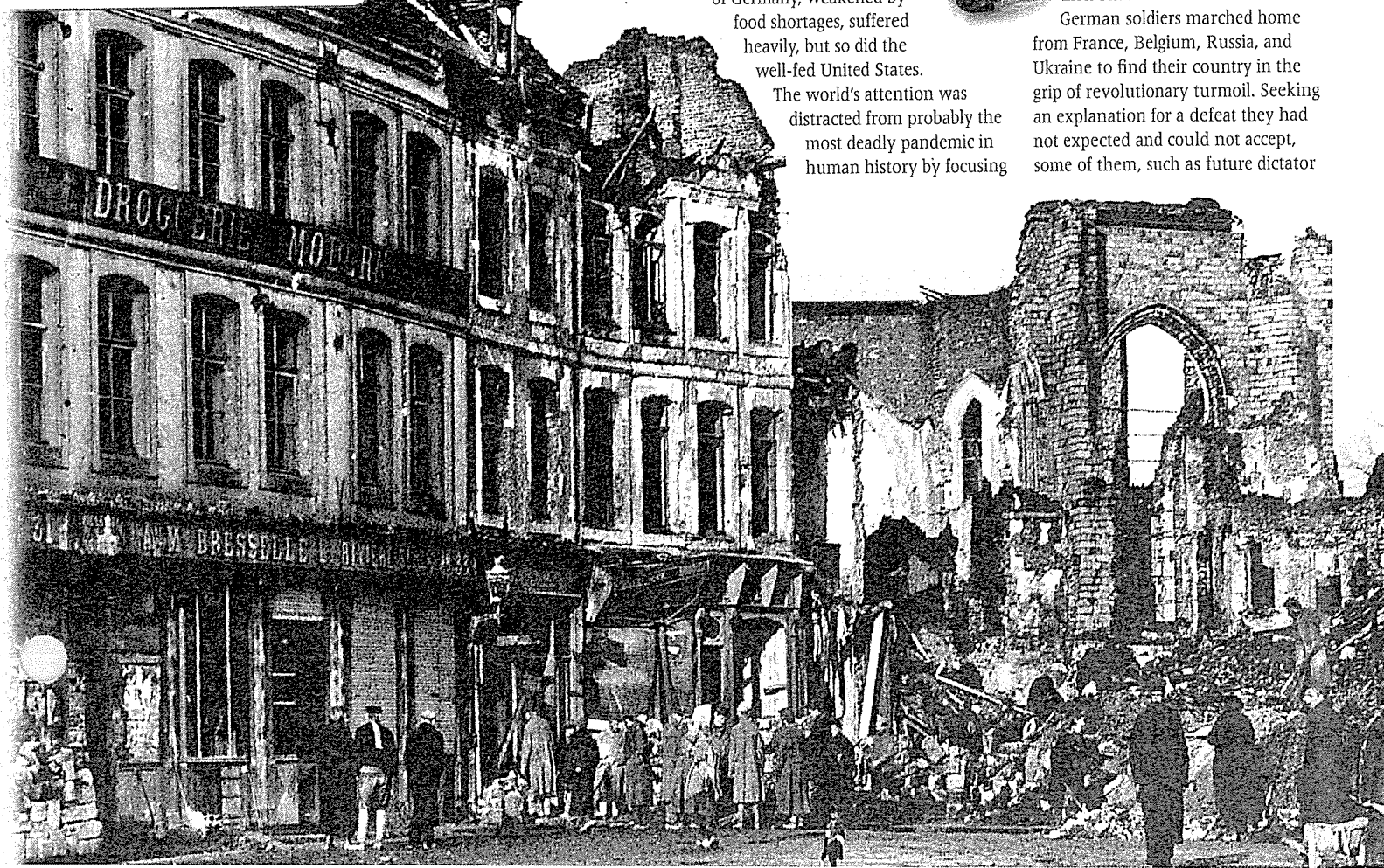
The "Spanish flu" that swept the world in 1918-19 mostly affected young adults, like this American soldier. Around 550,000 Americans died in the pandemic.



on the war and its aftermath. The demobilization of Allied soldiers proceeded slowly and often unfairly, leading to public protests and serious disturbances—including an incident in which five mutinous Canadian soldiers were shot at their army camp in Wales. Implementation of the terms of the Armistice with Germany went ahead. Allied soldiers occupied the Rhineland and German warships and submarines were interned in British ports. Allied prisoners of war were released from their camps and left to find their own way to friendly territory.

Extreme nationalism

German soldiers marched home from France, Belgium, Russia, and Ukraine to find their country in the grip of revolutionary turmoil. Seeking an explanation for a defeat they had not expected and could not accept, some of them, such as future dictator



German hardship

Women stoop to salvage food from a garbage dump in Berlin in the aftermath of the war. Malnutrition was rife and the death toll high.

Adolf Hitler, were drawn into nationalist extremist groups that blamed socialists and Jews for the debacle. Unable to reintegrate into civilian life, many ex-soldiers joined paramilitary organizations called Freikorps. The German government, led by moderate Social Democrats intent on founding a parliamentary democracy, used the Freikorps to crush an attempted communist uprising in Berlin in January 1919. A socialist republic proclaimed in Bavaria, southern Germany, in May 1919 was also brutally suppressed.

**Pitiful living conditions**

Life remained a miserable struggle for most Germans, who faced poverty, cold, and hunger, induced by political chaos and the effects of the Allied naval blockade, which under the terms of the Armistice was maintained until a final peace agreement was signed.

It was a similar picture in other countries shattered by the war. In the Turkish capital, Constantinople (Istanbul), typhus was rampant, food scarce, fuel unobtainable, and transportation at a

standstill. In the former Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, the condition of many people was pitiful.

New conflicts

There were outbreaks of fighting as new states sought to establish their borders—for example, between Poland and Czechoslovakia. In Hungary, a communist revolutionary, Bela Kun, seized power in March 1919 and proclaimed a Soviet Republic. He was overthrown by an invasion of Romanian and Czechoslovak forces, which allowed Hungarian Admiral Miklos Horthy to take power.

The victor countries were not immune to conflict and disorder. Italy was swept by riots and strikes. In the United States, the authorities made widespread arrests of anarchists and socialists in the “Red Scare” from April 1919. The British Empire was challenged by revolts in Ireland, Egypt, and India. Meanwhile, Belgium and France faced the daunting challenge of reconstruction in the war-devastated zone of the Western Front, with its ruined or obliterated towns and

villages, wrecked factories and mines, gas-poisoned soil, and dangerous litter of unexploded munitions. Even neutral countries such as Norway and the Netherlands were stalked by hunger.

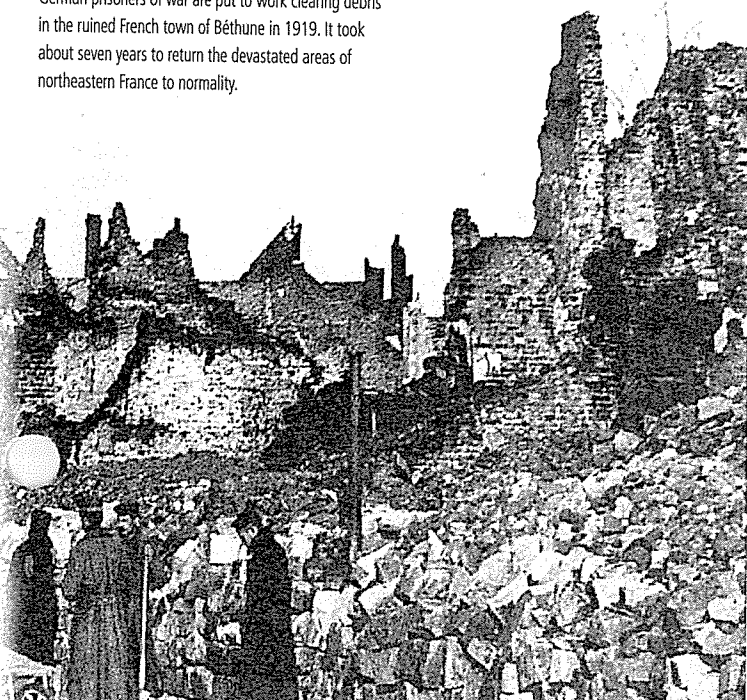
The establishment of the American Relief Administration in February 1919, to provide food aid to Europe, was an attempt at a civilized international response to the catastrophe. But mostly individuals and states had to seek their own way back to normality.

“We have won the war. Now we will have to win the peace. That may prove harder.”

FRENCH PREMIER GEORGES CLEMENCEAU, NOVEMBER 11, 1918

Clearing the ruins

German prisoners of war are put to work clearing debris in the ruined French town of Béthune in 1919. It took about seven years to return the devastated areas of northeastern France to normality.

**GERMAN DICTATOR (1889–1945)****ADOLF HITLER**

The future German dictator Adolf Hitler was Austrian. He moved to Munich in Germany as a young man, joining the German army as a volunteer in August 1914. After the war, he drifted into nationalist politics, and in 1921 became leader of the small Nazi Party.

In 1923, his attempt to seize power in the Munich Putsch failed. After a spell in prison, he built up mass support by arguing that all Germany's ills were due to the Treaty of Versailles. Taking power in 1933, he sought to reverse the result of World War I, eventually leading Germany to catastrophic defeat in World War II.



Additional WW1 Devastation: The Influenza Pandemic of 1918

The influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 killed more people than the Great War, known today as World War I (WWI), at somewhere between 20 and 40 million people. It has been cited as the most devastating epidemic in recorded world history. More people died of influenza in a single year than in four-years of the Black Death Bubonic Plague from 1347 to 1351. Known as "Spanish Flu" or "La Grippe" the influenza of 1918-1919 was a global disaster.

The Grim Reaper by Louis Raemaekers

In the fall of 1918 the Great War in Europe was winding down and peace was on the horizon. The Americans had joined in the fight, bringing the Allies closer to victory against the Germans. Deep within the trenches these men lived through some of the most brutal conditions of life, which it seemed could not be any worse. Then, in pockets across the globe, something erupted that seemed as benign as the common cold. The influenza of that season, however, was far more than a cold. In the two years that this scourge ravaged the earth, a fifth of the world's population was infected. The flu was most deadly for people ages 20 to 40. This pattern of morbidity was unusual for influenza which is usually a killer of the elderly and young children. It infected 28% of all Americans (Tice). An estimated 675,000 Americans died of influenza during the pandemic, ten times as many as in the world war. Of the U.S. soldiers who died in Europe, half of them fell to the influenza virus and not to the enemy (Desert News). An estimated 43,000 servicemen mobilized for WWI died of influenza (Crosby). 1918 would go down as unforgettable year of suffering and death and yet of peace. As noted in the Journal of the American Medical Association final edition of 1918:



"The 1918 has gone: a year momentous as the termination of the most cruel war in the annals of the human race; a year which marked, the end at least for a time, of man's destruction of man; unfortunately a year in which developed a most fatal infectious disease causing the death of hundreds of thousands of human beings. Medical science for four and one-half years devoted itself to putting men on the firing line and keeping them there. Now it must turn with its whole might to combating the greatest enemy of all--infectious disease," (12/28/1918).

The effect of the influenza epidemic was so severe that the average life span in the US was depressed by 10 years. The influenza virus had a profound virulence, with a mortality rate at 2.5% compared to the previous influenza epidemics, which were less than 0.1%. The death rate for 15 to 34-year-olds of influenza and pneumonia were 20 times higher in 1918 than in previous years (Taubenberger). People were struck with illness on the street and died rapid deaths. One anecdote shared of 1918 was of four women playing bridge together late into the night. Overnight, three of the women died from influenza (Hoagg). Others told stories of people on their way to work suddenly developing the flu and dying within hours (Henig). One physician writes that patients with seemingly ordinary influenza would rapidly "develop the most viscous type of pneumonia that has ever been seen" and later when cyanosis appeared in the patients, "it is simply a struggle for air until they suffocate," (Grist, 1979). Another physician recalls that the influenza patients "died struggling to clear their airways of a blood-tinged froth that sometimes gushed from their nose and mouth," (Starr, 1976). The physicians of the time were helpless against this powerful agent of influenza. In 1918 children would skip rope to the rhyme (Crawford):

*I had a little bird,
Its name was Enza.
I opened the window,
And in-flu-enza.*

The influenza pandemic circled the globe. In India the mortality rate was extremely high at around 50 deaths from influenza per 1,000 people (Brown). The Great War, with its mass movements of men in armies and aboard ships, certainly aided in its rapid diffusion and attack. The origins of the deadly flu disease were unknown but widely speculated upon. Some of the allies thought of the epidemic as a biological warfare tool of the Germans. Many thought it was a result of the trench warfare, the use of mustard gases and the generated "smoke and fumes" of the war. Only now, nearly a century later do we know the cause.