

# The Road to War

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. Many factors contributed to the outbreak of World War I.
2. European nations suffered massive casualties in the war's early battles.

### The Big Idea

In 1914 tensions in Europe exploded into the deadliest war the world had ever seen.

### Key Terms and People

militarism, p. 721

Archduke Francis Ferdinand, p. 721

mobilize, p. 721

Central Powers, p. 721

Allied Powers, p. 721

trench warfare, p. 722

stalemate, p. 723

U-boats, p. 724

### TAKING NOTES

As you read, identify the major battles of the beginning of World War I. In a chart like the one below, list the battles and where they were fought.

Battle	Location

## If YOU were there...

You are walking past a newspaper stand when a headline catches your eye: "Austria-Hungary's Archduke Francis Ferdinand Assassinated in Sarajevo." Your first thought is, "Who's he?" You pick up the paper and read about the archduke and about the rising tensions in Europe related to his death. The article makes it sound like Europe is about to explode into war.

**At this point, do you think the assassination will affect the United States? Why or why not?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** European nations had not been involved in a major war in the region since the 1870s. Rising political tensions during the early 1900s threatened this peace, however, and nations began to build up their military forces. Even a small incident might trigger a major war.

## Outbreak of War

Though Europe was at peace in the early 1900s, relations between European nations were not necessarily friendly. In fact, feelings of fear and distrust were growing among European powers such as Germany, France, Great Britain, Russia, and Austria-Hungary. This dangerous tension had several important causes.

## Tensions in Europe

One cause of tension was the rise of nationalism in the 1800s. Nationalism is a strong sense of pride and loyalty to one's nation or culture. Nationalism inspired people who shared a language or culture to want to unite politically. In 1871, for example, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I brought together several German states to form the nation of Germany.

While nationalism helped bring stability to Germany, it caused instability in other places. The empire of Austria-Hungary included people from many different cultural groups. One of these groups was the Slavs. Slavic nationalists wanted to break away from Austria-Hungary and join the independent Slavic country of Serbia on the

Balkan Peninsula. Leaders of Austria-Hungary reacted angrily, seeing this movement as a threat to their empire.

Another source of tension in Europe was imperialism. Britain's huge empire, stretching from Africa to Asia, brought it wealth and power. Eager to share in such benefits, other European powers competed for control of overseas territories. Fierce competition for territory took place within Europe as well. For example, Germany had taken the Alsace-Lorraine region from France in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. France wanted it back.

In this competitive atmosphere, nations focused their resources on **militarism**—the aggressive strengthening of armed forces. European nations raced to build armies and navies that were larger than ever before.

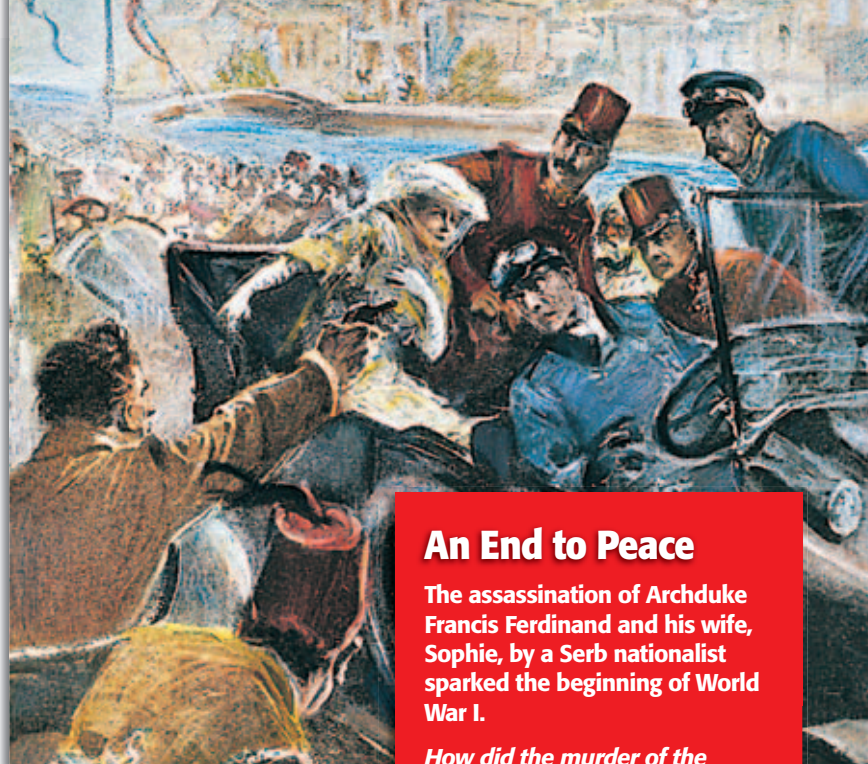
As nations became more powerful, they sought to protect themselves by forming new alliances. Germany formed an alliance with Austria-Hungary in 1879. Each promised to defend the other in case of enemy attack. Concerned with Germany's growing power, France and Russia created their own alliance in 1893. Britain joined France and Russia in 1907.

## The Spark

With so much hostility dividing the nations of Europe, a German general felt that “a European war is bound to come sooner or later.” All that was needed was a spark to set Europe on fire. That spark flew from the Balkan province of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina had gained independence from Turkish rule in 1878. In 1908, however, Austria-Hungary annexed the province. Slavic nationalists resisted violently—they wanted the region to be part of Serbia.

On June 28, 1914, **Archduke Francis Ferdinand**, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, visited the province's capital of Sarajevo with his wife, Sophie. While riding through the streets, they were shot and killed by a 19-year-old Serb nationalist named Gavrilo Princip.



### An End to Peace

The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, by a Serb nationalist sparked the beginning of World War I.

*How did the murder of the archduke bring war to Europe?*

The assassination shattered Europe's fragile peace. Determined to crush Serbia and the Slavic nationalists, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Very quickly, other countries were pulled into the fighting. Russia had promised to support Serbia in case of war. It began to **mobilize**, or prepare its military for war. On August 1 Germany, Austria-Hungary's ally, declared war on Russia. Two days later, Germany also declared war on France, Russia's ally. To reach France quickly, the German army marched into Belgium on August 4. Britain, which had promised to support Belgium, then declared war on Germany.

As the fighting started, the alliance between Austria-Hungary and Germany came to be known as the **Central Powers**. Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire later sided with the Central Powers. France, Russia, and Britain were known as the **Allied Powers**. Italy joined them in 1915. Over the next several years, soldiers from 30 nations and six continents would fight in what was then called the Great War. The conflict later became known as World War I.

#### READING CHECK Identifying Cause and Effect

How did nationalism contribute to political tensions in Europe?

## Early Battles of the War

### FOCUS ON READING

What mistake did the German leaders make in their reasoning?

Both sides expected the war to be over in a few months. German leaders planned to defeat France quickly, before Russia could join the fighting. But as the Germans marched toward France, they met fierce resistance from Belgian soldiers. This gave Britain and France time to mobilize their own troops.

### The First Battle of the Marne

Belgian resistance slowed the German advance but could not stop it. On September 3 the German army was just 25 miles from Paris, the capital of France. The French army blocked the German advance at the Marne River, east of Paris. The First Battle of the Marne raged for several days before the Germans were pushed back.

By mid-September French and German troops faced each other along a long battle line called the western front. The western

front stretched from the North Sea all the way to Switzerland. Meanwhile, the Russian and German armies were struggling back and forth along the eastern front, which reached from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea. It quickly became clear that this war would be longer and deadlier than anyone had expected.

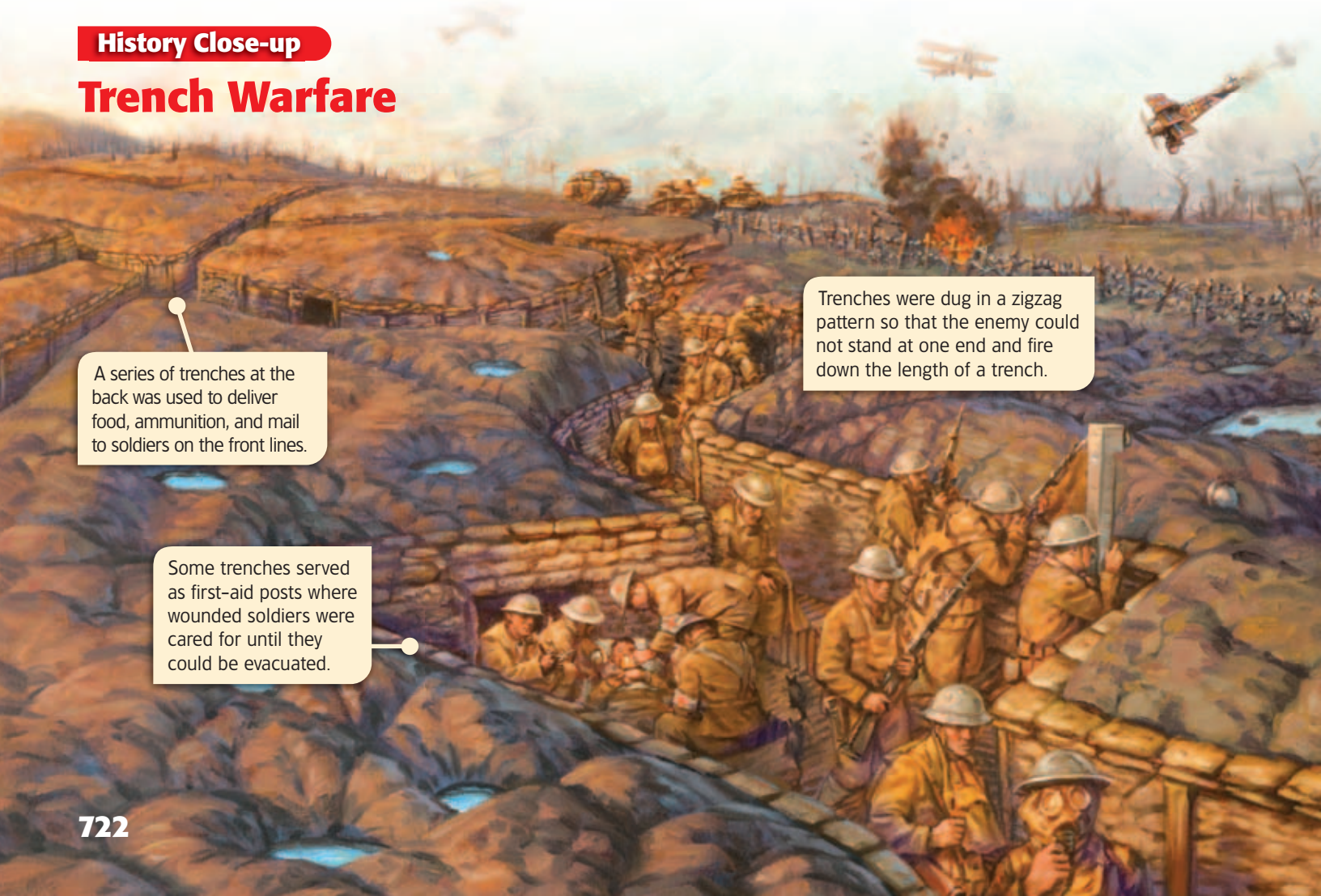
### A New Kind of War

Part of what made World War I so long and deadly was a new technique called **trench warfare**—defending a position by fighting from the protection of deep ditches. When the French defeated the Germans in the First Battle of the Marne, the Germans did not retreat far. Instead, they dug trenches nearby. Opposite them, the French dug their own trenches. A 400-mile-long network of trenches soon stretched across the western front.

Soldiers fought in these cold, wet, and muddy ditches, sometimes for months at a time. The filthy trenches were perfect breeding

## History Close-up

### Trench Warfare



A series of trenches at the back was used to deliver food, ammunition, and mail to soldiers on the front lines.

Some trenches served as first-aid posts where wounded soldiers were cared for until they could be evacuated.

Trenches were dug in a zigzag pattern so that the enemy could not stand at one end and fire down the length of a trench.

grounds for germs, and soldiers on both sides died from disease. An American in the French army described life in the trenches:

“The impossibility of the simplest kind of personal cleanliness makes vermin [bugs] a universal ill, against which there is no remedy. Cold, dirt, discomfort, are the ever present conditions, and the soldier’s life comes to mean ... the most misery that the human organism [body] can support.”

—Alan Seeger, *Letters and Diary of Alan Seeger*

The empty patch of ground between enemy trenches came to be known as “no-man’s-land.” This area was quickly stripped of trees and blasted full of holes by artillery shells. Anyone who ventured into no-man’s-land was likely to be killed by enemy fire.

Another factor that made World War I deadlier than previous wars was the use of modern technology. New machine guns, for example, could fire 400 to 600 bullets a minute. Enormous artillery guns fired shells over the trenches, where they exploded and sent speeding scraps of metal onto the soldiers below. Other shells spread poisonous

gases. If soldiers were not wearing gas masks, the gas destroyed their lungs, causing slow, painful deaths. Poisonous gases were originally banned but came into use by both sides by the end of the war.

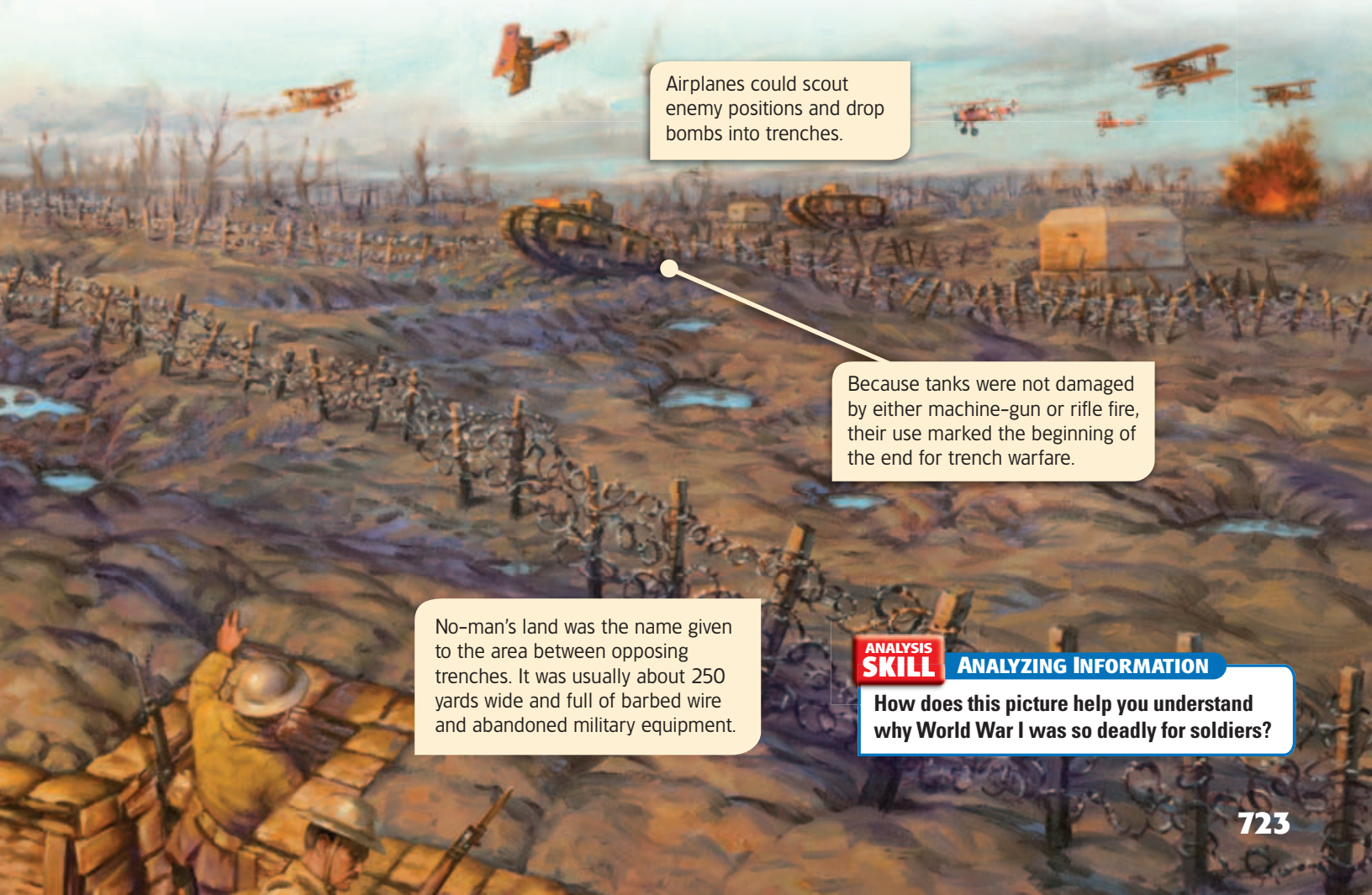
Other new weapons included tanks and airplanes. Tanks are armored combat vehicles that can cause heavy damage but cannot be destroyed easily. Airplanes were used to fire down on soldiers in trenches and to gather information about enemy locations. Airplanes also battled each other in fights called “dogfights.”

### Land and Sea Battles

After a year of vicious fighting, the war had become a **stalemate**—a situation in which neither side can win a decisive victory. Determined to break the stalemate, both sides launched massive attacks in 1916. In February 1916 the Germans attacked the French city of Verdun, at the southern end of the western front. That summer, the Allies staged an attack along the Somme River, in northeastern

### THE IMPACT TODAY

Many of the weapons first used in World War I, such as tanks and airplanes, are still used in warfare today. The use of poison gas, however, has been outlawed by international treaties.



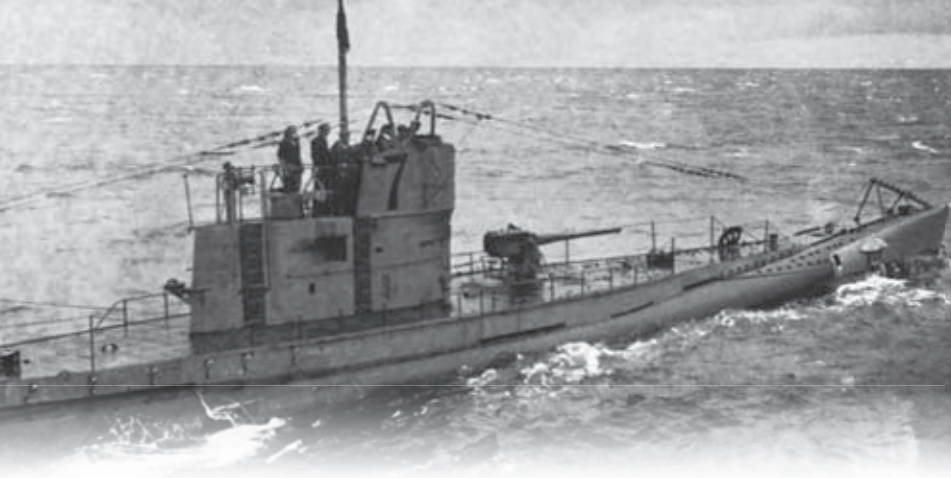
Airplanes could scout enemy positions and drop bombs into trenches.

Because tanks were not damaged by either machine-gun or rifle fire, their use marked the beginning of the end for trench warfare.

No-man’s land was the name given to the area between opposing trenches. It was usually about 250 yards wide and full of barbed wire and abandoned military equipment.

### ANALYSIS SKILL ANALYZING INFORMATION

How does this picture help you understand why World War I was so deadly for soldiers?



## German U-boats

Germany developed small submarines called U-boats as part of its war strategy. U-boats could strike Allied ships without being seen. They destroyed around 10 million tons of Allied and neutral ships and cargo from 1914 to 1918.

*Why might U-boats have been so effective against the Allies?*

France. Both battles raged for months, as the armies attacked and counterattacked.

By the end of the year, the Germans had failed to take Verdun. At the Somme River, the Allies had advanced just seven miles. Almost nothing had changed on the western front. But nearly 1 million men had been killed at Verdun and the Somme River.

As the stalemate on land dragged on, sea battles in the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea became even more important. The powerful British navy blockaded the ports of the Central Powers and laid explosive mines in the North Sea. These could blow a huge hole in a ship, sinking it in minutes. The tactic effectively stopped ships from reaching German ports with needed supplies.

The Germans responded by using submarines called **U-boats**. U-boats launched torpedoes against Allied supply ships, causing heavy losses. The Germans also attacked ships belonging to **neutral** countries they believed were helping the Allies. This would soon pull the United States into World War I.

**READING CHECK** Categorizing What new technologies did armies in World War I use?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** World War I became a stalemate by 1916 as countries battled for control. In the next section you will find out why the United States decided to join the fighting.

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

#### neutral

unbiased, not favoring either side in a conflict

## Section 1 Assessment

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- Describe** What factors contributed to the outbreak of World War I?
  - Contrast** How did nationalism affect Germany and Austria-Hungary differently?
  - Predict** What might have happened if Russia had not honored its agreement to defend Serbia?
- Identify** What were the outcomes of the early battles of the war?
  - Explain** How did Belgian resistance affect the German war plan?
  - Evaluate** How successful was **trench warfare** as a strategy?