

# THE ROAD TO WAR

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 was not entirely unexpected. Tensions had been brewing in Europe for years.

In 1871 Germany emerged as a new united state thanks to the success of the Prussian army in the Franco-Prussian War. Not only did France suffer a humiliating defeat; she also lost two provinces, Alsace and Lorraine. It was a loss the French would never accept; one day in another war they would get their revenge. Aware of the danger, Germany formed the TRIPLE ALLIANCE with Austria/Hungary (1879) and Italy (1882). France too found a new friend, signing the DUAL ALLIANCE with Russia in 1894.

Britain at first stood apart from any European entanglements. Her interests lay with her huge colonial empire, defended by the British Navy the largest in the world. Her relations with the new German Empire were at first good, but when Kaiser William II started trying to build up Germany's influence overseas this led to rivalry with Great Britain, and when the Kaiser decided that Germany should have a greatly expanded navy, this set alarm bells ringing. A naval arms race with Germany began and Britain began to look for friends in Europe.

In 1904 the British entered the ENTENTE CORDIALE with France. It was not a formal treaty but an agreement to co-operate on a range of issues from colonial matters to naval defence. In 1907 Russia joined them to form the TRIPLE ENTENTE. On both sides preparations were now being made in case of war.

A series of crises heightened tensions. Twice in 1905 and 1911 Kaiser William's interference in Morocco, which France saw as in her sphere of influence, raised the fear of war. But it was in south east Europe that the tensions finally came to the boil. Throughout the 19th century there had been trouble in the area as the Turkish Ottoman Empire crumbled and Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Albania emerged as new nation states. As the largest Slavic state Russia had supported the emergence of these mainly Slav countries and considered herself their protector. However, Austria/Hungary also looked to extend her influence in the area. Her multi-national empire already included many Slavs. In 1908 the Austrians annexed Bosnia from the Turks, much to annoyance of its people, especially those of Serbian race. Encouraged by groups in Serbia, some Bosnian Serb nationalists set up a secret society, the Black Hand, to fight for freedom.



## THE FINAL CRISIS

On 28th June 1914, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne arrived in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia for a state visit. Some Black Hand terrorists planned to assassinate him. Their first attempt with a bomb failed, but Gavrilo Princep succeeded in fatally shooting the Archduke and his wife, as their car passed near him. The Austrians blamed Serbia for the murder and issued an ultimatum to the Serb government, acceptance of which would have meant effectively surrendering Serbian sovereignty. When the Serbian government did not agree with all the terms demanded, the Austrians declared war and invaded Serbia on 29th July. Serbia looked to Russia for help, but when the Russian army began to mobilise, Germany promised her support to Austria. The Germans declared war on Russia on 1st August and on Russia's ally France on 3rd August. Britain was not committed to go to war to support the French, but when the Germans launched their attack on France through neutral Belgium, they too declared war on 4th August. What began as a quarrel between Austria and Serbia had now sucked the main European states into war for the next four years. [Italy however decided that as Germany was the aggressor, she need not support her. In 1915 she joined the war – on the side of Britain and her allies.]



Europe in 1914



How Britain saw German aggression in 1914  
(According to Punch)