Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Conflict and tension: the First World War, 1894–1918

Contents

1. The alliance system and rivalries
2. The outbreak of war
3. The Western Front
4. The wider war
5. The end of the war
6. Key terms
7. Quick questions
8. What to do next

The alliance system and rivalries

- The **Triple Alliance** (1882) joined Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. France and Russia allied in 1894. Britain signed the Entente Cordiale with France (1904) and an agreement with Russia (1907), forming the **Triple Entente**.
- Rivalries: the Anglo-German naval race (Britain launched HMS Dreadnought in 1906, and Germany built up its navy), competition for colonies, and French anger at losing Alsace-Lorraine to Germany in 1871.
- Crises: the Moroccan Crises (1905 and 1911) pushed Britain and France closer. In the Bosnian Crisis (1908–09), Austria-Hungary took over Bosnia, angering Serbia and Russia. The Balkan Wars (1912–13) made Serbia stronger.

The outbreak of war

- On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to Austria-Hungary's throne, was assassinated in Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb linked to the Black Hand group.
- Germany gave Austria-Hungary its full support (the '**blank cheque**'). Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July. Russia mobilised to defend Serbia, and Germany declared war on Russia (1 August) and France (3 August).
- The **Schlieffen Plan** was Germany's plan to defeat France quickly by marching through Belgium, then turn to fight Russia. When Germany invaded neutral Belgium, Britain declared war on 4 August 1914: it had promised to protect Belgium in the Treaty of London (1839).

The Western Front

- The **Schlieffen Plan** failed. Belgian resistance and the British Expeditionary Force at Mons slowed the Germans, Russia mobilised faster than expected, and the Battle of the Marne (September 1914) stopped the German advance. After the 'race to the sea', trenches stretched from the Channel to Switzerland, and the war became a **stalemate**.
- Barbed wire, machine guns and artillery made attacks very costly. New weapons included poison gas (first used by Germany at Ypres in 1915), tanks (first used by Britain at the Somme in 1916) and aircraft.
- Verdun (1916) was a German attack meant to 'bleed France white'. The Somme (July–November 1916) was launched partly to take pressure off Verdun; the British suffered about 57,000 casualties on the first day alone. Passchendaele (1917) was fought in deep mud.

The wider war

- Gallipoli (1915–16): an Allied attempt to knock Turkey out of the war and open a sea route to Russia failed, with heavy losses, including many Australian and New Zealand (ANZAC) troops.
- At sea, the Battle of Jutland (1916) was indecisive, but the German fleet stayed in port for the rest of the war. German U-boats sank merchant ships, until convoys (from 1917) cut the losses. Unrestricted submarine warfare helped bring the USA into the war in April 1917.

The end of the war

- Russia left the war after its revolution (the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, March 1918), letting Germany move troops west for the Spring Offensive (March 1918). It gained ground but exhausted the German army.
- The Allies, strengthened by American troops, counter-attacked in the Hundred Days Offensive (from August 1918). With food shortages and revolution at home, Germany's allies surrendering and the Kaiser abdicating, Germany signed the **armistice** on 11 November 1918.

Key terms

Triple Alliance	The alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy.
Triple Entente	The understanding between Britain, France and Russia.
Blank cheque	Germany's promise of full support to Austria-Hungary in July 1914.
Schlieffen Plan	Germany's plan to defeat France quickly through Belgium, then fight Russia.
Stalemate	A situation where neither side can win.
Western Front	The line of trenches across Belgium and France.

Your notes

No man's land	The ground between the opposing trenches.
Convoy system	Merchant ships sailing in groups protected by warships.
Armistice	An agreement to stop fighting.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Which countries were in the Triple Alliance?
2. Which countries formed the Triple Entente?
3. What was HMS Dreadnought?
4. Who was assassinated in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914?
5. What was the Schlieffen Plan?
6. Why did Britain declare war on Germany in August 1914?
7. Which battle stopped the German advance on Paris in September 1914?
8. About how many British casualties were there on the first day of the Somme?

Answers

1. Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy
2. Britain, France and Russia
3. A powerful new British battleship that sparked a naval race
4. Archduke Franz Ferdinand
5. Germany's plan to defeat France quickly through Belgium, then fight Russia
6. Germany invaded neutral Belgium
7. The Battle of the Marne
8. 57,000

What to do next

Practise 13 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.

Your notes