WORLD WAR I PART 1 OF 9 · AGES 11–16

WORLD WAR I EXPLAINED

The war of 1914–1918 in one page: when, who, where, how it was fought and why it changed the world.

When: 1914 to 1918

It began when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914. The guns stopped at 11am on 11 November 1918, and peace treaties followed in 1919–1920.

Who: two alliances

The Allies (France, the British Empire, Russia and others, later Italy and the USA) fought the Central Powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria.

Where: many fronts

Western and Eastern Europe, Italy, the Balkans, Gallipoli, the Middle East and Africa, plus battles at sea and in the air.

How: trenches and new weapons

Machine guns and artillery forced armies to dig in. Poison gas, tanks, aircraft and submarines were used on a large scale for the first time.

People from every continent

Over 65 million men were mobilised, including about 1.5 million in the Indian Army. More than 2 million Africans served as soldiers, porters and labourers.

Total war at home

Factories, farms and families were organised for war. Women took on new jobs, food grew scarce, and civilians faced blockade, occupation and air raids.

Why it still matters

About 16 million soldiers and civilians died. Four empires fell, new countries were created, and the peace settlement helped shape the road to the Second World War.

Two dates to remember

The Treaty of Versailles was signed on 28 June 1919, exactly five years after the assassination in Sarajevo that set the war in motion on 28 June 1914.

NEXT IN THE SERIES

2. Causes of World War I

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