

A large field of vibrant red poppies stretches across the foreground and middle ground, set against a backdrop of a heavy, grey, overcast sky. The poppies are in various stages of bloom, with some fully open and others as buds. The overall mood is somber and reflective.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

THE WAR TO END
ALL WARS

Foreword by Hew Strachan

Peter Simkins, Geoffrey Jukes & Michael Hickey

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FOREWORD

By Professor Hew Strachan

The First World War was fought on many fronts intensively and simultaneously. In this respect it bears direct comparison with the Second World War. In the Second World War, the relationship between fronts, and the co-ordination of their efforts, would be called grand strategy. But this was not a phrase known or used in 1914–1918. Most of the campaigns described in this volume were self-contained in their origins and even in their conduct. They represented national efforts made in pursuit of national goals.

In this respect the First World War became a world war because it conflated wars that had lives and directions of their own. It began in the Balkans. As such it was the third Balkan war fought in rapid succession since 1912, and in most respects the interests of the principal Balkan states in the war never ranged beyond the Balkan peninsula. Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania all sought local objectives. The exception was the most reluctant of the Balkan belligerents, Greece, which had eyes on territory in Asia Minor. But that conflict – the one fought over the Ottoman Empire – makes the same point: it too began before 1914 and it did not end in 1918. In fact its conclusion was reached with the establishment of modern Turkey in 1923.

Only two powers, one on each side, fully confronted the fact that they were fighting a multi-front war. Britain was of Europe but not in it; moreover it had sprawling and vulnerable global interests. These included India and a network of colonial bases between Delhi and London. Their sizeable Muslim populations were intimately affected by the fate of Islam's Holy Cities, which lay within the Ottoman Empire. The pursuit of grand strategy therefore found its most coherent form in the debates of the British cabinet as it weighed the priorities of competing commitments. These went to the most basic issues of war and peace. Should Britain introduce conscription in order to raise a mass army? Should it not concentrate on what it could do best, providing the arms and money for other powers on the European mainland to fight? The resulting discussions were frequently acrimonious, and after the

war the memoirs of the participants flung accusations that made ‘easterners’ and ‘westerners’, ‘frocks’ and ‘brasshats’ terms of abuse rather than precise descriptions. In reality the categories were never that neat, and the vigour with which the various options were canvassed bore testimony to the strength, not the weakness, of democracies in effective decision-making.

Germany was more genuinely divided between ‘easterners’ and ‘westerners’, but here the casualty was strategy itself. It stood at the physical heart of Europe, and it was the mainstay of the Central Powers’ alliance. Its armies could go east or west with comparable facility, but it never found a consistent policy with which to determine their deployment. Moreover, as Peter Simkins makes clear in his contribution to this volume, by 1918 Germany’s most important voice in the war’s direction, Erich Ludendorff, had lost his way. By then its allies were critically dependent on Berlin not only for weapons and money, but also for military advice and leadership. Germany could not stretch its resources that far.

The First World War may in some respects have begun before 1914 and continued after 1918, but this does not mean that fighting was continuous in this period, however defined. Even in the middle of the war two fronts enjoyed periods of comparative quiet. Both fall within the purview of Michael Hickey’s section of this book. In the autumn of 1915 Serbia, the country for whose defence the Entente powers of Russia, France and Britain had – at least nominally – gone to war, was overrun. Confronted by Austria-Hungary and Germany from the north and Bulgaria from the east, its army fell back through Albania to the Adriatic Sea. From here it was evacuated via Corfu to Thessalonika. Throughout 1916, 1917, and much of 1918, the Macedonian front was quiet enough for the British troops there to be known as ‘the gardeners of Salonika’. Then in mid-September 1918 it roared into life, and the Allied forces, led by the Serbs, knocked Bulgaria out of the war and threatened what Churchill saw as the soft underbelly of Europe.

Six months after the collapse of Serbia, in April 1916, a British division, besieged at Kut-el-Amara on the River Tigris in Mesopotamia, surrendered to the Turks. Here too the front went quiet. The British did not resume their advance on Baghdad until the following winter, taking the city on 11 March 1917. On the Turks’ other southern front, in greater Syria, there were similar pauses, the product not only of different priorities but also of the weather and of supply problems.

Serbia, Macedonia, Mesopotamia and Palestine are all treated here as part of the Mediterranean theatre. And so they were for a power like Britain that waged economic war through its mastery of the world’s oceans and used the sea to project its forces overseas. But that was not how it seemed to Turkey. It had one front, in the Caucasus, which determined the forces

available for its other fronts, including in 1915 Gallipoli. However, here the Caucasus is treated by Geoffrey Jukes as part of the Eastern Front. That was precisely the context into which it fitted for Germany: a Turkish thrust into Georgia and Azerbaijan could draw Russian troops away from the Eastern Front. The latter ran from the Baltic states in the north, through Poland, to Galicia in the south. When Romania entered the war on the side of the Entente in 1916, the Eastern Front extended yet further, as Russia found to its cost. Romania managed to divert German and Austro-Hungarian troops from Russia, but then required Russia to send troops to help it. Geoffrey Jukes concludes that by the winter of 1916–1917 the defence of Romania had become the principal preoccupation of Stavka, the Russian high command.

The message here is that no one theatre of war could in reality be treated in isolation from its neighbour. Romania was a Balkan power; the fighting in Serbia had implications for Russia; the frontiers of both Germany and Austria-Hungary straddled the compartments into which this book is logically divided. Much of Vienna's war effort was directed against Italy, and so undermined its conduct of the war against Russia. But when in October 1917 it achieved one of the most spectacular victories of the war, at Caporetto on the River Isonzo, the response of Italy's allies had repercussions for the war in the west, not the east. French and British divisions were despatched to Italy, and the Supreme War Council was created to coordinate the Allies' efforts – a process which would culminate with the appointment of Ferdinand Foch as Allied Supreme Commander in March 1918.

Peter Simkins acknowledges this interdependence, but still argues that the Western Front was the heart of the war. The fact that others agree with him is recognised by his being allowed twice as much space to discuss a smaller theatre of war (in geographical terms) as is each of his fellow contributors. And he is probably right. Germany was the mainstay of the Central Powers, and however many divisions they sent to other fronts, the total never exceeded that on the Western Front. Moreover, for Britain too the Western Front was an irreducible minimum, for two sensible strategic reasons. First, it had entered the war to secure the neutrality of Belgium. It could not afford to have an over-mighty continental power threatening its principal sea-lanes and imperial communications. Secondly, its chief ally in this endeavour was France. France had been invaded. The need to drive the Boche from its homeland, to recover its industries, to restore its frontiers and to liberate its peoples gave a dynamism and intensity to the Western Front probably unequalled elsewhere. There were no long pauses here, and when armistice came it meant victory for one side and defeat for the other.

Hew Strachan

INTRODUCTION

By Professor Robert O'Neill

The focus of our authors moves from the origins of the war to the battles of the Western Front, then to the Eastern Front including the Russian Revolution, and finally to the war across the Mediterranean from Italy and the Balkans to the Dardanelles, Sinai, Palestine and Mesopotamia.

The First World War challenged political and military leaders in a way in which no other conflict had since the Napoleonic Wars of a century earlier. It was the first truly global conflict among several major powers, ranging across Europe, Africa, the Middle East and East Asia, and hence over the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans. Of course the principal instigators, Germany and Austria-Hungary, did not intend the war to be anything other than a European conflict, with later consequences for the wider world. But in threatening the interests of Great Britain in August 1914, the Central Powers brought into immediate play not only the full resources of the British Empire, but also those of Britain's East Asian ally, Japan. Only one hour after hostilities had begun for Britain, the Royal Australian Navy was firing on and capturing the first of 24 German ships seized in Australian waters. On 23 August Japan declared war on Germany and began to eliminate the German presence in China and the northern Pacific.

The German colonial empire in Africa soon became the theatre for a protracted struggle. The Ottoman Empire, despite its strong naval links with Britain, chose to side with the Central Powers, whose armies the Turks rated the more highly. For Britain, whose navy was converting from coal to oil as its principal fuel, control of the Persian Gulf region at the south-eastern end of the Ottoman Empire was vital and this need set a wider dimension to the conflict. The fact that France's principal ally, Russia, shared a border with the Ottoman Empire meant that soon the armies of both Russia and Turkey were engaged in and around the Caucasus. Thus the direct clashes of the German and French armies in Western Europe,

and of the German, Austrian and Russian armies in Eastern Europe, while being potentially of decisive importance, have to be understood as two campaigns in a global engagement.

Because success eluded the Central Powers on these two key European fronts, the resources of the world beyond Europe became increasingly important in inclining the balance of force in Europe in favour of Britain, France, Russia and their allies. The opening of the war did not directly touch the United States, and the US Government attempted to remain aloof from what it saw as a war between European powers. But American commerce needed the freedom of the seas and from 1915 this liberty came into jeopardy. Also the balance of American interests made its technological and industrial resources more readily available to Britain and France than to Germany. It was only a matter of time before the increasingly hard-pressed Germans were to attack American shipping and draw the United States into the war on their opponents' side.

By 1914 the technological revolution in armaments, and hence in tactics and strategy, had reached the point at which the total resources of the belligerent powers became essential elements in the conflict. Human resources in Europe soon became fully stretched. Political leaders, where they were wise, paid heed to the needs, aspirations and opinions of their citizens and subjects. Societies which had moved towards becoming representative democracies had more effective ways of bearing the strains of the conflict than had the more autocratic structures of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Britain and France endured the war much more cohesively than did the other four, all of whose empires were to collapse either during the war or as immediate consequences of it.

When Russia was plunged into revolution in 1917, it withdrew from the war and virtually allowed the Central Powers to command resources and territory from the Baltic to Ukraine. The German high command drew fresh hope for a decisive victory in Western Europe in 1918. While Lenin consolidated his authority in the Russian heartland, General Ludendorff moved forces to the west for his great gamble, Operation *Michael*. But the strain of war was telling on every German family and when *Michael* failed, a crisis of morale at home and in the trenches set a limit on what German soldiers, workers and women were prepared to tolerate. Acceptance of defeat in 1918 brought with it the end of the German monarchy and initiated the experiment in democracy that we now call the Weimar era, which in turn was to collapse under the impact of Nazism.

The role of women was extended into new domains by the pressures of war. They played an increasing part in industrial production. Their responsibilities as carers for families and homes became heavier under



The opposing sides, 1914–1918.

the impact of war-induced shortages, the absence of their men and the burden of bereavement. Their demands for political power through having the right to vote could no longer be resisted by those democracies that had refused it in the face of the Suffragette movement of the pre-war years. While women in even the most advanced democracies did not gain equality with men in the sense that we now understand the term, the First World War was a powerful catalyst of the social change which was to lead to an era in which women now share the highest political (but not military) offices with men.

The period of the First World War was one of the most fruitful in terms of technological development and application. Aviation, developed only just before the war, became a major asset for the belligerents. Tens of thousands of aircraft were produced by the major powers. Strategic bombing began and civilians learned to recognise warning alarms and the ‘all clear’ signal. Chemical warfare was introduced to the battlefield in a major way. The submarine became a potent threat to the mercantile and naval shipping of the

powers that controlled the surface of the sea. The range and destructive power of artillery increased immensely. The development of radio communications allowed senior commanders to control their forces directly and immediately over distances unimagined before, from the continental theatres of action in Europe to the oceans of the world. The firepower of the machine gun and the now more accurately made rifle increased the defensive capabilities of infantry in trenches.

The challenge to the feasibility of attacking such defences forced military leaders to develop new tactics and new ways of devolving initiative to front-line commanders when in action. It took all too long before these new approaches were developed and tested to the point at which they began husbanding the lives of the hapless infantry who had to make attacks across open ground. Both sides proved adept in inventing new methods of combat, so lengthening the war and adding to its huge costs in human life and resources. But finally the weight of Allied numbers and firepower eroded the capacity of the armies of the Central Powers to hold their ground, and their collapse followed shortly.

The length and heavy human toll of the war inclined both mass opinion and practically minded politicians towards placing a ban on the offensive use of military power and requiring nations to settle matters in dispute by negotiation or arbitration. President Woodrow Wilson of the United States took the lead in drawing up the Covenant of an association to achieve these ends: the League of Nations. Although it was to fail and be discarded in the 1930s, the League did much good work in the 1920s and provided many lessons, positive and negative, which influenced the foundation and shaping of its successor, the United Nations. The scope of this conflict, the new developments it fostered and its costs and consequences have made the First World War one of the most rewarding passages in human history for study and contemplation.

This study of that war is brought to you by three authors who know their fields well, have studied and written about them with distinction over many years, and most importantly have interesting and important new things to say about their respective topics. Peter Simkins, formerly Senior Historian at the Imperial War Museum, London, has pioneered new approaches to the history of events on the Western Front, especially the ingenuity and intelligence of the men involved, leavened by their sense of humour and the capacity to care for their comrades. Geoffrey Jukes, a modern Russian historian and linguist, was a Senior Fellow in International Relations at the Australian National University, Canberra. He has studied his subject deeply, walked the key battlefields and visited Russia many times to draw on and appraise the work of its scholars. Michael Hickey has seen war as a soldier in Korea, in East Africa, at Suez and in Aden in the 1950s and 60s. His books include a major study of the Dardanelles Campaign. He has also walked many a mile over the

battlefields of Europe and the Middle East, testing his ideas in terms of what the war was like for the men on the ground there in 1914–1918. This book is but an introduction to a vast and fascinating topic. Knowledge of the problems men and women faced during the First World War, and of the solutions they developed, from the tank to the League of Nations, is a good foundation for the understanding of international events, especially wars, in the 21st century and how their destructive effects might be avoided or minimised.

CHRONOLOGY

1908	Austria-Hungary annexes Bosnia-Herzegovina
1912–1913	Balkan Wars Loss of Turkish North African provinces to Italy
1914	
28 June	Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife at Sarajevo
5/6 July	Germany gives Austria-Hungary blank cheque of support against Serbia
23 July	Austro-Hungary issues ultimatum to Serbia
25 July	Serbia mobilises
26 July	Austro-Hungarian mobilises against Serbia; Russia enters 'period preparatory to war'
28 July	Austrian Emperor Franz Josef signs declaration of war against Serbia
29 July	Germany demands immediate cessation of Russian mobilisation preparations
30 July	Russia decrees full mobilisation in support of Serbia
31 July	Russian mobilisation begins; Germany

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	proclaims 'threatening danger of war' and issues ultimatum to Russia
1 August	Germany declares war on Russia and orders general mobilisation; France orders general mobilisation
2 August	Germany issues ultimatum to Belgium demanding right of passage through its territory; German troops invade Luxembourg
3 August	Germany declares war on France; Germany invades Belgium; Turkey declares 'armed neutrality'; Italy declares neutrality
4 August	Britain declares war on Germany; United States declares neutrality
5 August	France asks Russia to attack Germany; Montenegro declares war on Austria
6 August	Austria-Hungary declares war on Russia; Serbia declares war on Germany; French troops move into Upper Alsace
7 August	Germany captures citadel at Liège
10 August	France declares war on Austria-Hungary
12 August	Austria-Hungary invades Serbia; Britain declares war on Austria-Hungary
12–13 August	Russia invades East Prussia
14 August	Battle of the Frontiers begins
17 August	Battle of Stallupönen
20 August	Battle of Gumbinnen
23 August	Battle of Mons; British Expeditionary Force begins retreat
26 August	Battle of Le Cateau
26 August–2 September	Battle of Komarów
27–31 August	Battle of Tannenberg
31 August	Greece formally declares neutrality

3 September	Battle of Lemberg
5–10 September	Battle of the Marne
7–17 September	Battle of the Masurian Lakes
11 September	Battle of Grodek
13–27 September	Battle of the Aisne
14 September	Falkenhayn takes over control of German operations from Moltke
17 September	‘Race to the sea’ begins
1 October	Turkey closes Dardanelles
10 October	Antwerp falls to Germany
18–30 October	Battle of the Yser
19–30 October	First battle of Warsaw
20 October–22 November	First Battle of Ypres
1 November	Turkey declares war on Anglo-French Entente
2 November	Russia and Serbia declare war on Turkey
3 November	Falkenhayn succeeds Moltke as Chief of the German General Staff
5 November	Britain and France declare war on Turkey
7–17 November	Second battle of Warsaw
11 November	Ottoman Sultan, as Caliph of Islam, proclaims <i>jihad</i> against Britain and France
11–12 November	Battle of Wloclawek
13–16 November	Battle of Kutno
19–25 November	Battle of Łódz
3–12 December	Battle of Limanowa-Lapanów
8 December	Austrian Third Army retakes Carpathian passes
17 December	French winter offensive begins in Artois

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20 December	French winter offensive begins in Champagne
29 December	Battle of Sarikamis begins
1915	
2 January	Russia appeals to London for a diversionary attack to be made against Turkey
4 January	French offensive in Artois ends
17 January	Russians finish mopping up operations at Sarikamis
3 February	Turks fail to cross Suez Canal
19 February	Allied fleet begins bombardment of outer forts at the Dardanelles
10–12 March	Battle of Neuve Chapelle
18 March	Anglo-French naval attack on the Chanak Narrows repulsed with loss of three battleships
22 March	Russians capture Przemyśl, taking 100,000 prisoners
22 April	Germans use poison gas for the first time on the Western Front
22 April–25 May	Second battle of Ypres
25 April	Allied attack on Gallipoli begins
2–10 May	Battle of Gorlice-Tarnów
9 May	Allied offensive begins in Artois; battle of Aubers Ridge
9–10 May	Battle of Sanok
13–18 May	Battle of Jarosław
15–27 May	Battle of Festubert
23 May	Italian Government declares war on Austria-Hungary

25–26 May	Formation of a coalition cabinet and creation of Ministry of Munitions announced in Britain
20–22 June	Austrians retake Lemberg
July	Russians withdraw from Galicia
4 August	Allied reconnaissance party arrives at Salonika to assess port and railway facilities
5 August	Third battle of Warsaw; Germans take Warsaw
6 August	Allied landings made at Anzac and Suvla Bay
7 August	Tsar appoints himself Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army
10 August	Turkish counter-attack at Gallipoli drives British and New Zealanders off high ground
20 August	Italy declares war on Turkey
September	Zimmerwald conference of Socialist Internationals; Germans capture Vilnius
21 September	Greek premier Venizelos calls for massive Allied reinforcement of Salonika as condition for Greek entry into war
25 September	Allied offensive in Artois and Champagne; first use of poison gas by British at battle of Loos
27 September	Greek King Constantine consents to Allied force landing at Salonika
October	Battle of Dunaburg
1 October	British advance party arrives at Salonika
5 October	Combined German-Austrian attack on Serbia begins; British and French forces land at Salonika
9 October	Belgrade falls; Austrians invade Montenegro
11 October	Bulgarian troops invade Serbia
14 October	Mutual declaration of war between Serbia and Bulgaria

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19 December	Evacuation of the Anzac and Suvla beach heads at Gallipoli in one night without casualties; Haig replaces Sir John French as Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force
1916	
8 January	Successful completion of Gallipoli evacuation at Helles
10 January	Completion of Allied 'Entrenched Camp' at Salonika
14 January	Battle of Köprükۆy; Russians advance on Erzerum
27 January	First Military Service Act becomes law in Britain, introducing conscription for men aged between 18 and 41
11–16 February	Battle of Erzerum; Russians take Erzerum and Mus
21 February	Battle of Verdun begins
25 February	Germans capture Fort Douaumont at Verdun
18 March	Unsuccessful Russian Vilnius offensive begins; ends 14 April
April	International Socialist Conference held at Kienthal (Second Zimmerwald Conference)
24 April	Easter Rising in Dublin
29 April	In Mesopotamia, Kut falls with 13,309 British and Indian prisoners plus over 3,000 non-combatants
25 May	Second Military Service Act becomes law in Britain, extending conscription to married men
31 May/1 June	Naval battle of Jutland
4 June	Opening of Brusilov's offensive

5 June	Sherif Hussein starts Arab revolt at Medina, proclaims independence of Hedjaz
1 July	Battle of the Somme begins
3–9 July	Unsuccessful offensive by Russian West Front
7 July	Lloyd George succeeds Kitchener (drowned en route to Russia) as War Minister
28 July	Opening of second phase of Brusilov's offensive
27 August	Romania declares war on Austria-Hungary, invades Transylvania
29 August	Hindenburg succeeds Falkenhayn as Chief of German General Staff, with Ludendorff as 'First Quartermaster General'
1 September	Britain and France secretly sign the Sykes–Picot agreement on post-war partition of the Ottoman Empire
6 September	Romanians complete occupation of Transylvania
15 September	British use tanks for the first time at Flers-Courcelette on the Somme
19 September	German-led forces invade Transylvania
3 October	German victories in Transylvania and Dobrudja
10 October	Tsar terminates Brusilov's offensive
11 October	Allies disarm Greek forces; riots in Athens in protest at Allied action
16–17 October	Final unsuccessful Russian effort to take Vladmir-Volynski
24 October	French counter-attack at Verdun; Fort Douaumont recaptured
21 November	Emperor Franz Josef dies, aged 86; succeeded by his great-nephew Charles
23 November	Greek Provisional Government at Salonika declares war on Germany and Bulgaria

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25 November	Battle of the Somme ends
1 December	Fighting in Athens between royalist troops and Anglo-French detachments
7 December	Lloyd George becomes Prime Minister, succeeds Asquith
12 December	Nivelle replaces Joffre as French Commander-in-Chief
 1917	
5–7 January	Allied conference in Rome to discuss priorities for campaigns in Italy and Salonika
February	Cold weather disrupts food and fuel supplies to Russian cities
1 February	Germany begins unrestricted submarine warfare
18–22 February	German forces commence preliminary withdrawal from Ancre sector
20 February	First attack on Hedjaz railway by Arab irregulars
8–12 March	Food riots in Petrograd; garrison troops mutiny
11 March	Baghdad falls to General Maude
12 March	Russian Revolution begins; Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet formed
14 March	Petrograd Soviet Order No. 1 claims control over garrison
15 March	Tsar abdicates
16 March	Germans begin main withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line
26 March	First battle of Gaza
6 April	United States declares war on Germany

9 April	Opening of British Arras offensive; Canadians storm Vimy Ridge
16 April	Lenin arrives in Petrograd; French spring offensive begins on the Aisne
17 April	Second battle of Gaza; despite use of tanks, momentum is lost and attack stalls
5 May	Allies launch major offensive in Serbia but fail to get Serb co-operation
15 May	Pétain succeeds Nivelle as French Commander-in-Chief
16 May	Kerensky becomes Russian Minister of War
22 May	Kerensky appoints Brusilov as Commander-in-Chief
7 June	British attack on Messines Ridge
12 June	King Constantine of Greece abdicates after Allied ultimatum, succeeded by younger son Alexander; British and French troops arrive at Piraeus
18 June	Russian South–West Front offensive begins
26 June	Venizelos confirmed by Allies as Greek Prime Minister
2 July	Russian South–West Front offensive stalls; Greece declares war on Central Powers; in Arabia, Colonel Lawrence and Arab irregulars attack Turkish garrisons
6 July	Central Powers counter-attack on Eastern Front; South–West Front retires to River Seret
10 July	North and West Front troops refuse to attack
13 July	Kornilov replaces Brusilov, calls off offensives
31 July	Third battle of Ypres begins
27 August	Failure of Kornilov’s attempt to seize power
1–5 September	German Riga campaign

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12 September	In Italy new German Fourteenth Army under General von Below deploys on Isonzo front
24 October	Battle of Caporetto; Austro-German attack breaks Italian Second Army
29 October	General Cadorno orders retreat to line of River Piave
31 October	Italians back behind River Tagliamento; in Palestine, Allenby opens third battle of Gaza
5 November	Allies confer at Rapallo as Italians ask for 15 Allied divisions
6 November	Passchendaele captured by Canadians
7 November	Bolsheviks seize power
8 November	Lenin proposes peace: 'no annexation and no indemnities'
9 November	General Diaz replaces Cadorna as Italian Commander-in-Chief
16 November	Allenby resumes advance on Jerusalem; Clemenceau becomes French Prime Minister
20 November	Battle of Cambrai begins
9 December	Jerusalem falls to Allenby
10 December	Armistice between Romania and Central Powers
17 December	Armistice between Russia and Central Powers
22 December	Russo-German peace negotiations begin at Brest-Litovsk; in Salonika, General Guillaumat replaces Sarrail as Allied Commander-in-Chief; Austrians fail to break through River Piave as astonishing revival in Italian national morale takes place
1918	
1 February	Austrian Navy mutinies at Cattaro
9 February	Germany signs separate peace with Ukraine

10 February	Trotsky ends negotiations
19 February	Germans advance to within 80 miles of Petrograd
3 March	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; Russia leaves the war
21 March	German Operation <i>Michael</i> offensive begins in Picardy
26 March	Foch appointed to co-ordinate Allied operations on Western Front
9 April	German <i>Georgette</i> offensive begins in Flanders
27 May	German <i>Blücher</i> offensive begins on the Aisne
9 June	German <i>Gneisenau</i> offensive begins
15 July	Last German offensive begins near Reims
18 July	Allied counterstroke on the Marne
8 August	Battle of Amiens begins
14 September	Final Allied offensive starts in Macedonia with battle of the River Vardar; mutinies break out in Bulgarian Army
19 September	Allenby fights and wins battle of Megiddo
20 September	RAF aircraft destroy the Turkish Seventh Army in defiles of Wadi Fara
23 September	British capture Acre and Haifa
26 September	Start of Franco-American offensive in Meuse–Argonne sector; Bulgaria seeks peace terms as mutinous troops March on Sofia to declare a republic
28 September	Start of Allied offensive in Flanders
29 September	British, Australian and American troops open main offensive on Hindenburg Line; Bulgaria signs armistice after talks at Salonika
1 October	Allenby and Lawrence arrive simultaneously at Damascus

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24 October	Allies attack on wide front and win battle of Vittorio Veneto, followed by rout of Austrian Army with mass desertions of Czech, Serb, Croat and Polish troops
26 October	General Ludendorff resigns
30 October	Ottoman Empire sues for peace
3 November	Austria-Hungary signs armistice
9 November	Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates
11 November	Armistice between Allies and Germany ends hostilities on the Western Front

1919

8 January	General Milne appointed Commander-in-Chief at Constantinople with garrison of 35,000 troops
3 February	Venizelos outlines Greek claims to Smyrna at Versailles
13 May	Greek troops land at Smyrna
22 May	In Turkey Kemal issues his 'Amasya Decisions', calling for new national government
28 June	Treaty of Versailles signed
11 July	Ottoman Government outlaws Kemal, who is elected President by new Turkish National Congress on 23 July
27 November	Kemal sets up National Council of Representatives at Angora (renamed Ankara)

1920

16 March	Allies tighten occupation of Constantinople; massacres of Armenians by Turks continue
18 March	Last meeting of Imperial Ottoman Parliament

- 23 April** In Turkey, the Grand National Assembly convenes at Ankara and forms new government
- 25 April** League of Nations mandates for Palestine and Mesopotamia announced; Palestinian Arabs attack British troops and Jewish settlers
- 22 June** Greeks launch offensive in Anatolia against Turkish Nationalist forces and advance to Usak, 120 miles east of Smyrna
- 25 July** Greek forces occupy Adrianople in Turkish Thrace
- 10 August** Treaty of Sèvres; Turkish nationalists refuse to accept it and go to war with Greece

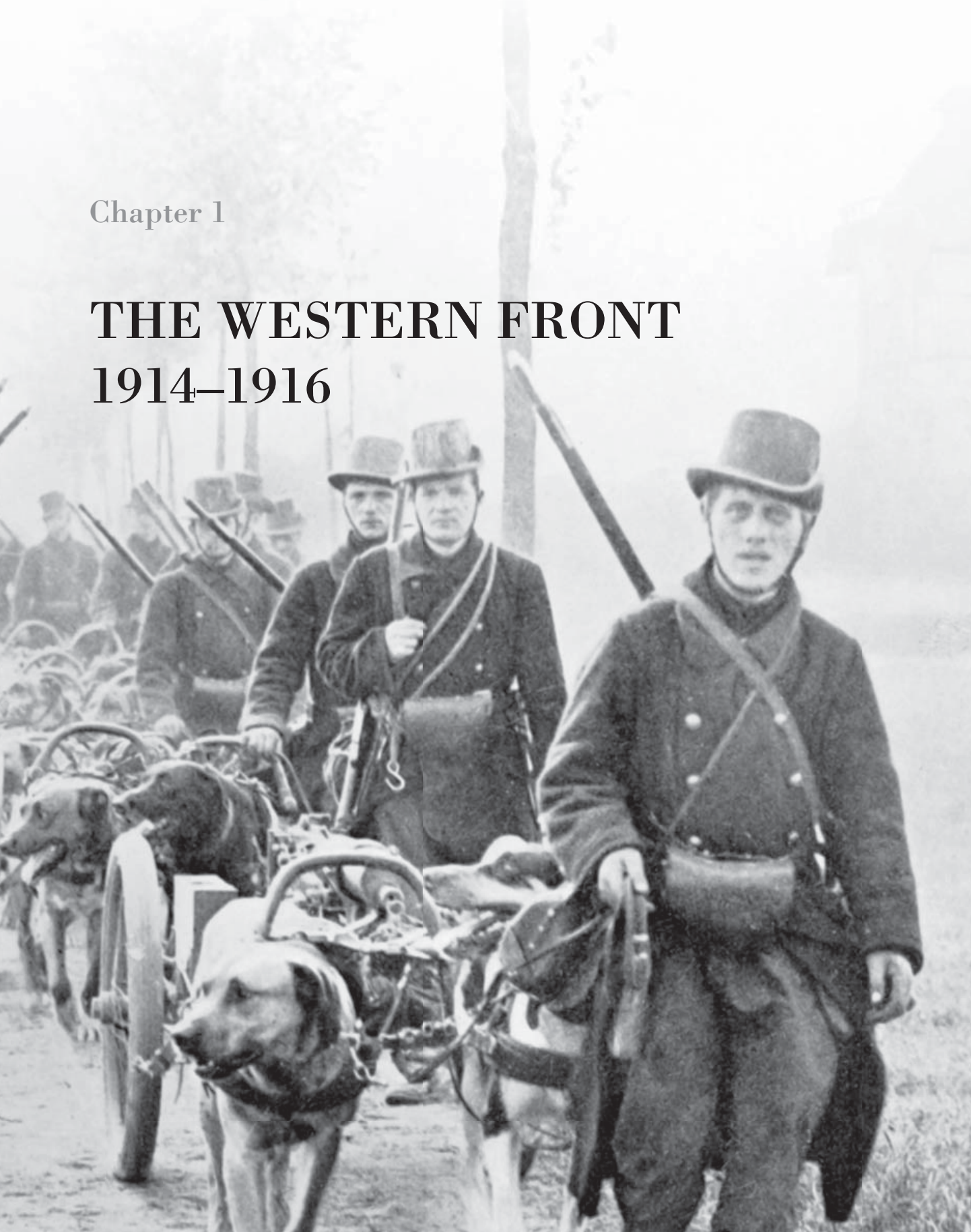
1923

- 23 August** Following the Treaty of Lausanne, replacing the Treaty of Sevres, Allies evacuate Constantinople



Chapter 1

THE WESTERN FRONT 1914–1916



BACKGROUND TO WAR: THE ROAD TO WAR

The route which led the major powers of Europe to war in 1914 was long and tortuous, with many complex and interwoven factors eventually combining to drive them into a protracted and cataclysmic struggle. Among these factors were new naval and military technology, colonial rivalries, economic competition and irreconcilable national ambitions. However, perhaps the most important and obvious turning point towards a general European conflict was the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871. That limited confrontation had seen the humiliating defeat of France and the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership. The sudden emergence of the German Empire, which as part of the spoils of victory took the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine from France, brought about a fundamental shift in the European balance of power. Germany's subsequent and accelerating progress towards economic ascendancy only intensified the anxieties of her neighbours and competitors.

For the best part of two decades, between 1871 and 1890, the new European status quo was not seriously challenged, thanks to the diplomatic dexterity and deviousness of Otto von Bismarck, the German Chancellor,

Previous page:

Belgian troops during the withdrawal to Antwerp, 20 August 1914. Note the dog-drawn machine guns. (IWM Q81728)

Below:

British recruits at Aldershot in 1914. Many of those who volunteered at the outbreak of war would not see action until 1915 or 1916.



in keeping France isolated. When Bismarck left office in 1890 it was not long before a fresh series of unpredictable currents began to erode the foundations of his carefully constructed Continental system. A rapid deterioration in Russo-German relations and a rapprochement between Tsarist Russia and Republican France compelled Germany to strengthen its existing links with the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, so ensuring that it possessed an ally to the east. While Germany was undeniably the dominant partner in this particular alliance, it would pay a heavy price for a policy that tied it more closely to a dilapidated empire that was itself finding it increasingly difficult to curb the nationalist aspirations of its diverse subject peoples in south-eastern Europe. The potentially explosive situation in the Balkans was made more dangerous by the decline of Turkish influence there, offering both Austria and Russia (the self-proclaimed protector of the southern Slavs) tempting territorial and political prizes in the region. In seeking to exploit such opportunities, Austria and Russia each embarked upon a course which could only end in confrontation. The rise of Serbia added yet another hazardous element to an unstable regional mixture. Serbia had been infuriated by Austria's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908 but had itself gained influence and territory as a result of the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, giving Austria, in turn, mounting cause for disquiet and irritation.

With the departure of Bismarck, the belligerent and erratic Wilhelm II – who had become *Kaiser* (Emperor) in 1888 – soon spurred Germany to follow a more aggressive path in international relations. France, already determined to avenge the disaster of 1870–1871 and win back its lost provinces, was further alarmed by Germany's developing industrial and military muscle; Russia too had grounds for concern about an Austro-German alliance that not only threw an ominous shadow along its western frontier but was likely to counteract Russian interests in the Balkans.

The first, and probably the most significant, crack in the edifice erected by Bismarckian diplomacy came in 1892 with the removal of its cornerstone – the isolation of France. That year, Russia and France concluded a military agreement – reinforced by additional talks in 1893 and 1894 – under which each promised to come to the other's aid if either were attacked by Germany.

Kaiser Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany 1888–1918.
(Topfoto)



Moreover, the change from Bismarck's *Realpolitik* (politics of realism) to the *Weltpolitik* (world policy or politics) of Kaiser Wilhelm II ultimately forced Britain to review its relations with other leading players on the European and world stage. Admittedly, Germany was not the only power that made Britain uneasy. Recurrent tension in its relations with France and Russia, previously its chief naval competitors, had caused Britain to pass the Naval Defence Act in 1889 in order to safeguard the supremacy on which its national security and prosperity rested. The Act embraced the doctrine that the Royal Navy's establishment should, at any given time, match the combined naval strength of any two other countries. The maintenance of this 'Two Power Standard' became more difficult as the United States and Japan also began to overtake Britain industrially and to build ocean-going fleets. Britain was, however, content to stick largely to its policy of 'splendid isolation' so long as the balance of power in Europe was not imperilled and no single nation became too dominant or threatened Britain's security by making a hostile move into the Low Countries towards the Channel ports.

Britain was, in fact, relatively friendly with Germany for much of the last quarter of the 19th century, not least because Queen Victoria's eldest daughter was married to the German Crown Prince, Frederick, who succeeded to the imperial throne in March 1888. Frederick died from cancer after reigning for barely three months, and the accession of his estranged and impulsive son, Wilhelm II, heralded fresh competition with Britain for colonies and overseas markets as the new Kaiser sought world power status for Germany. Even so, it was the German Navy Laws of 1898 and 1900 that did most to alienate Britain. Shaped by the German Naval Secretary, Rear Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, with the Kaiser's enthusiastic support, these measures disclosed Germany's intention to construct a fleet, including 38 battleships, within 20 years. Regarding Britain as Germany's 'most dangerous naval enemy', Tirpitz envisaged the German fleet as a political pawn which would strengthen his country's hand in world affairs. To this end he wished to provide Germany with sufficient capital ships to mount a genuine challenge in the North Sea and give it the capability of inflicting such damage on the Royal Navy that the latter would fall below the 'Two Power Standard'. The launching of 14 battleships in Germany between 1900 and 1905 inaugurated a naval arms race that would enter an even more menacing phase when Britain launched the revolutionary turbine-driven 'all-big-gun' battleship HMS *Dreadnought* in 1906.

German backing for the Boers during the South African War of 1899–1902 hastened the demise of Britain's earlier isolationist policy. Since the United States Navy was not obviously aimed *directly* at its interests, Britain, in 1901, deliberately abandoned any attempts to compete with growing

American naval power. The following year an Anglo-Japanese treaty was signed, considerably reducing British anxieties in the Far East and enabling Britain to concentrate more warships in home waters. In 1904 the *Entente Cordiale* greatly strengthened British diplomatic and, later, military ties with its traditional rival, France. A similar understanding was reached with Russia in 1907, once Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 had all but removed the long-standing Russian threat to India. Thus before the end of the first decade of the 20th century Britain had swung noticeably towards the Franco-Russian alliance.

The understandings with France and Russia did not constitute formal agreements and neither did they commit Britain irrevocably to go to war in support of either power, but it was now at least morally bound to France and Russia in opposition to the Central Powers, Germany and Austria. Any unforeseen incident involving one or more of these countries might well ignite a general conflagration which, because of the rival alliance systems, could engulf them all. In these circumstances it would certainly not have served Britain's interests to stand aside and allow Germany to conquer France and occupy the Channel ports. Therefore, despite all the contradictions in Britain's new international stance, the possibility of its participation in a European war on the side of France and Russia was – as Germany should have been well aware – far from remote.

Diplomatic manoeuvres, opposing alliances and naval rivalries were not the only ingredients which rendered the European powder keg more explosive and conditioned nations and peoples for armed conflict. The spread of education and adult literacy in the decades before 1914 also saw the rise of a popular press ready to glamorise deeds of military valour or take an unashamedly jingoistic line when reporting foreign affairs. Chauvinism and aggressive imperialism were similarly encouraged by capitalism. Fashionable ideas about 'national efficiency' and concepts such as 'Social Darwinism' emphasised the survival of the fittest and fostered the belief that war was a purifying ordeal necessary to counter any signs of national decadence and moral degeneration. As most political and military leaders erroneously thought that should war come, it would be short, statesmen were generally more willing to solve international disputes by military rather than diplomatic means.

All the individual national motives for conflict and collective failures to halt the slide into the abyss cannot, however, conceal the primacy of Germany's responsibility for war in 1914. In the often savage debate that has raged since the work of Professor Fritz Fischer in the 1960s, historians have disagreed about the extent to which Germany positively sought and planned the conflict in advance; but few have denied that Germany was its

THE FIRST WORLD WAR



European alliances before and during the First World War.

mainspring. For Prussian aristocrats, the officer class and industrialists, war held great attraction as a means of negating or diverting attention from the increasing internal influence of the Social Democratic Party. It would also enable Germany to forestall the modernisation and improvement of the Russian Army, expected to be complete by 1916–1917. Since Germany's impressive economic expansion had not yet been rewarded by world power status, a successful war would simultaneously end its diplomatic and military encirclement and bring it the geopolitical influence it felt it deserved.

On 8 December 1912, the Kaiser summoned his senior military advisers to a war council. The fact that some of the conclusions reached on this occasion coincided with the actual events of 1914 has led Fischer and other historians to view the meeting as evidence that Germany's leaders took a conscious decision there and then to go to war within 18 months. The importance of the meeting in this respect may have been exaggerated, but there is no doubt that the Kaiser and the military-political-industrial élite wanted hegemony in Europe and were fully prepared to contemplate war, with all its attendant risks, as the quickest way of realising their ambitions. This in itself represented a serious enough threat to European peace but the situation was made infinitely more hazardous by the iron grip which the Kaiser and his circle maintained on the reins of power in Germany. Whereas considerable checks and balances were imposed upon the political and military leaders of Britain and France by their respective parliamentary systems, the German Army was essentially beyond civilian control. Its senior officers were directly responsible to the Kaiser, and neither the Chancellor nor the state secretaries (or 'ministers') were ultimately answerable to the Reichstag, the German parliament. In other words, those in Germany who were most willing to plunge Europe into war in order to deal with their own internal and external difficulties, and to assure Germany's standing in the world, were subject to the fewest effective restraints.

WARRING SIDES: THE OPPOSING ARMIES

Germany's strategic ambitions and the unique status its armed forces enjoyed within society helped to ensure that, until 1916 at least, the Imperial German Army would be the dynamo of the First World War. It was Germany's war plan that did most to determine the course, if not the nature, of the conflict. The plan itself had been shaped originally, between 1897 and 1905, by Count Alfred von Schlieffen, then Chief of the German General Staff. Schlieffen's overriding aim had been to enable Germany to deal successfully with the strategic nightmare of a two-front war against Russia and France, should such a situation arise. However, by appearing to offer a feasible solution to this problem, the plan reduced the army's fears of a two-front war and, correspondingly, strengthened its willingness to accept the risks of such a conflict. In these respects, one could argue that the Schlieffen Plan, instead of being a mere precautionary measure, actually increased the likelihood of a general European struggle.

Schlieffen estimated that, should Germany have to face both France and Russia, the latter would be slower to mobilise and deploy, giving Germany a vital margin of some six weeks in which to overcome France by means of



Count Alfred von Schlieffen, Chief of the German General Staff 1891–1905. His war plan, with modifications, largely shaped German strategy in 1914. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

a massive and rapid campaign in the west. As soon as France was defeated, Germany could then transfer the bulk of its forces to the east to tackle Russia. There was a danger, nonetheless, that the fortresses along France's north-eastern frontier might fatally delay the German Army's lightning western offensive. Accordingly Schlieffen resolved that German forces must cross a narrow strip of Dutch territory known as the 'Maastricht Appendix', then sweep through neutral Belgium before driving into north-western France. The pivotal role in the campaign was given to five armies deployed between Metz and Holland, totalling 35 corps in all. The most powerful forces were allocated to the extreme right wing of the offensive. One army here was expected to swing round to the west of Paris, on the outer flank of a colossal wheeling movement which was intended to take the opposing French armies in the rear before trapping them up against their own frontier. It was anticipated that, on the outbreak of war, the French would advance immediately into Lorraine, so two weaker German armies were assigned to the left, or eastern, wing. Their task was to contain the French

movement and even fall back slowly, if required, in the hope of luring the enemy forces beyond any point from which they could seriously interfere with the planned German encirclement.

Helmuth von Moltke, Schlieffen's successor, made several key alterations to the original plan between 1906 and 1914. Though a diligent and painstaking officer, Moltke was also introspective and suffered from bouts of low self-confidence. He was especially anxious about the potential threat to German communications which the expected French thrust into Lorraine would pose. Consequently, most new divisions created after 1906 were assigned to the German left wing rather than the crucial right. Once seven times stronger than the left, the right wing became only three times stronger as a result of Moltke's changes. Of equal significance was his decision to abandon the projected movement through Holland while sticking with the planned advance through Belgium. This decision was doubly unfortunate for it not only complicated the problems of deployment – squeezing the right-wing armies into a tighter initial bottleneck – but also failed to eliminate the considerable diplomatic and strategic disadvantages almost certain to ensue from any German violation of Belgium's neutrality. Historians have

rightly observed that, even as originally conceived, the Schlieffen Plan was unworkable, as it paid insufficient heed to the problems of over-extended supply lines, inadequate communications systems, the fatigue of troops and the unpredictability of battle. It also miscalculated the speed of Russian mobilisation and the level of resistance that Belgian forces and civilians would offer. However, it is equally true to say that the changes wrought by Moltke did little or nothing to improve it and further undermined its already tenuous prospects of success.

Conscription, the bedrock of the German military system, permitted Germany to increase the size of its army swiftly, from a peacetime strength of around 840,000 to more than 4,000,000 trained soldiers when war was declared. Able-bodied young German males first joined the Landsturm at the age of 17; at the age of 20 they were called to the colours for full-time military training, which lasted two or three years, depending upon their arm of service. Thereafter they would pass into the reserve for four or five years and then carry out additional spells of service with the Landwehr and Landsturm until they reached 45. The Landwehr and

German infantry
photographed on
manoeuvres before the First
World War. (Getty Images)



Opposite:
The rival war plans.

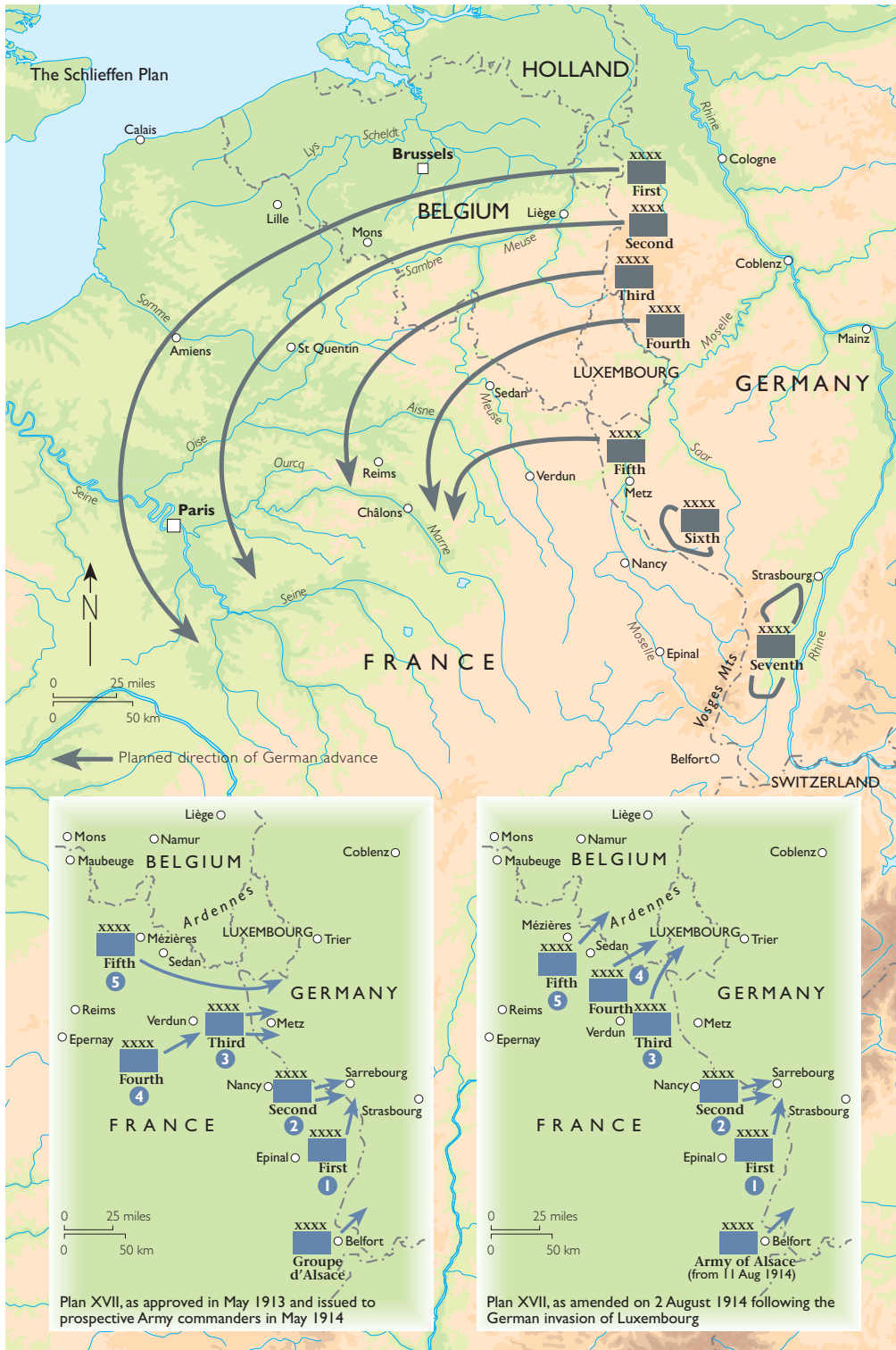
Landsturm, upon mobilisation, would undertake defensive duties on lines of communication, and the reservists were alternatively recalled to regular units or formed new reserve corps and divisions that could confidently be used as front-line formations. The system, especially the employment of reservists, was to give the Germans a significant advantage over the French Army in some critical sectors along the front in the opening weeks of the war.

In the summer of 1914 German infantry training was in the midst of a transition from close-order to open-order tactics – a factor that would cost their infantry dear. However, the army as a whole was excellently trained, had a solid nucleus of highly capable non-commissioned officers and could claim a clear superiority in its light, medium and heavy howitzers – weapons which would quickly prove their worth in the operations to come.

The French military system was likewise based upon conscription. In 1913 compulsory service had been extended to three years with the colours, then 14 in the reserve. Because its population was smaller, France had to call up a bigger proportion of the nation's men, including colonial recruits, to attain even a semblance of parity with Germany. At the outbreak of war, France was able to muster approximately 3,680,000 trained soldiers but had fewer reserve formations than the Germans mobilised.

In the wake of the humiliation of the Franco-Prussian War French military doctrine had been recast. The most important figure in this process was Lieutenant-Colonel (later Marshal) Ferdinand Foch. His teachings as Chief Instructor (1896–1901) and Commandant (1908–1911) of the *Ecole Supérieure de Guerre* placed the 'will to conquer' firmly at the core of the French Army's creed and inspired an almost mystical faith in the primacy of the *offensive à l'outrance* (attack to the limit). The same gospel was preached by one of Foch's disciples, Colonel Louis de Grandmaison, who between 1908 and 1911 headed the War Ministry's important Operations Branch. It was reflected too in the army's superb, quick-firing 75mm field gun, which more than matched its German 77mm equivalent, although medium and heavy artillery were given a lower priority.

The plan with which the French went to war – known as Plan XVII – was prepared under the guidance of General Joseph Joffre, the Chief of the French General Staff from 1911 and the Commander-in-Chief designate in the event of hostilities. The imperturbable Joffre, a follower of the Foch–Grandmaison philosophy, rejected a previous scheme for a defensive concentration along the Belgian border and instead announced his intention to 'advance with all forces united to attack the German armies'. Five French field armies would be deployed under Plan XVII. Of these, the First and



Plan XVII, as approved in May 1913 and issued to prospective Army commanders in May 1914

Plan XVII, as amended on 2 August 1914 following the German invasion of Luxembourg