Causes and events of the First World War, 1890–1918

The First World War (1914–18) has been a subject of much discussion and interest amongst historians. It was fought throughout the world, though focused mainly on Europe, and resulted in nearly ten million fatalities. The war was fought between the Entente Powers (France, Britain and Russia) and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire). This chapter will look at both the reasons why it occurred and how events unfolded.

It will address four key questions concerning the causes and events of the First World War, 1890–1918:

1. Why was there increasing tension between the Great Powers, 1890–1914?
2. Why did the First World War break out in 1914?
3. What happened on the Western Front?
4. How important were the other fronts?

The first key question will analyse the various causes of the tension between Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. It will concentrate on five different factors: the system of alliances; imperialism; trouble in the Balkans; the attitude of the German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II;

SOURCE

Cartoon about the First World War by Louis Raemaekers, 1915.
and, finally, increasing militarism. These factors did not cause the First World War on their own, but they did make war more likely.

The second key question will address the short-term causes of the war, namely the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and the reaction of the different countries to this event. However, the main focus will be on deciding which of the major powers was most to blame for the outbreak of war. Unlike the Second World War, where Hitler’s aggression was a clear factor in bringing about conflict, the First World War does not offer such a straightforward picture; this explains why its origins are still a subject of ongoing debate. This part of the chapter will also explore the way in which these short-term causes link together with the long-term causes.

The third key question deals with the different events during the war on the Western Front, which refers to a line across Europe where the two sides came into conflict with each other. Over the course of the war, there were several fronts which saw both sides engage, though the bulk of the fighting was done on the Western Front. This question will explore the nature of the fighting, including conditions for soldiers and the type of weaponry, the major battles and key decisions from the generals, the importance of the USA’s entry into the war, and finally, the reasons why the war ended.

The final key question will touch upon the events of the war on the different fronts, namely at sea, Gallipoli, and on the Eastern Front. It will also show how the fighting on these fronts connected with what was happening on the Western Front and, therefore, how it contributed to the overall war effort. This information will help to gain a general understanding of how the events of 1914–18 led to the eventual defeat of Germany and her allies.

This chapter consists essentially of three questions about a significant military conflict: Why it happened? How it happened? Who was responsible? Arguably the most important theme running through it is how change occurs and the reason for it. For instance, the relationships between the major powers were constantly changing in the years before the outbreak of war. In addition, the fortunes of countries during the war fluctuated a great deal. Another theme is the different relationships during wartime: not only between the different countries; but also between soldiers and officers.

Overall, it is important to remember that this conflict brought about approximately nine million fatalities, eight million prisoners and missing persons, and 20 million wounded. It also saw the use of new and deadly weapons, such as poison gas attacks, which resulted in almost 100,000 deaths during this period. The financial cost of the entire conflict was probably in the region of $180–200 billion. Many of the events of the First World War are simply unimaginable for us today, yet the historian’s task is to make them explicable. The two principal aims of this chapter are for the reader to have a sound understanding of, first, why the war took place and second, how the war was won.

SOURCE B

The stern hand of Fate has scourged us to an elevation where we can see the everlasting things that matter for a nation – the great peaks we had forgotten, of Honour, Duty, Patriotism, and clad in glittering white, the pinnacles of Sacrifice, pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven. We shall descend into the valley again; but as long as the men and women of this generation last, they will carry in their hearts the image of these mighty peaks, whose foundations are not shaken, though Europe rock and sway in the convolutions of a great war.

David Lloyd George speaking towards the end of the First World War.

SOURCE C

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle? Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

From Anthem for Doomed Youth by Wilfred Owen.

KEY WORDS

Assassination – a politically inspired murder.
Imperialism – extending the rule of an empire over foreign countries, or belief in the importance of your empire.
Militarism – the principle of maintaining a large and aggressive fighting force.
Why was there increasing tension between the Great Powers, 1890–1914?

Did the Alliance System make war more likely?

Learning Objectives

In this lesson you will:

- learn about the alliance system
- analyse whether this system made war more likely.

Background

The First World War caused an unprecedented amount of death and destruction. After the end of the conflict it seemed clear in Britain and France that Germany had to bear responsibility for the war. However, since that time historians have asked whether other factors were to blame. One of their arguments is that the war came about as a result of the alliance system in Europe. As well as seeking protection in the size of their armies, the countries of Europe sought protection by forming alliances. The two main alliances became known as the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente.

Fact file

The creation of the Alliance System

1882 – Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy signed the Triple Alliance.
1894 – France and Russia signed a defensive alliance.
1904 – Britain and France signed the ‘Entente Cordiale’.
1907 – Russia and Britain signed a convention that, with France, led to the Triple Entente.

Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy)

Each member of the Triple Alliance promised to help the others if they were attacked by another country. Germany and Austria-Hungary were natural allies given their shared language, culture and history as parts of the Holy Roman Empire.

The main reason for the formation of the Triple Alliance was because Austria-Hungary had three major internal problems:

- the Czech people in the north wanted their own state
- the Slav peoples in the south-west wanted their own state
- the Serbs living in the south wanted to be part of the neighbouring state of Serbia.

The threat of the Serbs was particularly potent since Russia was prepared to support Serbia in any struggle with Austria-Hungary. Therefore, it was important that Germany could protect Austria-Hungary if this situation escalated. Italy, a far weaker industrial and military power than either of the other two members of the Triple Alliance, joined because she felt threatened by both Germany and Austria-Hungary and wanted to protect herself from invasion by signing an alliance with them.

Key Words

Empire – a group of countries or peoples ruled over by an emperor or empress.
Expansionist – (of a nation) wanting to enlarge its territory.
Holy Roman Empire – union of territories in Central Europe which began in the Middle Ages and lasted until 1806.
Mobilisation – getting ready for war.
Neutral – not taking part or giving assistance in a dispute or war.
Germany, however, had more expansionist ambitions than either Italy and Austria-Hungary, including gaining an empire to match that of Britain and France. An alliance for Germany was a useful way of keeping other European powers, such as France and Britain, at bay.

**Triple Entente (Britain, France and Russia)**

The Triple Entente was less structured than the Triple Alliance, in that none of its members was entirely committed to helping the others should one of them be attacked, but the understanding nevertheless was that each member would support the others. France and Britain both joined because they were suspicious of Germany: Britain feared Germany's naval expansion and imperial ambitions, while France was concerned about a possible German attack on its eastern borders. Russia feared Germany, but it was also at odds with Austria-Hungary over the issue of Serbia, whose independence Russia wanted to maintain. However, Russia had recently lost a war with Japan in 1905 and was concerned about her military capabilities and the Entente, therefore, was useful protection.

**Did the alliance system lead to war?**

On the one hand, Austria-Hungary would not have felt so confident to attack Serbia without knowing that it would receive support from Germany. In addition, Russia might have resisted a confrontation with Austria-Hungary in the face of German pressure had it not signed an agreement with France. Then again, Italy was part of the alliance system and did not join the war on the side of the Triple Alliance. In fact, in 1915 it joined on the side of the Triple Entente.

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**Fact file**

**How each country entered the war in 1914**

- Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia (28 July).
- Russia began a general mobilisation in preparation for a war against Austria (30 July).
- Germany declared war on Russia (1 August).
- Germany declared war on France. Italy announced that she would remain neutral (3 August).
- Britain declared war on Germany (4 August).
- Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia; Serbia declared war on Germany (6 August).

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**ACTIVITIES**

Match the statements below to either the Triple Alliance or the Triple Entente:

- They were all worried about the military strength of the same European power.
- Two of the members had many similarities with each other.
- One of the members did not border any of the other two.
- One of the members was concerned about the break-up of its Empire.

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**Activities**

What was the Entente Cordiale of 1904?
How far did colonial problems create tensions between the Great Powers?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
In this lesson you will:

- learn about the various colonial problems of the Great Powers
- analyse whether these problems made war more likely.

GETTING STARTED
Which three countries were members of the Triple Alliance?
Which three countries were members of the Triple Entente?

Background
Since the 1870s, many of the powerful European countries had laid claim to much of the continent of Africa in a flurry of competition known as the ‘scramble for Africa’. In just a few decades the major European countries – Britain, France, Belgium and Italy – laid claim to most of Africa. It was a process driven in large part by commercial rivalry between the European powers, as they competed to secure commercial markets and trade routes. For example, Britain was determined to secure its trade routes to India through the Suez Canal.

A change of German policy
In the mid-1870s, Otto von Bismarck, the first chancellor of Germany, decided to pursue a policy of colonial expansion. Britain and France had already begun to compete to acquire territory in Africa in the early 1870s. In Germany a theory of Weltpolitik (‘world policy’) developed, which argued that the nation should expand beyond the frontiers of Europe. Bismarck’s Germany now joined in the competition for territory, and in a few decades most of the continent of Africa had been parcelled up between the European powers. By 1914 Britain, although it had long been an advocate of free trade, paradoxically ended up with the largest share of territory in Africa, reflecting the commercial advantages it had enjoyed prior to the ‘scramble’. This sudden process of conquest of new territory led to a succession of incidents between the colonial powers in different parts of Africa.

A change of attitude from the three major powers
The first significant colonial problem came between Britain and France. Britain was keen to gain control of the Nile, seen as important for its trade routes to India, while France was keen to expand its territory in north Africa, and in 1898 the two countries clashed over claims to territory around the town of Fashoda in the Sudan, leaving the British in possession and the French bitter and resentful. The two countries almost went to war but instead agreed to set out a clear frontier which separated their spheres of influence. One reason they avoided a military confrontation was because both powers were concerned about the growing threat from Germany. In 1896 Kaiser Wilhelm II had sent a supportive telegram to the president of the Transvaal, Paul Kruger, to congratulate him on repelling British attempts to undermine the Transvaal; this infuriated Britain, which saw the telegram as an attempt to interfere in what they considered to be their sphere of influence. Since the discovery of gold in the Transvaal Britain had acquired enormous commercial interests in the region, and the Transvaal was now home to large numbers of expatriate British workers. The British increasingly began to see Germany as a serious rival.

KEY WORDS
Colonise – to settle in another country.
Sphere of influence – area in which one country’s interests predominate.
Transvaal – a republic in the north of South Africa which was colonised by Boer settlers in the 1830s and 1840s.

KEY PEOPLE
Kaiser Wilhelm II – German Emperor 1888–1918.
Otto von Bismarck – Chancellor of Germany 1871–90.
Confrontation

Two disputes over Morocco, in 1905 and 1911, were to reveal the real tensions which existed between Germany and the Triple Entente.

Tangiers Crisis

In 1904, France had reached an agreement with Spain which had virtually guaranteed French control over Morocco. In 1905, however, the Kaiser visited Tangiers and declared that he supported the Moroccans in their struggle against the French. The Kaiser wanted to show that Germany was now an important power in the region, but France was furious. An international conference was called to settled the dispute, and Germany could not prevent France from retaining effective control of Moroccan affairs. The Kaiser was humiliated, as the verdict of the conference implied that he had no right to speak on colonial matters.

Agadir Crisis

Another dispute arose over Morocco in 1911. In the midst of a Moroccan rebellion against French rule, the Kaiser sent a gunboat, the Panther, to the port of Agadir in Morocco. The British and French suspected he wanted to establish a naval base. Again, international pressure forced the Kaiser to back down and accept France’s position in Morocco, but he was awarded the colony of Middle Congo (now Republic of Congo) as a form of consolation.

Conclusion

The main result of the Moroccan crises was to increase British fear and hostility towards Germany and to draw Britain closer to France. British backing for France during the crises reinforced the Entente between the two countries and added to Anglo-German tensions, deepening the divisions which would culminate in the First World War. Germans were angered by the small amount they had received in compensation and wanted revenge. In addition, colonial issues confirmed the Kaiser’s view that Britain, France and Russia were determined to resist Germany’s ambitions.

However, the First World War did not begin as a result of either of the Moroccan crises, and the colonial disputes did not feature either Austria-Hungary or Russia, which would both play a large role in the origins of the war.

GradeStudio

What is the message of Source B? Use the source and your own knowledge to explain your answer. [6 marks]
**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson you will:

- learn about the different problems in the Balkans
- analyse why they were so difficult to solve.

**GETTING STARTED**

Without using a map, how many European countries can you name which are south of Romania and east of Italy?

**A warning shot – the Bosnian Crisis of 1908**

The first Balkan crisis came in 1908, after a revolution in the Ottoman Empire. This presented the Austro-Hungarian Empire with an opportunity to make territorial gains, as Turkey was too weak to fight back. In October 1908 Austria-Hungary annexed the former Turkish province of Bosnia-Herzegovina in October 1908. This infuriated Serbia since Bosnia included many Serbs, but because Germany made clear its support for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Russia refused to intervene in support of Serbia. Even though Germany, like the other European nations, disapproved of the Austro-Hungarian actions, it still expressed full solidarity with its trusted ally. However, the incident encouraged Russia to increase its military capacity and strengthened its resolve to support Serbia in the event of any future conflict in the Balkans.

**SOURCE A**

In order to raise Bosnia to a higher level of political life ... the new order of things will be a guarantee that civilisation and prosperity will find a sure footing in your home.

Proclamation of the Annexation of Bosnia, 6 October 1908, by the Emperor of Austria-Hungary, Franz Josef.

**ACTIVITIES**

How does the Bosnian Crisis prove that the alliance system was not the sole cause of war?

**VOICE YOUR OPINION!**

Did Serbia have the right to control another state if there were Serbs living there?

**SOURCE B**

The Austrians, taking advantage of a revolution in Turkey, annexed Bosnia. This was a deliberate blow at the neighbouring state of Serbia, which had been hoping to acquire Bosnia since it contained about three million Serbs among its population.


**A growing threat – the Balkan Wars, 1912–13**

After the Bosnian Crisis, Turkey continued to grow weaker as the Ottoman Empire slowly declined. In 1912–13, the Balkan League (Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria) attacked Turkey and captured a sizeable amount of the remaining Turkish land in Europe. Britain and Germany used their combined influence to bring the war to an end at the Treaty of Bucharest. Serbia emerged from this episode as the most powerful state in the Balkans, because of its strong army and its friendship with Russia, and it now felt confident enough to challenge the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

**ACTIVITIES**

1. What evidence is there that colonial problems were not a major factor in bringing about the Balkan Wars?
2. The following statements represent assumptions that some of the major powers had as a result of affairs in the Balkans. Explain why they had these views.
   - Serbia thought it was strong enough to challenge Austria-Hungary.
   - Germany thought that Britain would not fight against it.
   - Russia thought that it could no longer allow Austria-Hungary to apply pressure on Serbia.
   - Austria thought that Serbia had to be dealt with.
3. Look at the map showing the boundaries in the Balkans. Which countries gained and which countries lost out as a result of the Treaty of Bucharest?
By 1914, Austria-Hungary was looking for a convenient excuse to crush Serbia, and was therefore expecting to go to war to solve the Balkan problem. Britain and Germany worked together to avoid war, and this might have given the Kaiser the false impression that Britain would not fight Germany over a conflict in the Balkans. This was a factor which might have made Germany more reckless in 1914.

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, 1914

The opportunity which Austria-Hungary had waited for came with the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo. Although there was no hard evidence that the orders for his assassination came from the Serbian government, Austria-Hungary blamed Serbia, and gave Serbia an ultimatum which would effectively have made Serbia part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Serbs could not possibly accept this, and their rejection of the ultimatum began the chain of events which led to the countries of the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente declaring war against each other.

Conclusion: the significance of the Balkans problems

- The decline of the Ottoman Empire had led to weak government, and this, together with the presence of many different nationalities, made the region very unstable.
- Two Great Powers, Russia and Austria-Hungary, had key interests in the Balkans because of its access to the Mediterranean. They were therefore reluctant to see the other extend their influence in that region.
- Both Russia and Austria-Hungary were prepared to go to war to defend their interests.

Fact file

The Balkans in 1918 referred to a region of southeastern Europe which included the following countries:
- Albania
- Bosnia
- Bulgaria
- Greece
- Montenegro
- Romania
- Serbia
- Turkey

KEY WORDS

Annex – to incorporate new territory into a city, country or state.
Solidarity – union arising from common responsibilities and interests.
Ultimatum – a final, uncompromising demand or set of terms, which if rejected could lead to the use of force.

KEY PEOPLE

Franz Ferdinand – heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne 1896–1914.

Are you surprised by Source A? Use the source and your knowledge to explain your answer. [7 marks]
How important was the Kaiser in causing the worsening international situation?

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson you will:

- learn about details of Kaiser Wilhelm’s reign
- analyse the importance of this in worsening international relations.

**GETTING STARTED**

Try to match different rulers who you have learned about throughout history to the following descriptions:

- aggressive
- peaceful
- intelligent
- mad
- successful
- disastrous.

**Germany begins an aggressive foreign policy**

German foreign policy changed after the forced resignation of Bismarck, Germany’s capable chancellor, in 1890. Kaiser Wilhelm II chose to pursue a policy of *Weltpolitik*, which aimed to make Germany a world power through the acquisition of foreign territories. This signalled a new era in the foreign policy of Germany, which now entered an expansionist phase, with an aggressive foreign policy and increased spending on rearmament.

**Fact file**

**Kaiser Wilhelm II**

- Born 1859.
- Became Kaiser of Germany (1888).
- Forced the resignation of Otto von Bismarck, the first chancellor of Germany (1890).
- Declared war on Russia and France (1914).
- Forced to **abdicate** after Germany lost the First World War (1918).
- Died in **exile** (1941).

A cartoon entitled ‘Dropping the pilot’, which refers to the time when Kaiser Wilhelm II was suddenly without the support of the experienced Otto von Bismarck.
The Kaiser alienates the countries of the Triple Entente

Germany was certainly not the only country with imperial ambitions, but the fact that it seemed willing to confront other powers so directly contributed to the worsening of the international situation. Despite Bismarck’s repeated warnings about the dangers of isolating Russia, the Kaiser chose not to renew the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia, which eventually led to a Franco-Russian alliance in 1894. Germany’s dangerously dismissive attitude with regard to Russia encouraged two countries, which had few strategic interests in common, to form the beginnings of an alliance. Germany now faced potential enemies on both its borders.

In the early 1890s, relations between Germany and Britain were friendly despite the absence of any formal alliance. However, the Kaiser jeopardised this healthy relationship by embarking upon a policy of interference in the affairs of the European colonies. This was shown by the Kruger Telegram in 1896, his decision to launch a huge navy-building programme in 1898 (the same year as the Fashoda incident), and his support for the Boers during their war with the British in 1899–1902. Britain was steadily becoming convinced that Germany was a threat and, in 1904, Britain and France signed the Entente Cordiale (to become the Triple Entente when Russia’s signature was added in 1907) partly in response to growing alarm at the Kaiser’s policy of Weltpolitik. If the Kaiser had conducted his foreign policy in an aggressive yet cautious manner, as Bismarck would probably have done, the Triple Entente might never have been signed.

The Kaiser misjudged Britain and France

The existence of the Triple Entente did not of course mean that war was inevitable, as was shown by the Bosnian and Agadir crises. However, the Kaiser grew over-confident and misjudged the international situation, in particular the tolerance levels of Britain and France. When it came to the July Crisis and Austria-Hungary’s declaration of war against Serbia, his response was to provide a ‘blank cheque’ to Austria. Perhaps he thought that Britain would never agree to fight a war against Germany and that the Triple Entente would never actually lead to France declaring war in support of Russia. However, he had been reckless once too often, and this time war was the outcome.

SOURCE B

The new emphasis on foreign policy was to help overcome serious differences between the industrial and agrarian wings of Germany’s wealthier classes and to create a united front of the whole nation against the world. Thus German Weltpolitik was partly created by a domestic policy, which aimed at diverting the attention of the masses from social and political problems at home by dynamic expansion abroad.

From July 1914 by Immanuel Geiss.

HISTORY DETECTIVE

Find out which German political party in the Reichstag opposed Kaiser Wilhelm II’s policy of an expensive rearment programme.

Such a vision of Weltpolitik found favour with patriotic extremists such as the Pan-German League, which preached hatred of France, Britain and Russia and called for an unrestrained policy of overseas expansion. In 1897 Wilhelm made the significant appointment of Admiral von Tirpitz, the new Secretary of State for the Navy, who was keen for Germany to build a large naval fleet in order to expand its empire. By the end of the century, the Kaiser had both the resources and the support to pursue his policy.

ACTIVITIES

Using the information from this lesson, prepare a case both for and against the notion that the Kaiser was to blame for the start of the First World War. Afterwards, decide which case is the strongest and explain the reasons for your choice.

KEY WORDS

Abdicate – to renounce the throne.
Exile – to expel from one’s native country.
Reichstag – Parliament of Germany until 1945.
Rearmament – equipping an army with new and better weapons.
Extremist – a person who goes to extremes, especially in political matters.
Agrarian – relating to land, land ownership or the division of landed property.
Why did the Kaiser initiate the arms race?

There were three main reasons why Kaiser Wilhelm II initiated the arms race between 1900 and 1914:

- to gain colonies abroad
- to challenge Britain and France
- to glorify war and nationalism.

German naval power

One of the most significant causes of tension in Europe was the naval rivalry which developed after 1900. Ever since the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, Britain had ruled the seas without any challenge; its navy was the most powerful in the world.

This situation began to change in 1898 when Kaiser Wilhelm announced his intention to build a powerful German navy. A large German navy could assist in German attempts to gain colonies, as well as further the country’s economic and commercial interests elsewhere in the world – the Kaiser and his admirals felt that Germany needed a navy to protect its growing trade. The Kaiser was supported in his desires by Admiral Tirpitz, who was also enthusiastic for building up a naval force that was capable of competing with the British navy.

Why did the arms race escalate, 1900–14?

Britain responds to the German naval challenge

Britain accepted that Germany, as a large country, needed a large army. But Germany had a very small coastline and Britain could not accept that Germany needed a large navy. Britain concluded that Germany’s reason for wishing to increase the size of its navy was to threaten Britain’s naval might in the

Fact file

Number of dreadnoughts built by Britain and Germany, 1906–1914

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Britain</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
North Sea. Although Germany’s navy was much smaller than Britain’s, the British navy was spread all over the world, protecting the British Empire.

As a result, a naval race took place. Both countries spent vast sums of money building new warships, and the cost soared when Britain launched a new type of battleship – HMS *Dreadnought*, in 1906 (Source A). Germany immediately responded by building her equivalent. This did little to improve relations between Britain and Germany.

By 1914, Great Britain had built 38 dreadnoughts and dreadnought battle cruisers, compared to Germany’s 24 dreadnoughts and dreadnought battle cruisers. The reason why Britain vastly expanded her navy was in response to German militarism.

**Land rearmament**

While Britain and Germany engaged in a battle for naval supremacy, the major powers on mainland Europe were also building up their armies (see table below). Despite the serious financial cost of rearmament, almost all the major European countries increased their armed forces in the decade preceding the outbreak of the First World War. For instance, Britain built up the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), which by 1914 consisted of 150,000 highly trained and well-equipped professional soldiers. It was designed to be ready to go to war and fight at short notice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1914</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>0.7m</td>
<td>0.8m</td>
<td>0.9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>0.6m</td>
<td>0.55m</td>
<td>0.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1.1m</td>
<td>1.3m</td>
<td>1.35m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria-Hungary</td>
<td>0.25m</td>
<td>0.3m</td>
<td>0.35m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>0.5m</td>
<td>0.7m</td>
<td>0.9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0.25m</td>
<td>0.3m</td>
<td>0.35m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Military personnel by nation, 1900–14.*

The arms race in which all the major powers were involved contributed to the sense that war was bound to come, and soon. Financing it caused serious financial difficulties for all the governments involved in the race, and yet they were convinced there was no way of stopping it. Although publicly the arms race was justified to prevent war, no government had in fact been deterred from arming by the programmes of their rivals, but rather increased the pace of their own armament production.

From *Origins of the First World War* by James Joll.

The following were all partially responsible for the outbreak of the First World War:

i  the alliance system
ii  German militarism
iii  conflict in the Balkans.

Which do you think was the most responsible? Explain your answer, referring only to (i), (ii) and (iii). [10 marks]
Why did the First World War break out in 1914?

Why was Franz Ferdinand assassinated?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this lesson you will:

- learn about the factors that led to Franz Ferdinand’s assassination
- analyse who was most to blame for the assassination.

GETTING STARTED

Can you think of any other assassinations of high-profile figures? Who is usually responsible for these assassinations?

The assassination of Franz Ferdinand

Archduke Franz Ferdinand was the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. His assassination was the trigger for the First World War. Four events combined to put Franz Ferdinand in a position where he could be assassinated.

1 Franz Ferdinand was only allowed to make military visits with his wife Sophie

Franz Ferdinand’s wife, Sophie, was not of very aristocratic blood, which greatly angered Franz Josef, who banned the two of them from making public appearances together. Franz Ferdinand was hurt by this but found a loophole whereby, as Field Marshal of the Austro-Hungarian Army, he could make military visits with his wife. However, his safety could not be guaranteed on these visits. In addition, his defiance of Franz Josef may have led him to be more willing to ignore the warnings which he received about Serbian nationalist activity in advance of making this trip.

Fact file

Austria-Hungary’s ruler

- Franz Josef became Emperor of Austria in 1848.
- In 1867 he became Emperor of the newly created dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary, and kept this title until his death in 1916.
- His reign of 68 years was one of the longest in recent history.

2 Austrian concern about nationalism

Austria-Hungary’s greatest fear throughout the early 20th century was Balkan nationalism. Many different nationalities lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its rulers were worried that a rise in Serbian nationalism could encourage other nations to rebel and thereby threaten the whole empire. As a result, the government dealt harshly with Serb nationalism, as they did during the Bosnia Crisis in 1908. However, the level of Serb nationalist feeling meant that a state visit would inevitably be dangerous, but if anything were to happen to the Archduke it was equally likely that Austria-Hungary’s response would be harsh.

3 Serbian nationalist groups

In response to the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s intolerance of any separatism in the Balkans, increasingly violent forms of nationalist protest in Balkan states such as Serbia began to emerge. One such group was called the ‘Black Hand’, which was dedicated to uniting all Serbs, including those that lived in Bosnia, to rise up against Austria-Hungary. Since the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia in 1908, it had waged a terrorist war and was a sworn enemy of the Austro-Hungarian army.
Franz Ferdinand picked the worst day to go to Sarajevo

What made the situation even more dangerous was that 28 June was Serbia’s National Day. This marked the anniversary of the battle in 1389 when Serbia had been conquered by the Ottoman Empire, but also when a Serb hero, Milos Obilic, had assassinated the Sultan. The day was therefore symbolic of Serbian nationalism and the assassination of foreign rulers.

The assassination – a chance event?

On his way to the town hall, the Archduke’s procession had to drive along the Appel Quay where six terrorists were waiting for him, armed with pistols and bombs. He drove past the first two terrorists but nothing happened—the assassins either lost their nerve or were not in a good enough position to carry out the assassination. The third assassin, Nedeljko Čabrinović, aimed a grenade at the Archduke who was seated in the open car, but it bounced off and blew up the car behind, killing two officers.

The Archduke’s car quickly sped to the town hall, fearful of more attempts. In doing so, it drove right past the other three assassins: Cvetko Popović, Trifko Grabež and Gavrilo Princip. After visiting the town hall, the Austrian governor, Oskar Potiorek, suggested that the visitors should return by a different route to avoid trouble. However, Potiorek had forgotten to tell the chauffeur this information, and the chauffeur then took a wrong turn down Franz Josef Street. The driver stopped and began to reverse. By a fateful coincidence, the car had stopped within a few yards of Gavrilo Princip, who was on his way home, feeling bitter about the miserable failure of the day. Princip stepped forward and fired two shots. The first bullet struck the Archduke, and the second hit the Duchess. Both died soon after.

SOURCE A

Sunday 28 June 1914 was a bright and sunny day in Sarajevo. Bosnia was preparing for a royal visit from Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria . . . Hidden among the crowds, however, were six teenage terrorists sworn to kill the Archduke. They hated him and they hated Austria. The Archduke had been warned that the city was full of Bosnian Serb Nationalists, but he had received so many death threats in the past that he now courageously ignored them.

Adapted from Britain at War by Craig Mair.

SOURCE B

Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie leaving the town hall of Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. Moments later, on their way to visit victims of an earlier assassination attempt that day, they were shot and killed by the Serb nationalist Gavrilo Princip.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES
In this lesson you will:

- learn about the stages between the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and the outbreak of the First World War
- analyse the reasons why the assassination led to the outbreak of war.

GETTING STARTED
To test your knowledge of the story so far, write down descriptions of the following people:
- Nedeljko Čabrinović
- Gavrilo Princip
- Franz Josef
- Otto von Bismarck
- Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Austrian reactions to the assassination
Despite the fact that the Archduke was not popular, there was a feeling of outrage in the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the way in which their country had been humiliated by a lesser power. However, they had to be careful about any action they took, since they knew that if they decided to take military action, the Russians were almost certain to intervene in defence of Serbia.

Critical dates leading to the outbreak of war in 1914
Within 40 days of the assassination, the world was at war. There were eight critical points along the way.

5 July – the Kaiser gives his support to Austria-Hungary
Kaiser Wilhelm gave Austria-Hungary an offer of unconditional support in its handling of Serbia. This became known as the ‘blank cheque’, since it gave Austria-Hungary the licence to be as aggressive as it wanted with Serbia, knowing that it could count on German support. Without this promise of support, it is unlikely that Austria-Hungary would have risked a war with both Russia and Serbia.

23 July – Austria-Hungary blames Serbia for the assassination
Austria-Hungary naturally blamed Serbia for the death of Franz Ferdinand and sent an ultimatum. The ‘blank cheque’ had given the Austro-Hungarian government the confidence to do this, though they knew it would lead to a rejection from Serbia, which would in turn be an excuse for an Austro-Hungarian declaration of war. Therefore, the blank cheque did not immediately start the war but nevertheless galvanised the Austrians into sending an ultimatum.

28 July – Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia and shells its capital, Belgrade
The Serbian reply was predictably unsatisfactory. The Austro-Hungarian army had already begun to mobilise, and the government now declared war on Serbia, with Belgrade receiving heavy bombardment. Kaiser Wilhelm appeared to want the Austrians to halt in Belgrade and use the city as a basis for further negotiations, but he never withdrew his offer of unconditional support as a way of making that happen.

29 July – the Russian army prepares to help Serbia defend itself against the Austrian attack
In response to Austria-Hungary’s official rejection of further negotiations with Serbia, Russia began to partially mobilise its forces. The following day, both Austria-Hungary and Russia began general mobilisation for 31 July. This aroused German attention, and Germany then issued an ultimatum to Russia. In response, France decided to order mobilisation for 1 August.

ACTIVITIES
1 Why did Austria take 25 days, from the assassination on 28 June, to issue the ultimatum?
2 What does the paragraph on events of 28 July prove about the Kaiser’s diplomatic intentions?
3 Consider the events of 29 July.
   - Did Russia initiate or react to aggression?
   - How did other countries react to Russia’s action?
   - Why might Russia’s action have been considered unexpected?
1 August 1914 - Germany declares war on Russia and moves its army towards France and Belgium

On this day, the German ultimatum to Russia expired and Germany declared war on Russia. The French army was put on a war footing ready to fight any German invasion.

3 August 1914 - Germany declares war on France and invades Belgium; Britain orders Germany to withdraw from Belgium

In response to the French putting its army on a war footing, Germany now declared war on France. In response, Britain issued an ultimatum to Germany to respect the neutrality of Belgium. This surprised Germany since she had not expected Britain to enter the conflict.

4 August 1914 - Britain declares war on Germany

The British ultimatum expired at midnight and Britain declared war on Germany.

6 August 1914 - Austria-Hungary declares war on Russia

Once a country had mobilised its troops, war became practically inevitable. This was because other countries saw it as a threat, and if a country started to de-mobilise this would leave it vulnerable to attack.

Activities

What is the message of the cartoon in Source B?

Source A

An unjust war has been declared on a weak country. The anger in Russia shared fully by me is enormous. I foresee that very soon I shall be overwhelmed by the pressure forced upon me and be forced to take extreme measures which will lead to war. To try and avoid such a calamity as a European war I beg you in the name of our old friendship to do what you can to stop your allies from going too far. Nicky

Tsar Nicholas to Kaiser Wilhelm, 29 July. Nicholas and Wilhelm were cousins, and had been close friends.

Source B

This cartoon, ‘A Chain of Friendship’, appeared in an American newspaper in July 1914. The caption reads: ‘If Austria attacks Serbia, Russia will fall upon Austria, Germany upon Russia, and France and England upon Germany.’

Galvanise – to stimulate into sudden activity.

Neutrality – the policy of a nation that does not participate in a war between other nations.

Why did the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand lead to war? [6 marks]
How far were the actions of Austria-Hungary, Britain, Germany and Russia responsible for the outbreak of war?

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson you will:

- learn about the extent to which the various countries were to blame for the outbreak of war
- analyse who was most to blame.

**GETTING STARTED**

Pick any of the major European countries and give three reasons why they should not be blamed for the outbreak of war. (You may want to refer to the map of Europe on page 45.)

**Austria-Hungary**

It is clear that Austria-Hungary intended her ultimatum to be rejected and was quite prepared to bring Russia into the war, given the promise of German support. Austria-Hungary was responsible for the bombardment in Belgrade, which led to Russia's partial mobilisation. Instead of listening to Germany and using the bombardment as a basis for future negotiations, the Austro-Hungarians proceeded to bring both Russia and Germany into their war with Serbia. If it had not been for Austria-Hungary's aggressive reaction, Germany might not have entered the war. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that Austria-Hungary had a right to hold the Serbian government to account over the assassination, although the July Crisis was an over-the-top reaction.

**Voice Your Opinion!**

Do Austria-Hungary or Germany deserve more blame, given that Austria-Hungary only acted so decisively because of the guarantee of German support?

**Britain**

The first mistake made by Britain was its failure to prevent Austria-Hungary declaring war through the proposed Four Power Conference of ambassadors in London. However, this was unlikely to have had much impact, given Germany's guarantee to Austria-Hungary.

In addition, Britain did not make clear to Germany until it was too late that Britain would intervene on the side of France and Russia unless Austria-Hungary was restrained. This meant that right up until the outbreak of war, most German politicians did not believe that Britain would involve herself in a Continental war. Perhaps if Germany had known with certainty that she would be confronted by the British Navy and by the manpower of the British Empire, she would have compelled Austria-Hungary to moderate her attitude towards Serbia. On the other hand, Britain was a member of the Triple Entente and had at least a moral obligation to support her allies. The foreign secretary Lord Grey had already informed the German ambassador that Britain could not remain neutral in the event of a general European war, and the Kaiser knew of Britain's commitment to Belgium when he declared war on France.

**Russia**

Russia's decision to defend Serbia against Austria-Hungary despite the events of the assassination did escalate the crisis. If Russia had not defended Serbia, it is unlikely that France and Britain would have done so. However, if Austria-Hungary had been allowed to take control of the Balkans, this might have led to an increasingly powerful Triple Alliance declaring war on the Triple Entente in any case.

Another factor is that the Russian government was the first to order mobilisation. Although this was not in itself an act of war, it did serve to encourage similar moves by other European powers, and so made a conflict more likely.
Germany

Germany's immediate responsibility lay in the Kaiser's guarantee of unconditional support to Austria-Hungary without knowing what its rulers intended to do. This guarantee gave Austria-Hungary the confidence to apply extensive pressure to Serbia, knowing that even if other major powers were dragged into the war they would still receive German support. Beyond this, of course, Germany also declared war on Russia and France and invaded Belgium. The extent of German responsibility is further emphasised by the existence of the Schlieffen Plan (see pages 60–61), which was designed to prepare Germany for a war on two fronts.

The role of Serbia and France

The actions of Austria-Hungary, Britain, Russia and Germany have received the most attention from historians in analysing the origins of the First World War. However, it is important not to forget the significance of Serbia and France.

- The Serbian government was aware of a plot against the Archduke but took no effective measures to prevent it being carried out. They also refused to accept all of the demands contained in Austria-Hungary's ultimatum.
- France did nothing to inflame the situation, but she did little to ease it either, for example, by trying to restrain her ally Russia or by protesting to her enemies Germany and Austria-Hungary. She might have tried harder to warn Germany that Britain would support France in a future war.

Can someone be guilty if they do not take any action?

ACTIVITIES

Rank these six countries – Serbia, France, Germany, Britain, Austria-Hungary and Russia – in order of their responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War. Think about the following factors:

- over-reaction
- whether they were threatened
- whether they initiated or were reacting to aggression.

Source A

This cartoon by F.H. Townsend appeared in Punch magazine on 12 August 1914. Note how the cartoon portrays Belgium as a threatened child, and the stereotyped figure of Germany as an aggressive military man with sausages.

Schlieffen Plan – German military plan during the early 20th century which was designed to prepare for a possible war on two fronts.

Study Source A.

Why did Punch magazine print this cartoon? Use the source and your knowledge to explain your answer.

[7 marks]
The Schlieffen Plan

The Schlieffen Plan was a military plan created by General Count Alfred von Schlieffen in December 1905. It consisted of three main points, but it also had three main assumptions; can you spot them below?

1. Attack France

The main German army was to attack France through neutral Belgium and Luxembourg and encircle Paris (see map). Although Belgium’s neutrality had been guaranteed by Britain in the Treaty of Washington (1839), Schlieffen did not think that Britain would go to war over a bit of paper. If Belgium resisted Germany over the attack, the huge inferiority of the Belgian army would be no match for the German army. To draw attention away from an invasion of Belgium, a diversionary attack would be launched across the heavily defended Franco-German border.

Imagine you are advisers to Kaiser Wilhelm II. In pairs discuss the following:

- Which enemy would you advise him to attack first? Why?
- Would you advise him to attack both at the same time? Why?
2 France to be defeated in six weeks
Schlieffen knew that if war took place it was vital that France was speedily defeated, as this would discourage potential allies such as Britain from continuing to fight. Moreover, Schlieffen calculated that it would take Russia six weeks to mobilise its large army for an attack on Germany, which meant it was vital for France to surrender before Russia had fully mobilised, as the Germans would require 90 per cent of their troops in the fight on the Western Front.

3 Attack Russia
Once France had been defeated, Germany would use her modernised rail system to move troops from the Western Front to the Russian Front. Russia would then be attacked and defeated.

Reasons for the Schlieffen Plan
The Schlieffen Plan was the result of two main considerations:
1 Concern over the Entente Cordiale
In 1904, France and Britain signed the Entente Cordiale, which aimed to encourage co-operation against the perceived threat from Germany. Negotiations were also underway to add Russia to this alliance. This made the German military fearful of a combined attack from France, Britain and Russia, and therefore they looked for ways of striking first.

2 Power
Germany wanted to initiate a war that would extend her control over Europe and make her the foremost power in the world.

How did the Schlieffen Plan contribute to the outbreak of war?
Germany had to react quickly to Russian mobilisation
The Schlieffen Plan depended for its success on speed. During the time it took to mobilise the huge Russian army, France would be rapidly defeated by an attack through neutral Belgium. Therefore, as soon as the Russians began partial mobilisation in response to Austria-Hungary's declaration of war on Serbia, the German army declared a state of pre-mobilisation and issued an ultimatum to Russia to demobilise fully within 12 hours or Germany would declare war on Russia. If the Schlieffen Plan had not been in existence, Germany might not have felt so threatened by Russian mobilisation. However, the reality was that for this plan to work, Germany needed to ensure that any war with France did not begin too soon after Russian mobilisation.

Germany had to bring France into the war
The events of the July Crisis were not going well for Germany, since Russia was mobilising but France showed no signs of going to war to help the Russians. This meant that the Russian army would be mobilised before Germany had a chance to defeat the French, and this would have put them in the uncomfortable position of fighting a war on two fronts. As a result, on 3 August 1914 Germany declared war on France without any provocation and invaded Belgium. Without the Schlieffen Plan, it is possible that Germany would not have moved so swiftly to bring France (and unintentionally Britain) into the war.

Overall, the Germans felt that if they were going to fight a war, it might as well be according to the Schlieffen Plan. They therefore manipulated the events of the July Crisis in such a way that it led to the outbreak of war. However, the Schlieffen Plan did not contribute to the first part of the July Crisis, which was part of the unrelated Austro-Hungarian aggression.

Failure of the Schlieffen Plan
Ultimately the Schlieffen Plan failed in its three major assumptions:
• Britain did not stay out of the war – the Germans were surprised that Britain decided to go to war based on its obligations in a 75-year-old treaty
• France was not defeated within six weeks – the Germans were surprised by how quickly the British Expeditionary Force reached France and Belgium
• Russia did mobilise within six weeks – the Germans were surprised by the Russian army’s early advance into East Prussia.
What happened on the Western Front?

Why did the war get bogged down in the trenches?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
In this lesson you will:

- learn about the main stages of the early part of the war on the Western Front
- analyse why the Western Front witnessed trench warfare.

GETTING STARTED
Write down at least one advantage and one disadvantage of the following strategic positions during battle:
- on top of a hill
- in a trench
- in a forest
- in a wide open space.

Steps to trench warfare
It did not take long for the war to get bogged down in trenches. The idea of digging trenches was defensive; it implied that further advance was unlikely, but made it much harder for one side to take the position of the other. It represented a type of stalemate between the two sides. However, trenches did not emerge immediately.

Step 1 – The failure of the Schlieffen Plan
It seemed likely at first that the German army might succeed following its invasion of Belgium on 4 August, but several factors combined to prevent a crushing German victory on the Western Front.

- Heroic Belgian resistance
  Although the Belgians did not stop the crushing German advance and could not counter the massive German artillery bombardments, their heroic resistance bought time for British and French troops to mobilise.

- The impact of the British Expeditionary Force
  Although the BEF slowed, rather than repelled, the German advance, because they were hugely outnumbered, their entry into the war contributed to the Germans’ failure to break the line of its enemies.

- France opted for a more defensive strategy
  The initial French plan of launching a direct attack on Germany, known as Plan 17, was a disaster and the French lost many men. In response to this, the French army regrouped its forces to defend Paris from the advancing Germans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date in 1914</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 August</td>
<td>Britain declares war on Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 August</td>
<td>Battle of the Frontiers begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–10 September</td>
<td>First Battle of the Marne halts German advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 September</td>
<td>First Battle of Aisne begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 September–24 November</td>
<td>The ‘race to the sea’; trenches appear on 15 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14–22 November</td>
<td>First Battle of Ypres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 November</td>
<td>German commander Erich von Falkenhayn orders German troops on the Western Front to dig into defensive positions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Russian mobilisation
The Chief of the German General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke, had to pull 100,000 troops out of the army advancing on Paris because the Russians had mobilised far more quickly than expected.

Supply problems
Due to the rapidity of the German advance, their supplies of food and ammunition could not keep up, which left their soldiers underfed and exhausted.

**Step 2 – The Battle of the Marne**
The German general, Alexander von Kluck, decided to march to the east of Paris as opposed to the original plan of entering from the west. The French moved their troops into defensive positions quickly, while the German army was overstretched. The combined British and French forces were able to stop the German advance along the line of the River Marne. They then counter-attacked and pushed the Germans back to the River Aisne, though they were unable to drive them out of France altogether. Neither side could make any progress, leading them to dig trenches to protect themselves from snipers and shell fire. This was the first sign of the stalemate which was to come.

**Step 3 – Trench warfare**
The Battle of the Marne had shown the difficulty the Germans faced in trying to break through enemy lines. By mid-November, during the Battle of Ypres, the deadlock was well and truly established. Both sides had proved unable to break their opponents down. Instead, millions of troops dug a line of trenches which stretched from the sea in the west to the Alps in the east. The Germans had not taken Ypres, and trench warfare had begun.

**Conclusion**
Trenches appeared on the Western Front because of the failure of both sides to break through the other’s defences. The trenches were a form of protection from the new weaponry which was appearing in battle. Once these trenches had been dug, however, it was clear that the war would not be over by Christmas.

**Key Words**
- **Artillery** – guns.
- **Shell** – an explosive artillery projectile.
- **Sniper** – someone firing at long range from a hidden position.
- **Stalemate** – a situation in which neither side can make progress.
- **Trench** – a long narrow excavation in the ground, dug to shelter troops from enemy fire or attack.

**Voice Your Opinion!**
If the governments of the countries in the Triple Alliance and Triple Entente had expected the war to involve trenches, would there have been such readiness to go to war?

**Source A**
*Punch* cartoon ‘Unconquerable’, by Bernard Partridge, dated 21 October 1914, showing Kaiser Wilhelm II speaking to King Albert of Belgium. The transcript of the cartoon reads:

**THE KAISER:** ‘So, you see – you’ve lost everything.’

**THE KING OF THE BELGIANS:** ‘Not my soul.’

**Source B**
That (French soldiers) who have retreated for ten days, sleeping on the ground and half dead.

General von Kluck after the Battle of the Marne.
What was living and fighting in the trenches like?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
In this lesson you will:

- learn about conditions in the trenches
- analyse the consequences of these conditions.

GETTING STARTED
Think back to what you have already learned about trenches. What are likely to be the worst things about these trenches for the soldiers?

Living in the trenches
The conditions in the trenches were not pleasant. They were often waterlogged, and had few if any comforts such as heating and toilets. Soldiers had to endure torments such as:

1  Dysentery
   This was caused by infected water. It was a particular problem in the early stages of the war because it took some time before regular supplies of water to the trenches could be organised. Instead, soldiers were supplied with water bottles (although there were rarely enough of them) and often depended on impure water collected from shell-holes.

2  Trench foot
   This was an infection of the feet, brought on by cold and wet conditions, which caused the feet to go numb. If left untreated, it could result in amputation and even death. As the Germans were the first to decide where to dig, they had been able to choose the higher ground, which meant that the British were forced to dig trenches in areas that were, in some parts of the Western Front, only a few feet above sea level. Trench life, therefore, involved a never-ending struggle against water and mud, which resulted in duckboards being placed at the bottom of the trenches to protect soldiers from problems such as trench foot.

3  Rats
   The reality of war was that the large number of decomposing bodies of the many men killed in the trenches attracted rats, as did the food scraps which littered the trenches. These rats spread infections and contaminated food.

Fighting in the trenches
The experience of fighting in the trenches was even more harrowing than the appalling living conditions. The war saw the appearance of new, deadly forms of weaponry, including:

1  Machine guns
   Sometimes the opposing trenches were as little as 40 metres apart. The main method of attack was to climb out of the trench and advance into ‘no-man's land’ to charge at the opposing trench. Millions died as machine guns cut through most soldiers well before they reached the enemy trenches.

2  Shrapnel shells
   These were anti-personnel artillery shells which carried a large number of individual bullets to the target and then exploded them. They were widely used by all troops to support their infantry assaults and resist counter-attacks, and to target troops in the open. However, trench warfare limited their effectiveness, because they could not cut the barbed wire entanglements in no-man's land, or make enough of an impression on the trenches.
Gas attacks

The Germans first used chlorine gas cylinders in April 1915 against the French Army at Ypres. Chlorine gas destroyed the respiratory organs of its victims and led to a slow death by asphyxiation. However, by 1915 allied troops were supplied with gas masks and anti-asphyxiation respirators.

Another type of gas used was phosgene, which killed its victim within 48 hours of an attack. The most lethal type of gas was mustard gas, first used by the German army in September 1917. It was almost odourless and took 12 hours to take effect.

Almost 100,000 soldiers died as a result of poison gas attacks, and another 1.2 million were hospitalised. The Russian Army, with over 50,000 deaths, suffered more than any other country.

What were the consequences of these conditions?

Shell-shock

By 1914, British doctors working in military hospitals noticed patients suffering from 'shell shock', which occurred when a bursting shell exploded nearby. The extraordinarily frequent use of heavy artillery made this a common condition during wartime. In many cases men suffered mental breakdowns, which made it impossible for them to remain on the front line.

Insubordination

Due to the awful conditions, not to mention the fear of death, many soldiers refused to obey orders. Approximately 300 British soldiers were court-martialled and executed by officers during the war. Many others were punished by being stationed in positions that were in range of enemy shell-fire.

If the shrapnel shells could not damage the enemy's trenches, what were the dangers when launching an infantry assault?

Official figures on executions in the British Army, 1914–18.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offence</th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1916</th>
<th>1917</th>
<th>1918</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desertion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cowardice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quitting post</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striking a superior officer</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casting away arms</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutiny</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping on post</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are you surprised by Source A? Use the source and your knowledge to explain your answer. [7 marks]
How far did General Haig mismanage the Battle of the Somme?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
In this lesson you will:
- learn about General Douglas Haig and the Battle of the Somme
- analyse whether or not Haig mismanaged the battle.

GETTING STARTED
There are two sides stuck in the trenches. What is the best way to launch an attack on the other side?
- Infantry assault
- Shells then infantry assault
- Dig a tunnel
- Air attack.
What are the likely problems with other options?

The Battle of Verdun
In February 1916, after over a year of stalemate, the Germans began a determined battle to capture strategic French forts surrounding the city of Verdun. For six months, both sides committed men and resources in huge quantities into this battle, and by July 1916 some 700,000 men had been killed. By the middle of 1916, the French were close to breaking point. The battle finally ended in December, France having been able to defend the city with huge losses on both sides.

The Battle of the Somme
For many, the Battle of the Somme symbolises the horrors of the First World War, because of the enormous number of casualties and because it demonstrated the ineffectiveness of trench warfare. The four-month battle, which aimed to push the Germans so hard that they would be forced to move some of their troops from the Verdun battlefield, led to the loss of over a million soldiers. By the time the battle ended, the British and French soldiers had gained ten miles of land and had lost 600,000 lives. Consequently, those responsible for British strategy, such as Douglas Haig, have received a great deal of criticism.

Fact file
General Douglas Haig
- 1861–1928.
- In 1914, he helped to organise the British Expeditionary Force.
- In December 1915, Haig succeeded Sir John French as commander-in-chief of the British Army on the Western Front.
- He was commander of the British Army during the Battle of the Somme.

Haig’s mistakes
Haig is a controversial figure. He was a vastly experienced soldier but his strategy had a number of weaknesses.

1 Haig over-estimated the impact of the artillery bombardment
The Battle of the Somme began with a week-long artillery bombardment of the German lines, which included the firing of over one million shells. The aim was to destroy both the German trenches and the barbed wire in front of the trenches. However, the Germans had dug in much more deeply than British intelligence had realised, and they were therefore less susceptible than expected to artillery fire. By the time of the British infantry’s assault, the German defences were still in place.

2 He used a simple tactic of advancing upon the enemy
Haig has been criticised by some for his belief in the simple advance of infantry troops on enemy lines. Once the artillery firing had stopped, the British had all but signalled that the infantry was on its way. When the British arrived, they were gunned down by rapid machine-gun fire.

3 He did not adjust his tactics after they had failed
It is perhaps unfair to blame Haig for the lack of impact of the artillery bombardment, part of the reason for the heavy Allied casualties on day one (20,000 dead and 40,000 injured). However, even after the worst day in British military history, Haig did not adjust his tactics soon enough, and many more soldiers were to die in the same way. On the other hand, the artillery soon learnt to adopt the technique of the creeping barrage, moving the range of the artillery forward as the troops advanced, so one could argue that this criticism is unfair.
4 He did not use the tank
Although the tank was used for the first time at the Somme, Haig, in common with most other generals, was doubtful about its value, despite the fact that it could have proved useful on the battlefield.

5 He made no allowance for the weather
Heavy rain on 7 July 1916 turned the battlefield into a swamp, and the trenches became knee-deep in mud. Haig did not change his tactics to respond to these changing circumstances.

Justification of Haig’s strategy
Although Haig arguably made blunders in the battle, it achieved its main objective, which was to relieve pressure on the French at Verdun. The Battle of the Somme caused some 600,000 German casualties, enormously depleting their forces at Verdun. A month after the battle had finished, the German army acknowledged that they had suffered defeat in Verdun, having been pushed back to their original positions. In addition, the ten miles gained was a strategic victory of sorts.

SOURCE A
A sarcastic message from Punch magazine to General Haig, which has underlying references to the Battle of the Somme.

SOURCE B
…when I came on the scene the whole place, trenches and all, was spread with dead. We had neither time nor space for burials, and the wounded could not be got away. They stayed with us and died, pitifully, with us, and then they rotted. The stench of the battlefield spread for miles around. And the sight of the limbs, the mangled bodies, and stray heads.

John Raws was killed at the Battle of the Somme. He wrote this letter to his brother on 12 August 1916 just before he died.

ACTIVITIES
Look back at the five criticisms of General Haig’s strategy. Rank them in order of importance, with 1 representing the most important and 5 representing the least important.
How important were new developments such as tanks, machine guns, aircraft and gas?

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson you will:

- learn about developments in weaponry
- analyse their importance in the war.

**GETTING STARTED**

Name three weapons that were developed during the First World War.

**New weapons**

Many of the weapons used for the first time in the First World War were soon to become regular features of 20th century warfare.

**Tanks**

The tank was a British invention, due to the foresight of Winston Churchill, who recognised that the idea had potential and funded its development. Tanks were used for the first time at the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and performed some very useful tasks, including crushing barbed-wire defences, spraying the enemy line with machine-gun fire and advancing ahead of the infantry. However, tanks in 1916 were very unreliable, with the majority breaking down before they even got to the German trenches.

By the autumn of 1917, the popular reputation of tank effectiveness had suffered and they were deemed to be of limited use in offensive operations, unwieldy and prone to malfunction. However, they finally achieved great success in November 1917 at the Battle of Cambrai, where they blasted through enemy lines. As a result, they came to provide Britain with a significant advantage over Germany.

**Machine guns**

During the First World War, the immense power of the guns was greater than in any previous war. Machine guns were one of the main killers in the war and accounted for many thousands of deaths.

Early machine guns had considerable problems. For example, they would begin to overheat rapidly so could only be used for a few minutes at a time. At the beginning of the war, the Germans already had thousands of machine guns while the British had...
very few. The Germans had been quick to realise their effectiveness; they could shoot hundreds of rounds of ammunition a minute. The presence of this weapon meant that soldiers who went over the top in trenches stood little chance when the enemy opened up with their machine guns.

The standard military tactic of the First World War was the infantry charge, and many soldiers barely got out of their trenches before they were shot. The Germans placed their machine guns slightly in front of their lines to ensure that the machine-gun crews were given a full view of the battlefield. This proved especially costly for the British at the Battle of the Somme, where thousands of troops were gunned down within minutes of the battle starting.

**Aircraft**

When war broke out in 1914, it was just over a decade since the Wright brothers’ first flight at Kittyhawk, and the number of aircraft on both sides was very small. There were few generals who viewed aircraft as anything more than a tool for observation and reconnaissance. France, for example, had less than 140 aircraft at the start of the war, although the rate of production improved, with France producing 68,000 aircraft by the end of the war. These early aircraft were highly unreliable, however, as can be shown by the fact that France lost over 50,000 of its aircraft in battle.

During the war, aircraft grew in importance after a French pilot, Roland Garros, became the first man to fire a machine gun from his plane. This sparked a tense battle between the two sides as to which could develop the most accurate fighter plane, although aircraft would not play a significant role in battle until the Second World War (1939–45).

**Gas**

The first poison gas attack was in April 1915 during the Second Battle of Ypres, when the Germans released chlorine into the French trenches across no-man’s land, causing panic as the soldiers coughed, retched and struggled to breathe. After this, both sides used poison gas many times during the remainder of the war. Initially, the attacks were designed to weaken the enemy troops before an infantry assault, but later developments of more lethal gases, such as mustard gas, could slowly kill the victims over the course of several weeks. This necessitated the development of gas masks, which made the soldiers immune to the effects of the gas. As a result of these gas masks, less than 5000 British troops died from gas during the war; the Russian army, which did not have such a supply of gas masks, lost over 50,000 troops.

**Conclusion**

The main importance of these new developments in weaponry is that they contributed to the stalemate. Due to technological improvements the supply of weapons and ammunition was inexhaustible – even if you managed to destroy an enemy machine gun, there were many more behind the lines. Although tanks and aeroplanes would eventually prove to be powerful offensive weapons, they were still in their infancy and were unable to overcome the defences of barbed wire, trenches and mud, especially when defended by machine guns. Perhaps if the army leaders had been more willing to use tanks and aeroplanes, the stalemate might have been broken sooner.

**KEY PEOPLE**

**Winston Churchill** – Member of Parliament during the First World War and later prime minister.

**Wright brothers** – two American inventors who built the world’s first successful aeroplane.

**ACTIVITIES**

Which countries took the lead in the use of the following weapons?
- Tanks
- Aeroplanes
- Machine-guns
- Poison gas.

What was mustard gas? [4 marks]
What was the importance of America’s entry into the war?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this lesson you will:

- learn about the reasons for America’s entry into the war
- analyse the consequences of America’s entry into the war.

GETTING STARTED

In pairs, discuss the benefits for a country of remaining neutral during the war. What type of things would have to occur to cause that country to join a war?

The American policy of neutrality

In 1914, when war was declared in Europe, the USA adopted a policy of neutrality and isolation. Their strategy had the full support of the majority of Americans, who preferred to stay out of the conflict. Despite America’s isolationism, relations between Germany and the USA had been deteriorating since 1914. Things became particularly strained after Germany announced that merchant shipping, including neutral ships, in a specified zone around Britain would be legitimate targets for their U-boats. President Woodrow Wilson warned the Germans about the danger of sinking an American ship, but this warning proved futile when, on 7 May 1915, the passenger ship Lusitania was sunk by U-boats, killing 128 Americans on board. However, it was not an American ship, and Wilson accepted Germany’s change of policy.

Why did the USA join the war?

On 9 January 1917, Germany announced a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare against American ships. The British naval blockade was beginning to have a major impact on Germany, and the Germans suspected American ships of carrying supplies to the Allies. By 21 March 1917, seven American merchant ships had been sunk. Wilson summoned Congress and, on 6 April 1917, America declared war on Germany.

KEY WORDS

Armistice – agreement to stop fighting.
Merchant shipping – commercial shipping.

KEY PEOPLE

Woodrow Wilson – President of the USA 1913–21.

ACTIVITIES

What might the Daily Express have hoped to achieve with the printing of this cartoon?

SOURCE

Cartoon ‘Brag Time in Berlin’ by Sidney Strube, first published by the Daily Express on 10 May 1915. The figure of Germany is shown dancing on the American flag. The banner on his hat translates as ‘God punish England’; he is saying ‘Germany above all’.
Was America’s entry a turning point of the war?

America entered the war at a time when the Kaiser had just announced a policy of unrestricted warfare, the British and French troops had sustained heavy losses at the Somme and Verdun, the French army was beginning to suffer from widespread mutinies, and shortly before Russia pulled out of the war (following the Russian Revolution – see page 199), causing more German troops to be diverted to the Western Front. America’s population of 90 million, together with the country’s unparalleled industrial might, injected some much-needed strength into the armies of the Triple Entente.

The limited initial impact of the Americans

By the end of 1917, however, the eagerly anticipated American arrival had produced few results. The Americans had not arrived in force, the French armies were still reeling from the mutinies of early 1917, which saw the convictions of over 20,000 men for mutinous activities, and, most devastatingly of all, the Germans had been able to transfer hundreds of thousands of troops to the Western Front after they had signed peace with Russia.

The overall importance of American entry into the war

In the final few months of the war, however, the contribution of American troops was significant. Over the course of June and July 1918, America sent over 580,000 men to the Western Front. By August 1918, there were nearly 1,500,000 American troops in France, and the Allies were planning for a major attack in 1919 that would be led by 100 American divisions. The German army could not hope to match such numbers – after the collapse of Russia they had about 1.6 million men on the Western Front – and it was in August 1918 that repeated Allied attacks began to succeed, leading to the armistice in November 1918.

Look at Source B. Why did Wilson make this speech at this time? Use the source and your knowledge to explain your answer. [7 marks]
Why did Germany agree to an armistice in 1918?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this lesson you will:

- learn about how the war ended
- analyse why Germany agreed to an armistice in 1918.

GETTING STARTED

Can you remember the major incidents so far of the war on the Western Front? Put the following battles into chronological order:

- Somme
- Marne
- First Battle of Ypres
- Verdun.

KEY PEOPLE

General Foch – senior French general during the First World War, supreme commander of the Allied armies 1918.


SOURCE A

I died in hell –
(They called it Passchendaele). My wound was slight,
And I was hobbling back; and then a shell
Burst slick upon the duck-boards: so I fell
Into the bottomless mud, and lost the light.

Extract from the poem 'Memorial Tablet' by the war poet Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967).

Ferdinand Foch, called up his reserve troops; the Allies now had large numbers of well-fed and well-equipped troops, supported by tanks, artillery and aircraft. The Germans had ended the period of trench warfare at exactly the time when the Allied armies were at their strongest position.

Germany needs to attack

The German situation was desperate by early 1918. The Allies' blockade of German ports had starved the economy of raw materials and the population (including the army) of food. In addition, the USA was increasing its movement of troops into France. Germany needed a quick victory on the Western Front, and the surrender of the Russian army gave them one last opportunity to achieve this.

One final offensive

In March 1918, the German commander Erich Ludendorff launched the great gamble to win the war, the German Spring Offensive. It started with the typical huge bombardment and gas attacks and was followed up with attacks by smaller bands of specially trained and lightly equipped storm troops. It was very effective; the Germans broke through the Allied lines in many places and Paris was now in range of heavy gunfire.

Although the Germans had made significant gains with their offensive, they had not reached Paris. With the loss of around 400,000 soldiers, it was only a matter of time before the numerical advantage of Britain, France and the USA began to show. The Supreme Commander of the Allied armies, General Foch, called up his reserve troops; the Allies now had large numbers of well-fed and well-equipped troops, supported by tanks, artillery and aircraft. The Germans had ended the period of trench warfare at exactly the time when the Allied armies were at their strongest position.

SOURCE

I died in hell –
(They called it Passchendaele). My wound was slight,
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TIMELINE

July 1917
Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) begins an offensive by the British and French which resulted in a small amount of land gained at the cost of many lives

March 1918
Germany launches its Spring Offensive
The Allies push for victory

Finally, on 15 July 1918, Ludendorff ordered the last German offensive of the war, which was a disaster. The Germans sustained heavy losses but only gained two miles. This triggered a massive counter-attack along much of the Western Front, and by the end of September the Allied forces had reached the Hindenburg line. By October the Germans were in full retreat, and on 11 November 1918 the armistice came into effect. The Great War was over.

Why did Germany agree to an armistice?

There were several reasons why Germany agreed to an armistice in November 1918.

1. To avoid revolution
Kaiser Wilhelm abdicated on 9 November. The new German government under Friedrich Ebert was under pressure of imminent revolution in Berlin, Munich and elsewhere across Germany. Because of the communist revolution in Russia, many left-wing political organisations were gaining support, and Ebert feared a communist revolution unless he made peace.

2. Terrible conditions in Germany
The British naval blockade of Germany led to appalling food shortages. By the autumn of 1918, malnutrition was common in Germany, leading to a significant increase in the civilian death rate.

Terms of the armistice

The armistice was formally signed in Foch’s railway carriage on 11 November. The terms included the following major points:

- withdrawal of German troops from Belgium, France and Alsace-Lorraine in the west and a retreat to the original territorial boundaries in the east
- the immediate surrender of large amounts of equipment including weapons and warships
- the Germans had to renounce the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the Treaty of Bucharest.

KEY CONCEPTS

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk – peace treaty signed in 1918 between communist Russia and the Central Powers, marking Russia’s exit from the First World War.

Treaty of Bucharest – peace treaty signed in 1918 between the Central Powers and Romania.

GradeStudio

What was the German Spring Offensive? [4 marks]
How important were the other fronts?

Who won the war at sea?

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson you will:

- learn about the different stages in the war at sea
- analyse its contribution to the defeat of Germany.

**GETTING STARTED**

Based on the information you have studied so far, think about the different reasons why the war at sea was also vital during the First World War.

The war at sea

The sea campaigns of the First World War involved minimal fighting but often had huge significance, because control of the sea meant stopping supplies getting to the enemy. Both sides were worried about leaving each other vulnerable to attack, and Churchill described Admiral Jellicoe, the commander of Britain's Grand Fleet, as 'the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon'.

There were five main stages in this aspect of the war.

1 Early battles

There were some significant events early on in the war, such as a victory for the Royal Navy in the North Sea at Heligoland, the shelling of some British east coast towns by German cruisers, and the German cruiser Goeben sneaking past British warships to reach Constantinople, which forced the Ottoman Empire to enter the war on the German side.

2 British blockade

A crucial factor in the eventual Allied victory was the British naval blockade of Germany, which stopped supplies reaching German ports. As Germany's coastline was very small, the blockade was easy to enforce. It stopped all goods entering Germany, including food, and in all over half a million German civilians died from starvation as a result of the blockade. The Germans responded in two ways: first by attacking the British Grand Fleet at the Battle of Jutland and later by starting a U-boat campaign (see below).

3 Battle of Jutland

The only major sea battle of the war was at Jutland in 1916. By this time, Germany had a new, more aggressive admiral, Reinhard Scheer, who saw that the blockade was causing severe damage to Germany and urged that it had to be broken. The two navies met at Jutland, in the North Sea, and although the Germans had the better of the exchanges (sinking 14 British ships with 6000 casualties compared to their loss of 11 ships and around 2500 casualties), the battle failed to achieve the important objective of lifting the blockade. It was also clear that the German surface fleet was in no position to challenge the Royal Navy in the North Sea, which meant that any attacks on either the Royal Navy or on Allied merchant ships would have to be carried out by submarines.

4 U-boat campaign

Before the Battle of Jutland, the Germans had tried to enforce their own blockade of Britain by using U-boats to sink merchant ships. In February 1915, Kaiser Wilhelm II declared the seas around the British Isles a war zone, announcing that ships in the area would be sunk. In May 1915, U-boats sank the British liner RMS Lusitania, which incurred the loss of 1000 passengers (see page 190).

**KEY PEOPLE**

Admiral Jellicoe – Commander of the British Grand Fleet at the Battle of Jutland.

Admiral Scheer – Commander of the German fleet at the Battle of Jutland.
After Jutland, the Germans adopted a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, in which all shipping was open to attack. This was partly a tactic of desperation, partly an unsuccessful strategy to keep America out of the war.

After the USA entered the war in 1917, Germany was in a better position to engage in unrestricted submarine warfare. She had a fleet of 46 large U-boats capable of operating in deep water, as well as 23 U-boats that could operate at a coastal level. The policy nearly worked; in the spring of 1917 Britain’s supplies of food had reached crisis levels, but Britain survived because the U-boats could not maintain such a high level of activity. The U-boat successes increased steadily in March (sinking 560,000 tons of shipping) and reached its peak with 860,000 tons in April. In May, however, numbers dropped to approximately 600,000 tons, because the British Admiralty was finally able to introduce a viable counter-measure to the German U-boat strategy.

5 Convoy system
Although there were other tried and tested anti-submarine techniques, the introduction of convoys made merchant ships easier to defend. In this instance, a convoy is a group of ships travelling together for mutual support. There were disadvantages to using convoys, including the fact that merchant shipping vessels had to travel at the speed of the slowest vessel in their convoy. Because of this weakness, the British Admiralty was reluctant to use convoy tactics at the start of the war because the German surface fleet was still operational. But after the Battle of Jutland, the Admiralty changed its tactics, and a convoy system was introduced in 1917. Their main advantage was that U-boats could only sink a small number of vessels in a convoy because of their limited supply of torpedoes and shells. From May 1917 to the end of the war, the convoys ensured that the overwhelming majority of merchant vessels reached their destination. The campaign of unrestricted warfare had failed.

**ACTIVITIES**

1. In pairs, discuss whether you think the convoy system is a good idea. Why would it help resist the threat from German submarines?

2. Would you prefer to fight on land or at sea? Write down the advantages and disadvantages for each.

**VOICE YOUR OPINION!**

Were the British right to initiate a blockade against Germany even though it would cause starvation for German civilians?
What happened in the Gallipoli campaign of 1915?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this lesson you will:

- learn about the events of the Gallipoli campaign
- analyse the reasons why the campaign was such a disaster.

GETTING STARTED

Which country had now entered the war as a result of Germany’s war at sea?

Origins of the Gallipoli campaign

In late 1914 Winston Churchill, who was by then First Lord of the Admiralty, and Lord Kitchener, who was the Secretary of State for War, persuaded the government to attempt an attack on the Dardanelles. There were several reasons for this.

- **Stalemate on the Western Front** – one possible way of gaining a breakthrough was through an attack on one of Germany’s allies.
- **Turkey was one of Germany’s more vulnerable allies** – the war planners were particularly attracted by the idea of a knock-out blow against Turkey, which had joined the Central Powers in November 1914 and was seen as its weakest member.
- **To improve sea routes** – a successful attack on the Dardanelles would open up a sea route to the Eastern Front so that the Allies could get supplies to the Russians.
- **To reduce the pressure on other fronts** – in establishing a new front, the Allies could attack not just Turkey but also Germany’s main ally, Austria-Hungary, through the Balkans. The Germans would be compelled to assist their allies and so divert troops away from either the Western or Eastern fronts, leaving the Allies with a weakened army to fight.
- **There appeared to be no danger of trench warfare** – although there was a plan for some infantry to accompany the warships, there was no thought of any land invasion, which meant that there was no chance of getting bogged down in trench warfare.

HISTORY DETECTIVE

Where is Gallipoli?

The Gallipoli campaign

In March 1915, the warships began their assault on the strong forts, such as Sedd el Bahr and Kum Kale, that lined the Dardanelles, before making their advance. However, as the British and French ships entered the straits a combination of mines and shell fire from the forts on the shore sank three battle cruisers and damaged others.

At a stroke, the British had lost two-thirds of their battleships in the Dardanelles, which threatened the heart of the Royal Navy. Rear-Admiral Robeck decided that the army should instead launch a land invasion and capture the Dardanelles peninsula, as it was impractical to use destroyers to clear the minefields. The plan was for the naval operation to restart once the Turks had been driven out of Gallipoli.

Helles beach

In April, a hastily assembled force of British, French and ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand) troops attacked Helles beach. Their task involved charging up steep hillsides under a hail of machine-gun fire, which resulted in many casualties. By May, the British had lost thousands of troops at Helles. It was soon clear that it would not be possible to clear the Turkish forces, led by Colonel Mustafa Kemal, off the peninsula.

The order therefore came through to dig in. Conditions in the trenches were awful, due to the huge numbers of decaying corpses and disease which was rife in the vicinity.

Suvla Bay

In August, General Sir Ian Hamilton ordered an attack on Suvla Bay involving over 60,000 soldiers. Although the plan nearly worked, the Allied troops could not break through the defences of the Turks, led by Mustafa Kemal. The Turks finally retook Suvla Bay on 10 August, four days after the initial landing.

KEY PEOPLE

Lord Kitchener – Secretary of State for War 1914–15.

Mustafa Kemal – successful Turkish commander at Gallipoli in 1915, who later became first president of Turkey.
**Submarine campaign**

One successful part of the Allies’ campaign in the Dardanelles came with the use of submarines to attack the harbour at Constantinople, resulting in the sinking of large numbers of Turkish warships and merchant vessels.

**Withdrawal**

By November 1915, the troops in Turkey were short of supplies, suffering from frostbite due to the hard Turkish winter, and without any prospect of success. The decision was taken to withdraw. Suvla Bay and Anzac Cove were evacuated in December, and the campaign ended with the evacuation of Helles in January 1916.

**Reasons for the Allied defeat**

There were several reasons which explained why the Allied troops suffered at the hands of the Turkish forces.

1. **The fighting power of the Turkish Army**
   
   Due to the lack of credible intelligence, the Allied commanders hugely underestimated the Turkish army, believing that it would not pose much of a threat.

2. **Germany had improved the skill and organisation of the Turkish Army**
   
   A new German commander, Otto Liman von Sanders, had doubled the defensive forces at Gallipoli. Before his arrival, the troops were poorly equipped and were defending a 150-mile coastline with just over 60,000 soldiers. Von Sanders gave the troops vital training in defending trench positions and placed the Turkish troops in strategic positions above the beaches on which the Allies were expected to land.

3. **Confusion within the British ranks**
   
   Churchill was not entirely sure whether he had received an agreement to force the Dardanelles, and in the end the land invasion went ahead without formal agreement from the War Council. Without this vital communication, it was difficult to agree upon a more effective strategy.

The overall campaign was a disaster of the first order. The death toll on both sides amounted to approximately 100,000, with the Allied armies losing just over 40,000 soldiers.
Why was Russia defeated in 1918?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this lesson you will:

- learn about the main events of the war on the Eastern Front
- analyse the main reasons why Russia was defeated.

GETTING STARTED

Using the information that you have acquired from previous lessons, what do you know about the war on the Eastern Front?

The Eastern Front

The fighting on the Eastern Front took place across a vast area of territory. Because of the enormous open spaces over which the armies moved, the conflict did not become bogged down in trench warfare. The fighting began when the Russian Army invaded eastern Germany. There were several key events over the course of the next three years.

The Battle of Tannenberg, 1914

After some initial successes, this battle in the first month of the war represented Russia’s worst defeat of the entire conflict, and one from which she never fully recovered. There were over 30,000 Russian casualties, and only 10,000 out of 150,000 managed to escape. The defeat was so bad that General Aleksandr Samsonov committed suicide.

First Battle of the Masurian Lakes

This battle was a German offensive which attempted to push the Russians out of Germany. It cost the Russian army approximately 125,000 men, while the Germans lost 40,000 men.

Russia steadily driven back

Although the Russians did have some success in 1915, they were steadily driven back after a shattering defeat at Gorlice in May 1915, which caused the Russian Army to retreat far back into Russia. Although the Russians did not score any significant military victories, the pressure was taken off the Eastern Front for a while due to the need from Turkey for German assistance in the Dardanelles. Similarly, some of the Russian offensives, such as that of Lake Naroch in March 1916, were designed to relieve the German pressure on the Western Front.

Russia launches an impressive counter-attack

Under General Brusilov in June 1916, Russia mounted a stunning counter-attack on Austrian and German troops. German records indicate just how surprised the Germans were at the success of the Russian advance. However, once the artillery support ceased, the Russian troops on the ground became exposed to poison gas attacks, which led to a Russian retreat.

Kerensky Offensive

On 1 July 1917, Russian troops attacked the enemy forces in Galicia, with some initial successes. However, the Kerensky Offensive, named after Alexander Kerensky, by then Prime Minister of Russia, was soon halted because the Russian soldiers mutinied and refused to fight. The inevitable response from Germany and Austria-Hungary was to break through the Russian lines, causing them to retreat about 150 miles.

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

A few months later, the Bolsheviks took power in Russia and, led by Lenin, promptly pulled out of the war. Although the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was not signed until March 1918, Russian troops stopped fighting at the end of 1917. Unsurprisingly, the British and French troops were horrified, as it meant that thousands of German troops were released to come to fight on the Western Front.

KEY PEOPLE

Vladimir Ilych Lenin – Bolshevik leader who became the first leader of the Soviet Union.

Alexander Kerensky – Prime Minister of Russia July–October 1917.

In this lesson you will:

- learn about the main events of the war on the Eastern Front
- analyse the main reasons why Russia was defeated.
Reasons for the Russian defeat

There were several reasons which explain why Russia was the only member of the Triple Entente to be defeated.

- **Lack of morale**
  The ordinary Russian soldier was not highly motivated to attack Germany as a result of the country’s treaty obligations towards its allies, Britain and France. This unwillingness led to several desertions and mutinies, for example during the Kerensky Offensive.

- **Lack of quality**
  The Russian soldiers were no match for their German counterparts. They were badly led, poorly equipped and underfed, and had to walk long distances (the German transport network was far superior).

- **Lack of discipline**
  The abdication of Tsar Nicholas II in March 1917 gave rise to the formation of soldier committees, which tremendously weakened the power of officers. In addition, it provided an opportunity for Bolshevik agitators to argue the case for pulling out of the war.

- **Lack of supplies**
  Like most other countries during the conflict, Russia struggled to supply food and fuel to its troops. However, most other countries did not have to contend with a series of strikes, such as the strike in October 1916, where rail workers in Petrograd protested about working conditions.

- **Political events in Russia**
  Ultimately, the single biggest reason for the Russian defeat was of course the Bolshevik Revolution, which ushered in a new government that had no intention of continuing the war against Germany. Almost the first act of the Bolshevik government was to pull out of the war.

Conclusion

Although Russia was defeated in 1918, and sustained more casualties than any other country, its contribution to the war effort should not be underestimated. For instance, the Battle of Tannenburg, although a disaster for Russia, succeeded in diverting German resources away from the Western Front, thereby halting the German advance on Paris. Later, Brusilov’s offensive was designed to relieve the pressure from Verdun, and initially it was a spectacular success. Russia therefore contributed a great deal to the Allied victory, but the Bolshevik decision to withdraw from the war at the end of 1917 could well have led to disaster for the Allies had the Americans not entered the war.

**KEY WORDS**

**Bolsheviks** – a party led by Lenin which took its name from the Russian word for ‘majority’. They believed in seizing power at the first opportunity.

**HISTORY DETECTIVE**

Why did the Bolsheviks not want to continue the war against Germany?

‘The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 was the main reason for Russia’s defeat.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

[10 marks]
Usefulness of source

a Study Source A.
How useful is this source as evidence about the Battle of the Somme? Use the source and your own knowledge to explain your answer. [7 marks]

Source A
At 7.30 a.m. the hurricane of shells ceased. Our men at once clambered up the steep shafts leading from the dug-outs to daylight and ran to the nearest shell craters. The machine guns were pulled out of the dug-outs and hurriedly placed into position. As soon as we were in position we saw a series of long lines of British infantry moving forward from their trenches. They came on at a steady pace as if expecting to find nothing alive in our front trenches. When the line was within 100 yards, the rattle of machine-gun fire broke out.

A German soldier describing what happened on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916.

Before you begin to answer this question, it is important that you recognise that the answer requires a comment about the usefulness of the source. Ask yourself what is in this source which can be used by the historian. You need to think about both what is in the source and how your own knowledge complements this.

Answer
This source is useful as it shows how the British got their tactics wrong during the Battle of the Somme. Firstly, it states that after the ending of the hurricane of shells, the German army ‘at once clambered up the steep shaft’ and ‘the machine guns were . . . hurriedly placed into position’. This proves that the British shell campaign prior to the attack on the German line was ineffective as the source makes no mention of the damage it caused. Moreover, it gives the impression that this German soldier knew the British were going to advance after the shelling had stopped since, as soon as the ‘shells ceased’, it launched the German soldiers into preparation for the British advance. In addition, it shows the futility of the British advance by commenting on their ‘steady pace’ and how they suffered at the hands of the ‘rattle of machine-gun fire’. This confirms the fact that the date of the source was the worst day in British military history with 20,000 British fatalities. However, this source does not shed any light on the overall effectiveness on the Battle of the Somme, in particular the amount of land that was gained and the number of German casualties.

Agree with a source?

b Study Source B
How far does the source prove that poison gas was the most dangerous weapon of the First World War? Use the source and your knowledge to explain your answer. [7 marks]

Source B
Utterly unprepared for what was to come, the [French] divisions gazed for a short while spellbound at the strange phenomenon they saw coming slowly toward them. Like some liquid the heavy-coloured vapour poured relentlessly into the trenches, filled them, and passed on. For a few seconds nothing happened; the sweet-smelling stuff merely tickled their nostrils; they failed to realize the danger. Then, with inconceivable rapidity, the gas worked, and blind panic spread. Hundreds, after a dreadful fight for air, became unconscious and died where they lay – a death of hideous torture, with the frothing bubbles gurgling in their throats and the foul liquid welling up in their lungs.

Anonymous British eyewitness account of the German gas attack at Ypres on 22 April 1915.

Your answer should:
• agree and disagree with the source
• engage with the source and use your own knowledge
• factor in the origin of the source when arriving at an overall judgement at the end.

On the one hand, this source does prove that poison gas was the most dangerous weapon of the First World War. The ‘inconceivable rapidity’ of the gas proves how sudden and unexpected it came upon the soldiers. The scale of the devastation is revealed when it says that at
Moreover, the fact that the deaths were described as ‘hideous torture’ and featured scenes such as ‘frothing bubbles gurgling in their throats’ would only have served to dampen morale amongst the soldiers thereby increasing the danger of this weapon. This source refers to first poison gas attack in April 1915 but later developments of more lethal gases, such as mustard gas, proved to be even more devastating. The fact that over 100,000 soldiers died in this conflict as a result of gas attacks would, along with the evidence in the source, seem to support the view that poison gas was the most dangerous weapon of the war.

On the other hand, the source reveals that they ‘gazed for a short while’ which would have been enough time to put on a gas mask in order to counter the effects of the gas. Although this might not have been the case at Ypres in 1915, it was certainly true that gas masks played a large part in minimising the amount of casualties incurred as a result of the gas attack, particularly in the case of the British forces who suffered 45,000 fewer casualties than Russia as a result of poisonous gas attacks. In fact, more British soldiers died on the first day of the Battle of Somme as a result of machine gun fire than as a result of all poisonous gas attacks during the war.

Overall, therefore, the source clearly proves that poisonous gas was a dangerous weapon in 1915 but the fact that the source is only concerned with one battle, one army, and does not mention the other devastating weapons, limits its effectiveness as evidence of poisonous gas being the most dangerous weapon of the First World War.

c Study Source C
Why do you think this poster was made? Use the source and your knowledge to explain your answer.

In order to get full marks in a question like this, it is important to explain what the message of the poster is and why it was published.
Causes and events of the First World War, 1890–1918

Here is an example of a question that requires you to consider two sides of an argument. This is a common type of question in Unit A971. The skill you require is to use your knowledge of the topic to give evidence in supporting a two-sided argument.

Was the Alliance system the main cause of the First World War? Explain your answer. [10 marks]

Examiner’s tip

Think about everything you have learnt on the causes of the First World War and decide which bits are relevant to this question. It’s always a good idea to plan what specific evidence you are going to use to support each side of the argument. Look at this mark scheme before thinking about what you need to do to answer the question.

When you are answering a question that asks you to consider two (or more) sides of an argument, it is often a good idea to plan your answer to make sure that you don’t forget anything.

Use the mark scheme and the ideas below to help organise your answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraph</th>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph one</td>
<td>A brief introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph two</td>
<td>Explain why the alliance system lead to the outbreak of the First World War</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph three</td>
<td>Explain at least one other cause of the First World War</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph four</td>
<td>Reach and support a conclusion, what do you think was the main cause of the First World War?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mark scheme

Level 1: General and vague assertions
Level 2: Identifies or describes factors from at least one side of the argument
Level 3: Explains evidence supporting one side of the argument
Level 4: Explains evidence supporting both sides of the argument
Level 5: As level four, but also reaches and supports a final judgement in answer to the question.
Look at the example below and think about how the candidate moves up these levels:

**Student’s response**

By 1914 the major powers had organised themselves into two different alliances. Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy formed the Triple Alliance, while Britain, France and Russia formed the Triple Entente. These alliances meant that if one country went to war then its allies would also be caught up in the fight. So when Franz Ferdinand was shot in 1914 by a Serbian group, Austria declared war on Serbia, Serbia’s alliance with Russia brought it into the war as well. Germany supported Austria and then France supported Russia. The alliance system meant that all the major powers of Europe became involved in an event which originally only involved Serbia and Austria.

However, this was not the only cause of the First World War. The ‘blank cheque’ that Germany supported Austria-Hungary with was also a major contributing factor. The ‘blank cheque’ meant that Germany would support Austria-Hungary no matter what course of action they chose to follow. It is unlikely that Austria-Hungary would have declared war on Serbia, knowing that Russia would support Serbia, if they hadn’t known that they were guaranteed the support of the mighty German army.

**Examiner’s comment**

This is a good start. The candidate is using the principle of a three-part paragraph: they have made a clear point, supported it with specific evidence and then linked the evidence to the question in order to explain their ideas.

By giving examples of how the alliance system caused the First World War, the candidate has achieved level two: identification.

In the example, the candidate explains their evidence and so the answer moves up to a level three. This will earn approximately half marks.

To go up to level four you need to explain the other side of the argument. Now look at this second paragraph from the example.

By explaining evidence from both sides of the argument the candidate moves up to level four.

To strengthen this still further the candidate could give more than one piece of evidence for each argument.

To attain level five the candidate needs to reach an overall judgement about the original question: was the alliance system the main cause of the First World War? It is important to save something new for this conclusion, rather than just summarising what has already been said.

Have a go at writing your own conclusion in which you reach and explain a clear judgement in answer to this question.