

THE GREAT WAR, WHICH CAME TO BE KNOWN AS WORLD WAR I

The Great War defined the times through which we have lived. It was the genesis of the 20th Century. Four dynastic empires collapsed while the War was being fought. The utopian ideology of Marxism became dictatorial communist rule through the Russian Revolution. Arabian tribes became nations. New nations also came into being in Eastern Europe. Imperialism in Africa and Asia changed courses. Japan became predominant in Asia. Western financial systems tottered during the War and ultimately crashed as a result of it. An extreme nationalistic dictatorship arose in Germany, and World War II followed. Our nation became the leader of the Western World.

The tools of warfare changed dramatically during the War. Yet British and French generals still wasted lives and lied about battles. Austro-Hungarians melded belligerence with ineptitude. Italy fired 217 generals in 29 months. Russia sent troops into battle without weapons. In East Africa there were 1,000,000 casualties. The United States granted Puerto Rico citizenship in order to draft some new citizens. Germany was most proficient, and lost.

Twenty-two million people were killed in the War. Its horrors made many once known men "unknown" soldiers. For example, 89,784 British soldiers killed in Belgium were never recovered or identified, and skeletal remains of 130,000 unidentified French and German men lie in Verdun's ossuary. Yet war brought more than death. Society everywhere changed immensely.

The War shattered for many the ability to believe in ideals. Skepticism and cynicism replaced trust and honor and reinforced "tribalism," hyper-patriotism, and bigotry. Yet the War also had gallantry, passion, and colorful heroes such as Blackjack Pershing, Roland Garros, Lawrence of Arabia, and the Red Baron. Along with the valor and squalor of the War, we shall consider the lives of both extraordinary and ordinary people as they strained to reassemble our civilization. It all makes a fascinating subject.

Leader: Robert Nolan is an attorney who has a history degree from the University of Scranton, where he is on the adjunct faculty, a law degree from Harvard, and has previously presented Evergreen Forum courses on America's Revolutionary War, Civil War, Old West, and Vietnam War.

Thursdays: 10:00 a.m. to noon, 8 weeks: February 25 through April 15

Maximum: unlimited