Fallen Fields

Y6 Autumn 1

WW1

Before the war

In the early 1900s, Britain was one of the world's most powerful nations and had a large empire. British politicians wanted to avoid wars, there had been a period of peace in Europe. However, Germany was becoming a cause for concern, ruled by an ambitious kaiser who was envious of Britain's military strength.

Causes of war

Image from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

The First World War started after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 28th June 1914. However, other factors, including imperialism, nationalism, militarism and alliances between countries, also contributed towards war breaking out.
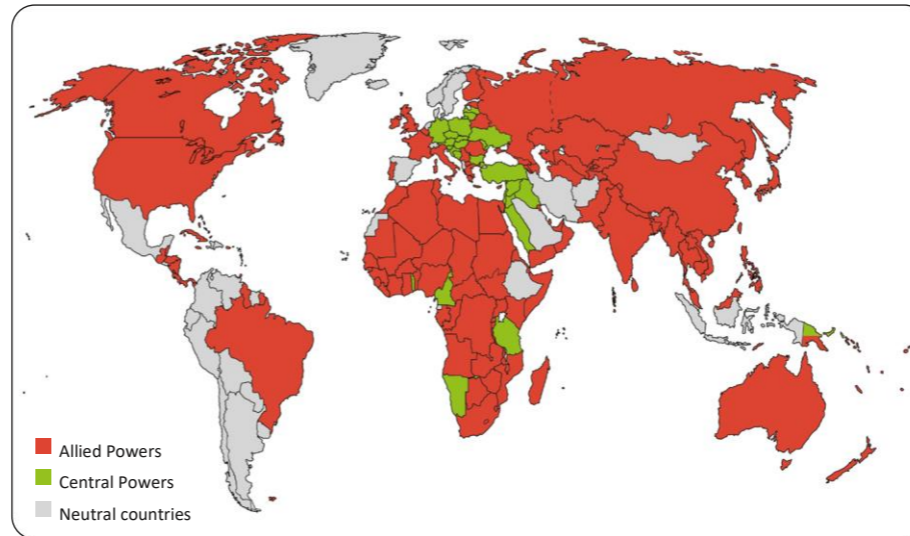
Warring countries

The war was fought between two groups: the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire) and the Allied and Associated Powers (27 countries, including Britain and its dominions, France, Russia, Japan, Portugal and Italy). Britain's dominions included Australia, Canada, the Indian subcontinent, New Zealand, Newfoundland, South Africa and parts of the Caribbean and Africa.

The end of the war

The war ended in 1918, at 11am on the 11th November. Germany signed an armistice, an agreement for peace. The Allies celebrated the end of the war and, in London, a huge crowd gathered in Trafalgar Square. On the 28th June 1919, exactly five years after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Germany and the Allied Powers signed a peace treaty called the Treaty of Versailles.

- Allied Powers
- Central Powers
- Neutral countries

Becoming a soldier

When war broke out, the army needed soldiers. Initially, men did not have to fight but were persuaded to join by propaganda. Later on, conscription was introduced in Britian, meaning that men aged between 18 and 41 had to join the army. Soldiers were also recruited from British colonies overseas. In total, 8 million soldiers from Britain and the British Empire fought in battles in France, Belgium, Italy, the Middle East and Africa.

Image from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

Life in the trenches

Soldiers on both sides dug deep, narrow ditches, called trenches, to hide from enemy attack. Soldiers lived in the trenches for weeks at a time. Trench conditions were terrible. They were smelly, muddy and infested with lice and rats. The soldiers did not get much sleep and were woken early to complete daily chores or fight. During rest time, soldiers wrote letters and sometimes played card games.

Image from: Getty Images/Photo 12

Weapons and technology

During the First World War, both sides used a combination of weapons, such as artillery, guns and poison gas, and vehicles, such as tanks and aircrafts. Some of these, like poison gas and tanks, were invented for the First World War and were being used for the first time. Poison gas was one of the most feared weapons of the war and was fired into the trenches inside shells. Its effects included vomiting, sore eyes, blistering skin and internal and external bleeding.

Life on the home front

The war changed the lives of ordinary people around the world. In Britain, rationing, bombing and strikes by discontented workers made life difficult for people living on the home front. New jobs were created to help with the war effort, including jobs for women that had previously been done by the men who had gone to fight. Women worked in munition factories making bombs and weapons, drove public transport, grew crops and took care of livestock, joined the policeforce and undertook non-combative roles in the armed forces. Some men stayed at home because they refused to fight for moral reasons. They were known as conscientious objectors and were often treated harshly.

Image from: Wellcomecollection.org

Timeline overview of World War

1914

Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife

June 28 — Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia

July 28 — Germany declares war on Russia and France

August — Britain declares war on Germany

1915

Beginning of the Allies' Gallipoli Campaign against the Ottoman Empire

April 25 — German U-boat sank the *Lusitania*, a British ship, killing more than a thousand passengers, including Americans

May 7

May 23 — Italy declares war on Austria-Hungary

1916

Battle of Verdun

February 21

Battle of Jutland

June 1 — Brusilov Offensive

June 4

Battle of the Somme

July 1

1917

The United States declares war on Germany

April 6

Third Ypres Campaign

July 31

Russia signed armistice with Germany

December 15

1918

US President Wilson presented his Fourteen Points to the Congress

January 8 — Treaty of Brest-Litovsk between Russia and Germany

March 3 — Beginning of the German Spring Offensives

March 21

Germany signed the armistice

November 11

1919

Paris Peace Conference

January 18 — Signing of the Treaty of Versailles

June 28

Did you know?

- The First World War is also known as 'World War One' and the 'Great War'.

- The war was triggered on 28th June 1914 by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife, Sophie.

- Dogs, as well as horses, were used in the war effort. They were used to carry messages in capsules attached to their body. They also carried and placed telegraph wires in important areas.

- On Christmas Eve in 1914, both sides declared an unofficial truce and sang Christmas carols to each other. On Christmas Day, they played football matches in no man's land, the area between German and British trenches, and exchanged food and souvenirs.

- Cannons and artillery were often extremely loud. In 1917, the explosives used to destroy a bridge in France were reportedly heard over 130 miles away in London.

- Most trenches were approximately 3 metres deep and 1–2 metres wide. They were dug in a zig zag pattern instead of straight lines.

- We wear poppies on Remembrance Day because they were one of the first flowers to bloom on the battlefields of Flanders during the war. Their bright red colour symbolised the bloodshed, but also the hope of new life.

- Tanks were initially called 'landships'. However, to disguise them as water storage tanks rather than as weapons, the British gave them the code name 'tanks'.

- Tear gas, mustard gas and chlorine gas were all used in the First World War. This was the first known use of chemical weapons.

- 80,000 British troops suffered from shell shock, a psychological reaction to the trauma endured by soldiers serving on the war's key battle fronts.