

Fallen Fields

First World War 1914–1918

Before the war

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

Causes of war

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

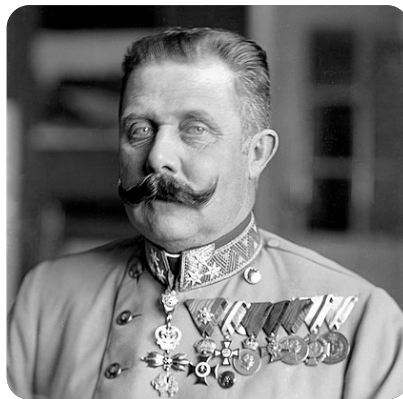
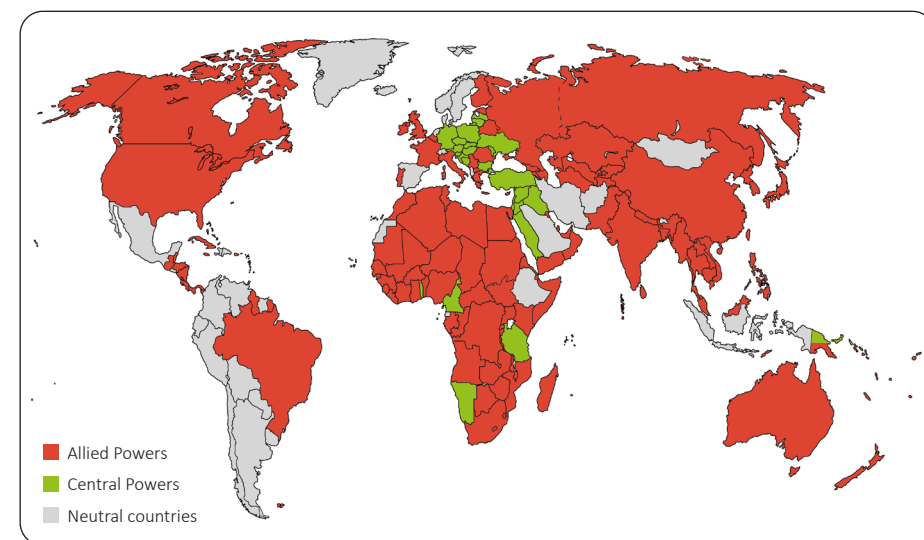


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Warring countries

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



Becoming a soldier

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



Image from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

Life in the trenches

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



Image from: Getty Images/Photo 12

Weapons and technology

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

Life on the home front

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



Image from: Wellcomecollection.org

The end of the war

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

Remembrance

The poppy is a symbol of remembrance. During the First World War, poppies grew on barren land, such as old battlefields. A Canadian doctor called Lt Col John McCrae was inspired by the sight of the poppies to write a famous poem called *In Flanders Fields* after his friend died at Ypres. After the war, the poppy became an official symbol of remembrance. There are war cemeteries close to the battlefields, and many countries have memorials for the dead soldiers whose identities are unknown, such as the Grave of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey, London.



First World War timeline

1914	
28th June	Archduke Franz Ferdinand is assassinated
28th July	Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia
4th August	Britain and its dominions declares war on Germany
6th–12th September	First Battle of Marne
19th October–22nd November	First Battle of Ypres
24th–25th December	Christmas truce
1915	
19th February 1915–9th January 1916	Battle of Gallipoli
22nd April	German forces launch their first gas attack near Ypres, Belgium
31st May	London suffers first German zeppelin bombing raid
1916	
21st February–18th December	Battle of Verdun
27th January	Conscription for unmarried men aged 18–41 is introduced in Britain
31st May–1st June	Battle of Jutland
1st July–18th November	Battle of the Somme
15th September	Britain deploys the first ever tank used in warfare
1917	
9th–12th April	Battle of Vimy Ridge
17th July	The British royal family changes its surname from the German Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to British name Windsor.
31st July–6th November	Third Battle of Ypres, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele
1918	
8th–11th August	Battle of Amiens
21st September	Battle of Square Hill
9th November	Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates as ruler of Germany
11th November	Armistice is signed between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany
1919	
28th June	Treaty of Versailles is signed

Glossary

alliances	Groups of countries that promise to protect and support each other.
Allied and Associated Powers	Allied Powers signed treaties with Britain, France and Russia, while Associated Powers joined them more informally.
armistice	An agreement, made by both sides in a war, to stop fighting and discuss ways to make peace.
artillery	Large, heavy guns used in land warfare.
assassination	The killing of a prominent person, often for political or religious reasons.
Central Powers	Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire.
conscription	Compulsory enlistment for state service, typically into the armed forces.
dominions	Autonomous communities that were within the British Empire, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), South Africa and parts of Africa and the West Indies.
home front	The civilians living in a country at war.
imperialism	A desire to conquer other countries through colonisation, use of military force, or other means, and bring them into an empire.
kaiser	The German emperor.
militarism	The belief that it is important to have strong armed forces and that they should be used to gain land and political power.
munitions	Military weapons, ammunition, equipment and stores.
nationalism	The belief that a person’s home country is better and stronger than others.
propaganda	Information, especially biased or misleading, used to promote a political cause or point of view.
rationing	A system allowing each person to have only a fixed amount of food.
Treaty of Versailles	A peace treaty signed at the end of the First World War, which blamed Germany for the conflict and listed its punishments.