

ALL ABOUT...

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

NG KIDS travels back in time to find out more about a conflict that rocked the world...

It is more than 100 years since the beginning of the **First World War**, aka **World War I** or **The Great War for Civilisation**. Although a hundred years might seem like a very long time ago, but it isn't really. Your great-great grandparents were around then, and they would have lived through, and maybe even **taken part in**, this conflict.

Why did the war start?

Lots of history books have been written on exactly this subject. But it all boils down to

the fact that Europe had split into two large families of countries. The **Allies** — the British Empire, France, Belgium, Russia and later, the USA — were in one family. And the **Central Powers** of Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey were in the other. On **4 August 1914**, Germany invaded Belgium, and so, standing by its promise to stick up for Belgium, Britain declared war on Germany. The world was at war...

How long did it last?

When the First World War began that summer, most people thought it would

be over by Christmas. Many believed that Britain was so powerful it could win very quickly. In fact, the First World War lasted **four terrible years**, not four months.

Trench life

By the winter of 1915, the opposing sides had both dug long ditches called **trenches** which faced each other, in some places just 30m apart! These lines of narrow trenches stretched from the Belgian coast to Switzerland, and were known as the **Western Front**. Over five million British soldiers spent time living in these muddy,

miserable ditches, taking it in turns to be on the **Front Line** — the trench closest to the enemy. Day-to-day life there was smelly and grim.

During Christmas 1914, some German and British soldiers agreed to stop fighting each other for a day or two. They chatted, sang and even played football together!

There were millions of giant rats, overflowing latrines (loos) and a terrible lice infestation. Not to mention the dead bodies. Every so often, soldiers on the **Front Line** would be instructed to leave their trench and venture into **No Man's Land** (the area between the sides) to try to push back the enemy.

A new type of war

This war was very different from conflicts of the past. For the first time, powerful

new weapons and vehicles were used — at sea, on land and in the air — resulting in many people being killed or wounded. In Britain, you could sometimes hear what sounded like thunder coming across the English Channel from Europe. In fact, it was the huge boom of big guns, called **artillery**, being fired on the Western Front. 75% of all men who died in the First World War were killed by artillery.

It's all over

On the **11th hour**, of the **11th day**, of the **11th month** in **1918**, the First World War officially ended when an agreement (known as an **armistice**) was signed by Germany and the Allies. This date is known as **Armistice Day**, and is still commemorated each year when people wear **paper poppies** to remember those who fought and died in conflicts around the world — the pretty red

flowers were the only things that grew on the bloody battlefields of Western Europe. Sadly, by the time the First World War was over, more than **18 million** people had been killed worldwide. It was hoped it would be the war to end all wars. But this wasn't to be the case. Just 21 years later, the **Second World War** broke out.



People of different ethnicity, religions and from many countries fought side by side

The British Empire

Back in 1914, the world was a very different place to live. **King George V** (the grandfather of our present Queen, Elizabeth) was not just the King of Britain. He was also the **Crown Head of State** of many countries around the world — a community of nations known as the **Empire**.

More than a million people from countries in the Empire volunteered to fight for the British Empire, including those from **India, Canada, Australia, Nigeria, South Africa** and parts of the **Caribbean**. These countries also supplied coal, metal, food and animals for the war effort.



People from across the Empire were urged to fight



Turn over to find out what life was like at home during the First World War...



Soldiers in the trenches would spend their days doing chores, firing at the enemy, playing cards and writing letters home. Incredibly, **nine** out of ten men survived!



These big guns were hard to work