

# WORLD WAR 1

World War I, otherwise known as the Great War, lasted for over four years. It involved all the world's great powers, which were assembled in two opposing alliances; the Allies, centred on the Triple Entente of Great Britain, France and the Russian Empire, and the Central Powers, originally based on the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy.

There were many causes. The early 20<sup>th</sup> Century was characterised by intense nationalism, with states stressing their strength and importance. There was robust British and German competition to have the most powerful navy in the world (Photograph 1<sup>1</sup>).

In addition, major European nations competed to gain new colonies in Africa. The French distrusted Germany after the 1870-1871 Franco-German war, and the Balkans region of Europe was claimed by both Russia and Austria. These difficulties were compounded by the personal ambition of Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm to dominate his European royal peers.

Furthermore, there was resentment amongst many people whose countries were bound up in the major empires. On 28 June 1914, nationalists in Austro-Hungarian occupied Serbia



<sup>1</sup> HMS Dreadnought (British Battleship, 1906) underway. Wikimedia Commons.

assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne, in Sarajevo. This was the spark that caused war to be declared.

The conflict opened on 28 July 1914, with an Austro-Hungarian invasion of Serbia. This was followed by a German invasion of Belgium, Luxembourg and France. The Germans and Austro-Hungarians also invaded the Russian Empire.

The German advance on Paris was brought to a halt and the armies dug in. The opposing lines then changed little until 1918, despite increasingly complex and innovative attempts by both sides to take the initiative and advance (Photograph 2<sup>2</sup>).



The Russians successfully defended against the Austro-Hungarian attack but the German Army forced it back. Additional fronts in Europe and Asia, opened after the Ottoman Empire, controlled by Turkey, joined the war in 1914, Italy and Bulgaria in 1915 and Rumania in 1916. In 1917, the Russian Empire collapsed and, with the advent of the October Revolution, Russia left the war.

1918 saw the United States enter the fray, which tipped the balance in the Allies' favour. The Germans launched a massive Spring Offensive on the Western Front to seize the initiative, but this attack was ultimately unsuccessful. It was followed by an Allied advance, which broke the German defensive line. Consequently, Germany agreed to a cease-fire on 11 November 1918, now known as Armistice Day.

The war demolished four defeated empires: German; Russian; Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman, and several smaller states emerged, spreading democracy. Social traditions, such as the rights of workers and women, started to alter, technology changed and the United States found itself drawn into European affairs; a process that, at the time of writing, continues.

A world-wide, inter-governmental organisation called the League of Nations was formed in the hope of preventing another such conflict. The advent of World War 2 demonstrated that it had failed.

More than 70 million military personnel, including 60 million Europeans, were mobilised in World War 1. More than 9 million combatants were killed, nearly one million of them from Britain and the Allies. This carnage was largely due to the great technological advances in military firepower which preceded the war, without the corresponding advances in mobility.

Forty members of The Western Downland community died in service in World War 1. The four campaigns in which those who served on land perished are indicated on the map above<sup>3</sup>.



### Western Front Campaign

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<sup>2</sup> © IWM (Q 70165). Still from the British documentary film 'The Battle of the Somme' 1916.

<sup>3</sup> Map courtesy of The Robinson Library at: [www.robinsonlibrary.com](http://www.robinsonlibrary.com).

Gallipoli Campaign

Salonika Campaign

Mesopotamia Campaign

Introduction

Notes

Western Downland Contribution

Roll of Honour Names