Germany knew that command of the seas was of supreme importance to Britain. As an island nation, Britain depended on its navy to keep the sea lanes open for supplies of food and raw materials. The German surface navy was no match for the British Royal Navy, but the Germans had a more deadly weapon - the submarine or U-Boat (Unterseeboot). From the beginning of the war, German submarines prowled the seas. They attacked British ships in an attempt to cut off supplies. At the same time, the British navy tried to blockade the German coast so that food and war supplies could not get into Germany by sea.

Germany warned that it would sink all ships in enemy waters without warning. They did however, place an ad in the New York Times in 1915 warning Americans not to travel on the British luxury liners across the Atlantic. They did not want the Americans to enter the war on the side of the British. However, despite this warning in the New York times, one month later, the British luxury liner Lusitania was torpedoed. Eleven hundred and ninety-eight people drowned in panic and chaos and more than half the passengers on the vessel were Americans. The Lusitania, like many passenger ships during the war, was being used to also transport supplies to the Allies. The Americans, despite claiming to be neutral, and despite the American people wanting to not get involved in a European war, were providing aid and support to Britain throughout the war.

The American people were shocked at this attack on their citizens. American public opinion was turning against Germany.

As early as August 20, 1914, the British were treating food as contraband and interfering with neutral shipments of food to Europe. On November 5, 1914, they declared the whole sea from Scotland to Iceland a "war zone," covered it with fields of explosive floating mines, and ordered all ships going to the Baltic, Scandinavia, or the Low Countries to go by way of the English Channel, where they were stopped, searched, and much of their cargoes seized, even when these cargoes could not be declared contraband under existing international law. In reprisal the Germans on February 18, 1915 declared the English Channel a "war zone," announced that their submarines would sink shipping in that area, and ordered shipping for the Baltic area to use the route north of Scotland. The United States, which rejected a Scandinavian invitation to protest against the British war zone closed with mines north of Scotland, protested violently against the German war zone closed with submarines on the Narrow Seas, although, as one American senator put it, the "humanity of the submarine was certainly on a higher level than that of the floating mine, which could exercise neither discretion nor judgment."

The United States accepted the British "war zone," and prevented its ships from using it. On the other hand, it refused to accept the German war zone, and insisted that American lives and property were under American protection even when traveling on armed belligerent ships in this war zone. Moreover, the United States insisted that German submarines must obey the laws of the sea as drawn for surface vessels. These laws provided that merchant ships could be stopped by a war vessel and inspected, and could be sunk, if carrying contraband, after the passengers and the ships' papers were put in a place of safety. A place of safety was not the ships' boats, except in sight of land or of other vessels in a calm sea. The merchant vessel was protected under these rights only if it made no act of hostility against the enemy war vessel. It was not only difficult, or even impossible, for German submarines to meet these conditions; it was often dangerous, since British merchant ships received instructions to attack German submarines at sight, by ramming if possible. It was even dangerous for the German submarines to apply the established law of neutral vessels; for British vessels, with these aggressive orders, frequently flew neutral flags and posed as neutrals as long as possible. Nevertheless, the United States insisted on insisting that the Germans obey the old laws, while condoning British violations of the same laws to the extent that the distinction between war vessels and merchant ships was blurred. Accordingly, German submarines began to sink British merchant ships with little or no warning. Their attempts to justify this failure to distinguish between combatants and noncombatants on the ground that British floating mines, the British food blockade, and the British instructions to merchant ships to attack submarines made no such distinction were no more successful than their efforts to show that their severity against the civilian population of Belgium was justified by civilian attacks on German troops. They were trying to carry on legal distinctions remaining from an earlier period when conditions were entirely different, and their ultimate abandonment of these distinctions on the grounds that their enemies had already abandoned them merely made matters worse, because if neutrals became belligerents and noncombatants became combatants, Germany and her allies would suffer much more than Britain and her friends. In the final analysis this is why the distinctions were destroyed; but beneath all legal questions was to be found the ominous fact that war, by becoming total, had made both neutrality and negotiated peace almost impossible.
Unrestricted Submarine Warfare

By 1917, the war on the Western Front was still dragging on. Germany decided to introduce a policy of "unrestricted submarine warfare." German U-boats would sink any Allied or neutral ship approaching Britain. The goal was to cut off all supplies and weapons from reaching that Allied nation. The policy was extremely effective. In four months, German submarines sank over 1000 Allied ships. Britain had to find a way to counter the U-boats, or it would be starved into surrender.

One answer was the convoy system. Since the beginning of the war, Canada had been shipping huge quantities of food, munitions, and other war supplies to Britain. The port of Halifax was the chief transport link between Canada and Europe. Now instead of cargo ships sailing alone from Canada and the United States to Britain, they began to sail in fleets or convoys. Supply ships were escorted by armed destroyers that kept constant watch.

Canada's navy had only two warships at the beginning of the war, but yachts and other vessels were bought, refitted, and armed. These ships took part in many of the convoys to Britain and helped to get through necessary supplies. A Canadian Patrol Service also protected shipping and sought out submarines off Canada's coast.

By the end of the war, Canada's navy had grown to 112 warships staffed by 5500 officers and men. Canadian shipyards built more than 60 anti-submarine motor launches. In addition, several thousand Canadians served in the British Royal Navy, in the Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve, and in the Royal Naval Air Service.

The War in the Air

- Invented in 1903
- Used in WWI for observation
- Eventually, pilots armed themselves
- Pistols, Grenades, eventually machine guns
- Problem: Where do you put the guns?

- Rolland Garros: "Deflector Plates" that deflected bullets away from the propeller
- Anthony Fokker: Synchronizing Gears, gun fires through the propeller
- Possible to fight in the air by 1915
When war broke out in 1914, the airplane was a new and unproven invention. Few military leaders had any confidence in the airplane as a weapon of war. Canadian Col. Sam Hughes is reported to have said, "The airplane ... will never play any part in such a serious business as the defense of a nation."

Canada had no air force of its own when the war broke out. The Royal Canadian Air Force was not organized until 1924. But Canadians who wanted to fly joined the British Royal Flying Corps. They served as pilots, gunners, air crew, and mechanics. Canadian airmen proved to be formidable flyers and quickly gained a reputation for bravery and prowess in battle. Britain responded by launching a pilot training program in Canada. By 1918, 40 percent of the British Airforce pilots were Canadian.

At the beginning of the war, Germany seemed to have the upper hand in the air war. The Germans had 400 airplanes, while the French had only 156 and the British 113 planes. By autumn, the Germans also had a superior fighting plane called the Fokker. It was armed with a machine gun that had a timed firing mechanism so that bullets did not hit its own propeller blades. German flyers also used gas filled balloons called Zeppelin airships on observation missions and bombing raids. Eventually, both sides used airships. By 1917, the British had developed the Sopwith Camel, and effective fighter plane.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go0LprJwxaw

Young men, most in their late teens or early twenties, flocked to the air force. Trench warfare offered no glory. Pilots fought in leading edge war machines and received better food, pay, and uniforms. They also slept in warm beds at night. But they paid a high price for their glory. The percentage of pilots killed was higher than in any other branch of the military. In late 1916, it was said that the average life of a pilot was three weeks. The air service was called "the suicide service." Planes were sometimes referred to as "flying coffins."

The pilots' fighting technique was to engage in dangerous aerial duels called dogfights. The flyers maneuvered their light planes to dive on the enemy from the rear and then fire. Those hit went down in a "flamer." There were no parachutes to save those unlucky enough to be shot down. Many other casualties were the result of mechanical failure.

Aces

The great air Manfred von Richthofen, Britain's Alfred Ball, and Canada's Billy Bishop. An ace was a fighter pilot who had shot down at least five enemy planes. Von Richthofen, known as the Red Baron, downed 80 planes in his career. Few people know that it was a Canadian air ace who finally shot down the Red Baron.

On 21 April 1918, von Richthofen, flying above the Somme Valley, spotted an Allied plane far below. He put his plane into a steep dive and moved in. His target was an inexperienced Canadian flyer, Wilfred May. Suddenly, May's gun jammed, but behind von Richthofen was another Canadian pilot, Captain Roy Brown. Brown opened fire on the Red Baron, and his plane fell in a deadly spin, killing him at age 26. Today the seat of the Red Baron's plane is on display at the Royal Military Institute in Toronto. You can put your finger through the bullet hole in the seat.
Questions

1. What is unrestricted submarine warfare?
2. Why did the Germans find it difficult to run their blockade of Britain?
3. What is the convoy system?
4. What is the name of the ocean liner that was sunk by the Germans which helped to turn American public opinion against Germany?
5. What were planes used for at the start of the war? What other aircraft were used?
6. What was the name of the aerial duels fought by WWI pilots?
7. Who was the Red Baron?
8. Write a few sentences on who Billy Bishop was? see pg. 94