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Opening extract from

50 Things You Should Know About the First World War

Written by

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50 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE FIRST WORLD WAR

by Jim Eldridge



QED PUBLISHING

INTRODUCTION

For hundreds of years, countries in Europe had been at war with one another. Each nation wanted more power and more land, which they hoped to take from the countries around them. By the start of the 20th century, most European nations ruled a handful of other countries, known as an empire.

THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR

Before 1871, Germany was a group of small kingdoms. The biggest of these was Prussia. In 1870, Prussia went to war with France. When Prussia won in 1871, it seized French land and joined with other kingdoms to form the nation of Germany. The conflict left people in France hungry for revenge and determined to win back their land.

STICKING TOGETHER

After the Franco-Prussian War, France worried about another attack, and Russia was suspicious of Germany's plans to expand. France and Russia agreed they would come to each other's aid if Germany ever attacked. At the same time, France and England made an agreement which later became an **alliance** against Germany.

▼ *The Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) created many tensions between France and Germany.*

BALKAN WARS

In 1912, Montenegro, Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria fought the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. Then, in 1914, Bulgaria turned on its allies, starting a second war. Bulgaria lost lots of land, while Serbia nearly doubled in size. Serbia's size frightened many countries. It looked like another war might be just around the corner...

▼ *The Turkish army waiting for action in Greece, 1912.*

ROYAL FAMILIES

Most of the royal families of Europe were related to each other via Queen Victoria, who ruled Britain until her death in 1901. Three of her grandchildren were:



King George V of Britain

Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany

Alexandra, wife of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia

THE ARMS RACE

European nations feared that their rivals might try to seize land from them, so they did their best to defend themselves: they built bigger and better armies, with the latest, most powerful weapons. Germany was particularly jealous of Britain's navy. Between 1906 and 1914, Germany built 20 new battleships!

1 1914

The year war began

When the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne was killed in 1914, it was just months before all of Europe was at war. Armies marched away, expecting a quick, glorious victory. Both sides were sure the war would be over by Christmas. No one was ready for the long, drawn-out struggle that was to come...

▼ *Men in England leaving their homes to join the armed forces in 1914.*



ALLIES VS CENTRAL POWERS

At the start of the war the two sides were:

- **THE ALLIES: the French Republic and Empire, the British Empire, the Russian Empire, Belgium, Serbia and Montenegro**
- **THE CENTRAL POWERS: the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire**



KEY EVENTS

28 JUNE
Archduke Ferdinand is assassinated (see page 8).

28 JULY
Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia. Russia sends troops to defend Serbia.

1 AUGUST
Germany declares war on Russia.

3 AUGUST
Germany declares war on France.

3 AUGUST
Germany invades Belgium. Britain declares war on Germany (see page 10).

AUGUST
War spreads to Africa (see page 22).

23 AUGUST
The Battle of Mons (see page 10).

27–30 AUGUST
The Battle of Tannenberg (see page 11).

5–9 SEPTEMBER
The Battle of the Marne (see page 12).

SEPTEMBER
The first trenches are dug on the Western Front (see page 14).

2 The assassination of Franz Ferdinand

On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, visited Sarajevo in Bosnia. There, he and his wife were shot and killed by Gavrilo Princip, who was part of a Serbian terrorist group. The assassination was the spark that led to war.



► *Archduke Franz Ferdinand*

DEFENCE TREATIES

Several European countries were bound to each other by defence **treaties**. These promised that the countries involved would support each other in the event of war.

Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy signed the Triple Alliance in 1882.

Russia, France and Britain formed an alliance **called the Triple Entente in 1907.**

CHOOSING SIDES

Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Germany backed its ally Austria-Hungary, while Russia supported Serbia. When Germany declared war against Russia, the French took up arms against Germany.

The Schlieffen Plan 3

Germany had been preparing for war for years. In 1905, Count Alfred von Schlieffen made plans to attack the countries he saw as Germany's biggest enemies: France and Russia. He planned to defeat France, then turn on Russia. By 1914, Germany had an army of over 4 million – it was ready to put its plan into action.

ASSUMPTIONS OF THE PLAN

The German army assumed that things would go to plan. But when they marched into Belgium on 3 August 1914, their assumptions did not match up to reality.

ASSUMPTIONS	REALITY
1 Belgium would be easily beaten.	1 The Belgian army put up strong resistance. They delayed the German attack on France by a month.
2 Britain would stay out of the conflict.	2 Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August.
3 Russia would take six weeks to mobilise its army (move it to the action).	3 Russia mobilised its army in just 10 days.



◄ *This map shows the Eastern Front and the Western Front as red lines.*

A WAR ON TWO FRONTS

By the time German troops reached the French border, the French army was waiting for them. Meanwhile, the Russian army was approaching from the East. Germany was now fighting a war on two **fronts**: the Western Front (against France and Belgium) and the Eastern Front (against Russia).