

The First World War

(Outline)

There are many still not fully answered questions concerning the First World War. Here are some key ones to think about as we plow together through this course:

- Why did it start?
- Why couldn't they stop it?
- Who was to blame?
- Why did the pre-war plans all fail?
- How important was the American contribution?
- Were the generals (generally) dumb?
- Was the German Army actually defeated?
- Could the war have been continued after Nov. 1918?
- Should the Allies have pressed on into Germany?

Part 1: The War Begins, 1914

(Creating and exploding a Tinderbox)

I. Set up and causes

1. FEAR!!!
2. Ism's
 - a. Nationalism (Jingoism)
 - b. Imperialism (Colonialism)
 - c. Militarism (War Plans: Schlieffen Plan, Plan XVII, etc.)
 - d. Pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism
3. Other general factors
 - a. Arms race (specifically the Naval Arms Race)
 - b. Population pressure in Germany (Lebensraum)

II. Individual Countries and where they stood

1. Italy (to be treated as a great power)
2. Turkey (Regain N. Africa, Balkans, and long-standing enemy of Russia)
3. Austria-Hungary (To survive as an empire and fear of Russia)
4. Germany (To hold a "place in the sun" + fear of two front war)
5. Russia (Pan-Slavism, Lebensraum, and to regain lost prestige)
6. France (Regain Alsace & Lorraine + fear of Germany)

7. England (Maintain her empire, supremacy of the RN & integrity of international rule of law; channel ports)

III. The spark initiates an inferno (“some damn foolish thing in the Balkans”)

1. Assassination of the Arch-Duke (ho-hum)
2. Austria decides to punish Serbia
3. Gets a “**BLANK CHECK**” from Germany
4. Austria issues ultimatum and mobilizes
5. Willie/Nicky telegrams
6. **RUSSIA MOBILIZES** (can’t do a partial?) (Russian blank check) (French Blank Check)
7. **GERMANY MOBILIZES** (can’t do a partial?); **ATTACKS FRANCE THRU BELGIUM**
8. England declares war.

IV. War starts on three fronts.

1. Austria invades Serbia and gets soundly defeated
2. Russia invades Germany far earlier than anyone expected
3. Russia and Austria invade each other
4. Germany executes the Schlieffen Plan
5. France executes Plan XVII

V. Eastern Front

1. Russia evicted from East Prussia
 - a. Gumbinnen
 - b. Tannenberg (arguably most complete victory of the war)
 - c. Masurian Lakes
2. Austrian drive from Galicia heavily defeated.
3. German 9th Army halts Russian Galician campaign.
4. Russian 10th Army halts German Polish campaign (Lotz)
5. Winter stalemate ensues

VI. Western Front

1. Plan XVII Fails
2. Germans sweep through Belgium and NE France
3. Battles of the Frontiers
 - a. The French stop
 - b. The Germans close up and dig in
 - c. The French attack and get slaughtered
 - d. The French retreat.
 - e. The French stop (repeat the process)

4. The Marne
5. The "Race to the Sea"
6. Permanent Stalemate ensues

VII. 1914 Summary

1. Six major offensives all fail
2. Cost was horrendous
3. War became "static" (at least in the west)
4. Falkenhayn relieves Moltke
 - a. Easterners vs. Westerners
5. 18th century linear tactics do not work against 20th century weapons and trenches. Something new is needed.

Part 2: Big battles, Europe 1915 – 1916

(Little Gain)

Generalship

1. "The Donkeys" (Clark, 1961) paints an erroneous picture
2. New tactics constantly being tried
3. Repeated failures due to:
 - a. Inexperience
 - b. Inadequate technology
 - c. Improved defenses
4. Some fit the stereotype (Cadorna, Nivelle) but most did not.

Trenches

1. Highly evolved and complex "cities"
 2. Use of inverted A-frames and narrow gauge railroads
 3. Germans were much more permanent
 4. Informal "truces" & trench raids
 5. "A tier a year"
 6. Snipers
 - i. Sniper plates
 - ii. Wounded in no-man's land
 - iii. Reverse fire indicators
 7. Introduction of concrete
 8. Use of interlocking defensive "hard points"
- I. Italy enters the war (May 1915)
9. Between then & November 1916, 9 Battles of the Isonzo
 10. Accomplished very little except mounting Italian losses

11. Italy 302K, Austria 277K
12. Army moral becoming a major issue for both
13. Following the 6th Isonzo battle the Austrians initiate the Battle of Asiago (Strafexpedition). Italians lose additional 140K.

II. Eastern Front

1. German pressure to “pacify” the east. (The Decisive Theater?)
2. From the SW used Austrian troops w/ German leadership
 - a. Gorlice-Tarnow (Battle of Lemberg)
 - b. Galicia and through the Carpathians
 - c. Russians driven back to 1914 positions. (The “Great Retreat”)
3. The Czar takes charge (Disaster) (Sept 1915)
 - a. Vodka
 - b. Supreme Command
4. Bulgaria joins the Central Powers and Serbia driven from the war (Oct 1915)
 - a. Salonika “Front” opens and stalls. (Oct 1915)
5. The Brusilov Offensive (Summer 1916)
 - a. Drove Austrians back 60 miles
 - b. 768 batts. vs. 453 batts.
 - c. Relieved pressure on Verdun and Asiago
 - d. Huge casualties (2.4M) finished both Russian & Austrian armies
 - e. Brought Romania into the war for a short time (Bad decision!)

IV. Western

- a. Champagne (Dec 1914)
 - b. Neuve-Chapelle (March)
 - c. 2d Ypres (April)
 - d. Artois Campaign (Sept-Oct)
 - e. Loos (Sept-Oct)
 - f. Results: Apparently nothing (learning perhaps?)
 - g. Casualties (Allied 1.5M, German 600K)
- 2) Verdun (Feb 1916) – “Bleed the French Army white”
 - a) Perfect read of the French reaction
 - b) Confusion in primary German objective
 - c) East side of the Meuse only (this was a major blunder)
 - a. 10 months, 1M casualties, 5 miles
- 3) Somme (June 1916)
 - a. Designed to relieve pressure on Verdun
 - b. Massive artillery preps

- c. Raw troops
- d. "Layered Defense"
- e. 5 months, 1.2M casualties, no significant gains.
- f. "The Muddy Graveyard of the German Army"

V. Summary

- 1. Serbia & Romania (essentially) out of the war
- 2. French close to worn out
- 3. Russia close to worn out
- 4. Italians & Austrians have about worn each other out
- 5. Germans seem to still be well "in the game" (but are they?)
- 6. English now have the main allied burden on the Western Front

PART 3: The War at Sea *(Rule Britannia)*

Artillery

- a. Shrapnel vs. HE (HE won)
- b. "Shell shortage"
- c. Heavy vs. "field" artillery
- d. How to support the offensive??
 - i. Massive sustained bombardment
 - ii. Brief intense bombardment
 - iii. Rolling barrage
- e. Ranging fire vs. calculated fire
- f. Either way, artillery was the great killer of WWI ($\approx 80\%$)

Machine guns.

- a. Tactics
- b. Types

I. The Naval War

- a. Kaiser was determined to have a Navy to challenge England (Tirpitz/Mahan)
- b. Failed to anticipate the English reaction.
- c. Waste of resources??
- d. Start:
 - i. England: 29 Dreadnaughts (+ 13 building)
 - ii. Germany: 18 Dreadnaughts (+9 building), but....
 - iii. England has a lot more ocean to cover

II. The Cruiser War

- a. 17 German cruisers all over the globe
 - i. 5 in E. Asia Squadron (Spee)
 - ii. 2 in the Med
 - iii. Serious threat to England's lifelines
- b. Helgoland Bight (Aug 1914)
 - i. 4 German cruisers sunk by Beatty
- c. Goeben & Breslau escape to Turkey (Aug 1914)
- d. All were wrapped up by November except Spee
 - i. Little damage except EMDEN (Muller/15 ships)
 - ii. Coronel (Nov) - British disaster
 - iii. Falklands (Dec)
 - 1. British strategic move (battle cruisers)
 - 2. German strategic blunder (Attack Falklands)
 - 3. German bad luck (clear weather)
 - 4. Dresden survives until March

III. Jutland

- a. Run up to the battle
 - i. Room 40
 - ii. Scarborough, Whitbey, & Hartlepool
 - iii. Dogger Bank (Jan 1915)
 - 1. German cruiser sunk, 2 damaged
 - 2. Kaiser orders no more "risk taking"
 - 3. Becomes a "fleet in being" (not really)
- b. The plans
 - i. Sheer
 - 1. Trap Beatty
 - 2. Needed complete secrecy (didn't have it)
 - ii. Jellicoe
 - 1. Counter -Trap Sheer
 - 2. Needed excellent communications (didn't have it)
 - 3. Could not afford to lose!!!
 - iii. Numbers:
 - 1. Germans: 16 D/N's, 5 B/C's
 - 2. British: 28 D/N's, 9 B/C's
 - iv. Neither plan worked but Jellicoe came closer
- c. The Battle
 - i. Initial British plan worked well; however,

- ii. British battle cruisers not able to fight in the line
- iii. Beatty kept his head and drew Sheer into the trap
- iv. Crossed Sheer's "T", Sheer's turn away
- v. Sheer turns back in and is crossed again
- vi. Sheer turns away and launches torpedo attack
- vii. Jellicoe turns away.
- viii. Night falls and Sheer escapes

- d. Results: a clear British strategic victory
 - i. Damaged D/N's vs. sunk B/C's
 - ii. British Fleet actually more superior following the battle.
 - iii. High Seas Fleet finished as a key war fighting force

IV. Submarines

- a. U-Boat campaign
 - i. U-9 sinks 3 cruisers in < 1 hour
 - 1. Signals submarine as potent weapon
 - 2. Germans begin major building effort
 - ii. War Zone declaration (Feb 1915)
 - iii. Lusitania (May 1915)
 - iv. Jutland means it's U-Boats or nothing
 - v. Unrestricted Sub warfare declared, Feb 1917
 - vi. Convoys start in the spring
 - vii. U-Boat war ends (summer 1917)

- a. British campaign in Sea of Marmora
 - 1. May – Dec 1915
 - 2. Sank all Turkish Battleships
 - 3. 50% of the Turkish merchant fleet
 - 4. Took Turkey out of the naval war

V. Blockade

- a. First actions of the Royal navy
 - i. Tore up the cables
 - ii. Established far blockade with some local patrols
- b. After losing three cruiser in 1 hour dropped near blockade.
- c. Essentially stopped all German maritime commerce for the war
 - i. Impounded, blockaded or sank them all
 - ii. Neutral blockade runners only source
- d. Some 700000 civilian deaths attributed to the blockade

- VI. A major factor in home front discontent which played key role in Germany's eventual defeat

Part 4A: The War in the Air
(Learning to Fly)

Poison Gas

- a. First used in Russia on limited scale
- b. 2d Ypres; first major use (Chlorine)
 - i. French colonials broke and ran
 - ii. Germans not ready to exploit
 - iii. Canadians plugged the gap
- c. Both sides adopted gas quickly
 - i. Phosgene use at Verdun and thereafter
 - ii. Mustard gas used at 3d Ypres
- d. Counter measures came out fast
 - i. After 1915 deaths were very rare
 - ii. < 1% of deaths were due to gas
- e. It was really a harassment weapon
 - i. Didn't work very well
 - ii. Problem for user as well as defender

I. Aircraft in 1914

- 1. About 1000 planes available to the warring powers
- 2. Plus some dirigibles and many balloons
- 3. Well est. physical & training requirements
- 4. Clear and recognized mission – reconnaissance

II. Early uses

- 1. First important successes – The Marne & Tannenburg
- 2. Importance of denial becomes apparent
- 3. Garros – December 1914 (First fighter kill)
- 4. Pegoud – First “Ace”
- 4. Fokker – “Eindecker” (May 1915) & the “Fokker Scourge”
- 5. Developing a “Fighter” plane
- 6. Becomes a performance & number contest

III. Artillery spotting becomes dominant mission

- 1. Generates the famed dogfights & aces
- 2. But really about performance & numbers
- 3. By 1917, ground attack also became important

IV. Bombing

1. Attempted early on with little success
2. Zeppelins against London
 - a. Weather issues
 - b. Terror weapon of little consequence
3. Bombers were better but not much
 - a. Technology just wasn't ready

V. 1918

1. Allies completely out built the Germans
2. Developed effective "Combined Arms" concept
3. At Amiens, >1000 aircraft; At Meuse-Argonne > 1500 aircraft
4. However, in the final analysis the aircraft was not a decisive weapon in this war

Part 4B: Middles East & Colonies *(A World War)*

I. Turkey takes on too much

1. 1914 invasion of the Caucasus
 - a. 81% casualty rate
2. 1915 assault on Suez
3. Followed by the Senussi Campaign

II. Gallipoli (Feb – Nov 1915)

1. Strategic concept (knock Turkey out of the war) – Excellent
2. Tactical execution – Terrible!!
 - a. Greatly underestimated the Turks
 - b. Fuzzy tactical goals (navy vs. army, who does what?)
3. A complete failure

IV. British attack towards Baghdad (March 1915)

- a. Initial success
- b. Stopped at Ctesiphon
- c. Besieged at Kut-el-Amara
- d. Repeated efforts to relieve failed
- e. Surrendered March 1916
- f. Although costly, the British campaign had protected the oil fields.

V. Summer 1916 Caucasus offensive

- a. Yudenich shows some real skill
- b. Typical high casualty rates
- c. Both sides quit for the winter
- d. Russian revolution puts a halt to all combat on this front

II. Middle East 1917-1918

- 1. British drive Turks out of Sinai (Jan 1917)
- 2. But then get seriously defeated trying to invade Palestine
- 3. (Apr 1917) Allenby takes over and begins a drive to take "Jerusalem by Christmas" (Takes it Dec 8.)
 - i. Turks lose 71% of the force in the region
 - ii. British lose 20% (18K)
 - iii. Turks fall back to Jaffa Jordan line.
- 4. Battle of Megiddo destroy three Turkish armies (Sept 1918)
 - i. Perhaps the most brilliant campaign of the war
 - ii. Combined arms and meticulous planning
 - iii. Turks leave the war (October 30, 1918)

III. Pacific

- a. Very quickly Japan & Australia carve up the German Pacific holdings
- b. Only battle was Tsingtau (Fell to Japan in Nov)

IV. Africa

- a. Togoland (1914), German Southwest Africa (1915), Cameroons (1916) all fall relatively easily
- b. German East Africa
 - 1. Lettow-Vorbeck conducts a brilliant campaign
 - 2. Never defeated. Last victory at Kasama on 13 Nov 1918.
 - 3. Surrendered on Nov 23, 1918

Part 5A: 1917 in Europe (Armies Collapse)

Tanks

- a. Churchill proposal in Jan 1915
 - i. Developed by the NAVY (?)
 - ii. First model in Sept 1915
- b. Combat

- i. On the Somme (Sept 1916) – Failure
 - I. Bad tactics
 - II. Mechanical problems
- ii. Cambrai (Nov 1917)
 - I. Much more successful
 - II. Again however, bad tactics ruined the try
- iii. Final Allied offensive

Tactics

- a. Evolved steadily over time
- b. From mass attack to small unit attack
- c. From “breakout” to limited objectives
- d. From riflemen to special purpose soldiers
 - i. <50% of the attackers in 1918 would be riflemen
 - ii. Light M/G’s, flamethrowers, indigenous artillery
- e. Avoid strong points, go around them.

I. Recap:

- a. Germany has stabilized the Eastern Front
- b. Serbia & Romania are out of the war in the Balkans
- c. Allies still trapped at Salonika
- d. The Italians have had no success at the Isonzo River
- e. After Verdun & Somme, the Western Front is a complete stalemate

II. Germany develops a plan to win the war (Late 1916-Luddendorf)

- a. Unrestricted submarine warfare to remove England from the war
- b. Finish off the Russians on land
- c. Move many troops from east to west
- d. Finish off the French on land
- e. All before America has an impact (1919 at the earliest)
 - i. America entered in April 1917
 - ii. Immediate naval & financial impact
 - iii. Had no impact on land until 1918

III. Eastern Front

- a. Russian revolution brings socialist government to power (March 1917)
- b. The “Kerensky” offensive (July 1917)
 - i. Complete failure
 - ii. Austro-German counter-attack crushed the Russian army
 - iii. Russian essentially quits (“votes with their feet”)
 - iv. Nov 1917, the Bolsheviks take power and formally drop out of the war

- c. Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918)
 - i. Formally ended Russia's war
 - ii. Germans still had to keep major units in the east
 - iii. The treaty would hurt Germany badly at Versailles

IV. The Western Front

- a. German withdraw to the "Hindenburg Line" (Feb 1917)

- b. The Nivelle Offensive (2d Aisne)
 - i. An unmitigated disaster (terrible OpSec)
 - ii. Failed to consider the German withdraw
 - iii. Creeping barrage failed in execution
 - iv. 187K casualties
 - v. Leads directly to the French Army "mutinies"
- c. The Mutinies (May – June 1917)
 - i. Work stoppage better term
 - ii. 54 divisions involved (\approx 1 Million men)
 - iii. Nivelle replaced by Petain (hero of Verdun)
 - iv. "Carrots & sticks"
 - v. French army essentially OOC for the rest of the summer
 - vi. British agree to relieve pressure on French
 - vii. Spectacular German (& British) intelligence failure

- d. The British Sector (Flanders)
 - i. The Battles of Arras
 - a) Vimy Ridge (April)
 - a. Major Canadian success
 - b. Achieved the (limited) objective
 - b) Messines (June)
 - a. Mines
 - b. Insufficient reserves
 - c. Limited but success none the less
 - d. The British appear to be learning
 - ii. 3d Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) (July – November)
 - a) Goal – take pressure off the French Army
 - b) Objective – Bruges & the channel U-boat ports
 - c) Very heavy bombardment
 - a. 4 ¼ Million shells over 10 days
 - b. Zero surprise
 - c. Tore up the ground, destroyed the drainage system
 - d) Heaviest rain in 40 years
 - e) Haig refuses to call off the battle
 - f) Passchendaele captured – 6 Nov and battle called off.

- a. 3 miles, no breakthrough
 - b. 310K casualties
- iii. Battle of La Malmaison (Oct 23-27, 1917)
 - a) Roughly even in manpower but the French had 3X the number of heavy guns
 - b) Stunning French victory.
 - c) Drove the Germans off Chemin des Dames ridge
 - d) 50,000 vs. 14,000
- iv. Cambrai (Nov)
 - a) 1st concentrated use of tanks
 - b) Much improved use of artillery
 - c) Worked very well
 - d) Not ready to exploit success
 - e) Germans rapidly drive British back to start point (First use of Storm Troopers in the west)

V. Italian Front

- a. Two more battles of the Isonzo River
 - i. 280,000 Italian casualties for little gain
 - ii. Austrian army is also about finished and requests German aid
- b. Germans & Austrians attack at Caporetto (12th Isonzo -Oct)
 - i. The Italian army collapses
 - ii. 300,000 surrendered & 300,000 more ran away
 - iii. British and French reinforcements sent to Piave River
 - iv. Cadorna relieved by Diaz (finally!!)
 - v. Allies finally hold at the Piave; culminating point.
 - vi. Supreme War Council created (finally!)
- c. Germans rotate their troops to the Western Front

VI. Summary at the End of 1917

- a. Italian army essentially finished
- b. Austrian army essentially finished
- c. Russian army completely finished
- d. French army rebuilding moral.
- e. British army severely weakened by 3d Ypres
- f. German Army moving 40 divisions to the Western Front
- g. BUT: Americans are starting to come in numbers

PART 6: 1918

(The Final (?) Victory)

I. Situation in January 1918

- a. Germany continues its plan **DISPITE**:
 - i. Americans are arriving at 200,000 per month
 - ii. U-Boat war has been lost
- b. Troop have been transferred from Russia & Italy
 - i. Germans have local #'s superiority (1st time since 1914) (From 2 to 3, it was now 4 to 3)
 - ii. Transferred troops have been reequipped and retrained for new tactics (storm troopers).

II. The Americans arrive

- a. In 19 months (Apr 1917 to Nov 1918)
 - i. Created a 4 million men army
 - ii. Move 2 million of them to Europe
 - iii. Get 1 million of them trained and into combat
- b. An American army under an American flag
- c. How important were the Americans?
 - i. Wildly conflicting opinions on this.
 - ii. My Opinion: US didn't win it, but made sure Germany couldn't
 - iii. Read Vera Brittain's quote

III. Ludendorff's great gamble - **KAISERSCHACHT**

- a. **"Rolling the Iron Dice"** (again- 4th time)
- b. 5 major attacks between March and July
 - i. Drove the Allies back some 40 miles
 - ii. On the Marne threatening Paris again
 - iii. Allies agree to a Supreme Commander (Finally!!) (Foch)
- c. Completely exhausted the German Army
- d. Opened many flanks and salients to attack
- e. USMC @ Belleau Woods

IV. The Allies strike back (the 100 days offensive)

- a. All these attacks are characterized by combined arms
 - i. Tanks, aircraft, artillery, infantry working together
 - ii. "20 La Malmasons" (Foch)
 - iii. July & August the French, British, & Americans attack and attack and attack.
 - 1. 8 August; The Black Day: 13000 Germans surrender to the British
 - iv. In September the Allies attack repeatedly
 - v. Germans driven steady back.
 - vi. Canadians breach the Hindenburg line 29 Sept with US help (but still no breakout)
- b. By end of Sept, the Allies are losing momentum, However:
 - i. Salonika breakout drives Bulgaria out of the war
 - ii. British enter Damascus and Turkey seeks peace.
 - iii. Austria signs peace treaty w/ Italy and looks to peace in Europe
- c. Germans still fight on
 - i. Correctly believing the Allies are tiring

V. The End

- a. In October bread riots break out in Germany
 - i. Revolts in every major city
- b. The High Seas Fleet mutinies when ordered to sail
- c. Mass influenza breaks out (army & civilians)
- d. German leaders decide they must get the army back to Germany to control the country.
- e. Germany sends out an armistice delegation and armistice is declared on Nov 11.
- f. Controversially, the Allies kept hammering the Germans until the very last minute
 - i. Felt the German army did not know it was defeated (True)
 - ii. Germans continued an orderly retreat
 - iii. Even after the armistice, Britain kept the blockade in place

VI. Aftermath

- a. Versailles was a failure
 - i. Failed to put Germany completely down but planted numerous seeds of bitterness
 - 1. reparations
 - 2. embarrassed their sovereignty
 - 3. blamed them for the war
 - ii. These provisions plus failure to enforce the restrictions led directly to the Second World War.

b. Costs

- i. \$280 Billion (\approx 570 Trillion in today's money)
- ii. 9000 deaths per day of the war
- iii. Possible 2-3 times that number seriously wounded
- iv. Helped spread an influenza pandemic that killed more people than the war did (perhaps 50M)

c. Legacy – The Course of the Twentieth Century

Bibliography

(Updated August 2023)

There are literally tens of 1000's of books on the First World War or related subjects. A bunch of new ones have just come out to commemorate the 100th anniversary. I used only about 40 to put this course together and will list here only the ones that I think are best. I make no other claims for this list.

- 1) The First World War: John Keegan – my favorite military historian and I believe the best short available book on the subject.
- 2) The First World War; Hew Strachan – almost as good.
- 3) The Great War; Peter Hart – An excellent new book although it focuses more on combat and less on grand strategy and is Anglo-centric.
- 4) A World Undone; G.J. Meyer – Just an all-around good book on the war. Lots of detail for a single volume treatment.
- 5) War of Attrition, Fighting the first World War; William Philpott – A brilliant book about how the war was fought which I believe completely undoes the dumb incompetent generals' myth that pervades the war's cultural history.
- 6) Hundred Days, The Campaign That Ended World War I; Nick Lloyd – The often neglected most important 100 days of the war are laid out in a highly readable account.
- 7) Pandora's Box, A History of the First World War; Jörn Leonhard – A brand new and extensive (1000 pages) book by a German historian. As its title indicates it is much more than a military history but if you are looking for a holistic treatment, this book does a superb job of covering the diplomatic, economic, political, and social as well as the military aspects of the war.
- 8) Castles of Steel: Robert Massie (The Naval War)
- 9) The First Air War: Lee Kennett
- 10) The Guns of August: Barbara Tuchman – A wonderful groundbreaking account of how Europe drifted into war. (Two new books, "The Sleepwalkers" by Christopher Clark and "The War That Ended Peace" by Margaret MacMillan are giving her a run for her money on this topic.)
- 11) The Proud Tower: Barbara Tuchman – Another wonderful read; this one on Europe in the years leading up to the war.
- 12) Two Atlases of the First World War (both excellent) – one by Arthur Banks & the other by Martin Gilbert.
- 13) Yanks: John Eisenhower (America's War)
- 14) The Faces of World War I: Max Arthur – I think this is the best "picture book" available.
- 15) The Great War: Robert Cowley – A real jewel; 30 individual articles on various parts of the war by a series of eminent historians.

16) The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century: David Reynolds – "...a magisterial reinterpretation of the place of the Great War in modern history." Wonderful new book that puts the whole war in historical context.

And 1000's of others.

Here are three that I do not recommend unless you are well grounded in this war and can sort out fact and fiction.

- 1) The Donkeys: Alan Clark – Gave a serious veneer to the idea that all First World War generals were idiots. Now completely discredited by responsible historians. (See "War of Attrition" by William Philpott)
- 2) The Pity of War: Niall Ferguson – An economics historian makes his case that the world would be a whole lot better off if Britain (he is British) had not entered the war and allowed Germany to win. (Stakes too low, the costs too high) (??)
- 3) 11,11,11; World War One and Its Violent Climax: Joseph Persico – He makes the "shocking discovery" that lots of soldiers died in the final allied offenses as the allies kept pushing until the very end. He then completely misses why they did this thereby contributing to the "generals were all dumb" myth. If you are really looking for the "end of the war" narrative I suggest "Hundred Days: The Campaign That Ended World War One" by Nick Lloyd.

Europe 1914



World War One as a bar fight.

Germany, Austria and Italy are standing together in the middle of a pub when Serbia bumps into Austria and spills Austria's pint. Austria demands Serbia buy it a completely new suit because there are splashes on its trouser leg. Germany expresses its support for Austria's point of view. Britain recommends that everyone calm down a bit.

Serbia points out that it can't afford a whole suit but offers to pay for the cleaning of Austria's trousers. Russia and Serbia look at Austria. Austria asks Serbia who it's looking at. Russia suggests that Austria should leave its little brother alone. Austria inquires as to whose army will assist Russia in compelling it to do so. Germany appeals to Britain that France has been looking at it, and that this is sufficiently out of order that Britain should not intervene. Britain replies that France can look at who it wants to, that Britain is looking at Germany too, and what is Germany going to do about it?

Germany tells Russia to stop looking at Austria, or Germany will render Russia incapable of such action. Britain and France ask Germany whether it's looking at Belgium. Turkey and Germany go off into a corner and whisper.

When they come back, Turkey makes a show of not looking at anyone. Germany rolls up its sleeves, looks at France, and punches Belgium. France and Britain punch Germany. Austria punches Russia. Germany punches Britain and France with one hand and Russia with the other. Russia throws a punch at Germany but misses and nearly falls over. Japan calls over from the other side of the room that it's on Britain's side, but stays there. Italy surprises everyone by punching Austria.

Australia punches Turkey and gets punched back. There are no hard feelings because Britain made Australia do it. France gets thrown through a plate glass window but gets back up and carries on fighting. Russia gets thrown through another one, gets knocked out, suffers brain damage, and wakes up with a complete personality change. Italy throws a punch at Austria and misses, but Austria falls over anyway.

Italy raises both fists in the air and runs around the room chanting. America waits till Germany is about to fall over from sustained punching from Britain and France, then walks over and smashes it with a barstool, then pretends it won the fight all by itself. By now all the chairs are broken and the big mirror over the bar is shattered. Britain, France and America agree that Germany threw the first punch, so the whole thing is Germany's fault. While Germany is still unconscious, they go through its pockets, steal its wallet, and buy drinks for all their friends.