



# The Great War

This week marks 100 years since the conflict ended.

In 1918, after four years of battle, the First World War came to an end. It was a conflict like no other, at a time when technology was starting to play a new role in warfare. The UK experienced its first air raids (bombs dropped by aircraft), and much of Europe was turned into a battlefield.

### How the war started

Europe, where the conflict first broke out, was full of historic and political rivalries. When assassins from Serbia killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand (the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary) on 28 June 1914, the rivalries deepened. Exactly one month later, Austria-Hungary (which is now two separate countries) declared war on Serbia. Serbia was supported by an alliance of three countries: France, Russia and the UK. Austria-Hungary, meanwhile, was in an alliance with Germany. These different alliances meant that more and more countries became involved in the conflict. The UK declared war on 4 August, after German troops invaded Belgium, which the UK had promised to protect. Over the next four years, countries from across Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific, North America, South America and Asia became involved in the conflict.

### How the war progressed

For many years of the war, both sides would gain a little bit of ground before losing it again. Soldiers lived in trenches dug into the ground, where diseases were easily spread. In 1917, Russia left the war. By early 1918, Germany began to beat back the British and French troops. However they were unable to stay in control of the ground they'd won, and after counterattacks by the French and British, not to mention soldiers joining in from the US, it was clear that Germany couldn't win.



The war raged throughout Europe.



People queued up to fight in the war.



**UNDERAGE SOLDIERS**  
Soldiers had to be 18 before they could join the armed forces. However, 12-year-old Sidney Lewis lied about his age and was accepted.

### Christmas in the trenches

There was a brief break in the fighting in some places at Christmas in 1914. In Belgium, a German soldier approached his enemies to arrange a truce (a temporary pause in the fighting) on Christmas Eve. Elsewhere, the two sides sang carols to each other and exchanged gifts. There is a legend of a huge football match between the warring soldiers, but this is likely to have been exaggerated over the years. Games did pop up along the trenches, but were informal kickabouts, not one big match.



A truce in the trenches.



### DID YOU KNOW?

The bombs and guns in France were so loud that *The Times* newspaper reported that they had been heard by the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, near London.

### The war in numbers

**8.5 million**  
Soldiers who died during the four-year war.

**13 million**  
Estimated number of civilians who died as a result of the war.

**57,470**  
British deaths on 1 July 1916 in the Battle of the Somme, the deadliest day of the war.

**8 million**  
Horses died during the war

**11**  
Soldiers who died for every metre gained by the British and Commonwealth forces during the Battle of the Somme.

### Centenary commemorations

On 11 November, ceremonies will be held to remember the war. The day, known as Remembrance Sunday in the UK, is held each year, but this year's is special because it is exactly 100 years after the Armistice – an agreement to stop the fighting – was signed. Across the country, bells will be rung to mark the centenary. In 1918, after four years of the bells kept mainly silent during the war, they were used to let people know that the war was over. Around the UK, there will be services to remember those who died and poppies will be displayed. Poppies have become a symbol of Remembrance Sunday because the flowers grew on the battlefields after the war. Two minutes of silence will be held in public places at 11am, to allow people to reflect on the war and those who died.



A Remembrance Day tribute.

### The end of the fighting

Once it was clear that Germany could not win the war, the head of the country, Kaiser Wilhelm II, stepped down on 9 November 1918. Two days later, the war was over. Germany had to pay the costs for the damage caused, which caused terrible poverty in the country. This caused some people, including Adolf Hitler, to hate non-Germans and blame other countries for the hardship and problems in Germany. That tension grew and became one of the main causes of the Second World War.



The US marks end of the war.