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Opening extract from

How Can a Pigeon be a War Hero? Questions and Answers About the First World War

Written by

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Thanks to Kira Andrews for her enthusiastic research for this book

The First World War 1914-1918



To find out, turn the page!



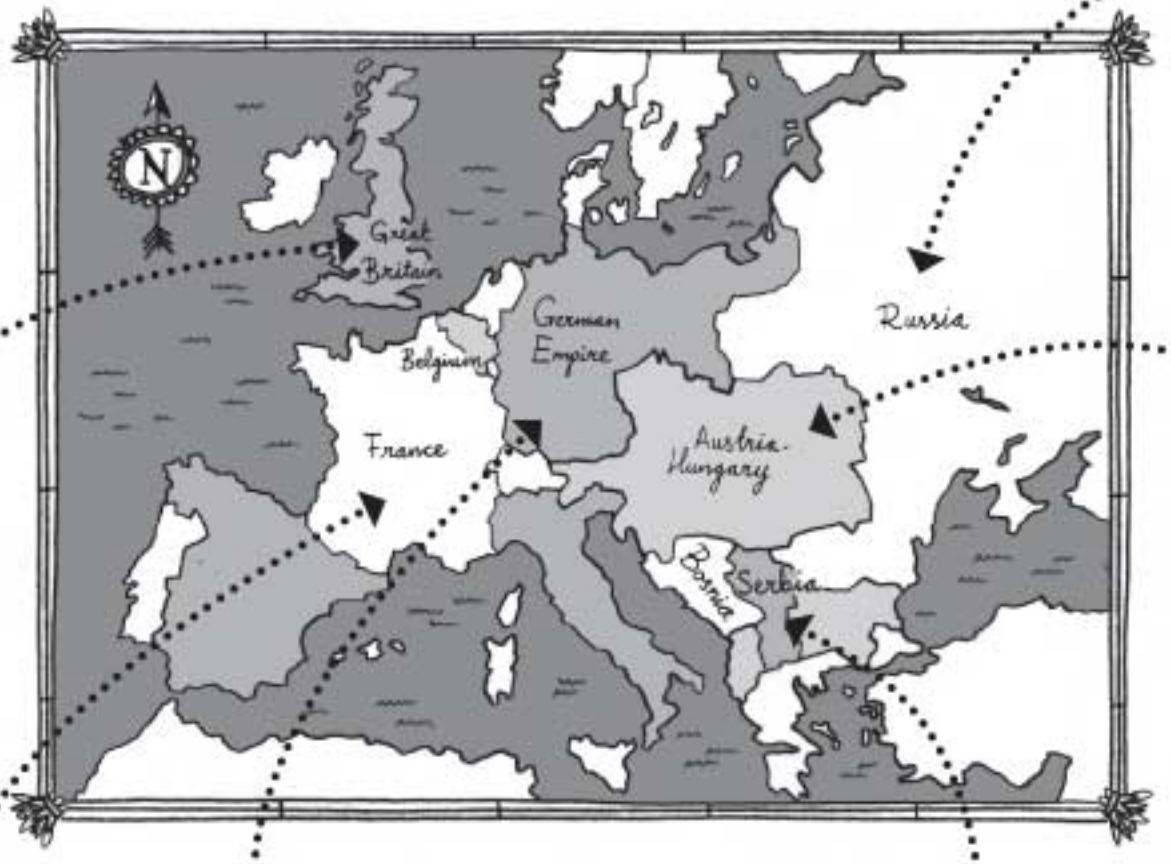
How did the First World War start?

Maybe you've heard answers to this question that start with an assassinated archduke, then Austria-Hungary and Imperial Germany and a Black Hand get involved, and after that things become more complicated and confusing until you end up wishing you'd never asked. It *is* a bit complicated. So take a deep breath, because we're about to become involved in empires, alliances and a struggle for world power.

By the beginning of the First World War, the powerful countries of Europe had been spoiling for a fight for some time, until one event started a chain reaction that led to war. But if that event hadn't happened, the strong likelihood is that something else would have started the war before very long anyway.



The main countries involved were . . .



Great Britain, which was nervous about Germany becoming too powerful and wanted to protect its trade routes, became friendly with France and Russia (even though it had a history of being their enemy). Britain also had an agreement that it would protect Belgium.

Russia, which had an enormous empire of its own, supported Serbia and was in conflict with Austria-Hungary.

Austria-Hungary, Germany's ally, was an old empire in decline at the time of the war, but wanted to hang on to its land and power, including a country called Bosnia.

France, which was big, powerful and suspicious of Germany, had formed an alliance with Russia in 1894.

Germany, which had become a country in 1871. Germany had a large army and an empire, and wanted to become even bigger and more powerful.

Serbia, in south-eastern Europe, didn't want to become part of Austria-Hungary's empire and wanted to take control of Bosnia to form a greater Serbia.

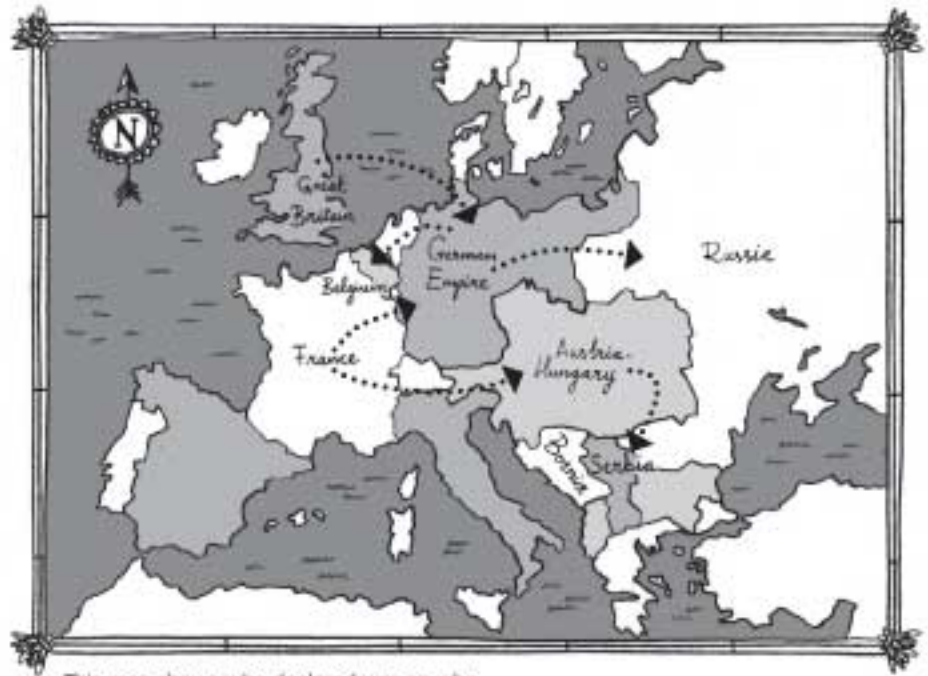
So what happened *exactly*?

In June 1914, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was killed by a Bosnian Serb youth who had been armed by an organisation called the Black Hand. This was the first step on the road to the First World War . . .



This photo of Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife was taken in Sarajevo in 1914, moments before they were assassinated.

- Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia . . .
- Russia stuck up for Serbia, which caused Germany, Austria-Hungary's ally, to declare war on Russia . . .
- France, as Russia's ally, joined in and was now also at war with Germany and Austria-Hungary . . .



This map shows who declared war on who.

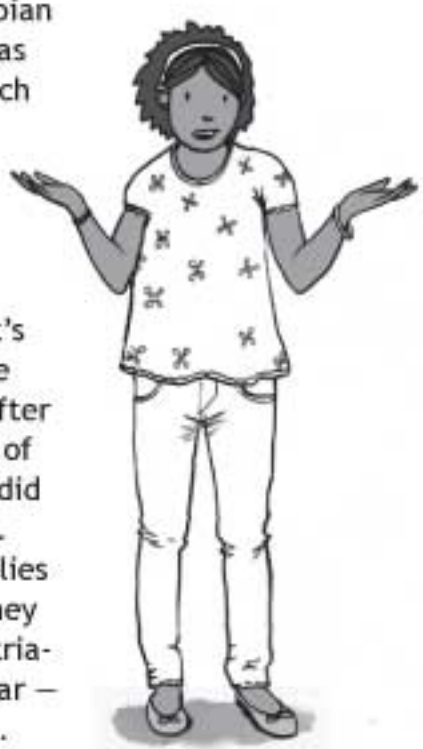
- Germany invaded the neutral country of Belgium, using it as the quickest route to attack the capital of France . . .
- Britain also entered the war, because it had promised to protect Belgium — but also because it wanted to stop Germany almost as much as France did.

These powerful countries, and others besides, were now involved in an absolutely massive fight — the biggest war there had ever been up to that point.

Which countries fought in the war (and where did all the soldiers come from)?

The German and Austro-Hungarian side in the First World War was known as the Central Powers.

The Russian, French, Serbian and British side was known as the Allies, which sounds much more friendly, but wasn't. Lots of other countries became involved on each side too:



The Ottoman Empire (which was ruled from what's now Turkey, and became the modern country of Turkey after the war) fought on the side of the Central Powers, and so did Bulgaria from October 1914. Italy also fought with the Allies from 1915 — even though they had been Germany and Austria-Hungary's ally before the war — and by 1916 so did Romania.

