

Decoding the Telegram

Jackson and Alana are helping Mrs. Johnson clean up old boxes in her classroom. As they are finishing up, they find a mysterious old document in one of the boxes...

"Hey Alana, look at this weird looking document."

"What's it about, Jackson?"

"I don't know, it looks like a strange sequence of numbers."

"What do they mean?", Alana asks as she looks at the old paper.

Mrs. Johnson overhears their conversation and joins in asking, "What did you kids find?"

"I don't know Mrs. Johnson, this old paper is full of numbers.", Jackson replied.

"Oh, Jackson that looks like a telegram."

"A telegram?" Alana asks.

"What is a telegram?"

"It's like an old-fashioned text message. People from the mid 19th and early 20th century used the telegraph to send messages in the form of a telegram.

These messages traveled a long distance and were usually written in code."

"Oh, that is so cool. I didn't know we had text messaging long ago!" Jackson said surprised.

"Hey Jackson, do you want to crack this code?"

"Sure, Alana!"

"Ok, these first numbers..."

WHOOOOOSH...

Jackson and Alana find themselves in what seems to be an early 20th century communications office. They see a group of people deciphering the code in the same document they had been holding moments ago.

"I wonder where this document took us, Jackson. These people seem to be cracking the code, just like we tried to do a couple of moments ago." Alana said.

"Yeah, they are calling it the Zimmerman Telegram. It seems like we're in 1917, when the Zimmerman Telegram was intercepted and decoded by the British."

"I remember this from our World War I lesson with Mrs. Johnson! This telegram was sent by Arthur Zimmermann, the German Foreign Secretary, to Mexico. The telegram offered U.S. lands to Mexico if they supported the Germans."

"That's true, Alana! The Zimmermann Telegram was the final push the U.S. needed to join Britain in World War I."

"Let's continue learning about the events that triggered WWI and the reasons as to why the U.S. became involved in it."



The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

Throughout history, many soldiers have lost their lives in war. Most soldiers' remains are returned home to their families while others are never returned because they are unidentifiable. After the First World War, Britain and France proposed the idea of commemorating the unknown soldiers by creating a monument called the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The tomb usually contains the remains of a deceased soldier and serves as a symbol for all of the anonymous soldiers that died in battle.

Many countries including the U.S. followed after with similar monuments. On March 4, 1921, the United States Congress approved the burial of an unidentified American soldier. You

can visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. On the monument, you will find three Greek figures representing peace, victory, and valor and six wreaths representing the six major battles of World War I. Next to it you will also find the graves of the unknown soldiers from World War II, the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The monument is guarded 24 hours a day, every day of the year, and in all weather conditions. The guard is changed every 30 minutes or hour during the cemetery's opening hours. Similar memorials can be found all over the world like at Westminster Abbey in London and under the Arc de Triomphe in France.

World War I: The War to End All Wars

European nations competing with each other for control of land, trade and military power led to World War I. When one nation got angry with another, countries began taking sides and forming alliances (agreements between nations to defend and support each other). A Serbian terrorist organization assassinated Franz Ferdinand, the archduke of Austria-Hungary, in June 1914. War soon followed. The main alliances that developed were the Allied Powers, made up of Great Britain, France and Russia, and the Central Powers, which included Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire (part of present-day Turkey).

The United States vowed to stay out of the war, but important events in 1917 made Americans rethink this position. The first was that telegram sent to Mexico from Arthur Zimmermann, the German foreign secretary. As we know, the "Zimmermann telegram" asked Mexico to support Germany during the war. In return, Germany would help Mexico get land back from the U.S.

Then, concern for the safety of American ships grew. There were more and more aggressive acts on the high seas. From February to April 1917, German submarines attacked and sank

several American trade ships. American sailors lost their lives in these attacks, which angered the United States. Also fresh in Americans' memories was the sinking of the Lusitania, a British passenger and cargo ship. Almost 1,200 people died (including 128 Americans) when the Germans torpedoed the ship in 1915. The Zimmermann telegram and these German submarine attacks convinced U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to ask Congress to declare war on the Central Powers. The U.S. entered the war as a member of the Allied Powers on April 6, 1917. Italy, Brazil, Japan and other countries also supported the Allies. Bulgaria later joined the Central Powers. It truly was a world at war.

Major Battles of WWI

Much of the fighting in WWI took place on the smooth, rolling lowlands of Belgium and France.

Ground troops had nothing to hide behind, so they dug huge networks of trenches. Soldiers

lived in those trenches; they ate, slept and died there. Anyone who ventured out of the trenches into "no man's land" ran the risk of being killed. In all, more than 8 million soldiers died during the war.

First Battle of the Marne (1914)

Soldiers fought this battle along the Marne River near Paris, France. The Allies stopped a German push toward Paris and won an important victory. The Germans retreated, and their plans of quickly winning the war were destroyed.

Battle of the Somme (1916)

The Battle of the Somme lasted from July to November 1916 and was fought north of the Somme River in France. The Allies won about six miles of German-occupied territory in this long battle, which resulted in 420,000 British, 200,000 French and 650,000 German casualties. A casualty is a soldier who is captured, wounded or killed.

Battle of Cambrai (1917)

In November 1917, the British launched an attack on the Germans at Cambrai, France. The battle was one of the first to use large numbers of tanks, heavy artillery (large guns or cannons) and airplanes together in battle. The British surprised the Germans by attacking with 476 tanks. This move surprised the Germans, and the British gained some ground. However, the Germans later took back much of what the British had gained.

Battle of the Meuse-Argonne (1918)

Soldiers fought the Battle of the Meuse-Argonne between September and November 1918 in the Argonne Forest of France. General John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, led more than 1 million Americans into battle. These American soldiers were nicknamed "doughboys." There are different stories behind this nickname,

but one comes from the large buttons on their uniforms. Some people thought the buttons looked like popular pastries.

The Battle of the Meuse-Argonne turned out to be one of the bloodiest of the war for the Americans. More than 26,000 doughboys lost their lives in this battle, and almost 96,000 were wounded. German casualties numbered around

100,000. French forces also fought the Germans alongside the Americans. The battle ended in victory for the Allies and led to the final defeat of the Central Powers. The two sides signed an armistice, an agreement to stop fighting, on November 11, 1918. Today we celebrate Veterans Day on November 11 each year.

Treaty of Versailles

In January 1919, the Allied leaders met in Versailles, France, to write a peace treaty. President Woodrow Wilson represented the United States. He wanted to end the war without punishing the Central Powers, particularly Germany, too harshly. He also wanted to form an international organization called the League of Nations. This group would join together to prevent future wars. When the treaty was

completed, it punished the Central Powers harshly, against Wilson's wishes. The treaty stated that Germany must pay huge fines, give up some of its territory and have limits on the size of its military. The treaty did create a League of Nations, but the U.S. Senate refused to approve the Treaty of Versailles or join the League. The Senate feared that the League of Nations would force the U.S. into other wars and keep the U.S. involved in problems overseas. They preferred to take care of America's problems and let the rest of the world take care of its own. This policy became known as isolationism. This way of thinking didn't last long, however, as America's involvement in World War II was just around the corner. What at first was known as the "Great War" soon became known as World War I.

Weapons of WWI

Trades & Technology

During WWI, both sides used many new and dangerous weapons. Soldiers were faced with machine guns, capable of shooting many bullets in a short time and killing dozens. Both sides also used poison gas. These gases caused temporary blindness, skin blisters and lung damage. Injuries caused by gas were known to be cruel and painful. Soldiers carried gas masks to protect themselves from the awful effects of the chemicals. Today, using poison gases in war is illegal under international law.

Airplanes were also turned into weapons during this war. These newer inventions were used to drop bombs on the enemy and fire machine guns at enemy planes.

Much of the fighting took place from trenches dug into the ground. The British first used tanks in WWI to cross trenches, crush barbed wire and shoot at the enemy, all from the safety of an armored vehicle. Submarines were important during WWI as well. Torpedoes fired from submarines sank many ships.



WWI Military Bases

A military base is a place where military employees and service members live and work. These bases store weapons, supplies and equipment. They also provide housing, stores and hospitals for service members and their families. Military bases are important to service members and the communities where they are located.

During WWI, the U.S. government built military bases and camps across the nation. Service members were trained at the bases and then sent overseas. Bases and camps also provided jobs for civilian workers, or people not in the military. In addition, local businesses loved the money the service members spent when they headed off base!

Camp McClellan in Anniston, Alabama, was once one of the largest training sites in the nation. More than 27,000 service members from New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia were trained there as part of the 29th

Infantry Division during WWI. Camp McClellan (later named Fort McClellan) was a permanent military base from 1929 until 1999, when it was officially closed.



Camp McClellan