

# The First World War and the Philosophy of Warfare



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2021 Virtual Research Colloquium

# Introduction and Thesis

World War One (July 28, 1914 - 11 November, 1918).

World War I was a watershed moment for the philosophy, ideology, and general attitudes towards warfare; like millions of soldiers, many long-held attitudes, myths and romanticized visions of war went to die on the battlefields of Europe from 1914 to 1918.

As the war progressed, generals were forced to change tactics and strategy in the face of modern warfare. Romantic militarism, the underlying philosophy behind the offensive-only strategy and the reckless tactics such as cavalry and bayonet charges, was altered along with the strategy and tactics.





# Pre-War Mindset, Military Doctrine, and Philosophy

Pax Britannica: 100 years of relative peace.

Positive outlook on war as a legitimate mechanism for resolving conflict.

Romantic Militarism: War was seen as manly, glorious, and adventurous.

Over by Christmas: The myth of the short war.

Aggressive, attack-centered strategy.

Propaganda tried to reinforced these attitudes.

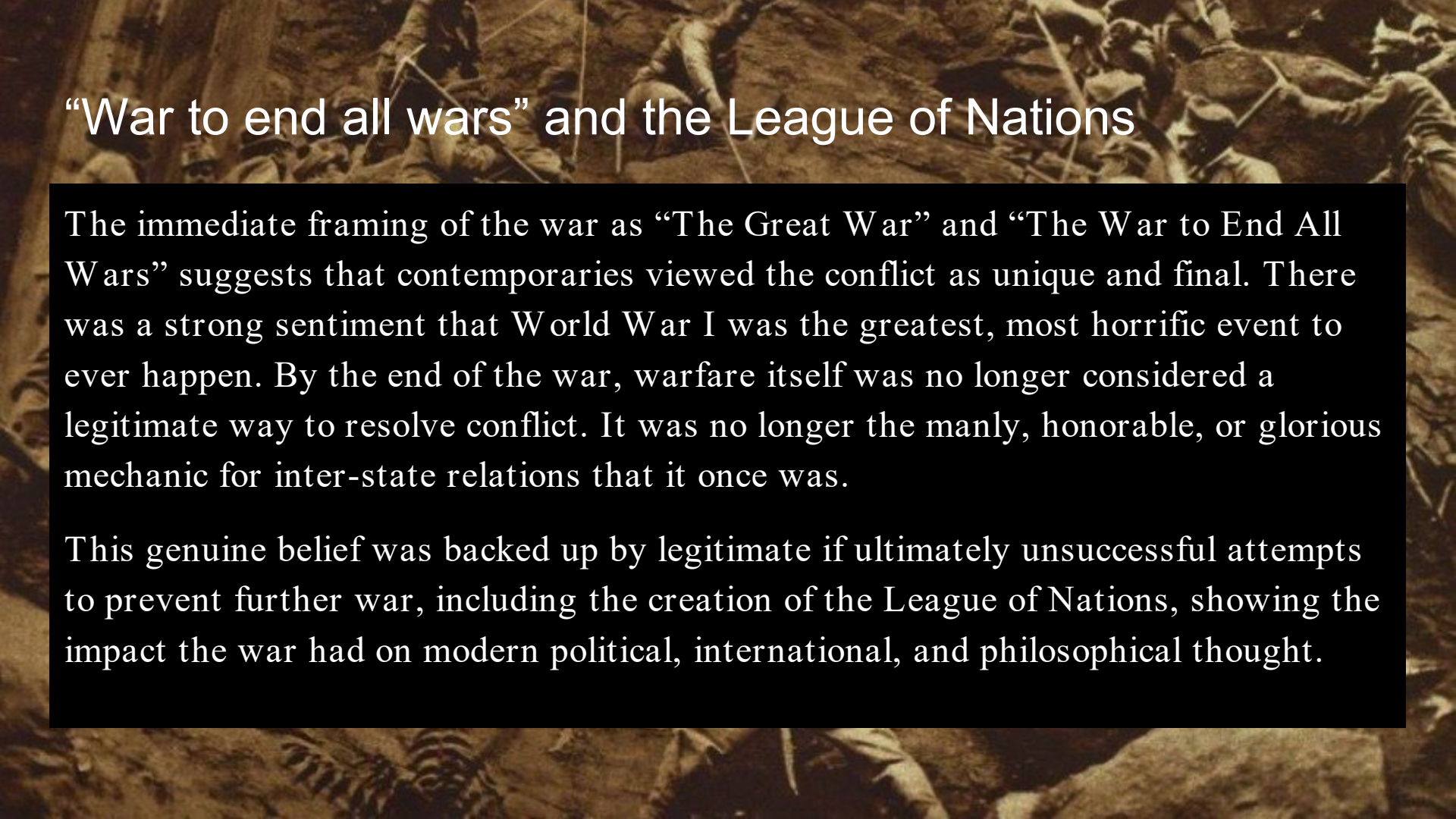
# The Death of Romantic Militarism



Brave tactics like calvary and bayonet charges crashed against modern military technology. As tactics changed to better suit the war, so to did attitudes on those tactics: the romance of war disappeared little by little.

The changing attitudes on warfare itself are most clearly seen by the soldiers who fought in the war. By the end, most had jaded, disillusioned views on the war and its causes. Most just wanted it to be over, regardless of who won.

The shift is also seen in political writings and the arts, especially poetry.



## “War to end all wars” and the League of Nations

The immediate framing of the war as “The Great War” and “The War to End All Wars” suggests that contemporaries viewed the conflict as unique and final. There was a strong sentiment that World War I was the greatest, most horrific event to ever happen. By the end of the war, warfare itself was no longer considered a legitimate way to resolve conflict. It was no longer the manly, honorable, or glorious mechanic for inter-state relations that it once was.

This genuine belief was backed up by legitimate if ultimately unsuccessful attempts to prevent further war, including the creation of the League of Nations, showing the impact the war had on modern political, international, and philosophical thought.



# Conclusion

The Great War clearly negatively affected how societies viewed and understood war.

By the end of the war, the Pax-Britannica mindset that glorified war as an honorable adventure was shattered. In its place, a more cynical worldview that wished to avoid war; a view seen through the lens of the horrific First World War experience.

The main mechanism of this shift were the dramatic changes in tactics and strategy that the war forced militaries to go through. As romanticized tactics had to be abandoned, so too did the romance behind them. What was left: the horrors of the reality of war.

# Closing



“August, 1914” (1918)  
by Vera Mary Brittain

God said, “Men have forgotten Me:  
The souls that sleep shall wake again,  
And blinded eyes must learn to see.”

So since redemption comes through pain  
He smote the earth with chastening rod,  
And brought destruction's lurid reign;

But where His desolation trod  
The people in their agony  
Despairing cried, “There is no God.”