The Great War Begins

IB Twentieth Century World Topics
Franz Ferdinand

- Austria had taken control of Bosnia, a Slavic nation.
- The Archduke of the Austrian empire, Franz Ferdinand, decided to do an inspection of the Bosnian capital city of Sarajevo.
- Serbia was a small nation to the east of Bosnia, also Slavic, that did not especially like Austria.
- Many people in Serbia wanted to free their Slavic neighbors and decided that killing the archduke would be the best way to do it.
- On June 28, 1914, members of a Serbian terrorist group called the black hand plotted to kill Franz Ferdinand.
- Gavrilo Princip, killed the archduke and his wife Sophie.
- The assassination started a chain of events that, within weeks, would pull Europe into the largest war the world had ever seen.
Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, European countries had undertaken a massive military buildup.

This is called militarism.

It was caused by a desire to protect overseas colonies from other nations.

The size of the armed forces and navy’s of Europe increased dramatically, especially in Germany.

In this nervous environment, even a minor disagreement had the potential to turn into armed conflict.
Alliances

• Seeking to protect themselves against opposing armed forces, the nations of Europe formed a series of alliances.

• The Triple Alliance united Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.

• France, Russia, and later Great Britain feared the growing power of Germany, so they too formed an alliance called the Triple Entente.

• Leaders hoped that these alliances would help prevent war.
Imperialism

- The quest to build empires in the late 1800s had created a lot of resentment among the different nations of Europe.
- Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, France, and Great Britain all viewed themselves as great imperial powers.
- They could not stand the thought of standing by and letting another nation gain more power and territory.
Nationalism is a strong devotion to one's nation or group. In the Balkan nations of southeast Europe was the home of many ethnic groups. In the early 1900s some of these ethnic groups were trying to break free of the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled the Balkan nations for hundreds of years. Serbia was one of these nations that was successful in breaking free. Balkan Serbian leaders wanted to expand their borders and unite their people into a “greater Serbia”. This comes to head when the black hand assassinated the heir to the throne of the Austria-Hungary empire.
After Ferdinand was killed, Princip was arrested.

When it was discovered Princip was a Serb, Austria decided it was good excuse to punish Serbia.

They leveled a series of humiliating demands on Serbia, and when they refused, they declared war on July 28, 1914.

Russia had promised to support their Slavic brothers the Serbs.

Germany, Austria’s ally, declared war on Russia, and then France because they were allied with Russia.
Fighting Begins

- Germany faced a two front war. Russia in the east, and France in the West.
- German military planners developed the Schlieffen Plan, which called for German troops to quickly defeat the French, and then turn and fight the Russians.
- Germany began with a quick strike into Belgium, who was neutral at the time.
- Great Britain had a long term alliance with Belgium to help protect British shores, so when Germany invaded, Great Britain declared war.
- Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire made up the Central Powers.
- Great Britain, France, Russian, and Serbia were known as the Allied Powers.
Fighting in 1914

- Germany’s plan for a swift victory failed, and soon the war became a bloody stalemate.
- During the Battle of the Frontiers, both sides took heavy losses, but they were German victories.
- Russia tried to attack Germany from the east, but the results were disastrous.
- The Battle of Tannenburg the Germans crushed the Russian invasion.
- Although a failure, Tannenburg did distract the Germans and allowed the French and the British to collect themselves and ready a counter attack.
• In the Battle of the Marne, the allied troops forced the Germans back.
• After retreating, German soldiers dug a series of deep ditches along the Aisne River.
• From the strongly defended trenches on the Aisne, the Germans were able to fight back.
• The Allied forces soon dug their own trenches.
• As a result, German and allied positions would change very little in the coming months.
• The deadlocked region in northern France became known as the Western Front.