

TOPIC 8: The Allies

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Commonwealth of Australia entered World War I as part of the British Empire and Commonwealth. That meant not only an instant wartime partnership with the heartland of the Empire — the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland — but also with other self-governing dominions of the Empire like Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. On the Western Front between 1916 and 1918, the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) served alongside the soldiers of all these nations in what was known as the BEF — the British Expeditionary Force. Also in this force were thousands of men of the British India Army and from many other colonies of the British Empire. In addition, the British contracted many thousands of Chinese labourers to work on the Western Front in a Chinese Labour Corps, and Australians would undoubtedly have been familiar with these men.

The war on the Western Front was fought almost exclusively in western France and along a narrow strip of Belgium that remained in Allied hands. Here, Australians would have encountered the armies of the British Empire's main ally, France. Behind the lines the soldiers of the AIF visited French pubs or 'estaminets' and met with the citizens of the country they had come to defend. One officer, Captain Frank Coen from Yass NSW, wrote to his mother:

It is a privilege for one to be given the opportunity of spending a portion of this life fighting for the liberty of a people [the French] so truly noble.

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Belgian soldiers would also have been encountered in Belgium. It should be remembered that it was the invasion of Belgium by the German Empire on 4 August 1914 that brought the British Empire and Australia into the war.

Apart from the soldiers of smaller nations involved in the war against Germany, such as the Portuguese, Australians in 1918 encountered the soldiers of a major new ally — the Americans. The United States entered the war in April 1917, and by early 1918 considerable numbers of soldiers of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) were arriving in France. On 4 July 1918, American Independence Day, a few American companies in training with the AIF went into action with the Australians at the Battle of Hamel in France. One American officer wrote of their time with the AIF:

The Australians appeared to be more akin to our class in that they were an independent, alert, energetic lot of men and splendid fighters. From the first when our soldiers came into contact with them they mixed well and took kindly to each other.

AIMS

Students at Level 1/2/3:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Know that there was a large number of deaths during the war• Realise that many nations were involved
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CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Level 1/2/3	<p>Much of this topic is concerned with contacts between civilians and soldiers in a battle area.</p> <p>Ask students to imagine that the area where they lived was part of a battleground between enemy forces and allies who were trying to protect them. What sort of contact might they have with the allies? How would they regard them? What would they expect of them?</p> <p>The only time this has actually happened in Australia is during World War II and to a far lesser extent the Vietnam War, when many Australians came into contact with American forces. Students may have some family members whom they could talk to about their experiences with the 'Yanks'.</p>
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AWM EZ0036

An Australian soldier chats to two village children and fills a bucket with water from the pump while his mate pulls the pump handle. The two were billeted at a farm south of Armentières, France, June 1916.

People from many different countries fought on the Western Front. The focus in this resource is on Australia. You may not realise that many other nations were involved in the war, many of them to a much greater extent.

Here is a list of the number of casualties from each country during the war. Some of the figures are precise official figures, others are estimates or approximate numbers.

Countries	Total Mobilised	Killed & Died	Wounded	Prisoners & Missing	Total Casualties	Casualties as % mobilised
ALLIED POWERS						
Russia	12 000 000	1 700 000	4 950 000	2 500 000	9 150 000	76.3
France	8 410 000	1 357 800	4 266 000	537 000	6 160 800	73.3
British Empire <i>Includes Australia*</i>	8 904 467	908 371	2 090 212	191 652	3 190 235	35.8
Italy	5 615 000	650 000	947 000	600 000	2 197 000	39.1
United States	4 355 000	126 000	234 300	4 500	364 800	8.4
Japan	800 000	300	907	3	1 210	0.2
Romania	750 000	335 706	120 000	80 000	535 706	71.4
Serbia	707 343	45 000	133 148	152 958	331 106	46.8
Belgium	267 000	13 716	44 686	34 659	93 061	34.9
Greece	230 000	5 000	21 000	1 000	27 000	11.7
Portugal	100 000	7 222	13 751	12 318	33 291	33.3
Montenegro	50 000	3 000	10 000	7 000	20 000	40.0
Total	42 188 810	5 152 115	12 831 004	4 121 090	22 104 209	52.3
<i>Figures for Australia (AWM)</i>	331 000	61 919	155 000	4 044	221 000	66.7
* Also Includes England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Canada, South Africa, Newfoundland						
CENTRAL POWERS						
Germany	11 000 000	1 773 700	4 216 058	1 152 800	7 142 558	64.9
Austria-Hungary	7 800 000	1 200 000	3 620 000	2 200 000	7 020 000	90.0
Turkey	2 850 000	325 000	400 000	250 000	975 000	34.2
Bulgaria	1 200 000	87 500	152 390	27 029	266 919	22.2
Total	22 850 000	3 386 200	8 388 448	3 629 829	15 404 477	67.4
Grand Total	65 038 810	8 538 315	21 219 452	7 750 919	37 508 686	57.6

www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWdeaths.htm

- 1) Use an atlas to identify these countries on the modern world map on the next page. (Some of the countries no longer exist so you should use the map on page 11 to locate these countries. You will need to mark the approximate location on the modern map of those which no longer exist today.)
- 2) How would you describe Australia's contribution to the war? Explain your reasons.
- 3) Why is World War I so important in Australian history?



Australians also had contact with French and Belgian civilians during the war. Here are some illustrations of contacts.

- 1) Describe what is happening in each case. Complete the sentence 'In this image we can see that contact between Australians and civilians involved ...'



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- 2) Not all examples of contact are photographed or painted. Discuss what other sorts of contact between Australians and local civilians you might expect to see, and make a list of these.



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