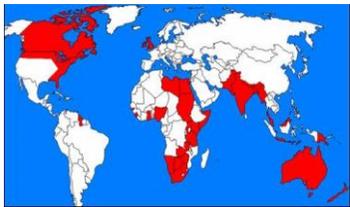


WW1 Knowledge Organiser

The British Empire 1914



The British Empire comprised the

dominions, colonies, and other territories ruled or administered by the United Kingdom. At its height, it was the largest empire in history and, for over a century, was the foremost global power. By 1913, the British Empire held sway over 412 million people, 23% of the world population at the time. At the peak of its power, the phrase "the empire on which the sun never sets" was often used to describe the British Empire, because its expanse around the globe meant that the sun was always shining on at least one of its territories.

The Steps to World War 1:

1. A Serbian man kills a very important man called Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo.
2. Austro-Hungary starts war on Serbia.
3. Russia says it will help Serbia.
4. Germany has an alliance with A-H, so says it will fight Russia too.
5. France has an alliance with Russia, so says it will fight Germany too.
6. Germany attacks Belgium to get nearer to France.
7. Britain has an alliance with Belgium, so promises to fight against Germany as well.
8. Lots of countries are part of the British Empire, such as Australia, Canada, India, so they join in too.
9. Japan has promised to support Britain in any war, so joins in.
10. USA starts neutral, but joins in later on.

In August 1914, Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, realised Britain needed a bigger army. He made a direct appeal to the men of Britain. Posters were displayed showing him pointing his finger at anyone passing by. Men felt proud to fight for their country.

- 54 million posters were issued.
- 8 million letters were sent.
- 12,000 meetings were held.
- 20,000 speeches were given by military spokesmen.



In the first weekend of the war, 100 men an hour (3,000 a day) signed up to join the armed forces. By the end of 1914, **1,186,337 men had enlisted**. The Government wanted as many men as possible to join the forces willingly. But in 1916 a law was passed to say men had to join whether they wanted to or not. This was called conscription.

Life in the Trenches

On the Western Front, the war was fought by soldiers in trenches. Trenches were long, narrow ditches dug into the ground where soldiers lived. They were very muddy, uncomfortable and the toilets overflowed. These conditions caused some soldiers to develop medical problems such as trench foot. There were many lines of German trenches on one side and many lines of Allied trenches on the other. In the middle was no man's land, which soldiers crossed to attack the other side.

A typical day in the trenches

5am 'Stand-to' (short for 'Stand-to-Arms', meaning to be on high-alert for enemy attack) half an hour before daylight

5.30am Rum ration

6am Stand-down half an hour after daylight

7am Breakfast (usually bacon and tea)

After 8am Clean selves and weapons, tidy trench

Noon Dinner After dinner Sleep and downtime

5pm Tea

6pm Stand-to half an hour before dusk

6.30pm Stand-down half an hour after dusk

6.30pm onwards Work all night with some time for rest (patrols, digging trenches, putting up barbed wire, getting stores)

Soldiers only got to sleep in the afternoon during daylight and at night for an hour at a time. During rest time they wrote letters and played card games.



The Christmas Truce

During the first Christmas of the war, something unique happened in some parts of the Western front.

On Christmas Eve, soldiers from both sides put down their weapons and met in no man's land. They sang carols like 'Silent Night' ('Stille Nacht' in German).

Men from both sides gave gifts to each other. The Germans gave sausages to the British and the British gave the Germans chocolates.

On Christmas Day, a British soldier kicked a football out of his trench and the Germans joined in. It was reported that Germany won the match 3-2.

The British High Command did not agree with the truce. They even suggested the Germans were planning an attack. They were ignored and no guns were fired on Christmas Day 1914. The truce lasted until the New Year in some parts of the Western Front. But it wasn't long before soldiers on both sides returned to life in the trenches.