

2.1A Why did the Great War start?

You can go to almost any town or village in Britain and see the names of dead soldiers, sailors and air crew carved on stone memorials like the one in **Source A**. This one was built to commemorate 60 ex-students of Castle High School, Dudley in the West Midlands, who died during the Great War of 1914–1918. It is outside the school's library. Many schools, factories, sports clubs, and town councils built memorials like this to record the names of young men who had died fighting for their country. So what caused this war? Why was it called the 'Great War'? And why were so many men so keen to join up to fight?

Mission Objectives

- Define and identify short- and long-term causes of the Great War.
- Explain how an assassination led to the outbreak of war.

What was so 'great'?

The Great War wasn't 'great' because men enjoyed themselves and had a great time; it was called the Great War because the world had never experienced such a big war before. Millions and millions of men, split into two sides (or **alliances**), spent over four years killing each other. To help them in their task, they used the deadliest weapons the world had ever seen. In total, around nine million people were killed – that's over 5000 deaths every day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, for over four years. Such was the horror felt at this enormous **death toll** that many called it 'the war to end all wars'. So just how did the Great War start?

Long-term causes

Wars usually have a number of different causes that build up over time. Some causes go back a very long time indeed, perhaps years or decades. But some causes may have happened only recently, in the last few days, weeks or months. Historians like to divide the reasons why something happened into **long-term** and **short-term causes**. The cartoons, maps and explanations on page 25 outline the long-term causes of the Great War.

Wise Up Words

alliance arms race assassinate death toll
long-term cause short-term cause Triple Alliance Triple Entente



SOURCE A: As well as ex-pupils, the memorial includes the name of a teacher who joined up to fight in September 1914. He was killed in action in France two years later, aged 31.

Hungry for More?

Where is the nearest Great War memorial to you? Is it close enough for you to walk to it? Maybe your school has a memorial like Castle High School, Dudley. If so, why not go and visit it and read through the list of names? Are there any names that are the same as yours or your friends'? You can research some of the names and details of how they died on www.cwgc.org.

What could so many countries fall out about? And why did so many young men volunteer to join the slaughter?

Nationalism

At the beginning of the twentieth century, people started to take great pride in their countries. This is called 'nationalism' – thinking that your nation is better than others. Unfortunately, for many leaders of Europe, the best way to prove they were the best was to have a war with their rivals.



Militarism

People took great pride in their armies and navies. To make sure that theirs were the best, countries spent more and more money on bigger and bigger armies (known as 'militarism'). Nobody wanted the smallest army, so countries got caught up in an **arms race**. To many, there was no point in having a big, expensive army if you weren't going to use it, and whenever countries fell out the temptation to use those weapons was always there.

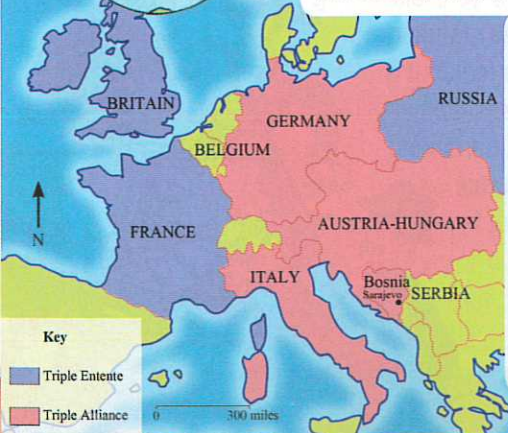


Imperialism

Britain had conquered lots of land all over the world by 1914 and had a huge empire. But other nations wanted big empires too – a desire known as 'imperialism' (from the word 'empire'). The race to gain control of other nations, particularly in Africa, led to tension and fierce rivalries among European countries. They began to see each other as a threat to their overseas possessions and thought war was the only way to remove this threat permanently.



SOURCE B: *The Alliance System.*



Alliances

As each country began to feel threatened, they looked for friends to back them up in a war – known as allies. Europe split into two alliances. Britain, France and Russia formed the **Triple Entente**, and Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy formed the **Triple Alliance**. The idea was to put people off starting a war as it would mean fighting against three nations instead of one. Although this made them feel more secure, it meant it would only take one small disagreement between any two nations involved and all of Europe would be dragged into a war.

Work


- 1 a Write a sentence that defines the following terms: • arms race • allies.
- b Copy the terms from **List A** into your book and match them to the correct definitions from **List B**.

List A

- militarism • alliances
- imperialism • nationalism

List B

- Groups of nations that agree to back each other up in a war.
- To love your country and think it is superior to others.
- To take great pride in your country's armed forces.
- To gain control of land and people around the world and build an empire.

- 2  Look at **Source B**.

- a Make a list of the countries in i) the Triple Alliance ii) the Triple Entente.
 - b If the Triple Alliance attacked France, how could Russia's friendship help France?
 - c If Austria-Hungary attacked Russia, how could France's friendship help Russia?
 - d If Russia attacked Germany, how could Austria-Hungary's friendship help Germany?
- 3 Some historians have compared Europe in 1914 to two groups of mountain climbers, all tied together with one rope.
 - If one of the climbers slipped and fell, what's the best thing that could happen?
 - If one of the climbers slipped and fell, what's the worst thing that could happen?

2.1B Why did the Great War start?

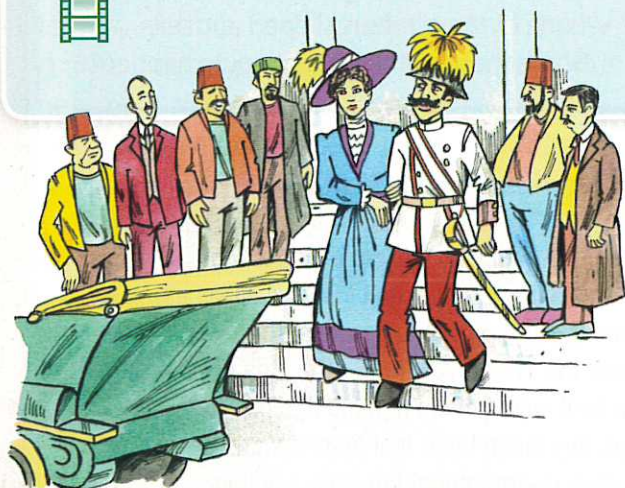
The short-term reason

Some historians have compared Europe in 1914 to a barrel of gunpowder in that it only needed a spark to make the whole thing explode. On 28 June 1914 the spark arrived. All it took was the murder of one man and his wife and all of the major nations of Europe were plunged into war. So who was this man? How was he murdered and why? And how did his death lead to the Great War?

'Unhappy anniversary'

On 28 June 1914, the heir to the kingdom of Austria-Hungary – Archduke Franz Ferdinand – arrived in the Bosnian city of Sarajevo. It was his wedding anniversary, so he was joined on the visit by his wife, Sophie. Bosnia was part of Austria-Hungary – but only since 1908 when it had been conquered. Many Bosnians were still deeply unhappy about this. They wanted to join with their neighbours, Serbia, and many Serbians wanted Bosnia to join with them. One gang of Serbians, known as the 'Black Hand', decided to take drastic action to highlight their cause – they planned to **assassinate** the Archduke. His visit to Sarajevo was the perfect opportunity.

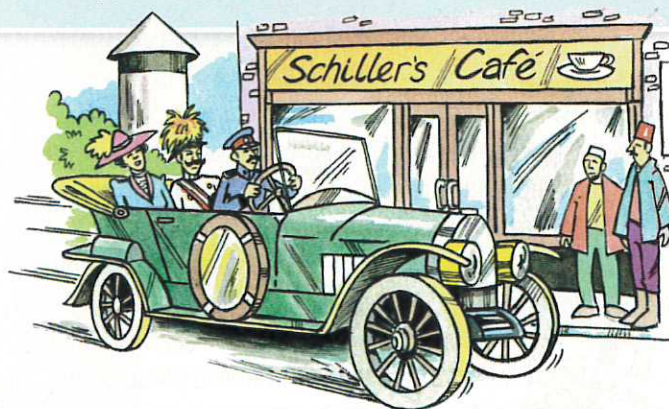
- 1 Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife arrived at Sarajevo train station at 9:28am. They were driven towards the Town Hall to meet the Mayor. Crowds lined the streets and the car drove slowly so that the royal couple could wave to the people.



- 2 Six Black Hand assassins waited for the car by the Cumurja Bridge. As the open-topped car passed, one of the Serbians threw a bomb at the royal couple. The bomb ended up beneath the car behind and blew up, injuring several people. The Archduke's car sped off to the Town Hall with a terrified Ferdinand inside.



- 3 The Archduke cancelled the rest of his visit, but decided to visit those injured by the bomb before he went home. At 11:00am, he again got into the chauffeur-driven car – but it drove a lot faster this time! As they passed Schiller's café, the driver was informed that he'd taken a wrong turn. He stopped to turn around.



- 4 After the bomb attack, the assassins had split up and run into the crowds. By coincidence, one of the gang – 19-year-old Gavrilo Princip – was standing outside the café. He took out a pistol, walked towards the car and fired two shots. Ferdinand was hit in the throat; his wife Sophie was shot in the stomach. Both were killed.



SOURCE A: *Princip is thought to have been terminally ill with tuberculosis when he murdered Franz Ferdinand. He survived another four years – long enough to see the terrible consequences of his actions.*



FACT!

Italy didn't stick to the agreements it had made before the murder. Instead it joined Britain, France and Russia's side in 1915. In total, 32 countries joined the war and the major ones lined up like this:

ALLIES: Britain and its Empire • France • Belgium • Italy (from 1915) • Serbia • Romania (from 1916) • Portugal (from 1916) • Russia (until 1917) • USA (from 1917) • Japan

VERSUS CENTRAL POWERS: Germany • Austria-Hungary • Turkey • Bulgaria (from 1915)

How did this murder lead to war?

Although the assassination was a terrible event, you might be wondering how this started a war. Read **Source B** carefully and you will discover that the murder started a countdown to the biggest war the world had ever known.

28 July: Austria-Hungary blames Serbia for killing the Archduke and attacks Serbia.

29 July: Russia, which has promised to protect Serbia against attack, gets its army ready to attack Austria-Hungary.

1 August: Germany, which supports Austria-Hungary, hears about Russian preparations for war. Germany declares war on Russia.

2 August: Britain prepares its warships.

3 August: Germany, which is more worried about the French army than about the Russians, decides to attack France first. It declares war on France, hoping to defeat the French quickly, and then on to face the Russians!

2 August: Germany asks Belgium to allow German soldiers to march through Belgium to attack France. Belgium says 'no'. Germany marches in anyway two days later. Britain, which has a deal to protect Belgium from attack (dating back to 1839), declares war on Germany.


6 August: Austria-Hungary declares war on Russia.

12 August: Britain and France declare war on Austria-Hungary.

▲ SOURCE B: Timeline of events.

As **Source B** shows, the murder in Sarajevo on that Sunday morning in June 1914 started a whole chain of events that threw Europe into war – a war in which millions would die.

Work

- 1  Imagine you were Franz Ferdinand's chauffeur on the day of the assassination. You have been called in as a witness by the police. Using the information from the cartoons, copy and complete this writing frame:

Crime:

Date:

Witness:

The Archduke, Franz Ferdinand, was dressed in

His wife was wearing

As I approached the Cumurja Bridge

The Archduke was furious so

Shortly after 11:00am I drove past Schiller's café, when I

It was just as I was reversing that

I did my best to help, but

- 2 Look at **Source B**. Why did:
- a Austria-Hungary attack Serbia?
 - b Russia attack Austria-Hungary?
 - c Germany invade Belgium?
 - d Britain declare war on Germany?
- 3 Did Gavrilo Princip start the Great War? Explain your answer carefully – you may want to discuss it and/or plan your answer with a partner first.