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The Inevitability of War

... *The old lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.*

From 'Dulce et Decorum Est', by Wilfred Owen

Death in Sarajevo: 28 June 1914

In 1888, the wily German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck (1815–98), predicted that, 'One day the great European War will come out of some damned foolish thing in the Balkans', and he was right. Several bullets fired by a young Bosnian Serb radical in Sarajevo were all it took to enflame the suspicions and hatreds that had built up amongst the nations of Europe for many decades.

In 1912, aged 18, Gavrilo Princip (1894–1918) had travelled to Belgrade to continue his education and while in Serbia, he had joined the secret nationalist organisation, Unification or Death, unofficially known as the Black Hand society. For the next two years, most of his spare time was spent with fellow nationalists who sought a union between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia and independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

When it was announced that Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1863–1914), the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, would be visiting Bosnia-Herzegovina in June 1914, Dragutin Dimitrijević (1876–1917), the chief of the Intelligence Department in the Serbian Army and head of the Black Hand, sent Princip, Nedjelko Čabrinović (1895–1916), Trifko Grabež (1895–1918) and four others to Sarajevo to assassinate the Archduke.

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Dimitrijević considered Franz Ferdinand a serious threat to a union between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, concerned that Ferdinand's plans to grant concessions to the South Slavs would make it more difficult to achieve an independent unified Serbian state.

On Sunday 28 June the Archduke and his wife, Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg (1868–1914), arrived by train at Sarajevo station from where they were to be taken to a reception hosted by General Oskar Potiorek (1853–1933), Governor of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Mayor of Sarajevo and the city's Commissioner of Police rode in the first car and in the second, the top rolled back to let the crowd see the royal couple, were the Archduke and his wife, accompanied by Potiorek and the Archduke's bodyguard, Count Franz von Harrach (1870–1934).

Seven members of the Black Hand group were posted along the route, but when one of them threw a bomb that exploded under the car following the royal vehicle, Franz Ferdinand's car sped off to the reception, making it impossible for the conspirators to carry out their plans. The reception went ahead and after it, Franz Ferdinand insisted on being driven to the hospital to visit those who had been injured in the explosion. En route, however, his driver took a wrong turn, driving his Gräf & Stift Double Phaeton car into Franz Josef Street where Gavrilo Princip just happened to be standing on a corner. As the car tried to reverse out of the street, Princip stepped forward, raised his gun and, from a distance of about five feet, fired two shots into the open vehicle, the first bullet hitting the Archduke in his jugular vein, the second striking Archduchess Sophie in the abdomen. The terrified driver immediately slammed his foot down hard on the accelerator and the vehicle sped off in the direction of the Governor's residence. But, it was too late; Sophie was dead on arrival and Franz

Ferdinand succumbed to his wound ten minutes later. During the next four years, as a result of these two deaths, many millions more would die in the horror of the First World War.

The Great Powers

The reasons for the outbreak of the war are a matter of ongoing debate. Each of the powers that took up arms during those terrible four years adhered to the claim that it had done so in the face of aggression by another power or group of powers. There was, however, an inevitability about the progress of events. The alliances that had been formed amongst the various nations meant that by 1914 Europe was made up of what have come to be known as 'armed camps'. Occupying one were Germany and Austria while in the other were France and Russia. In such a volatile situation, it would not take a great deal to light the 'powder keg' of European politics and once conflict was finally threatened, the other nations of Europe fell into line according to their alliances or on whichever side they thought would bring them most benefit in the event of victory.

In 1914, a map of Europe would have looked very different to how it looks today, especially where central and Eastern Europe were concerned. Germany, for instance, covered a much larger expanse than now, extending into areas of modern northern Poland and the Czech Republic. To the south lay the vast territory of Austria-Hungary, incorporating the modern-day nations of Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, large parts of Serbia and Romania and some lands that are now part of Italy, Montenegro, Poland and Ukraine. The Russian Empire stretched to the east, within its borders the modern-day states of Finland, Poland, Estonia, Latvia,

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Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. To the west, the frontiers of Spain, France and Portugal were much the same as they are today, but Great Britain incorporated all of Ireland, north and south.

There were five major European powers in 1914: Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary. Amongst these Great Britain was a superpower with an empire of some 13 million square miles that stretched around the globe and included around 20 per cent of the world's population. The Industrial Revolution had brought unimagined prosperity to Britain and the raw materials for her industries were transported from every corner of the globe, under the protection of the Royal Navy, the world's most powerful fleet. Britain stood alone on the fringes of the Continent. In the late nineteenth century, Great Britain, in the words of Canadian Finance Minister George Eulas Foster (1847–1931), stood 'splendidly isolated in Europe'. This concept of 'splendid isolation' nurtured under the leadership of Conservative Prime Ministers Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881) and the Marquess of Salisbury (1830–1903), was felt at the time to be the best way to preserve the prevailing balance of power on the continent. Meanwhile, Britain fought to preserve its interests in its colonies and dominions, going to war, for instance, with the Boers of South Africa, an ostensibly unequal contest that damaged Britain's reputation, leading to several European nations, most notably the Germans, expressing sympathy for the Boers. Another war, with France this time, was narrowly averted at the Sudanese town of Fashoda.

France had endured a turbulent few decades. In 1870, the German states, led by Prussia, humiliated her in the Franco-Prussian War that resulted in the loss of the eastern regions of Alsace and Lorraine and the payment of crippling reparations. Victory hastened German unification, with Wilhelm I (*r.* 1861–88) – King

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of Prussia – installed as Kaiser (Emperor). The French, traumatised by their crushing defeat, ousted their emperor, Napoleon III (r. 1852–70), nephew of Napoleon I (r. 1804–14, 1815), replacing his empire with the Third Republic. They remained embittered and determined to regain the territories that they had lost to the Germans.

German unification was principally the work of Otto von Bismarck (1815–98), Prime Minister of Prussia. A consummate politician, Bismarck involved Prussia in wars that gave it dominance over Austria and France and persuaded the smaller German states to accept Prussian leadership, with him as the first Chancellor of a united Germany. In 1888, Frederick III (r. 1888), married to Victoria 1840–1901), Princess Royal and daughter of British Queen Victoria (r. 1837–1901), succeeded Wilhelm I, but succumbed to cancer just four months later. The imperial crown passed to Wilhelm II (r. 1888–1918) who in 1890 forced Bismarck to resign and began to pursue policies that would contribute greatly to the outbreak of war in 1914. This ‘New Course’ as it is known, involved more direct personal rule by Wilhelm and the appointment of Chancellors whom he could control more easily than he could Bismarck.

The austere Emperor Franz-Joseph I (r. 1848–1916) had come to the throne of Austria-Hungary in 1848 and ruled over an unwieldy, multi-racial empire. His time on the throne was plagued by nationalism but he ensured a peaceful reign with the *Ausgleich* – the Austro-Hungarian Compromise – of 1867. With this he created a dual monarchy, making him Emperor of Austria as well as King of Hungary, re-establishing the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Hungary. Franz-Joseph had his share of tragedy in his lifetime. His son, Crown Prince Rudolf (1858–1889) committed suicide in 1889 and his wife, Empress Elizabeth, was assassinated in 1898.

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Archduke Franz Ferdinand, victim of Gavrilo Princip's June 1914 attack, was his nephew.

The vast Russian Empire, ruled by Tsar Nicholas II (r. 1894–1917), stretched from Europe in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east but Nicholas's autocratic rule was under constant threat from revolutionary groups seeking sweeping reforms. The Tsar's position was not helped by his domineering German-born wife, Alexandra Feodorovna (1872–1918) and her scandalous relationship with the unhinged mystic, Rasputin (1869–1916). In 1904, believing an easy victory would make him more popular, Nicholas led Russia into a foolhardy war against Japan, a conflict that ended in humiliation for the Tsar and his people, resulting in strikes, demonstrations and attempted revolutions in 1905 and 1906. To placate the angry Russian people, Nicholas promised to introduce civil liberties. He issued the October Manifesto in 1905, creating the State Duma, an elected assembly that he promised would have legislative and oversight powers, but he remained an autocrat.

Rivalries and Jealousies

In the late nineteenth century, suspicions and jealousies were a feature of the political landscape in Europe. As has already been noted, the French were anxious to redeem themselves and restore their lost territories following their crushing defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. They believed it inevitable that there would be a war by which this could be achieved. The Germans, on the other hand, were not satisfied merely with the acquisition of Alsace and Lorraine. The Kaiser was jealous of British colonial success and the wealth it brought. He looked at the power of the Royal Navy and determined that Germany too must have a powerful maritime

force if she was to become a global power. He made his views clear in a 1901 speech at the Elbe regatta: 'We have fought for a place in the sun and won it. Our future is on the water.'

In 1906, Britain stunned the world with the launch of a new class of ironclad battleship. With its range, speed, armoury of heavy-calibre guns – the 'all-big-gun' design – and steam-turbine propulsion, HMS *Dreadnought* rendered all other battleships obsolete. It made such an impression, in fact, that 'dreadnought' became the generic name for such vessels and everything that came before was dubbed 'pre-dreadnought'. The Germans were horrified, describing their own vessels as *fünf-minuten* ships because five minutes was the length of time it was thought they would survive if they were unlucky enough to encounter a British dreadnought.

The launch of the *Dreadnought* initiated a naval arms race between Britain and Germany, each new vessel built being bigger than the last and each demonstrating the latest developments in armament, armour and propulsion. Eventually, 'super-dreadnoughts' were being constructed at vast expense, many of which were still being used several decades later during the Second World War. It had been the Royal Navy's intention to establish a two-to-one ratio of battleships against Germany, but Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz (1849–1930) responded with the building of a powerful German Navy while debate raged in Great Britain about how many dreadnoughts should be built.

Meanwhile, there were problems at the other end of Europe. The Balkans had long been the continent's most troubled region. They had been part of the Ottoman Empire from the sixteenth century until the late nineteenth but by the turn of the century, most of the countries of the region had gained independence. It was an area of great strategic importance and Austria-Hungary and

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Russia, which each shared common borders with the former Turkish conquests, had been trying to gain influence there since the decline of the Ottoman Empire. The Russians, of course, shared Slav ethnicity with many of the Balkan nations and, understandably, felt a kinship with them. The German Kaiser naturally supported Austro-Hungarian ambitions in the region and Germany itself had attempted to curry favour with the Turks by promising aid and building a railway between Berlin and Baghdad.

The Slavs, however, had their own ambitions. There was talk of an independent Slav state that would survive without the involvement of the major powers. The chief proponent of this notion was Serbia.

Lighting the ‘Powder Keg’

Bismarck had devised a set of alliances that would safeguard Germany against its two principal threats – Russia and France. Initially, Russia had been a member of the League of the Three Emperors with Austria-Hungary and Germany, an agreement that Bismarck hoped would isolate France. That league was not renewed, however, after the 1878 Treaty of Berlin left Russia feeling cheated of the gains made in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–88. In 1879, Germany signed the Dual Alliance with Austria-Hungary, each signatory agreeing to come to the aid of the other in the event of an attack. Three years later, Italy joined with them to form the Triple Alliance but the Italians were far from wholehearted in their adherence to the agreement, especially in view of the fact that they clandestinely concluded a similar agreement with France shortly after. Furthermore, the Italians insisted that the alliance’s undertakings should not be regarded as being directed against the British.

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Despite claims by the Kaiser that these alliances were no more than defensive, they gave cause for concern across Europe. The Russians and French realised, of course, that the alliances were directed mainly against them, leading them, in turn, to sign their own alliance in 1894. In 1904, Britain and France signed the Anglo-French Entente or Entente Cordiale, not really a treaty, but a series of agreements aimed at peaceful co-existence. This, in turn, developed into the Triple Entente in 1907, when Russia signed the Anglo-Russian Entente with Britain. Germany now had every right to feel threatened, finding herself with enemies both to the east and west. The peace of Europe looked increasingly fragile with the continent split into these two armed camps and it would not take much to set the European powers at each other's throats.

There were a couple of crises before 1914 that could have brought war. The first occurred in 1905 when Kaiser Wilhelm, on a visit to Morocco, made a provocative speech in support of Moroccan independence from French control. Britain and Russia supported the indignant French. In 1911, tribesmen attacked the Moroccan city of Fez, forcing the French to dispatch troops to restore order. In an act of brinkmanship, the Kaiser sent a gunboat to the Moroccan port of Agadir, ostensibly to protect German interests in the region. When the British again expressed support for France in its actions and began the partial mobilisation of the Royal Navy, the Kaiser was forced to withdraw. Germany was embarrassed and, with Britain considered the source of her embarrassment, anti-British feeling swept across the country. The arms race became even more frenetic.

The second crisis erupted in the Balkans where Bismarck had feared a European war would begin. In 1912, the four states of the Balkan League – Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro and Serbia –

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defeated the Turks and in the following year, Bulgaria, disappointed at the secret division of the spoils from the first war, attacked its allies, Greece and Serbia. The Ottoman Empire and Romania joined in on the side of the Greeks and Serbians and Bulgaria was defeated. The result was a region seething with bitterness, distrust and a desire for revenge.

Countdown to War

The spark that finally brought war was the Archduke's assassination. Following the incident, the Austrians carried out an investigation, but failed to find evidence that linked the Serbian government to the assassin. Nonetheless, there were many in the Austrian government and military who believed that the incident presented them with the perfect excuse to go to war against the nation that was most vocal in support of a Slav state in the Balkans, a state that would undoubtedly present a worrying threat to the empire. It was inconceivable, however, that Austria-Hungary would declare war without German support because Russia would undoubtedly join any conflict on the side of Serbia. The Kaiser was quick to let it be known that Germany would uphold the terms of its treaty with its neighbour and, indeed, German military leaders were also eager to go to war. They were convinced that the time was right, especially as they believed their army to be in a much better state of readiness for conflict than those of Russia and France. The Saxon military attaché in Berlin wrote at the time that the German General Staff 'would be pleased if war were to come about now'. Thus, the Austro-Hungarians were given Germany's full support in moving towards war with Serbia.

The Austro-Hungarians sent an ultimatum – the 'July Ultimatum' – to Belgrade consisting of ten demands, a document

that the British First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill (1874–1965), described as ‘the most insolent document of its kind ever devised’. In a letter to his friend Venetia Stanley, British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith (1852–1928) summed up the serious nature of the situation and his perception at the time of his country’s position:

‘...the situation is just about as bad as it can possibly be. Austria has sent a bullying and humiliating ultimatum to Serbia, who cannot possibly comply with it, and demanded an answer within forty-eight hours – failing which she will march. This means, almost inevitably, that Russia will come to the scene in defence of Serbia and in defiance of Austria, and if so, it is difficult for Germany and France to refrain from lending a hand to one side or the other. So that we are in measurable, or imaginable, distance of a real Armageddon. Happily, there seems to be no reason why we should be anything more than spectators.’

The ultimatum contained demands such as the suppression of all publications that ‘incite hatred and contempt of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy’; the removal from the Serbian military and civil administration of officers and functionaries whose names the Austro-Hungarian Government would provide and the presence in Serbia of ‘representatives of the Austro-Hungarian Government’ for the ‘suppression of subversive movements’. The Serbs accepted almost all of the ultimatum’s points, rejecting the one that allowed Austrian police to operate in Serbia. The Austrians were delighted that the Serbs had not accepted all of the demands and began to prepare for war while Britain and France immediately called for a conference to debate the crisis. At 11 am on 28 July 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, shelling Belgrade the following

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day. Kaiser Wilhelm sent a telegram to his cousin the Tsar asking for his support for Austria-Hungary against Serbia. The Tsar replied:

‘I appeal to you to help me. An ignoble war has been declared on a weak country... Soon I shall be overwhelmed by pressure brought upon me... 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.’

It was all to no avail, however. On 30 July, the Russian Empire began a partial mobilisation of its forces, at last giving the German military what it had wanted, an opportunity to declare war. When Germany demanded that Russian preparations for war cease, Nicholas ignored the request. Therefore, on 1 August, Germany ordered a general mobilisation and declared war on Russia. That day, France and Belgium mobilised. On 2 August, Germany contacted the Belgian government demanding free passage for her troops through Belgium, a demand that was rejected by the Belgians the following day. That same day, Germany and France declared war on each other and news filtered through to the British government that German troops were already in Luxembourg.

Britain, although in an alliance of sorts with France and Russia, was not duty-bound to go to war with Germany. In fact, opinion was very much divided across the Channel. Some considered the trouble between Serbia and Austria-Hungary to be a long way away and little to do with Britain, a view made clear by a newspaper that sneered: ‘We care as little for Belgrade (the capital of Serbia) as Belgrade cares for Manchester’. Others held that Britain was honour-bound to support the members of the Triple Entente. It

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was all rendered academic, however, by Germany's invasion of neutral Belgium. In 1839, Britain, Germany and the other European powers had been signatories to the London Treaty guaranteeing Belgium's neutrality. On 4 August, German Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg (1856–1921) admitted to the German Reichstag that, indeed, the German invasions of Luxembourg and Belgium were in violation of international law, but, he argued, Germany was 'in a state of necessity and necessity knows no law'. At seven that evening, the British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Edward Goschen (1847–1924), delivered an ultimatum to Gottlieb von Jagow (1863–1935), the German Foreign Minister, demanding a commitment from the Germans by midnight that they would not further violate Belgian neutrality. When the ultimatum was rejected, Sir Edward demanded a meeting with Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg during which Hollweg expressed surprise that Britain was prepared to go to war over the breach of the treaty guaranteeing Belgian neutrality, a 'scrap of paper' as he described it. This attitude, when it was published, outraged public opinion both in Britain and the United States. At midnight, on the expiry of the ultimatum, Britain declared war on Germany.

The Kaiser is reported to have said, referring to his cousins the Tsar, King George V (*r.* 1910–36) and their grandmother, Queen Victoria:

'To think that George and Nicky should have played me false! If my grandmother had been alive, she would never have allowed it.'

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1914 'Home for Christmas'

*Shall they return to beatings of great bells
In wild trainloads?
A few, a few, too few for drums and yells,
May creep back, silent, to still village wells
Up half-known roads.*

From 'The Send-off', by Wilfred Owen

Mobilisation and Initial Moves

As Europe had hastened towards war, the summer of 1914 had continued as normal. The Kaiser had gone on a sailing holiday in the fjords of Norway; the French President had prepared for a trip to Russia; and King George V had opened a conference on one of the most pressing issues in British politics – home rule for Ireland. Encouraged by governments, however, emotions began to build, leading to demonstrations of patriotic feeling in many of Europe's capitals, including London. British politicians were bullish about the war, declaring that it would be 'over by Christmas', a sentiment seized on by the British people. The German Crown Prince Wilhelm (1882–1951) rejoiced in the prospect of what he described as 'a gay and jolly little war'. Meanwhile, his father, Wilhelm II, famously joked that it would be a case of 'lunch in Paris, dinner in St. Petersburg'. Everywhere, queues formed outside recruitment offices, as men clamoured to become part of what they believed would be a great adventure.

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Plans for war had been set in motion many years before. In 1904, the Kaiser had asked Field Marshal Alfred von Schlieffen (1833–1913), Chief of the Imperial German General Staff, to devise a plan that would allow Germany to fight a war on two fronts, against France and Russia. Von Schlieffen calculated that it would take six weeks for the Russians to fully mobilise and transport her troops to the front because of the distances to be covered, the poor state of Russian railways and the inefficiency of Russian bureaucracy. In that time, he reasoned, Germany could defeat France – the plan allowing 42 days for this – before the Russian army had the opportunity to invade East Prussia. The Schlieffen Plan was entirely dependent on German ability to mobilise quickly and invade France before the French were ready to withstand their attack. The Germans would march through Belgium into northern France, ‘letting the last man on the right brush the Channel with his sleeve’, as von Schlieffen put it. Meanwhile they would maintain a defensive posture on the central and right flanks, in Lorraine, the Vosges and the Moselle. As the army swept down, Paris was not to be taken. Instead, the German troops would pass to the west of the capital, trapping French troops in a pincer movement and isolating the north-east of France. The French, trapped around Paris, would be forced into a decisive battle. Von Schlieffen died in January 1913, his last words reported to have been, ‘Remember: keep the right wing very strong’. He was replaced by Helmuth von Moltke (1848–1916) who modified the plan, pulling large numbers of troops away from the main force and using them to bolster the armies in Alsace-Lorraine, at the Russian border and in the east.

On 4 August, German troops entered Belgium. The Belgian army, although only a tenth of the size of the invaders, stoutly defended its fortresses and cities, managing to delay the Germans

for a month. Belgian forts at Namur, Liège and Antwerp were destroyed by the Germans' 'Big Bertha' artillery – super-heavy howitzers – but the Belgians persevered in their resistance. The Belgian king even ordered the flooding of parts of the country in order to slow the Germans even more. Nonetheless, by 18 August, German troops had taken the vital fortress at Liège, the city that was key to the control of Belgium's railways. Three German armies consisting of three-quarters of a million men in fifty-two divisions entered the Belgian plains while the Belgians took up defensive positions in their fortresses at Antwerp and Namur. The French commander, General Joseph Joffre (1852–1931) was conducting a counter-offensive across the German border, following the French Plan XVII that aimed to drive the Germans back over the Rhine. It was a disaster, however. On 20 August, at Morhange-Sarrebourg, near Strasbourg, French troops, dressed in their old-fashioned red trousers and blue coats, charged uphill into German machine gun fire. They lost 150 guns and 20,000 prisoners were taken. Joffre attacked again on 21 August, in the Ardennes. Having found the German right and left to be strong, he targeted the centre, but German artillery was more effective in the woods than French weaponry.

Meanwhile, the Schlieffen Plan proceeded. German troops marched for hours through the Belgian capital, Brussels, stories of atrocities – shot civilians and burned villages – following in their wake. On 23 August at Dinant, close to the French border, the Commander of the German Third Army, Max von Hausen (1846–1922), ordered the shooting of 600 men, women and children in the town square. The intention was to crush the spirit of the Belgian people, but such incidents served only to rouse the ire of the watching world and sully the name of Germany.

The Battle of Mons and the Battle of the Marne

Plans had been in place for the creation of a British Expeditionary Force since the Second Boer War (1899–1902) and, according to the Entente Cordiale, the British Army's role in a European war was to send soldiers of an Expeditionary Force consisting of six infantry divisions and five cavalry brigades. The force was under the command of Field Marshal Sir John French (1852–1925) who had distinguished himself commanding the Cavalry Division during the Second Boer War. Unlike the European conscript armies, the BEF consisted of 70,000 regular soldiers and reservists. Although described disparagingly by the German Kaiser as 'a contemptible little army', they were, in fact, a highly trained professional force that made good use of its principal weapon, the Lee-Enfield rifle.

The British troops' first contact with the enemy came at Mons, a Belgian coal-mining town close to the French border. The British gallantly held the line of the Mons-Condé Canal for forty-eight hours against the larger German First Army. Initially, the British were victorious but eventually had to retreat because of the Germans' numerical superiority and also because of the French Fifth Army's retreat that exposed the British right flank to German attack. The battle gave birth to the legend of the 'Angels of Mons', visions of a supernatural force – angels or bowmen – seen in the sky alongside St George, who, some British soldiers claimed, intervened at the decisive moment of the battle. The rumour of spiritual intervention, however, derived from a fictional story written by Arthur Machen (1863–1947).

The Germans recognised that at Mons they had been dealt a stinging blow by the British, as described by German novelist and infantry captain Walter Bloem (1868–1951) in his book *Vormarsch*:

'... the men all chilled to the bone, almost too exhausted to move and with the depressing consciousness of defeat weighing heavily upon them. A bad defeat, there can be no gainsaying it... we had been badly beaten, and by the English – by the English we had so laughed at a few hours before.'

The retreat lasted for more than 250 miles, the British and the French closely followed by the Germans and fighting rearguard actions all the way. At Le Cateau, the British forces stopped and fought in a battle in which heavy losses were inflicted on both sides. Sir John French later relieved the commanding officer, Major-General Horace Smith-Dorrien (1858–1930), of his command for the decision to stand and fight. The German pursuit continued as the BEF strove to delay them long enough to allow the French to re-group and move reserves to the front. Soon, only the River Marne stood between the Germans and Paris.

The Germans' rapid advance had brought problems. As would happen so often in advances by all sides during this war, their lines of communication were now severely stretched, making it difficult to supply their troops at the front. Other difficulties were emerging. In the east, the Russians had mobilised much faster than allowed for in the Schlieffen Plan and were already gaining ground in East Prussia. Troops had to be withdrawn from the Western Front, therefore, and hurried eastwards. Further critical changes were made to the original Schlieffen Plan when General Alexander von Kluck (1846–1934), commander of the German First Army, decided that instead of continuing on past Paris to the west and encircling it, as the plan demanded, he would order his men to wheel in a south-easterly direction in pursuit of the retreating French. It was a major miscalculation, depriving the Germans of the chance to encircle Paris and exposing the right flank of von Kluck's

force which was attacked by the French Sixth Army under General Michel-Joseph Maunoury (1847–1923). Meanwhile, in Paris, reservists were assembled and conveyed to the front in taxis. For two weeks a battle raged along a 155-mile front, fought between more than a million troops on the Allied side and almost a million and a half on the German side. Eventually, the Germans were forced to retreat to a new defensive line along the River Aisne to the north-east. It was an immense strategic victory for the Allies, ending what had been a relentless month-long offensive by their enemy. The cost was 220,000 German and 263,000 Allied casualties, of whom 81,700 were fatally wounded. During the remainder of the war, no battle on the Western Front would average as many casualties per day as the Battle of the Marne.

The failure of the Schlieffen Plan ended the careers of several German generals, most notably Helmuth von Moltke. On 25 October, Erich von Falkenhayn (1861–1922) succeeded him as Chief of the German General Staff.

The ‘Race to the Sea’ and the First Battle of Ypres

The flat, coastal region of Flanders was the next target for the German army and they and the Allies now became engaged in what has become known as the ‘Race to the Sea’, each side trying to outflank the other and reach the coast. There were a number of battles – the First Battle of the Aisne (13–28 September); the First Battle of Picardy (22–26 September); the Battle of Albert (25–29 September); the First Battle of Artois (27 September–10 October); the Battle of La Bassée (10 October–2 November); the Battle of Messines (12 October–2 November); the Battle of Armentières (13 October–2 November); and the Battle of the Yser (18 October–30 November).

The French Tenth Army began to advance eastwards from

Amiens from 25 September. Meanwhile, the German Sixth Army reached Bapaume a day later and advanced to Thiepval on 27 September, attempting to drive westward to the English Channel and seize control of the vital ports of Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne. In doing so, they would capture the industrial and agricultural regions of northern France and at the same time cut off the BEF from its vital supply route. Belgium would also be isolated. But during the first six days of October, the German advance was halted by a French force commanded by General Ferdinand Foch (1851–1929) while German cavalry trying to reach the coast through Flanders were also brought to a standstill near Lille. All was now dependent on the BEF holding the coastal strip around the River Yser and the city of Ypres inland from there.

The First Battle of Ypres was the last major battle on the Western Front in 1914. Ypres was of immense strategic importance, both to the Germans and the Allies. For the Allies, it stood in the way of a German advance on the seaports that provided the shortest logistical supply route to Allied forces on the Western Front. It was of strategic importance to the Germans because a collapse of their Ypres front would provide the Allies with access to the flat and easily traversable terrain of Flanders. The Germans would have found it difficult to protect the huge and vital Ghent-Roeselare rail network axis that gave them operational mobility in Belgium as well as in northern France. The German-held ports of Ghent and Ostend would also then be open to capture by the Allies.

Falkenhayn had realised, of course, that the failure of the Schlieffen Plan meant that the war was going to extend beyond Christmas. Britain still reigned supreme on the high seas, given the Kaiser's reluctance to send his ships out into a full-scale engagement with the Royal Navy. Nonetheless, he still wanted to

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damage British and French military prospects in what remained of 1914. Using both veterans and eager young recruits, he mounted a huge offensive, supported by the powerful artillery that had destroyed the Belgian fortresses. The BEF, heavily outnumbered in both men and equipment, incurred huge losses and was pushed back to the town of Ypres and the 'Ypres Salient'. A salient is, of course, a very dangerous position to defend, surrounded as it is by the enemy on three sides and rendering troops within it extremely vulnerable. Withdrawal was unthinkable, however, as it would send the wrong message to a public at home eagerly awaiting good news. Each side missed opportunities for a decisive victory, the Germans, overestimating the numbers they faced, having abandoned their offensive prematurely. The attack fell mainly on the BEF which fought from a series of inadequate, shallow and waterlogged trenches. They had been nicknamed 'The Old Contemptibles' after the Kaiser's remark about them being 'Britain's contemptible little army' and now suffered heavy casualties as they were driven back towards Ypres. The BEF was decimated and would now have to be replaced by a mass conscripted army along the lines of the armies of Europe. The huge loss of life amongst Falkenhayn's poorly trained student and youth volunteers was too great a burden to bear and the Channel ports remained in Allied hands. The Germans lost 19,530 killed, 83,520 wounded and 31,265 missing; the Belgians lost a third of what remained of their army with 21,562 casualties; the French incurred around 50,000 to 80,000 casualties of all sorts and the BEF lost 7,960 dead, 29,562 wounded and 17,873 missing.

The First Battle of Ypres completed the entrenchments of the 'race to the sea' and marked the beginning of the static western front that would remain in place until 1918.

Trench Warfare

The construction of trenches now began in earnest on each side, resulting in vast areas of interlocking defensive networks that stretched along the 497 miles from the English Channel to the Swiss border. Trenches were not new to warfare. They had been used in the early eighteenth century in the War of the Spanish Succession, during the Peninsular War in 1810 and in other conflicts including the American Civil War. Never, however, had they played such an important role as now and they were employed in Italy and Gallipoli as well as on the Western Front. They have taken on a symbolic quality, forever associated in the collective consciousness with the futility of war and the waste of human life on a grand scale.

Trenches were about 12 feet deep and cut in a zigzag pattern so that troops could find protection from fire from their flanks and in order to stop the spread of a blast along the length of a trench if a shell landed in it. Barbed wire was stretched in front of the line, wiring parties venturing out every night to maintain it and improve its effectiveness. Front-line troops lived in 'dug-outs', rooms used for dormitories and stores dug into the trench-wall facing the enemy while zigzagging trenches ran back to safer areas in which hospitals and stores of supplies were located. Through time, the networks of trenches became increasingly sophisticated. There would be several lines of them running parallel to each other that could be used in the event of retreat. The sides of trenches were packed with sandbags, wooden frames and wire mesh, while duck-boards were put down to provide secure footing as the trenches became extremely muddy and treacherous underfoot when it rained. There were worse things than mud, of course. Rats fed on the dead bodies that lay in the trenches and soldiers often became

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infested with lice. The space between opposing trenches, known as 'no man's land', varied in width but was typically anything between 100 yards and 300 yards although in the cramped area known as Quinn's Post at Gallipoli opposing trenches were a mere 16 feet apart, leading to the constant tossing of hand grenades. 'Saps' were temporary, unmanned dead-end trenches that were dug out into no man's land, used for listening to the enemy's activities or for mounting surprise attacks.

In reality, a soldier did not spend much time in a front-line trench – from a day to two weeks – before being relieved. It has been estimated that a typical British 'Tommy' would spend 15 per cent of his time on the front line; 10 per cent in the support line; 30 per cent in the reserve line; 20 per cent resting; and 25 per cent on leave, training, in hospital or travelling. A British battalion could be expected to engage in action perhaps a handful of times a year and, indeed, some sectors of the front line saw comparatively little activity at all during the war. Meanwhile, other sectors saw almost continuous fighting, most notably Ypres and the exposed, overlooked salient. Even in quiet sectors there were dangers, however, from snipers, gas attacks, artillery rounds and disease. For example, in the first six months of 1916, the British army was not engaged in any significant actions, but still suffered more than 100,000 casualties. It has been estimated that just 50 per cent of men returned alive and uninjured from the trenches.

The British developed a system of three parallel lines of trenches connected by communications trenches, the front one usually only heavily occupied at dawn or dusk. The support or 'travel' trench was between 70 and 100 yards behind the front trench and it was to that one that troops retreated when the front trench was under bombardment. Between 100 and 300 yards further back was the third reserve trench where troops could

assemble prior to a counter-attack in the event that the front trenches were captured. About a mile back there were likely to be more lines of trenches to be occupied in the event of a retreat from the original line. But, as the war progressed and the efficacy of artillery improved, this set-up became obsolete.

The Germans had learned much from the trenches of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, using reinforced concrete to construct deep, shell-proof dug-outs that were ventilated. They were the first to employ the concept of 'defence in depth' in which they would create a front-line zone hundreds of yards deep made up not of a continuous line of trenches but of a series of redoubts from which enfilading fire could cover their neighbouring redoubts. The British would eventually adopt this approach, too.

As 1914 drew to a close, with the opposing armies deep in their trenches, the Western Front was locked in deadly stalemate.

The Eastern Front: the Battle of Tannenberg and the Battle of the Masurian Lakes

Following their crossing of the Danube at the beginning of the war, the Austro-Hungarian forces occupied Belgrade but the offensive was soon in trouble. A Serbian counter-attack liberated the city and drove the Hapsburg troops back across the Danube. It was no better on the Carpathian front where Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, Count Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf (1852–1925), sent his soldiers forward without ordering fire support or ensuring that his armies maintained a continuous front. Outnumbered by the Russians, they suffered heavy casualties and were soon forced to retreat. In the first weeks of the war the Hapsburg army suffered a third of a million casualties and had a further 100,000 men taken prisoner. Most critical, however, was

the loss of a considerable number of junior officers and NCOs who were vital in the complex business of leading what was a multi-ethnic army. These officers had become familiar with the various languages their men spoke and had managed to maintain morale and comradeship. Their replacements were middle-class Austro-Hungarians who viewed the troops they commanded as inferior.

At the outbreak of war, in an effort to bolster his popular support, Tsar Nicholas changed the German-sounding name of St Petersburg to the more Russian Petrograd. Meanwhile, the Tsarina, German by birth, threw herself into hospital work. Nicholas had wanted to assume command of the Russian army personally, but he was persuaded instead to appoint his cousin, the Grand Duke Nicholas Nicholayevich (1856–1929) as commander. Having never previously led an army, he was now put in charge of the largest army ever to take the field. The force under his command faced the Austro-Hungarians and Germans along a front that ran from the Baltic Sea, across East Prussia and Poland – at that time a province of Russia – to Galicia in Austria-Hungary. Endeavouring to gain a swift victory in the west, the Germans did not anticipate much involvement in the east to begin with, relying on the Austro-Hungarians to hold the line against the Russians. As we have seen, however, the speed of the Russian mobilisation and the failure of the Schlieffen Plan soon disabused them of this notion.

In terms of numbers, of course, Russia, with its inexhaustible supply of manpower, had a distinct advantage. Its regular army consisted of 1.4 million troops, with mobilisation adding a further 3.1 million to this number. Although they had the numbers, however, they were ill-equipped and lacked modern weaponry. Against the Austro-Hungarians this did not really hinder them but against the Germans it was a different matter entirely.

1914: 'HOME FOR CHRISTMAS'

At the start of the war, the French appealed to the Russians to launch an offensive in the east that might relieve some of the pressure in the west where the German assault on Belgium and northern France was in full swing. Under Generals Paul von Rennenkampf (1854–1918) – Russian despite the German name – and Alexander Samsonov (1859–1914), the Russian troops enjoyed unexpected early success. This had the desired effect from the French point of view, in that units were moved east from the Western Front to provide support. However, the early successes on the southern front were not matched in the north, in East Prussia. Here the Russians faced the far superior German military command with better-prepared troops and modern weaponry at its disposal. Furthermore, Germany's better transport system allowed their troops to be more mobile.

Russia's difficulties were exacerbated by the appointment of two new German commanders, Generals Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934) and Erich Ludendorff (1865–1937), who, it was hoped, would bring better strategic leadership in the east. Hindenburg, who would go on to become President of Germany from 1925 until 1934, was the son of a Prussian aristocrat, with a distinguished lineage whose military heritage could be traced back to the thirteenth century. He had retired from the army in 1911, but was recalled in 1914 at the age of 67. The ambitious Ludendorff was from a far humbler background and was almost twenty years younger than Hindenburg. During the course of the next few years, these two would become the real power in Germany in both military and political matters.

Towards the end of August, the Russian First and Second Armies advanced into East Prussia, but the two armies operated independently, one based south of the Masurian Lakes, the other north of them, a far from ideal operational situation. To make

matters worse, the Russians broadcast their movements in un-encoded radio messages, providing the enemy listening in with the exact locations of their armies and their plans. The Germans engaged each force separately from the other. At Tannenberg, near Allenstein (now Olsztyn), on 26 August, they cut off the Russian Second Army from supplies and reinforcements. The battle lasted until 30 August by which time the Russian Second Army had been destroyed. Russian prisoners numbered 92,000, while 78,000 were killed or wounded and 350 guns were seized. A mere 10,000 escaped to fight another day. The Germans suffered fewer than 20,000 casualties. Samsonov, the Russian commander, unable to stand the shame, shot himself in the head. The following month, the Germans were again victorious against Rennenkampf's First Army at the Battle of the Masurian Lakes, the Russians this time suffering around 120,000 casualties. The German Eighth Army had won one of the most astonishing victories in military history, destroying the Russian Second Army, giving a severe mauling to the First Army and expelling Russian troops from German soil. These actions, especially Tannenberg, represented a tremendous shot in the arm for German pride. They also established the reputations of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. A lull ensued on the Russo-German front. Nonetheless, there was a price to be paid because the reinforcements that had been dispatched from the Western Front would be sorely missed in the imminent Battle of the Marne.

The War at Sea

As already noted, the struggle for naval supremacy had begun long before the start of the war, but despite the intensive German shipbuilding programme, Britain still ruled the waves. At the start of the war, Britain had 20 dreadnought-type battleships against

Germany's 13; 8 battlecruisers against Germany's 5; 102 cruisers versus Germany's 41; 301 destroyers against Germany's 144; and 78 submarines against Germany's 30. The British Grand Fleet was based at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands although other naval bases such as Chatham, Portsmouth, Plymouth and Rosyth were also used. The German High Seas Fleet was distributed amongst the ports of Bremen, Emden, Wilhelmshaven, Kiel and Cuxhaven. There were also vessels of both sides patrolling the oceans of the world. During the war, however, there was little contact between the opposing navies. One reason was the importance of the Royal Navy to the British war effort. In fact, Winston Churchill famously described British naval Commander-in-Chief, Admiral John Jellicoe (1859–1935), as 'the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon'.

The first real naval action of the war occurred in August 1914 at Heligoland Bight off the German coast where the British planned to intercept German destroyers on their daily patrols. A force of thirty-one destroyers and two cruisers, commanded by Commodore Reginald Tyrwhitt (1870–1951) and submarines under the command of Commodore Roger Keyes (1872–1945) was dispatched to confront the enemy vessels, supported by six light cruisers and five battlecruisers. The action proved highly successful for the British. Three German light cruisers and a destroyer were sunk while another three light cruisers were damaged. The German losses were 712 killed, 530 injured and 336 taken prisoner. The British suffered some damage to 4 vessels, 35 dead and 40 wounded. The victorious British ships were welcomed home by cheering crowds but the battle resulted in the decision by the German government and, in particular, the Kaiser, to restrict further engagement with the enemy by ordering the German fleet to remain in port. This enabled Britain

to maintain a blockade of German ports, restricting access to trade and imports of vital supplies. The only actions that the German navy was allowed to mount were hit-and-run raids on ports on the British east coast, such as the bombardment of Yarmouth and Lowestoft. In Lowestoft, 200 houses and 2 gun batteries were destroyed, 3 people were killed and 12 were injured. The objective of such engagements was to lure British ships out of port where they would find themselves in conditions better suited to the Germans.

The next major naval engagement was fought at Dogger Bank in the North Sea on 24 January 1914. The Royal Navy was already at an advantage, having been passed German codebooks obtained by the Russians. This enabled them to intercept coded messages detailing the whereabouts of a German raiding squadron. The British ships found it exactly where it was supposed to be, at Dogger Bank, but the smaller and slower German force made a run for it, the British in hot pursuit. Engaging them with long-range gunfire, the British succeeded in sinking the German cruiser, the *Blücher*, with the loss of 954 lives. The remainder of the German squadron made it safely back to harbour.

Naval action was not limited to the North Sea, however. British merchant shipping was at the mercy of German surface raiders across the world's oceans. Vessels such as the SMS *Emden*, the SMS *Dresden* and the SMS *Karlsruhe* not only sank Allied ships, they also mounted raids on shore installations and bases. German Vice-Admiral Maximilian von Spee (1861–1914) commanded a naval squadron that had been based at Tsingtao within the German concession on the coast of China, but was forced to put to sea when the base was overrun by Japanese forces in 1914. After that, he led his ships on raids on Allied shipping and bases across the Pacific. On 1 November 1914, his ships sank two British armoured

cruisers – HMS *Good Hope* and HMS *Monmouth* – under Rear-Admiral Sir Christopher Craddock (1862–1914) off the Chilean coast in the Battle of Coronel. The British lost 1,570 men, the Germans just 3. It was the Royal Navy's first defeat since the Battle of Lake Champlain in the War of 1812 and there was an immediate call for revenge back in London. A large naval force, assembled under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee (1859–1925), won a major victory against von Spee's squadron in the Battle of the Falkland Islands, only one German vessel managing to escape. Von Spee and his two sons drowned in the battle along with 2,000 other German sailors. Meanwhile, the German raider, the SMS *Königsberg*, operating in the Indian Ocean and attacking British shipping making for the Suez Canal, was cornered and forced to scuttle in the mouth of the River Rufiji in German East Africa. She had sunk HMS *City of Winchester*, consigning to the ocean floor most of Ceylon's 1914 tea crop, and had also delayed the first ships carrying Australian and New Zealand troops to the battlefields of Europe.

The most famous of the German raiders was the remarkable light cruiser, *Emden*. She was captained by the impressive Karl von Müller (1873–1923) who was given free rein by German command to raid independently in the Indian Ocean. In two months, *Emden*, cleverly disguised with a dummy funnel to resemble a British warship, sank nearly two dozen ships. She also bombarded Madras, destroying 50,000 tonnes of petroleum and at Penang sank a Russian cruiser and a French destroyer. She was eventually sunk in the Cook Islands by the more powerful Australian cruiser, HMAS *Sydney*. Von Müller surrendered but some of his crew, led by First Lieutenant Hellmuth von Mücke (1881–1957), managed to escape and in one of the greatest adventures of the war journeyed to the Dutch East Indies and

Yemen before travelling to Constantinople and finally making it back to Germany.

A World War

The British declaration of war on Germany and its allies also committed her colonies and dominions to war and more than 2.5 million men would fight in the armies of the dominions as well as many thousands of volunteers from the Crown colonies. On 6 August 1914, therefore, two days after declaring war on Germany, Britain sent telegrams to the governments of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa requesting that they seize all nearby German colonies. A telegram was also sent to British ally Japan asking her to attack all German merchant shipping. Australia and New Zealand immediately set about the capture of all German garrisons in the vicinity. New Zealand took Samoa, while Australian troops captured German New Guinea, Papua and the islands that formed the Bismarck Archipelago, bringing an end to the German Empire in the southern Pacific for the loss of six Australians and no New Zealanders.

In the north Pacific on 12 August, the British China Squadron attacked and destroyed a German radio station on the island of Yap. Meanwhile, Japan, with her own expansionist ambitions in the Pacific, declared war on Germany on 23 August and began to seize all the remaining German possessions in the northern Pacific, including the Marshall, Caroline and Marianas Islands. Japan next struck the strategically important but heavily fortified German naval base at Tsingtao (modern-day Qingdao) on the coast of the Chinese mainland. Japanese ships imposed a blockade and assembled an invading force of 50,000 men that included one and a half battalions of British troops. Tsingtao fell on 7 November,

Japan suffering 6,000 casualties, the Germans 600. This brought the German Empire in the Pacific to an end.

Like every other major power, Germany had taken part in the 'Scramble for Africa' in the nineteenth century. Her colonies, all of which shared borders with British and French colonies, included Togo, the Cameroons, German South-West Africa (now Namibia) and German East Africa (now Tanzania). The British colony of South Africa had a large Afrikaner population, many of whom sympathised with Germany rather than Britain. They rebelled when Britain appealed to South Africa for help at the outbreak of war, but their revolt was quashed by armies led by the prominent South African statesmen, Louis Botha (1862–1919) and Jan Smuts (1870–1950), who then set about capturing the nearby colony of German South-West Africa. The retreating and heavily outnumbered German garrison quickly surrendered, the territory finally falling to the South Africans on 9 July 1915 for the loss of only 500 men.

For the Allies the war in West Africa started well. Togoland fell in just three weeks but Cameroon proved more difficult. The German garrison there, supplemented by indigenous troops, was well equipped and well disciplined. They had machine guns and light artillery and were able to operate in mountainous jungle country. Most importantly, however, they had a superb commander, Colonel Carl Zimmerman. Fighting a series of running battles, Zimmerman was never defeated, eluding his pursuers until February 1916 when he led his troops into neutral Spanish territory.

Meanwhile, in German South-East Africa, the British faced another German commander of genius, Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck (1870–1964). Invading from Kenya, the British were twice defeated in battle by his troops. Eventually, he abandoned

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conventional warfare and adopted guerrilla tactics, the ensuing campaign being described by one commentator as ‘the greatest single guerrilla operation in history, and the most successful’. His extraordinarily mobile force made good use of indigenous troops with local knowledge and he made life very difficult for Allied commanders, including Jan Smuts who had himself spearheaded a very successful guerrilla campaign during the Second Boer War. Lettow-Vorbeck would lead the Allies a merry dance until 1918 when he was driven from South-East Africa by sheer weight of numbers. He simply invaded Mozambique and then re-entered South-East Africa from where he launched an invasion of Northern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). When the war ended in 1918, he was the last German commander to surrender to the British.

The Home Front

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1914 was Herbert Henry Asquith, leading a Liberal government that had been in power since 1905, with Asquith as Prime Minister since 1908. The main political issue of the day was the situation in Ireland but there was also industrial unrest and the increasingly violent acts of the suffragettes to be dealt with. These issues were consigned to the shadows by the approach of war. There was a fear of invasion about which the Committee of Imperial Defence – the government body charged with organising Britain’s defence and military preparations – had written numerous papers since its establishment in 1904. As the atmosphere in the country grew tense and antipathy towards Germans intensified, the government introduced the Defence of the Realm Act 1914 (DORA) that substantially increased the power of the state to control and act against what were described as ‘unpatriotic’ forces. ‘No person shall by word of mouth or in

writing spread reports likely to cause disaffection or alarm among any of His Majesty's forces or among the civilian population' read one section and, indeed, a number of anti-war activists such as Willie Gallacher (1881–1965), John William Muir (1879–1931), Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), John Maclean (1879–1923) and James Maxton (1885–1946) were amongst those imprisoned under the act. Germans and Austrians residing in Britain were categorised as 'enemy aliens' and were interned, deported or had restrictions placed upon them visiting particular parts of the country. Censorship of the post and the press was introduced; the press could not report troop movements, numbers or operational activity of any kind that would be useful to the enemy. The penalty for breaching these regulations with the intention of helping the enemy was death and ten people were executed for such infractions.

Many seemingly innocent activities became prohibited, including kite-flying, feeding bread to wild animals, starting bonfires, discussing naval and military matters and the purchase and consumption of alcohol was restricted. Indeed, alcoholic drinks began to be watered down and the opening times of pubs were restricted for the first time, to between noon and 3pm and from 6.30 to 9.30pm.

In Germany, meanwhile, it has often been said that the outbreak of war was greeted with euphoria, but the reality was almost certainly more complex than that. Certainly there was pride that all the parties in the Reichstag – Germany's parliament – including the Social Democrats who had until then been anti-militaristic, unanimously voted for war. It was hoped that Germany's decades of internal political strife were now at an end. When the German army recorded a string of victories in the early days of the war, the feeling of what could be achieved by a unified Germany was reinforced. The feeling of the time has been described as the 'Spirit

of 1914' and is demonstrated by the estimated one million war poems that were sent to Germany's national newspapers during August. Meanwhile, countless leaflets and newspaper editorials hailed the political unity that war had engendered. However, there was also considerable apprehension about the conflict, especially as families watched their sons and husbands march off to war but it was subsumed by the hope that political unity was a reality and by the desire not to undermine the support of the troops heading for the front. On the other hand, while the German army may have been prepared for war, the German economy was not and this would be a recurring feature of the German war effort. The British blockade of German ports was devastating as Germany imported a substantial part of its food and raw materials by sea.

The War in the Air

Man had taken to the air in balloons as early as 1783 when the Montgolfier brothers had carried out their first experiments and Étienne Montgolfier (1745–1799) had undertaken the first manned ascent. Since then, many had tried to devise a means of controlling the speed and direction of balloons and render them capable of being much more than a sideshow attraction. In 1894, the German Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin patented a design for a cigar-shaped airship consisting of flexibly articulated rigid sections, the front section carrying the crew and the craft's engines. In 1900, he began using a petrol engine to drive the airship. A fleet of Zeppelins, as they were called, was soon providing the first passenger air service. Then, in 1903, the Wright Brothers made the first flight in a heavier-than-air machine, and six years later the Frenchman Louis Blériot (1872–1936) made the first powered flight across the English Channel. Soon after, aircraft

of all sorts – monoplanes, biplanes and triplanes – were rolling out of factories in Europe, America and Britain and, of course, their possibilities for use in war were being analysed by military minds anticipating a European war in the next few years.

Tethered observation balloons had been used in the French Revolutionary Wars, in the American Civil War and during the Franco-Prussian War. They came into their own, however, in the First World War. The British were initially behind in their technology, using spherical balloons but they quickly replaced these with balloons of French and Italian design that could be flown and could operate in bad weather. These balloons allowed the artillery on the ground to be targeted more accurately, a balloon-borne observer able to see more than one based on the ground. They were strategically vital and were heavily protected by anti-aircraft guns and eventually by fighter aircraft. Their crews were the first to utilise the parachute, albeit in a primitive form. Germany, meanwhile, used Zeppelin airships for reconnaissance over the North Sea and for bombing raids such as those at Great Yarmouth and London in 1915. By 1916, Zeppelins were around 660 feet in length, could carry loads of three to four tons of bombs and could fly at speeds between 61 and 82 miles per hour. They were developed to fly higher, at altitudes up to 24,900 feet, and further. LZ104, for instance, flew from Yambol in Bulgaria to German East Africa (modern-day Tanzania) to supply German troops there, a distance of 4,199 miles that it covered in 95 hours.

At the outbreak of hostilities, there was considerable debate about the use of aircraft in war. It was soon realised, however, that they could be effective in a reconnaissance role. In one particular instance, on 22 August 1914, the crew of a British reconnaissance plane was able to report to British High Command that the German General Alexander von Kluck's army was making

preparations to surround the British Expeditionary Force. Although this report contradicted all other intelligence, the commanders took their report seriously and were able to order a withdrawal towards Mons, probably saving the lives of around 100,000 soldiers. Again in 1914, French planes warned of the change in direction made by the German army that allowed the Allied counter-attack on the Marne.

To begin with, however, the number of aircraft available was small. The Germans, relying mainly on Zeppelins, had about 230 serviceable aircraft, the French had 138 while the British had about 63, mostly two-seaters that could attain a speed of 62 miles per hour and reach an altitude of just over 3,000 feet. The British planes were flown by members of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) – the air battalion of the Royal Engineers – and the Royal Naval Air Service. Pilots were generally members of the upper class who regarded flying as a hobby and the planes were manufactured at the Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough or by the private companies Sopwith Aviation or de Havilland.

Even while observing, or photographing the enemy lines, aircraft crew were armed with rifles and revolvers and they often came under intense fire from the ground. In the first few months of 1915, however, planes were increasingly used in an offensive role, strafing enemy trenches with machine guns and dropping bombs on roads, railway lines and ammunition stores. Their comrades on the ground did not always welcome them as their activities often stirred up enemy activity. There was also resentment that aircrews could return to base far behind the lines and spend their evenings relaxing far from danger. Soldiers were also suspicious about the astonishing camaraderie that existed between pilots of both sides. Before long, however, this camaraderie was tested when skirmishing and dogfights became

the norm in the skies of the Western Front. Planes would fly in a V-formation until contact was made with enemy planes, at which point they would break up and fight individually. Manoeuvrability and speed were essential in the aircraft and tactics such as attacking with the sun behind were employed. Pilots showed extraordinary skill and courage. The British did not even have parachutes, considering them to be 'un-British'. The Germans did have them and their survival rate was considerably higher than that of the British, particularly as they rarely flew beyond their own front line. In fact, at one point in the war, the life expectancy of a British pilot was little more than a couple of weeks and, by 1917, 50 British planes were being lost every week. The Lewis gun was soon adapted to fit British aircraft, being fixed to the side. There was the constant danger of a propeller being shot off by a plane's own bullets until the Dutchman, Anthony Fokker, invented an interruptible gear for the Germans. It prevented the machine gun from firing when the blade of a propeller passed in front of it.

At the start of the war, Allied aircraft such as the British DH.2 and the French SPAD were fairly successful, but the 1915 introduction by the Germans of the Fokker Eindecker with Fokker's interruptive gear swung the advantage to them. The development in 1916 of the French Nieuport XVII and the British two-seater biplane the Airco DH.4, designed by Geoffrey de Havilland, meant that Allied aircrews were no longer mere 'Fokker Fodder'. The pendulum swung back to the Germans towards the end of 1916 with the arrival of a new machine from the Albatros-Flugzeugwerke. This became completely dominant in the air in the coming months, especially during 'Bloody April' when the RFC and the French Air Service incurred heavy casualties during the Battle of Arras. Morale amongst airmen and ground crews hit a low ebb. All changed again when the Sopwith Camel – so called

because of the hump in its fuselage – was introduced. By the war's end, it had accounted for 1,294 enemy aircraft.

This new type of warfare produced its own heroes and 'aces', an ace being dependent on the number of enemy planes a pilot had shot down, each kill recorded on his aircraft's fuselage. Amongst the most famous were the German Manfred von Richthofen (1892–1918) – known as the 'Red Baron' – the Frenchman Georges Guynemer (1894–1917) and the British pilot Albert Ball (1896–1917). All three men were killed in action.

The First World War made it evident that aircraft were now a vital part of any fighting force and their tactical use had the power to influence the result of battles being fought on the ground. The British recognised this in 1918, when the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service were amalgamated to form the Royal Air Force, a separate branch of the armed forces.

Spies

The fevered atmosphere of pre-war Europe created a climate in which novels such as *The Riddle of the Sands* by writers such as Erskine Childers (1870–1922) and *A Secret Service* by William Le Queux (1864–1927) became hugely popular. They led to rumours of networks of German spies and a great deal of hysteria. The truth was that at that time there were no German spies operating in Britain. The outbreak of war changed that.

In 1909, the Secret Intelligence Bureau (SIB) was created in response to public concern about German spies operating in England. Major (later Colonel) Sir Vernon Kell (1873–1942), an expert in interrogation techniques, was appointed director of the newly created agency but in 1911, the various security services were reorganised, Kell's section becoming the Home Section. A

new Foreign Section was introduced, known as the Secret Service Bureau and headed by Sir Mansfield Smith-Cumming (1859–1923). Smith-Cumming became known as 'C' over the next few years due to his habit of initialling papers he had read. It was a designation that was applied to all future directors. In charge of Naval Intelligence was master code-breaker Admiral Sir Reginald 'Blinker' Hall (1870–1943). With Sir Alfred Ewing (1855–1935), he established the Royal Navy's codebreaking operation, Room 40, which in 1917 would decode the Zimmermann telegram that contributed to America's entry into the war. His work made Naval Intelligence the pre-eminent British intelligence agency during the war. Meanwhile, Special Branch was headed by Sir Basil Thomson (1861–1939), a former prison governor and colonial administrator. The staunchly conservative Thomson was said by some to be more interested in the activities of subversives and agitators in Britain than he was in German spies.

Germany's spying operation in Britain was headed by Gustav Steinhauer (1870–1930) who had recruited his network before the war by writing to German businessmen living in the United Kingdom and inviting them to work for him. Other German spies entered Britain via the United States or other neutral countries using stolen or forged passports. They visited sensitive sites such as ports, shipyards and areas where military training was taking place, communicating with their operators by means of letters written in code with invisible ink. Between 1914 and 1917, only 31 German spies were arrested on British soil, 19 of whom were sentenced to death while the remainder were imprisoned. The first German spy to be executed in Britain demonstrates just how amateurish their attempts were. Carl Hans Lody (1877–1914) was executed in November 1914, having left a trail of clues behind him as he carried out his espionage. Most of the information he

supplied to his masters was useless. One report claims that he informed his bosses that Russian troops had arrived in Scotland but he had in fact been speaking to some Scottish soldiers with strong accents and they had told him they were from 'Rosshire'.

Meanwhile, homing pigeons were killed in order to prevent them being used to carry messages to the enemy. There were also thousands of reports of 'night-signalling', spies signalling to Zeppelins or submarines to guide them to their targets. Hysterical accounts were given of enemy agents infecting cavalry horses with anthrax, starting fires at ports and even pretending to be circus performers or commercial travellers so that they could move around the country gathering intelligence. Eventually, in May 1915, the Asquith government decided to intern all 'enemy aliens' living in Britain for the duration of the war.