

2 America Joins the Fight

TERMS & NAMES

John J. Pershing

American
Expeditionary
Force

convoy system

Second Battle
of the Marne

Alvin York

armistice

MAIN IDEA

U.S. forces helped the Allies win World War I.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

For the first time, the United States asserted itself as a world power.

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Eddie Rickenbacker was America's most famous flying ace. He was one of the first Americans to get a look at the trenches from the cockpit of an airplane. The date was March 6, 1918. It was, recalled Rickenbacker, the first flyover of the battlefield by a "made-in-America Squadron." What Rickenbacker saw shocked him.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

[T]here appeared to be nothing below but these old battered ditches . . . and billions of shell holes. . . . [N]ot a tree, a fence . . . nothing but . . . ruin and desolation. The whole scene was appalling.

Eddie Rickenbacker, *Fighting the Flying Circus*

Rickenbacker went on to distinguished service as a wartime aviator. As you will read in this section, he and other U.S. soldiers helped the Allies win the war.



An American gun crew advances against German positions in 1918. The ruin that Rickenbacker described is apparent.

Raising an Army and a Navy

The U.S. Army was not ready for war. American fighting forces consisted of fewer than 200,000 soldiers, many of them recent recruits. To meet its need for troops, the government began a draft. This system of choosing people for forced military service was first used during the Civil War. In May 1917, Congress passed the Selective Service Act. This act required all males between the ages of 21 and 30 to sign up for military service. By the end of 1918, nearly 3 million men had been drafted.

About 2 million American soldiers went to France. They served under General **John J. Pershing** as the **American Expeditionary Force**, or AEF. British commanders asked the U.S. government to have AEF troops join existing French and British combat units. Wilson refused. He believed that having "distinct and separate" American combat units would guarantee the United States a major role in the peace talks at war's end. Most U.S. troops fought separately, but some fought under Allied command.

ReadingHistory

A. Finding Main Ideas How did women serve in the U.S. armed forces?

Close to 50,000 American women also served in World War I. Some volunteered for overseas duty with the American Red Cross. However, for the first time in American history, women also served in the military. The Navy, desperate for clerical workers, took about 12,000 female volunteers. The Marine Corps accepted 305 female recruits, known as Marinettes. Over 1,000 women went overseas for the Army. Nurses made up the largest group of females in the armed forces. However, women also acted as interpreters, operated switchboards, entertained troops, and drove ambulances for the AEF.

Around 400,000 African Americans served in the armed forces. More than half of them served in France. As they had at home, African-American troops overseas faced discrimination. However, it came from white American soldiers rather than from their European allies. At first, the Army refused to take black draftees. However, responding to pressure from African-American groups, the military eventually created two African-American combat divisions.

American Ships Make a Difference

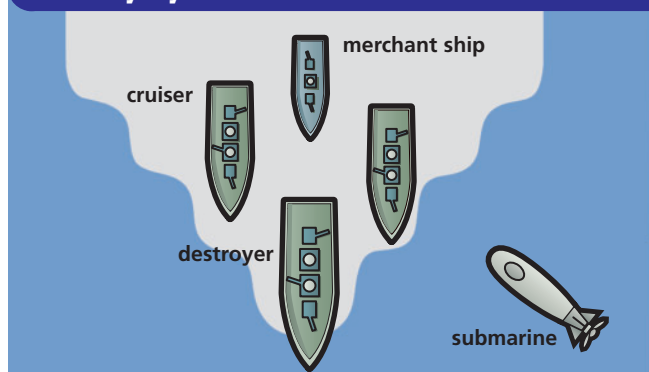
In the first years of the war, German U-boat attacks on supply ships were a serious threat to the Allied war effort. American Rear Admiral William S. Sims convinced the Allies to adopt a system of protection. In a **convoy system**, a heavy guard of destroyers escorted merchant ships across the Atlantic in groups. Begun in May 1917, this strategy quickly reduced the loss rate.

Another American tactic gave the Allies added protection from the U-boat menace. Beginning in June 1918, the Allies laid a barrier of 70,000 mines in the North Sea. The 180-mile-long minefield made U-boat access to the North Atlantic almost impossible. Admiral Sims called the North Sea minefield “one of the wonders of the war.”

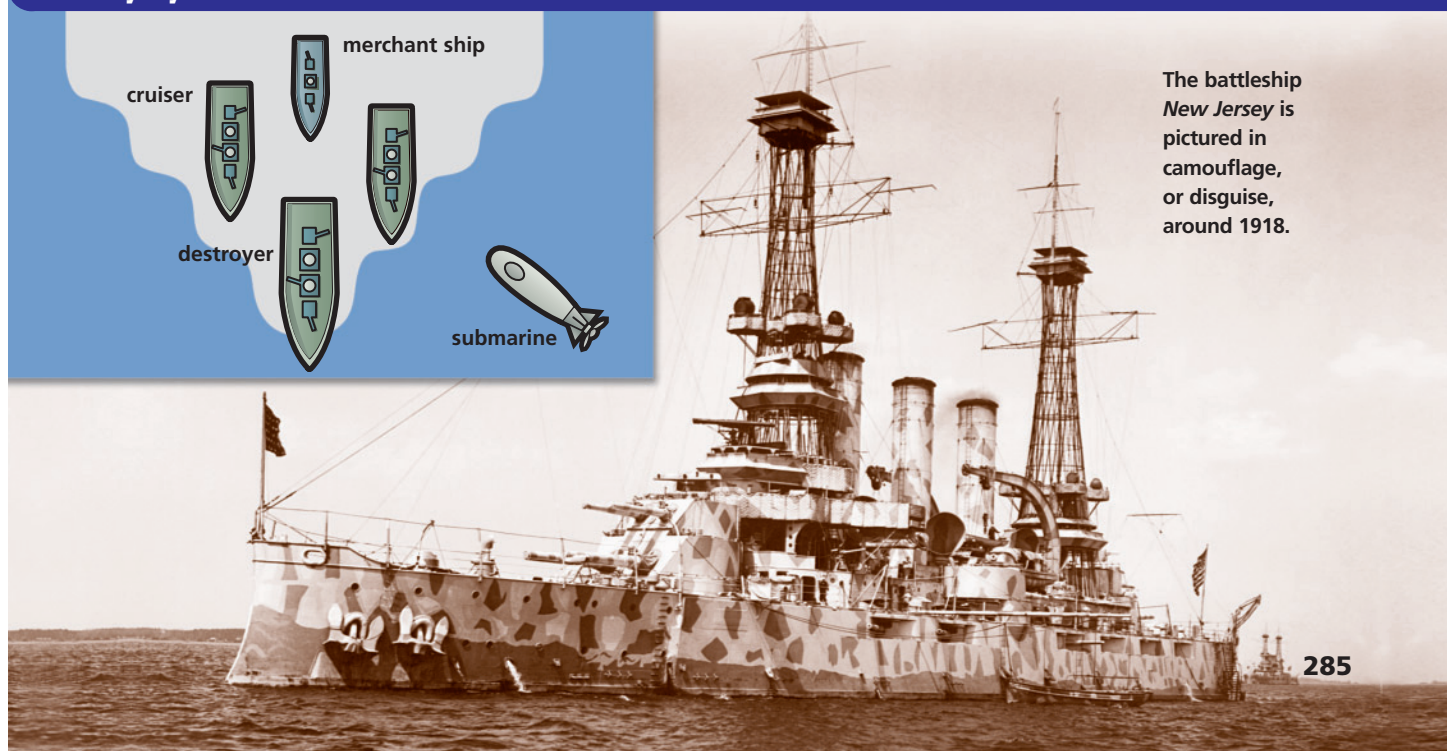
Vocabulary

mines: hidden explosive devices

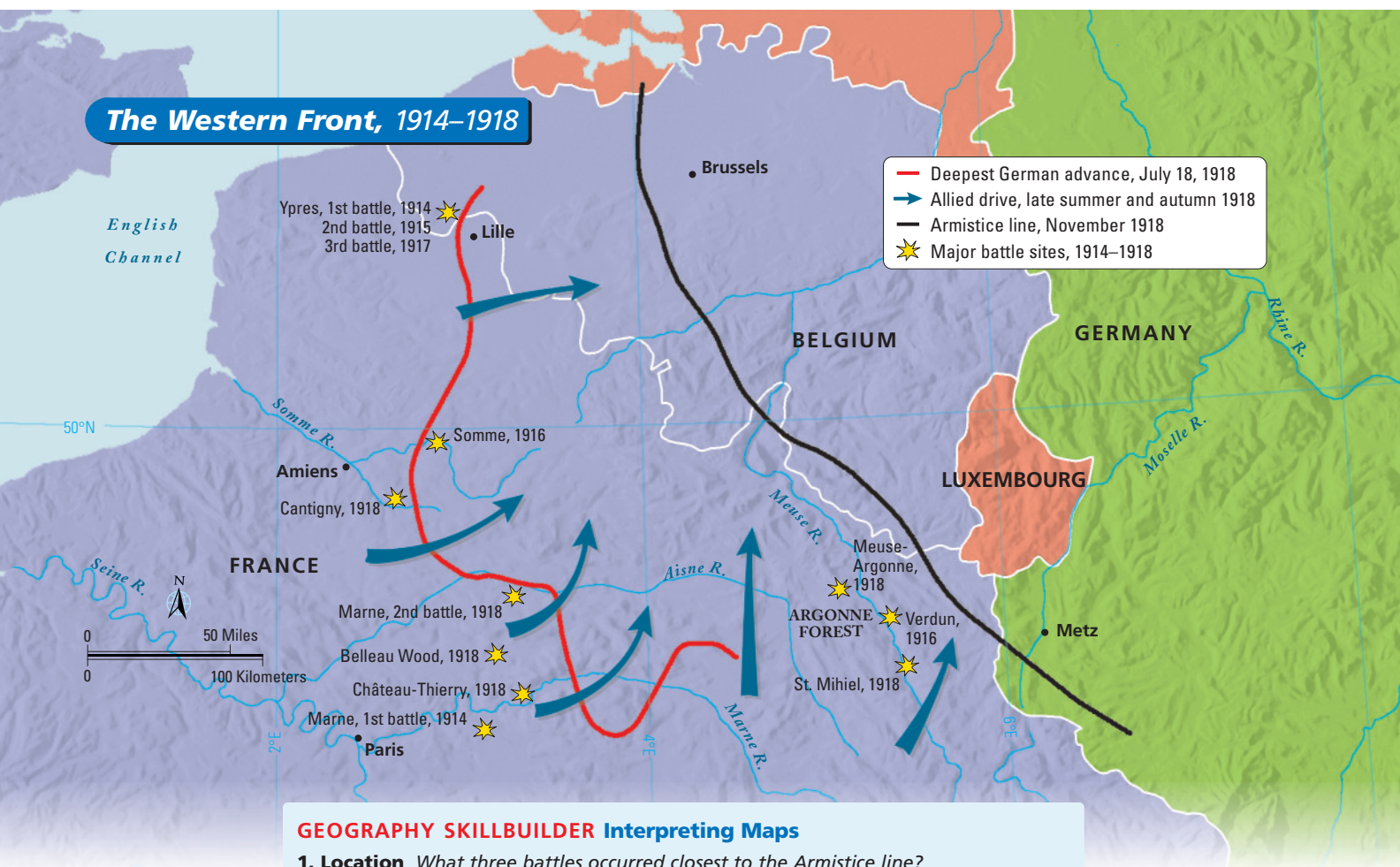
Convoy System



The battleship *New Jersey* is pictured in camouflage, or disguise, around 1918.



The Western Front, 1914–1918



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Maps

- Location** What three battles occurred closest to the Armistice line?
- Movement** In what two directions did the Allied drives move?

American Troops Enter the War

By the time the first American troops arrived in France in June 1917, the Allies had been at war for almost three years. The small force of 14,000 Yanks boosted the morale of the battle-weary Allies. However, almost a year would pass before the bulk of the American troops landed in Europe.

After their Russian opponents withdrew from the war, the Germans and the other Central Powers prepared to finish the fight in France. In March 1918, the Germans launched an offensive to end the war before the Americans arrived in force. Within two months, they had smashed through the French lines, reaching the Marne River only 50 miles from Paris. Just in time, in May 1918, one million fresh American troops arrived ready for action.

On May 28, American soldiers attacked the French town of Cantigny (kahn•tee•NYEE), which was occupied by the Germans. The soldiers advanced into the town, blasting enemy soldiers out of trenches and dragging them from cellars. Within two hours, the Yanks had taken control of Cantigny. The American victory lifted Allied morale.

When the Germans moved against the town of Château-Thierry (shah•toh•tyeh•REE), the Americans held their ground. They helped the French stop the German advance. Encouraged by these successes, French General Ferdinand Foch, commander of the Allied forces, ordered General Pershing's American forces to retake Belleau (beh•LOH) Wood.

Background

American soldiers were also called *doughboys*. This term was used even during the Civil War.

This was a forest near the Marne River well defended by German troops. American soldiers succeeded, but at a fearful cost. One unit lost 380 of its 400 men. However, the Americans had proved themselves in combat.

Pushing the Germans Back

The **Second Battle of the Marne** in the summer of 1918 was the turning point of the war. It began with a German drive against the French line. During three days of heavy fighting, about 85,000 Americans helped the Allies halt the German advance. The Allies then took the initiative. They cut the enemy off from its supply lines and forced the Germans back.

For the rest of the war, the Allies advanced steadily. By early September, the Germans had lost all the territory they had gained since the spring. September 26, 1918, marked the beginning of the final Meuse-Argonne (myooz•ahr•GAHN) offensive. Around 1.2 million U.S. soldiers took part in a massive drive to push back the German line between the Argonne Forest and the Meuse River. The war's final battle left 26,000 Americans dead. But by November, the Germans were retreating.

The Meuse-Argonne offensive made a hero of American soldier **Alvin York**. At first, Tennessee-born Sergeant York seemed an unlikely candidate for military fame. Because of his religious beliefs, he tried unsuccessfully to avoid the draft. He refused to bear arms on religious grounds. An army captain convinced him to change his mind. In October 1918, in the Argonne Forest, York attacked German machine gunners, killing 25 of them. Other German soldiers surrendered, and York returned to the American lines with 132 captives.

Another American hero was pilot Eddie Rickenbacker. He won fame as the U.S. "ace of aces" for shooting down a total of 26 enemy planes. Just before the Meuse-Argonne offensive, he attacked seven German planes, sending two of them crashing to the ground. This action won him the Medal of Honor.

Four African-American combat units also received recognition for their battlefield valor. Fighting under French commanders, the 369th, 371st, and 372nd regiments (and part of the 370th) were awarded France's highest honor, the Croix de Guerre. The 369th spent more continuous time on the front lines than any other American unit. Although under intense fire for 191 days, it never lost a foot of ground.

ReadingHistory

B. Recognizing Effects What was the effect of the Meuse-Argonne offensive?

ReadingHistory

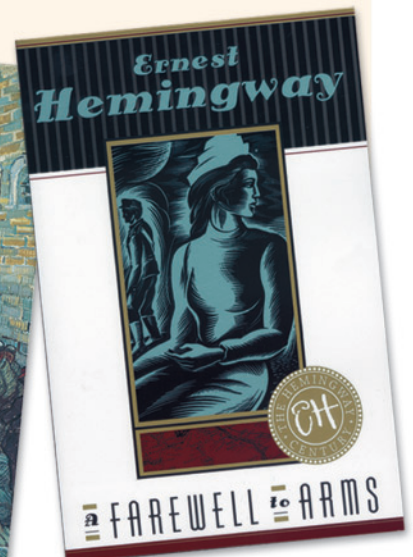
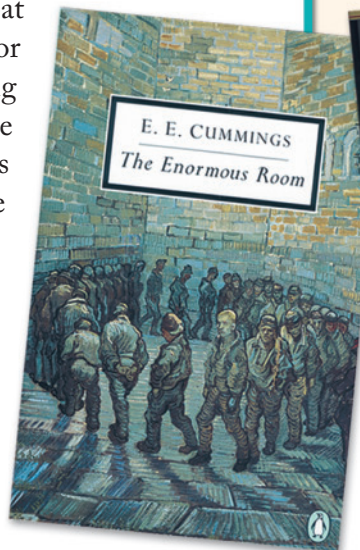
C. Evaluating What was heroic about Sergeant York?

Connections TO LITERATURE

LITERATURE OF WORLD WAR I

Several notable American writers served in World War I. They included Ernest Hemingway, the poet E. E. Cummings, and John Dos Passos. Hemingway drove an ambulance for the Italian army. He put this experience into his war novel *A Farewell to Arms*. Cummings wrote of his time in France in *The Enormous Room*.

Dos Passos, who also worked as an ambulance driver, once explained what attracted him to the battlefield: "What was war like, we wanted to see with our own eyes. I wanted to see the show."



Americans were proud of the contribution their troops made to the war effort. They helped shift the balance in favor of the Allies.

Germany Stops Fighting

After the defeat of the Meuse-Argonne, General Erich Ludendorff advised the German government to seek peace. In early November, Germany's navy mutinied and its allies dropped out. On November 9, the

Kaiser stepped down. Two days later Germany agreed to an **armistice**, an end to fighting. On November 11, 1918, at 11:00 A.M.—the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month—all fighting ceased.

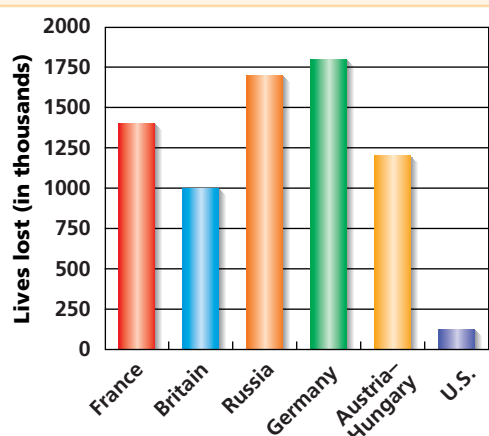
About 8.5 million soldiers died in the war, and about 21 million were wounded. Before he was killed in battle, one British soldier summed up the war's tragic costs.

Background

For many years after the war, Americans celebrated Armistice Day as a national holiday.

CONNECTIONS TO MATH

Military Deaths in World War I*



*Not all countries are listed.
Source: *Over There*, by Byron Farwell

SKILLBUILDER

Interpreting Graphs

- Which two nations on the chart suffered the most deaths?
- U.S. deaths were about what percentage of combined French and British deaths?

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

The sufferings of the men at the Front, of the wounded whose flesh and bodies are torn in a way you cannot conceive; the sorrow of those at home. . . . What a cruel and mad diversion of human activity!

William John Mason, quoted in *The Lost Generation of 1914*

Millions of civilians in Europe, Asia, and Africa also died in the war—from starvation and disease. In the next section, you will learn how the war affected U.S. civilians.

Section 2 Assessment

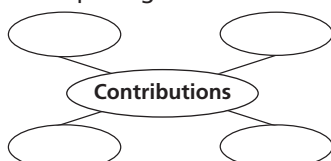
1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- John J. Pershing
- American Expeditionary Force
- convoy system
- Second Battle of the Marne
- Alvin York
- armistice

2. Taking Notes

Create a web to show how American groups or individuals helped fight the war.



Whose contribution was most surprising?

3. Main Ideas

- Why did Wilson want U.S. forces to fight as a separate American combat unit?
- What were two ways the U.S. Navy countered the U-boat threat?
- Why was the Meuse-Argonne offensive a turning point in the war?

4. Critical Thinking

Recognizing Effects How important was America's entry into the war to the Allied cause?

THINK ABOUT

- the morale of Allied troops
- troop strength
- performance in battle

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

MUSIC

LANGUAGE ARTS

Make an **audiotape** of music or sounds that suggest the stages of the war, or write a **letter** in the voice of a soldier in the war.