

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 174

“Lessons Learned III: The Great War”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

The Great War ended the way it began: in a muddle. The Central Powers were clearly beaten, but their surrender was not unconditional. Just as the question “Why did the war begin?” has no simple answer, the question, “What did the victors accomplish?” is similarly difficult.

The world had definitely changed. But how had it changed, and what did the changes mean? The answers were still unclear.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 174. Lessons Learned III: The Great War.

The war was over. The peace remained to be negotiated. Following the Armistice, and after the UK general election, representatives of the Allied powers gathered in Paris to hammer out a peace agreement, one that they hoped would prevent a repeat of the terrible war that just ended.

Next week, I’ll talk about the peace conference, and after that, we’ll take a tour to examine the state of the world and consider how the Great War affected it. But before we do any of that, I want to take this week’s episode to ruminate on the lessons to be learned from the Great War. Again, we’ll do this in the form of a listicle, just as we did back in episodes 36 and 79.

The top ten lessons to be learned from the experience of the Great War:

10. Modern military technology is orders of magnitude more lethal.

You know this is a topic I’ve been talking about since the beginning of the podcast. I’ve usually formulated it as, “Don’t make frontal assaults on entrenched enemies armed with modern weapons.” You’ll notice there are four parts to this formula: “frontal assaults,” “entrenched enemy,” “modern weapons,” and “don’t.” “Don’t” is the most important part of the formula. I

specify “frontal assaults” because other tactics, like flank assaults, can still work, and I specify “entrenched enemy” because enemies caught without proper defensive preparations are still vulnerable.

But “modern weapons” is an important part of the formula. For most of the history of warfare, the army that won the battle was the army that better resisted the temptation to panic and flee the battlefield. When soldiers flee a battle in a disorganized fashion, as opposed to an orderly retreat supervised by their commanders, they are highly vulnerable to pursuit. Since ancient times, armies have had specialized units, especially light infantry and cavalry, whose purpose was to pursue routed enemy soldiers and kill them, capture them, or at least harry them enough to prevent them from regrouping. When soldiers panic and begin to flee the battle, their flight often panics nearby soldiers. Nobody wants to be the last fighter left on the battlefield, since those left behind are the first ones the pursuit units catch up to. There have been many cases throughout military history where a rout beginning at one point on the battle line spread rapidly across the field. This outcome can be so sudden and so dramatic that in the ancient world it was sometimes viewed as a sign of divine intervention.

So historically, victory often went to the army that stayed strong, stayed brave, and kept together. Since ancient times, soldiers have been trained in the importance of courage and strength of character. Our modern English word *virtue* comes from the Latin *virtus*, which originally meant courage in battle and was derived from *vir*, which simply meant “man.” To be manly, to be virtuous, to stand fast in the heat of battle; these were all seen as related concepts.

Conversely, bold attacks on an enemy are intimidating. Seeing a large mass of heavily armed soldiers rushing toward you can easily precipitate panic, even among soldiers who are part of a large formation themselves. Historically, commanders often used this kind of all-or-nothing frontal assault to induce a rout in the enemy, once the commanders judged that the enemy soldiers were wavering. If they’d judged correctly, an assault could trigger a rout.

As late as the early twentieth century, as we have seen many times, the idea that courage and virtue were the decisive qualities that would carry the day on the battlefield was still very much in vogue among military leaders. But they were wrong. Modern weapons can for the first time in history cut down a unit of advancing soldiers faster than the soldiers can advance.

Ironically, one of the reasons the Great War was so terrible was the long peace of the Concert of Europe. European officers mostly lacked experience in combat with these new weapons. Most of the combat experience Europeans received in the late 19th century was in colonial wars. Colonial wars offered ample evidence that modern weapons were amazingly lethal. Consider for example, the Battle of Rorke’s Drift in 1879, when about 150 British soldiers held off an attack by some 4,000 Zulu soldiers during the Anglo-Zulu War. Not only was the British defense successful, but the British suffered only 17 soldiers killed and 15 wounded, about one-twentieth of the losses suffered by the Zulus, who fought only with spears and muskets.

It was this advantage in military technology that allowed Europeans to dominate the world by the end of the 19th century, but even so, because of the unfortunate racism of the time, most Europeans chose to interpret their victories not as evidence of the superiority of rifles over spears, but as evidence of superior European virtue and strength of character. The British soldiers at Rorke's Drift were a modern version of the Spartans at Thermopylae, holding off a far larger enemy, only better than the Spartans because most of the British survived.

It was not until Europeans turned their modern weapons on other Europeans that the lesson began to sink in. It wasn't character that won the day, it was smokeless powder. It was barbed wire. It was heavy artillery. No amount of bravery could sustain a charge against a machine gun emplacement. By the end of the war, it was no longer possible to look at armed conflict in the old-fashioned way. The older romantic notions of war as a test of character gave way to a different vision, one that saw war as ugly and futile. As sympathetic young men sent to their deaths by callous or incompetent commanders for no good purpose. What was even the point anymore?

9. Modern economies have vastly expanded the scope of war.

The deadlier war became, the harder it became to answer that question. What was the point? What great cause could be worth so much death and suffering?

Wars had also become so deadly because they had become so big. For most of the long history of warfare, the most important constraint on the size of an army was the wealth available to equip and field it. In some times and places, you had armies comprised of farmers wielding their farm tools or militias bringing their own muskets to the fight, but generally speaking, a king or a nation could have only as large an army as their treasury could support.

This began to change by the 19th century. The Industrial Revolution and the rapid economic growth of the time allowed for larger treasuries than ever before, but it wasn't only about the money. It was also about mass conscription, the *levée en masse* pioneered by the French Revolutionary government. It's important to bear in mind here that the *levée en masse* is not just a technological but a political innovation, and it's no coincidence that you first see it in the French Revolution.

Before the French Revolution, the army was seen as serving the king or the emperor. In a republic, the army serves the republic, which means it serves everyone. The army is no longer there to defend the king's rights and prerogatives; it is there to defend *your* rights and prerogatives. That in turn gives the army a stronger moral claim to your service when needed, or if you aren't soldier material, at least your tax money and whatever other support you may be able to give.

Additionally, mass conscription fits hand-in-glove with 19th-century romantic nationalism. You are a member of a tribe, an ethnic group, a nation, that the army exists to defend. Your stake in the war is no less than anyone else's, therefore everyone must expect to be asked to aid the war effort however they can. This gives republics and ethnic states something of an edge over monarchies, and especially a multi-ethnic monarchy like Austria-Hungary. In the Austrian Army, ethnic Germans and Magyars fought well, soldiers of other ethnic groups with notably less enthusiasm. In the Ottoman Empire, Turkish soldiers fought well, and they fought best when defending Turkish lands. Look no further to understand why a multiethnic Austria or a multiethnic Turkey could not survive the war.

These two trends, of increasing numbers of soldiers conscripted, and increasing wealth and production to equip and supply those soldiers, have reached their logical extreme in the Great War. At least some of the belligerents in the Great War literally called up every available male of fighting age. Britain, a country that took pride in its volunteer army, had to give up on volunteer armies. And in a loose sense, what ended the war was simply that the Central Powers ran out of soldiers.

It's also notable that the political aspect of mass conscription runs both ways. Yes, if you are a citizen of the nation, you have an obligation to serve. But the converse is also true. If the state imposes upon you the same obligation to serve in the military as everyone else, doesn't that imply that the state has an obligation to grant you the same rights and privileges that everyone else in your nation enjoys? It's no coincidence that mass conscription in Britain was quickly followed by universal suffrage. In the United States, once African Americans started getting drafted on the same terms as white Americans, well...the implications of that may take some time to sink in, but keep an eye on it.

8. The science of war has outpaced the art of war.

It may seem strange to think of warfare as an art. War is about death and violence and destruction, right? And yet there exist not one but two classic works entitled *The Art of War*, by Sun Tzu and Niccolò Machiavelli, a Chinese and a European thinker, respectively. This is because the best military leaders have always been the most creative and insightful.

If the concepts of "art" and "war" seem to you difficult to reconcile, consider this: creativity in military terms usually comes down to finding ways of imposing your will on the enemy with a minimum of bloodshed. Or, as Master Sun put it, "excellence in combat consists not in winning a hundred battles, but in defeating the enemy without fighting any."

Conversely, the worst military leaders are the ones who simply throw soldiers at the enemy and hope something good comes out of it. This is the image most people have of commanders in the Great War, but it's only partly accurate, as I hope I've shown you. The best commanders of the war were experimental and innovative, although there were others who, yes, simply threw their soldiers at the enemy and hoped something good would come of it.

General Conrad, I'm looking at you.

But war is not only about innovative leadership. It is also about innovative technology. The technology of war is always changing. Successful militaries quickly learn the new technologies and adapt to them, and historically, this process of learning and adapting took place during military conflicts. The biggest problem with the armies of the Great War wasn't their lack of innovation after the war began; it was that they had not changed before the war. The past fifty years had seen important technological advances, but Europe's armies had remained stagnant and complacent.

This is because it was a relatively peaceful era, at least in Europe. But it led to the situation we saw in 1914, when military tactics were far out of sync with the new military technology. The lesson here is that in this modern era of rapid technological change, you can't afford to wait for the next war. Militaries have to study, adapt, experiment, and innovate, even in peacetime.

The most important innovation of the Great War was the tank. The British developed tanks to break the defensive stalemate on the Western Front, but although they were useful, the war ended before tanks and tank tactics had advanced far enough to become decisive. I don't usually give out spoilers, but I will tell you this: tanks are going to be the most important military innovation of the twentieth century. Indeed, the twentieth century has been called "the century of the tank." Building better tanks, developing the proper tactics for using them, and the proper tactics for countering them, these are going to be the most important military challenges for the rest of the century.

7. Modern warfare is expensive.

Modern economies have made it possible to field armies of a size never before seen. But "possible" is not synonymous with "easy." The Great War was terribly expensive. Wars have always cost money, but no previous war had demanded such a large share of the gross domestic products of the belligerents. Half or more of the national economy was being spent on the war.

The economies of Britain, Italy, and the United States actually expanded during the war, owing to the stimulus of wartime demand, but the economy of France contracted. Remember that France lost a major share of its mining and manufacturing sectors to the German occupation. The Russian economy collapsed entirely. The Central Powers each lost about a quarter of their GDPs during the war.

The agricultural sector was strongly affected, both by the high demand for food to feed the armies and the loss of agricultural labor and horses. The results were shortages and soaring inflation in food prices worldwide, which as we have seen adversely affected even countries that remained neutral.

Civilian suffering in time of war is nothing new, but the widespread hunger and deprivation that struck nationwide and left millions of people eating turnip jelly on sawdust bread is. In Germany and Austria-Hungary, tens of millions of formerly well-fed and comfortable people were reduced to near starvation. In Russia, food shortages sparked a revolution.

The high prices were good for farmers, and wartime shortages encouraged investment in agricultural mechanization, especially among the western Allies. Increased productivity is generally a good thing, but after the war, food prices collapsed, to the detriment of farmers, especially those who had just invested so heavily in mechanization and now found themselves burdened with debts their harvests could not cover. Mrs. History of the Twentieth Century's grandparents were farmers, and they told her that for them, the Great Depression began as soon as the Great War ended. This was the experience of many farmers in many nations.

6. The international order is in need of revamping.

If you're a long-time listener, you'll remember me talking quite a few times about the Concert of Europe, which is the name given to the structure of international relationships in Europe in the century before the Great War. The Concert of Europe was not a formal arrangement. There were no treaties or written agreements or established international organizations meant to enforce or maintain it. It was merely what people at the time would have called a "gentlemen's agreement," though you should note that people at the time put a lot of stock in what they called "gentlemen's agreements."

At its heart, the Concert of Europe was simply an informal understanding that international disputes in Europe would be settled by calling an international conference of Europe's greatest powers, along with smaller stakeholder nations on an *ad hoc* basis. This conference would discuss the dispute until they came to a consensus on how to settle it peacefully. It doesn't sound like much, but it kept Europe mostly peaceful for almost a century, and Europe flourished.

In the run-up to the Great War, we saw the system begin to flounder. Conferences were called when the Balkan Wars began, but it seemed as if a new war would break out almost before the conference had a chance to tackle the issues that had led to the previous one. And during the July Crisis, Germany and Austria devised a secret, coordinated plan to undermine any attempt to organize a conference that might settle Austria's quarrel with Serbia peacefully.

So the problem with gentlemen's agreements is that gentlemen don't always behave like gentlemen. At the end of the war, most people wished for a way to put the genie back in the bottle, so to speak, and return to the days of the Concert of Europe. But the war itself was proof enough that the old system was obsolete.

What would a revised and corrected version of the Concert of Europe look like? Well, as far as people in 1919 were concerned, it would look something like this: it would build on the Concert of Europe precedent by similarly settling international quarrels with international conferences,

only now maybe we need a standing conference, rather than special conferences organized at need. It would not be enough to rely on consensus; Germany and Austria proved that bad actors could block a consensus and force the world into war if they wished, hence there was a need for an enforcement mechanism to compel a bad actor to comply with the will of the international community, or else.

It would also need to build on the experience of the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907. If the Great War taught us that modern weapons are both expensive to build and deploy and terrifying in their lethality, we've also learned that arms races, like the naval race between Britain and Germany, are also both expensive and destabilizing. Thus, an improved international order might ban certain specific weapons outright, while limiting the levels of others, so as to prevent rival nations from spending each other into bankruptcy, or worse, triggering another world war.

Notice that these arrangements sound very much like what Woodrow Wilson was calling for, the coming League of Nations.

5. Alliances can be shields or snares.

An alliance is an effective method of averting war and protecting one's own nation, right up until the moment that it isn't. The Franco-Russian Alliance is a good example. It was signed in 1894 and it helped protect France from German invasion for twenty years, until it provoked a preemptive invasion from a Germany that really wanted war with Russia.

For the rest of the twentieth century, the story of the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente would be presented as a cautionary tale of the dangers of entangling alliances. Nowhere is this more true than in the United States, where this concern echoes George Washington's Farewell Address, in which he advocated the nation "steer clear of permanent alliances." He never actually used the phrase "entangling alliances." That phrase was coined by Thomas Jefferson to restate Washington's advice, not entirely accurately.

The competing alliance structures in Europe are often cited as a cause of the Great War. The July Crisis is often portrayed as a minor squabble between Austria and Serbia blowing up into a World War because the alliances drew all the major powers into the conflict. The truth, as usual, is a little more complicated. Germany didn't get "drawn into" the Balkan conflict; German officials were egging the Austrians on every step of the way. And while on the surface, it might appear that the French were innocent bystanders, attacked by Germany preemptively because of France's alliance with Russia, the truth is that French and Russian officials had agreed beforehand to take a hard line in defending Serbia. If the French government had been more reluctant to confront Germany and Austria over Serbia and had communicated that reluctance to St. Petersburg and to Berlin, history might have played out very differently.

On the other hand, the British government got drawn into the war almost unwittingly, distracted as it was by the situation in Ireland. And Russia might never have found the will to confront

Germany and Austria at the same time, had it not had assurances of support from Britain and France.

No nation has a moral obligation to commit suicide. It follows therefore that no nation has a moral obligation to honor a treaty even if that means that nation's own destruction. If a nation's leaders follow a treaty obligation into a destructive war, don't blame the treaty. Blame the leaders. A treaty might draw a careless nation into a war, but it can't force war upon an unwilling one.

The real lesson here is that diplomacy is hard and requires constant attention. A good treaty can promote peace and stability with a minimum of oversight, but treaties do not run on autopilot. They need constant adjustment with adroit applications of diplomacy. The worst thing you can say about the competing alliance agreements of 1914 is that they greased the skids for the descent into war. But the decision to ride all the way down the slope was one made by the world leaders of 1914, not by their predecessors.

It's important to keep all this in mind once we begin looking at the peace treaties that ended the war and their effect on the next phase of twentieth century history. Wars aren't started by pieces of paper or by dead leaders of generations past. They are begun by the living, breathing leaders of their own time.

4. Wars begin when you will, but they do not end when you please.

I am quoting Niccolò Machiavelli here, but this pearl of wisdom is as applicable to the twentieth century as it was to the 16th. No nation entering the Great War, at least not in 1914 or 1915, expected the war to last as long as it did. As the fighting dragged on, the costs of the war quickly mounted until they far outweighed the issues that had led to the war in the first place.

Why did the Great War begin, anyway? I've been talking about the war for two years now, and if you asked me for a short, concise answer to that question, I would stumble. The proximate causes of the war seem so trivial, in retrospect. An assassination? A quarrel with Serbia? Really? A more persuasive answer might be that Germany and Austria believed that time was not on their side and that to accept the status quo would lead to their inevitable destruction. Better to upend the game board and hope the pieces land in a better configuration. You could say it was the culmination of a period of Great Power competition that left everyone feeling less secure than before.

Or perhaps Captain Blackadder said it best: "[T]he real reason for the whole thing was that it was too much effort *not* to have a war."

But if the war began because world leaders simply followed the path of least resistance, it is even sadder to contemplate that the war went on for as long as it did for precisely the same reason: it was too much effort to end it.

Perhaps I should say, after all the deaths, after all the costs and sacrifices, no national leader felt they could go to their public and “sell” a peace plan that simply restored the 1914 status quo, even with a few small territorial adjustments. Governments had to sell the war by presenting the other side as an existential threat, to their own nation and perhaps to civilization generally. This was necessary to justify the sacrifices they were calling for. The longer the war went on and the bigger the bill became, the harder it would be for anyone to accept a Woodrow Wilson-style “peace without victory.”

Instead, the longer the war raged, the bigger the victory had to be in order to justify the conflict. This made it very difficult for anyone to agree to a modest settlement. Even after the war ended, both at Brest-Litovsk and at Paris, the governments and militaries of the victors would quarrel among themselves over whether to settle for a gentle peace for the sake of future stability or to force a punitive and revanchist peace to make the defeated enemy repay the war’s enormous costs.

After the war, Allied governments tried to present the peace agreements as a great victory and blame the costs of the war on the defeated enemy. Political and military leaders on both sides would write and publish their memoirs in the 1920s. The message of most of these memoirs would be self serving, as in, “Don’t look at me! It wasn’t *my* fault!”

Worst of all, in Germany, the military leadership and their right-wing political supporters would soon begin to claim that Germany had been defeated not by the external enemy but by betrayal at home, by the Social Democrats and the labor unions and those calling for peace or complaining about the meager food rations. The narrative of the enemy within, the stab in the back, is going to poison German politics for a generation.

3. Communism is the stepchild of total war.

As the Western world struggled with these questions of why are we fighting and why don’t we just quit, the Bolsheviks stepped forward and offered plausible answers, albeit answers as horrifying as the war itself. It was capitalism and its handmaiden, imperialism, that want the war and refuse to end it. The capitalists and the ruling class are getting rich off the blood of your husbands and your sons. Which is what they always do, only now it has become more obvious.

This was an oversimplification, but a very useful one for the Bolsheviks—what the heck, I might as well begin calling them communists. That’s how they will be known for the rest of the century. Like the cat in Aesop’s fable, they know only one trick, but it is a very useful one. All political, economic, and social ills are caused by capitalism. Eliminate capitalism, and you eliminate the problem.

The Bolsheviks never would have triumphed in Russia had it not been for the war. And not only the war, but the breakdown in trust between the Russian people and the ruling elites. That broke down long ago, but now the chickens will come home to roost.

The fact of a communist government in one of the world's Great Powers will mean that for the next three generations, communist ideologues will have vast resources available to formulate and disseminate a communist critique of Western civilization. Every call to war that will be made for the rest of the twentieth century, and beyond, will be answered by the same accusation, that the conflict is a conspiracy to enrich a few at the expense of the many. Every economic or social or political injustice will be laid upon the doorstep of capitalism.

Don't get me wrong. I am not suggesting that Western civilization or capitalism should not be critiqued. Of course they should. They not only deserve it, they *need* it. It's healthy. At least some of the critiques coming from the communists and from the more moderate socialists will promote social progress. By 1942, US Vice President Henry Wallace will be able to proclaim the twentieth century "the century of the common man." Society will become less hierarchical, and more attention will be paid to the masses of ordinary people. Politically, socially, economically, and even culturally. Twentieth century art, literature, film, and entertainment will focus on ordinary people as never before.

What's not healthy is that these critiques will be coming from a closed and totalitarian society or that most of them will be at least as self serving as the anything coming from the defenders of the West. The dialogue will be forced into a binary us-against-them debate that rules out compromise. But that's a tale for future episodes. And despite the communists' proud boast of offering a better way of organizing a society, no nation will ever choose freely and peacefully to follow the Bolshevik lead. Communism takes root not at the ballot box, but in the wake of war, deprivation, and upheaval.

2. "Civilization" isn't all it's cracked up to be.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Europe was feeling pretty good about itself. European civilization was reaching new heights of prosperity, learning, and culture, and of course military power. Yes, the United States was a rising world power, and there were those restless British dominions, increasingly eager to be treated as peers rather than dependencies of the Mother Country. Some Latin American nations had achieved European levels of development. After the Great War, we will increasingly be embracing those nations too and speaking of "Western civilization" rather than "European civilization." But none of this belied the basic premise of European supremacy, since all those other countries have histories and cultures rooted in Europe.

Europe, or "the West" if you like, dominated the world militarily in the early twentieth century, but apologists for the West didn't like to dwell on the military aspect. The Mongols once dominated the world militarily, but of course Europeans didn't see themselves as twentieth-century Mongols. They saw themselves as twentieth century Greeks or Romans. The keepers of the flame of civilization against the midnight of barbarism.

The West did not always live up to these ideals of course. Consider the Opium Wars or the excesses of British rule in India (which we haven't gotten to yet, but we will, I promise) or the

treatment of Africans, notably the story of King Leopold's heart of darkness. And to its credit, the West sometimes took action against its own when the excesses became too shocking to ignore. But as with King Leopold, when action was taken it was taken slowly and timidly, and bad behavior was blamed on specific individuals or governments, not on a paternalistic worldview that attributed to the West a right and a duty to uplift the rest of the world, whether it wanted to be uplifted or not. Sometimes, mass killings and death in colonial territories were blamed on the natives themselves, who were depicted as too violent or stubborn or narrow minded to understand that it was necessary for their colonial masters to "civilize" them.

The Great War shattered this worldview. When European weapons gunned down large numbers of Africans or Asians, that was their own fault for not understanding that resistance was futile. But when Europeans turned their killing technology on one another, the full horror of modern warfare came home, and it was harder to explain away as native ignorance or some minor aberration. And as the war went on, and soldiers died by the thousands while their commanders and political leaders seemed helpless to prevent it, it was harder to defend Europe's privileged position as the keeper of civilization. Not that old-school propagandists didn't try. They did their best to portray the conflict as a glorious crusade for freedom and enlightenment against the forces of despotism, but the appalling body counts were too horrifying to explain away so easily. Which brings us to:

1. War is bad.

You probably think I'm being facetious, because in our time the simple statement "war is bad" has become such a commonplace that you only hear it when it's being used ironically, as when a character in a film or TV show is depicted as clueless or shallow. Of course war is bad! Did you think you were being profound?

But that's the modern view, formed from the experience of the past century. At the turn of the twentieth century, many still viewed war as a curative for the body politic. It was like exercise. You may resist it, it may seem like too much of a sacrifice, but deep down inside, you know it's good for you. It's refreshing and stimulating and helps keep you healthy and strong.

That's exactly what a lot of 19th century people thought about war. Those of you who have been listening along from the early days of the podcast recall when Theodore Roosevelt, back when he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy, opined that "I should welcome almost any war, for I think this country needs one." Roosevelt would continue to think this way for the rest of his life, but the generation for whom the Great War was a formative experience could never accept Roosevelt's view of it.

Wars used to be fought by a small cadre of professionals, while the rest of society looked on and cheered. Rather like a football game, except the stakes were potentially much higher. Modern warfare took all the romance out of it, and reduced it to unfeeling numbers, as in, the Allies won because they recovered numerical superiority on the Western Front. I am reminded of the

musical stage show *Pippin*, in which the title character goes off to war in a quest to find his calling. After witnessing a gruesome battle, the only thing the shattered young man can think to say afterward is, “I thought there’d be more...plumes.”

This sentiment would have been familiar to the millions of veterans returning home from the Great War. Any romantic ideas they may have held about how war builds character or about how courage and dedication lead to victory had not survived contact with modern reality.

The war had changed more than a few governments and a few boundaries. It had destroyed Europe’s self-image. The older generation hoped that the end of the war might herald a return to the Belle Époque, an era of growth and prosperity, of flourishing arts, of rapidly advancing scientific understanding. The younger generation knew this was a pipe dream, and faced the future with far less optimism than their parents had. They doubted that peace meant a return to ever-expanding freedoms and democracy and prosperity. And their doubts would soon be confirmed.

We’ll have to stop there for today. Thank you for listening, and I’d especially like to thank...Leon for his donation, and thanks to...Steven for becoming a patron of the podcast. The support of donors and patrons is what keeps this show on the road, metaphorically speaking, and if you have some filthy lucre weighing you down and you’d like to exchange it for the good karma that comes with being a donor or patron, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

And I hope you’ll join me next week on *The History of the Twentieth Century* as we turn to the Paris Peace Conference. Just an introduction, mind you. The ins and outs of the negotiations are far more than I can cover in one episode, but maybe we can at least talk about the League of Nations. That’s next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. The Great War engendered many changes in Western culture. One conspicuous change is the form of war memorials. You may have already noticed that war memorials from earlier conflicts are often a statue to an individual, usually a famous military leader, often depicted on horseback. These are grand, heroic monuments and they were probably funded by the government.

The Great War changed war memorials. Governments were short on funds afterward and few were feeling a sense of triumph. And yet among the public, the high death tolls seemed to demand some kind of recognition. And so you see the development of local monuments, usually funded by private donations. Because the budget for these memorials was usually limited, they tended to be simple. A block of stone. An obelisk. A metal plaque. The memorial might list the names of the fallen, or in a smaller community, perhaps the names of all who served, with those who gave their lives marked with a star.

In a departure from the older traditions, instead of honoring one great commander, the monument would be a catalogue of names; hundreds or thousands of them. Usually they were not separated by unit or marked by rank. They would simply be a roll of names, arranged in no hierarchy, often in alphabetical order, the very number of names serving as a statement of a community's grief.

The destructive power of modern weapons was such that the remains of many fallen soldiers were never identified. This inspired another new form of war memorial, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The principle of these tombs is that the remains of one unidentified soldier would be honored as representative of them all. On November 11, 1920, the second anniversary of the Armistice, services were first conducted in the United Kingdom and France related to the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey in Westminster, London, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. The following year, similar tombs were created in Italy, Portugal, and in the United States. The US Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was built at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. The remains interred there were returned from France aboard the US Navy cruiser *Olympia*, which you'll recall was once Commodore Dewey's flagship at the Battle of Manila 23 years earlier.

[music: Closing Theme]