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World War I—
The "Great War"

In 1914, a war began in Europe. People living back then called it the Great War. More nations battled in this war than in any other war before it. It lasted from 1914–1918. A total of 65 million soldiers fought in this war. More than 19 million people died around the world. It is one of the largest human **catastrophes** (kuh-TASS-truh-feez) in world history. Today, this war is called World War I.

The problems that caused this war had been brewing for quite some time. Some countries were becoming very rich. As a result, they wanted to expand their land. These countries in Europe had big armies and navies. But, they still needed support when they tried to take land from other countries. This produced jealousy and conflicts among the nations.

British troops charge German lines near Tower Bridge in France.

Building Up Forces

By 1914, Germany had more than eight million soldiers in its army. Russia had four million soldiers, and France had three million soldiers. Great Britain built up its navy. In fact, the British navy was almost as big as all of the other navies combined.

One Embarrassing Event

In 1870, France was in a battle with Germany but lost. So, Germany took over two French **provinces** (PRAW-vuhnts-ez). The French felt very embarrassed by this loss. It gave the French a reason to fight against Germany.